

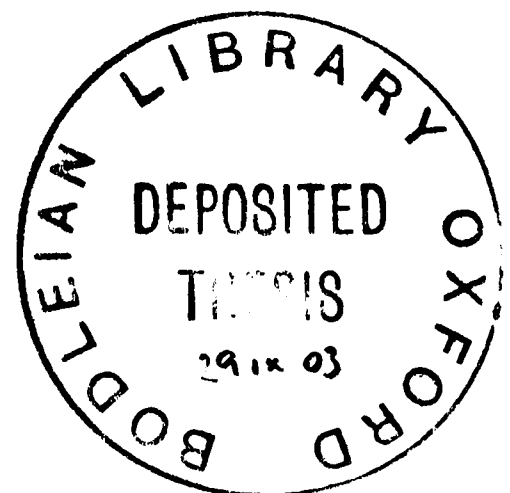
**'WORD' AND 'WISDOM' IN THE ECCLESIOLOGY
OF LOUIS BOUYER**

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ABSTRACT

‘Word’ and ‘Wisdom’ in the Ecclesiology of Louis Bouyer

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D. Phil. Trinity 2003

The subject of this study is the ecclesiology of Louis Bouyer of the Oratory. The basic claim of the thesis is that his doctrine of the Church is central to his theological project, second only to his preponderant gaze upon the mystery of the Trinity. Bouyer’s ecclesiological vision is specifically driven by the twin motifs of ‘Word’ and ‘Wisdom’. The deep dogmatic material that lies at the heart of his doctrine is the Church’s dependence on Christ, who is both Word and Wisdom. The Church is *creatura verbi divini* and equally *creatura sapientiae divinae*. It is constituted by the divine Word, and destined by the divine Wisdom for glory and union with God. The combination of a salvation-historical and christologically sacramental ‘Word-ecclesiology’, and a properly trinitarian and eschatologically oriented ‘Wisdom-ecclesiology’, is what distinguishes Bouyer’s doctrine of the Church.

Chapter One sets the stage for Bouyer’s Word-based ecclesiology through an exposition of his reinforced understanding of the ‘Word of God’. *Chapter Two* traces the Word’s crucial development into the Christian ‘mystery’, and finds that it is none other than Jesus Christ and his saving cross. In turn, the mystery must be embodied in the liturgy, in which it is perpetually proclaimed by and actualized in the Church. *Chapter Three* then presents Bouyer’s Word-ecclesiology in a twofold articulation: the ‘Church of the Word’ and the ‘Word in the Church’. *Chapter Four* recognizes a second mode of ecclesiological reflection in Bouyer through his Wisdom-motif which penetrates and complements the dominant logocentric perspective. *Chapter Five* finally argues that Bouyer’s construal of the Church’s principal actions (liturgical celebration, evangelical witness, and the total life of prayer and Christian discipleship) is consistent with his christological and trinitarian horizon, and that these ecclesial actions respond most appropriately to the divine initiative manifested in the Word and Wisdom.

LONGER ABSTRACT

‘Word’ and ‘Wisdom’ in the Ecclesiology of Louis Bouyer

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The subject of this study is the ecclesiology of Louis Bouyer of the Oratory. The basic claim of the thesis is that his doctrine of the Church, discernible if not always explicitly stated in almost all of his books and other writings, is central to his project, second only to his preponderant gaze upon the mystery of the Trinity. Bouyer’s ecclesiology gives a powerful vision of what it means to be the Church of God, a vision which is specifically driven by the twin motifs of ‘Word’ and ‘Wisdom’. The deep dogmatic material that lies at the heart of his Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology is the Church’s creaturely dependence on Christ, who is both Word and Wisdom; hence, the rock-bottom assertion: without Christ, there is no Church. The Church is *creatura verbi divini* and equally *creatura sapientiae divinae*. Because it is constituted by the divine Word, and destined by the divine Wisdom for glory and union with God, the Church must always be joined to Christ.

The *Introduction* presents Louis Bouyer’s place in twentieth-century French Catholic *ressourcement*, the goal of which was to unearth the rich store of ‘sources’ which are foundational for theological reflection and dogmatic formulation: scripture, the living tradition, the accumulated wisdom of the Church’s teachers and doctors, and the sacred liturgy. Bouyer’s substantial literary corpus makes it a daunting task to determine its overall content and general thrust. This thesis proposes three thematic locators which can serve as a compass to mark what is a vast theological terrain. First, Bouyer writes extensively on the divine-human relationship which, he suggests, is perhaps the most fundamental and central concern of theology. Second, the primary means of establishing that relationship is the ‘Word of God’. Third, the goal of the relationship is mutual encounter and union.

Chapter One sets the stage for Bouyer’s Word-based ecclesiology through an exposition of his reinforced understanding of the ‘Word of God’. He employs three complementary methodological approaches: phenomenological, anthropological-historical, biblical-historical. The biblical-historical approach is manifestly the most important because, for a *ressourcement* theologian such as Bouyer, scripture is ‘always the great Christian source of dogma and of spirituality’. While he will make extensive use of anthropological literature and *les sciences annexes*, these secular sources only serve to support *a priori* dogmatic positions and the revealed content of positive theology. Hence, he aims above all to recover the biblical notion of ‘Word’ with its powerful ‘personalist realism’. Like Karl Barth, he understands the divine Word in the strong sense of the divine *act*, *presence*, and *person*. Jesus Christ is, of course, the Word of God par excellence, the one who fulfils in his person – in what Oscar Cullmann calls

the 'mighty Christ-event' – all the divine promises and historical preparations as seen in the Old Testament. At his coming, the divine Word reveals its most central content, its most concentrated message: the paschal mystery of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'.

Chapter Two thus traces the Word's crucial development into the Christian 'mystery', and finds that it is none other than Jesus Christ and his saving cross. In turn, the mystery must be embodied in the liturgy, in which it is perpetually proclaimed by and actualized in the Church. An important passage from Bouyer's *Introduction to Spirituality* provides the 'programmatic text' for this chapter's exposition. The passage asserts that the paschal mystery is the substance of Christian faith, that the cross is the centre of that mystery, and that the liturgy (specifically the Eucharist) re-presents the saving work of Christ and makes it perennially fruitful. The chapter argues that, for Bouyer, 'cross' is his shorthand for the cross and the resurrection. Holy Thursday (Last Supper) and Good Friday (cross) are inseparable: the former announces, anticipates and explains the latter, while the latter fulfils the former. Going beyond standard Catholic sacramental theology, Bouyer's treatment of liturgical representation gives much more prominence to the 'Word'. However he remains faithful to Catholic teaching by affirming that the Word, while it actualizes the sacrament and, indeed, contains a sacramental reality, needs to lead to, and be finalized in, the sacrament, which is the only proper response to the Word. In short, by ascribing an actualistic efficacy to both the Word and the sacrament, Bouyer demonstrates that the two are not opposed to one another. Rather, they have a mutual co-inherence, and depend on each other for finality and completion. In asserting this, Bouyer's synthesis offers a possible means of rapprochement in an area of long-standing ecumenical controversy.

These first two chapters are prerequisite to a full exposition of Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology. They trace the divine Word's journey throughout Israel's history, its marvellous crystallization in the mystery of Christ, and its embodiment in the liturgy in order to be perpetually celebrated and made present. In short, a continuum 'Word-Mystery-Liturgy' has been demonstrated; the Church emerges from this continuum. *Chapter Three* thus presents Bouyer's primary ecclesiological vision in a twofold articulation: the 'Church of-the Word' and the 'Word in the Church'. The relationship between Christ and the Church is such that, together, they form the 'total Christ'; indeed, the Church is the 'fullness of Christ'. Concurrently, because the Word dwells in and is entrusted to the Church, it is equally correct to assert that the Word is 'of the Church'. The ecclesial body is constituted by Christ to be his eucharistic, proclaiming, and praying Church. These are considered to be the principal ecclesial actions which correspond most fittingly to the divine action in Christ the Word.

Chapter Four argues that Bouyer's primary, Word-centred perspective is penetrated and complemented by a recurring Wisdom-motif which locates the Church within the overarching plan of the entire Trinity. If Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology may be said to be influenced by the strong Lutheran idea of the Church as *creatura verbi divini*, his Wisdom-ecclesiology, espousing a similar vision of it as *creatura sapientiae divinae*, is indebted to Russian Orthodox sophiology. In his synthesis of the intuitions of Athanasius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Sergei Bulgakov, and others in the history of

Christian theology and spirituality, Bouyer shows that there is, in divine Sophia or Wisdom, a twofold reality. On the one hand, Wisdom is inseparable from the Godhead, constituting the divinity's very essence and being. On the other hand, it also refers to God's eternal and perfect plan for his creation. In short, Wisdom is said to be both *in and of* God, and *distinct from* God. As to the first, Wisdom is intra-trinitarian, divine, and uncreated; as to the second, it is economic and created, tending towards a succession of historical realizations, embodiments or appearances. For Bouyer, the two personal realizations of Wisdom in history are Mary and the Church. It is here that his Wisdom-ecclesiology formally comes into play: in its created aspect, Wisdom is destined to be both 'mother' and 'bride'. This maternal and spousal character, seen in a supreme manner in the Mother of God, is finally and completely realized in the pan-cosmic Church of the redeemed.

The Wisdom-motif makes a number of important contributions to Bouyer's ecclesiological vision. It highlights the activity of the whole Trinity; this trinitarian perspective is at once immanent and economic, teleological and soteriological. The role of the Holy Spirit, both in its eternal procession from the Father through the Son, and in its economic completion of Christ's salvific work, is given a wider hearing. Wisdom-ecclesiology also brings out the invisible and eschatological dimension of the Church, orienting it towards its finality and perfection in the 'nuptials of the Lamb'. Such biblical and mythopoetic imagery underlines what is the destiny of all of Christ's elect in his creation: eternal union with the Father, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the recourse to Wisdom gives Bouyer the breadth of vision and fluidity of language to more fittingly extol the *mirabilia Dei*. This praise of the Creator, the 'hymn of glory' to God which is at the root of 'theology', indicates Bouyer's primarily doxological thrust in articulating his Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology.

Chapter Five argues that Bouyer's construal of the Church's principal actions (liturgical celebration, evangelical preaching and witness, and the total life of prayer and Christian discipleship) is emphatically undergirded by biblical teaching on anthropology and cosmology. Human beings are sinful but saved by Christ; this fact confines their most appropriate ethical actions to that of serving the divine Word and praising the divine Wisdom. The world is fallen and held captive by rebel forces; the Church/Christians must perforce first flee from it, in order to later return and make a contribution to it. While Bouyer appears to devote more attention to 'fleeing' rather than 'contributing', and while it may be admitted that he writes but little on the particularities of Christian behaviour, his understanding of ecclesial action in terms of liturgy, evangelization, and spirituality is consistent with his christological and trinitarian horizon. These are the principal actions of the Church which, for him, respond most appropriately to the divine initiative manifested in the Word and Wisdom.

Criticisms that his treatment of ecclesial action is either deficient or too idealized are attenuated by recalling Bouyer's conception of a 'Word-Mystery-Liturgy-Church' continuum. The liturgical celebrations of the ecclesial body are thus seen to spring from its very constitution *as* a body, indeed, the very Body of Christ. The charge of idealism loses its pejorative force when Wisdom – understood as God's eternal and perfect plan or

idea for creation – is appreciated for what it is: the divine invitation and ultimately victorious intention to recapitulate all things in the Father, that he might be ‘all in all’. While it may be admitted that Bouyer hardly ever deals directly or at great length on specific moral issues, this lacuna can be excused by the fact that Bouyer never claimed to specialize in moral theology, nor did he deem it his life-work to construct a complete theological *summa*. Moreover, the sobering biblical view of human sinfulness and limitation and of the world’s rebellion against God accounts for Bouyer’s suspicion towards extravagant claims of temporal salvation and human achievement. From beginning to end, his theology is *theo*-logical and asymmetrical when viewed against the wider backdrop of his total vision, with its keen appreciation of divine initiative, of grace and matchless generosity.

The *Final Conclusions* point out both the similarities which Bouyer’s doctrine of the Church shares with other ecclesiological accounts, and the additions and enrichments his account makes to them. When these different ecclesiological emphases (kerygmatic, eucharistic and communion) are laid out side by side with Bouyer’s Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology, one can conclude that his doctrine of the Church, because it is drawn from the ‘sources’ of the inexhaustible scriptures and the living tradition, hardly claims to any real material originality. Hence, it should not be wondered at that his account bears strong resemblances to other traditional and classical construals. On the other hand, precisely because his ecclesiology is keyed to the controlling motifs of Word and Wisdom, and because Bouyer combines with such skill anthropological (secular) and *ressourcement* (sacred) data, his doctrine has a far richer texture and a more breathtaking scope than other accounts: a vision of historical unfolding, of divine promises fulfilled in time, of eternity and eschatological consummation.

Finally, to the question ‘What is his ecclesiology *for*?’, the thesis offers three answers: it aims to be ecumenically convergent and fruitful for dialogue and rapprochement; it seeks to be both prophetic and practical; and, most of all, it aspires to be doxological. Beginning with his signature theology of the Word, Bouyer’s account presents a God who is ever seeking a faithful interlocutor or dialogue partner, a role which Israel fulfilled in the Old Testament and which has been succeeded by the Church of the New Testament. But more than a dialogue partner: the Word seeks a people among whom to pitch its tent, and Wisdom, an abode among the sons of men. The astounding disclosure is of a Bridegroom-God going in search of a bride, a Father seeking children who can give him praise. Bouyer’s doctrine of the Church, on one level a competent and thoroughly Catholic account, is, on another and perhaps less suspected level, a catholic (i.e., universal) call to worship. Both the ‘Word’ and ‘Wisdom’ invite the Church to be amazed at the depth of the divine *agape* revealed in the mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’, and they summon the ecclesial community to that eucharistic life which, in Bouyer’s excellent description, is the ‘life of discovery in exultant praise of the fullness of God and the fullness of his design for us; it is the surrender of ourselves to the totality of the divine gift itself.’

The combination of a salvation-historical and christologically sacramental Word-ecclesiology, and a properly trinitarian and eschatologically oriented Wisdom-

ecclesiology, is what distinguishes Bouyer's doctrine of the Church. Word and Wisdom together provide a fuller, double-sighted account: the Church as linked to Christ and rooted in the Trinity, visible and invisible, historical and eternal, the unfaithful 'betrothed' in search of her Bridegroom and the virginal 'bride' in everlasting bliss. By means of the Word-motif, Bouyer manages to interweave Christology, soteriology, hamartiology, a *theologia crucis*, biblical theology, eucharistic theology, mystagogy, liturgics, anthropology, a theology of missions and of spirituality; with an additional Wisdom-motif he is also able to incorporate a coherent triadology, Mariology, a theology of creation, of the masculine/feminine, cosmology and eschatology. Thus, his all-pervading logocentric and sophiological perspective (the former much more dominant than the latter) provides a way of pulling together the various threads of his entire theology.

TO MY BROTHERS IN THE SERVANTS OF THE WORD

TO PARAPHRASE BILBO BAGGINS' FAREWELL SPEECH:
'ONE LIFE IS TOO SHORT A TIME TO LIVE AMONG SUCH EXCELLENT
AND ADMIRABLE MEN.'

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Finally, I can only stammer after Father Bouyer's more eloquent prose in thanking our Lord God for so much mercy and grace –

*Joyous light of the Father's hallowed glory:
heavenly, holy, and blessed Jesus Christ,
reaching the sunset hour,
as we gaze at the evening light,
we praise you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
You are indeed worthy of the holy voices' everlasting song,
O Son of God, giver of life,
Wherefore does the whole world ceaselessly extol and magnify your name.*

(Cosmos, 233)

ABBREVIATIONS

Below is a list of abbreviations of published works of Louis Bouyer cited more than once in this thesis. Full publication information is provided in the Bibliography.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Church of God</i> | <i>The Church of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit</i> |
| <i>Christian Mystery</i> | <i>The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism</i> |
| 'Christianisme' | 'Christianisme et eschatologie' |
| <i>Cistercian Heritage</i> | <i>The Cistercian Heritage</i> |
| <i>Le Consolateur</i> | <i>Le Consolateur: Esprit-Saint et Vie de Grâce</i> |
| <i>Cosmos</i> | <i>Cosmos: The World and the Glory of God</i> |
| <i>Decomposition</i> | <i>The Decomposition of Catholicism</i> |
| <i>Eternal Son</i> | <i>The Eternal Son: A Theology of the Word of God and Christology</i> |
| <i>Eucharist</i> | <i>Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer</i> |
| <i>Fourth Gospel</i> | <i>The Fourth Gospel</i> |
| <i>Gnosis</i> | <i>Gnosis: La connaissance de Dieu selon les Ecritures</i> |
| <i>L'Incarnation</i> | <i>L'Incarnation et l'Eglise: Corps du Christ dans la théologie de saint Athanase</i> |
| <i>Invisible Father</i> | <i>The Invisible Father: Approaches to the Mystery of the Divinity</i> |
| <i>Liturgy Revived</i> | <i>The Liturgy Revived: A Doctrinal Commentary of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy</i> |
| <i>Le métier</i> | <i>Le métier de théologien. Entretiens avec Georges Daix</i> |
| <i>Monastic Life</i> | <i>The Meaning of the Monastic Life</i> |
| 'Mysticism' | 'Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word' |
| <i>OSPAS</i> | <i>Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality</i> |
| <i>Paschal Mystery</i> | <i>The Paschal Mystery: Meditations on the Last Three Days of Holy Week</i> |
| 'Quelques mises au point' | 'Après les journées de Vanve. Quelques mises au point sur le sens et le rôle de la liturgie' |
| <i>Religieux</i> | <i>Religieux et clercs contre Dieu</i> |
| <i>Rite and Man</i> | <i>Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy</i> |
| <i>Sacred Scripture</i> | <i>The Meaning of Sacred Scripture</i> |
| <i>Seat of Wisdom</i> | <i>The Seat of Wisdom: An Essay on the Place of the Virgin Mary in Christian Theology</i> |
| <i>Sophia</i> | <i>Sophia ou le monde en Dieu</i> |
| <i>Spirit and Forms</i> | <i>The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism</i> |
| <i>SNTF</i> | <i>The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers</i> |
| <i>Word, Church, Sacraments</i> | <i>The Word, Church and Sacraments in Protestantism and Catholicism</i> |

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

I am fortunate that many of Father Bouyer's books have been translated into English, in which case the quotations are cited directly from the published English translation. In the few instances where a translated passage needed to be amended, these are indicated in the footnote and keyed to the original edition, in which case the French title is cited (e.g., *Le Fils éternel*, *Le Père invisible*).

In the case of untranslated material, I have rendered the original French into English as best as I could, occasionally including the French word or phrase (in parentheses) for the benefit of the reader.

The observant reader may notice differences in the English spelling, owing to the provenance of the extant translations. Some expressions are obsolete (e.g., *to-day*) or archaic (e.g., *Ezechiel*, *Osee*). American and British editions would render the translation in, respectively, American English (e.g., *actualize*, *center*, *favor*, *preeminent*) and British English (e.g., *actualise*, *centre*, *favour*, *pre-eminent*).

My own translations, as well as the prose of the main body of this thesis, are in British English. I am guided by *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Judy Pearsall et al. (Oxford: OUP, 1998), which currently lists as 'standard British spelling' such words as *actualize*, *conceptualize*, *criticize*, *demythologize*, *fulfil*, *fulfilment* and *fullness*.

INTRODUCTION

A. THE SUBJECT AND CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

THIS THESIS AIMS to articulate, analyze, and assess the ecclesiology of Louis Bouyer of the Oratory. The basic claim of the thesis is that his doctrine of the Church, discernible if not always explicitly stated in almost all of his books and other writings, gives a powerful vision of what it means to be the Church of God, a vision which is specifically driven by the twin motifs of ‘Word’ and ‘Wisdom’. Above all, Bouyer’s account depicts the Church in creaturely dependence on Christ, who is both Word and Wisdom. The Church is *creatura verbi divini* and equally *creatura sapientiae divinae*. Because it is constituted by the divine Word, and destined by the divine Wisdom for glory and union with God, the Church must always be joined to Christ.

Under the primary rubric of what may be called his ‘Word-ecclesiology’, the ecclesial body is first of all the ‘Church of the Word’, constituted by Christ to be his eucharistic, proclaiming and praying Church. Concurrently, because the Word dwells in and is entrusted to the Church, it is equally correct to assert that the Word is ‘of the Church’. This Word-centred vision is penetrated and complemented by a Wisdom-motif which locates the Church within the overarching divine plan of the entire Trinity, and which orients it towards its eschatological finality and perfection in the ‘nuptials of the Lamb’. Such biblical and mythopoetic imagery underlines what is the destiny of every Christian and indeed of all of Christ’s elect in his creation: eternal union with the Father, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit. The combination of a salvation-historical and christologically sacramental Word-ecclesiology, and a properly trinitarian and eschatologically oriented Wisdom-ecclesiology, is what distinguishes Bouyer’s doctrine

of the Church, giving rise to the distinctive ecclesial actions of liturgical celebration, evangelical preaching and witness, and the total life of prayer and Christian discipleship.

To date there have been six doctoral dissertations written on various aspects of Bouyer's theology. It is not surprising that his *doctrine of Christ* has been examined by two researchers, considering how manifestly christocentric his writings are.¹ Similarly, two studies have been made on his *sacramental theology*, indicating scholarly consensus on a particular field of theology in which Bouyer has made his mark.² Another piece of research examined the anthropological roots of Bouyer's *mystagogical theology*,³ while the most recent study focused on the male-female, husband-wife relationship within his *théologie de l'Alliance*.⁴ However, no previous dissertation has explored his ecclesiology as such; neither has there been a serious examination of the sophiological colouring of much of his theology.

This thesis therefore aims to contribute to a relatively small but growing body of scholarship on Bouyer's theology by examining directly his doctrine of the Church. The study is conducted specifically from the perspective of his twin motifs of Word and Wisdom. It is not the author's intention to present Bouyer's ecclesiology *in toto*; certain aspects of ecclesial constitution (e.g., papal primacy, canon law, ministry and laity) are not discussed except in relation to these motifs which, as will be argued, are the unique

¹ Cf. Henry Christopher Twohig, *The Christology of Louis Bouyer* (unpublished thesis, Oxford: University of Oxford, 1981), and Jean-François Hûe, *L'Incarnation du Verbe dans le contexte d'une théologie de la Parole de Dieu selon les écrits du R. P. Louis Bouyer de l'Oratoire* (published excerpts, Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1985).

² Cf. Pierre Marcial Rakotomahefa, *Le Repas-sacrifice. Contribution à la théologie de l'Eucharistie d'après les écrits du P. Louis Bouyer de l'Oratoire* (published excerpts, Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1981), and Jan Chaim, *La Dottrina sacramentale di Louis Bouyer* (published excerpts, Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1984).

³ Cf. Richard William Walling, *Metamorphosis of the Sacred: Christian Liturgy and the Mystery of the Incarnation in the Work of Louis Bouyer* (unpublished thesis, Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1990).

⁴ Cf. Karin Heller, *Ton Créateur est ton époux, ton rédempteur: contribution à la théologie de l'Alliance à partir des écrits du R. P. Louis Bouyer, de l'Oratoire* (Paris: P. Téqui, 1996).

window through which to view his doctrine. From such a study the author hopes to recover and bring to light, as well as to assess and possibly critique, his key ecclesiological assertions. It is the author's contention that the deep dogmatic material embedded in his ecclesiology, giving rise to an equally profound intuition of the Church's most appropriate actions, can help to revitalize the self-understanding of today's ecclesial community as to its identity and mission.

B. LOUIS BOUYER'S THEOLOGICAL PROJECT

BORN IN 1913 into French Lutheranism, Bouyer was ordained a pastor in 1936. Three years later, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church, studied for the priesthood, and received holy orders in 1944. He has spent much of his life in constructing an edifice ambitious in scope, erudite in content, and doxological in tenor. An extremely prolific writer, he has produced a literary corpus which, according to Karin Heller, would equal that of Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁵ Although he was never a *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), he served the council in other capacities: in 1960 he was a consultant for the Preparatory Commission for studies and seminaries; in 1964, a consultant for the application of the liturgical reform. His expertise has been sought by the curial Congregation for the Divine Worship and the then Secretariat for Christian Unity. He was a member of the Pontifical International Theological Commission in 1969 and in 1974. An outstanding Roman Catholic theologian with an international reputation, especially in the fields of spirituality and liturgical theology, he is also paradoxically not as well known, read, and appreciated today as he deserves.

This thesis is in part an attempt to rediscover the theological legacy of Louis Bouyer, and to demonstrate that his is a theology of astonishing depth and breadth. His

⁵ Karin Heller, 'La tâche du théologien comme puissance de la parole: la contribution de Louis Bouyer à la théologie de l'incarnation', *Rivista Teologica di Lugano*, 5/3 (2000): 335-49, in 337.

books, covering numerous theological topics, manifest a broad range of interests as well as an exceptional grasp of the material, both sacred and secular. His literary style is characterized by a kind of forceful clarity and perspicacity. His prose is frequently breathtaking, even when he is most ferociously adversarial, but especially when he is most inspired simply to proclaim the Gospel. For that is one way of summarizing the overarching goal of Bouyer's theology: the announcement of the Gospel through the liturgy.⁶ His role in the French *ressourcement* movement, his contribution to the recovery of the treasures of traditional Christian teaching, his ecumenism, his doctrinal synthesis accomplished in a manner both lucid and erudite (what James Connolly calls 'a classical example of the French technique of *haute vulgarisation*'⁷), his campaign to restore spirituality to theology without compromising theological rigour – all this indicates a theologian of major importance. Heller's assessment of Bouyer thus seems justified:

Among the theologians of the twentieth century, Louis Bouyer occupies a position that is totally unique (*particulière*). This position is not easy to determine, for his [theological] activity and publications result from a rare conjunction between personal aptitudes and a religious situation that is uncommon in France. His singular position in the French context before and after Vatican II gives to his theological work a great originality. It allows us to see in him a theologian who prepared the way for a theology of the Word in the contemporary world.⁸

What, then, was the 'French context' which gave such magnitude, relevance and value to Bouyer's lifelong work?

1. Intellectual and Theological Context

BOUYER'S THEOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENT must be examined in the light of the context in which he lived. As Helmut Thielicke has said, 'a person is what he has behind

⁶ Interview with Jean-Robert Armogathe, 30 September 2002, Institut Bossuet, Paris.

⁷ James M. Connolly, *The Voices of France: A Survey of Contemporary Theology in France* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 64.

⁸ Heller, 'La tâche', 335.

him'.⁹ By all accounts Bouyer lived through some of the most remarkably vibrant times in the history of Catholic theology in general, and French theology more specifically. France in the mid-twentieth century saw an unprecedented theological revival, itself the product of several factors: the rich brew of literary and philosophical currents affecting not only the *intelligentsia* but even pedestrian life, the arsenal of specialist tools (in biblical studies, historical research, etc.) available to theologians, the deployment of theology for pastoral care and for missionary work, and a general vitality in Catholic intellectual thought which refused to be confined to the 'quasi-official neo-scholastic theology of the period, [was] opposed to it and therefore almost automatically came under fire from this fortress.'¹⁰ The times were so heady that Yves Congar, for example, could write: 'Anyone who did not live through the years 1946 and 1947...has missed one of the finest moments in the life of the Church. [... Men and women] sought to regain evangelical contact with a world in which we had become involved to an extent unequalled in centuries.'¹¹ While Congar is here referring especially to the fresh surge of theological and pastoral activity after the horrors of the Second World War, his statement can be an apt commentary on the decades both before and after the war. The Second Vatican Council must be seen as at the very least partly determined by this amazing period of time.

It was an age in which such diverse figures as Maurice Blondel (b. 1861) and Jean-Paul Sartre (d. 1980) could serve as its 'intellectual bookends' – the one a Catholic apologist whose *L'Action* and other philosophical writings were intended to demonstrate

⁹ 'Ein Mensch "ist" doch das, was er hinter sich hat', in his *Ich Glaube* (Stuttgart, 1967), 157, cited by Mark Schoof, *Breakthrough: Beginnings of the New Catholic Theology* [original title: *Aggiornamento*], trans. N. D. Smith (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970), 11.

¹⁰ Schoof, *Breakthrough*, 48-49. Cf. also Joseph A. Komonchak's 'Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism' (unpublished article), Catholic University of America, unspecified date.

¹¹ Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1966), 32.

that philosophy and apologetics were basically one, the other an avowed atheist who, according to Frederick Copleston, may by his own account be the purest advocate of French 'existentialism', strictly speaking.¹² A roll call of the mighty minds in that era would include luminaries in Thomistic philosophy such as Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, and Joseph Maréchal, and poets, thinkers and men of letters such as Charles Péguy, Paul Claudel, and Georges Bernanos. Teilhard de Chardin and Gabriel Marcel looked at the world from vastly different points of view: the former focusing on the evolving universe with its Omega Point, the latter pondering the human situation in a world pregnant with 'mystery'.¹³ What seems to unite all these thinkers is a concern for the meaning of human existence in a world which, reeling from two devastating world wars, has since lost its innocence: not simply 'What is the meaning of human existence?' but even more fundamentally, 'Is there meaning...?' Thus theological controversies in this period, at first sight seemingly abstract, often masked deeper, more existential issues. Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel* (1946), for example, while it provoked heated scholarly disagreements over the correct understanding of nature and grace, actually touched on a fundamental issue of human existence. As David Schindler puts it: 'The question has to do with the way in which relation to God becomes constitutive of the human being, such that life is fundamentally a drama, an engagement with God.'¹⁴

¹² Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy. Volume 9, Part II: Bergson to Sartre* (New York: Image, 1977), 16, 135.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 113-34.

¹⁴ Interview with David Schindler, by the 'Threads' magazine of the Archdiocese of Denver, 2002. Cf. <http://ressourcement.aquaetignis.org/articles/schindler.html>. In similar terms Fergus Kerr writes: 'What was again the result of painstaking historical research in often long neglected texts...had emerged more openly as a demand for the retrieval of the biblical-patristic power of the doctrine of the image of God – retrieved precisely to defend the religious or sacred character of human nature – of all human life.' Cf. his article, 'French Theology: Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac', in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford (Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 105-17, in 111.

In other words, faced with such a *Sitz im Leben*, French Catholic theology could no longer afford to be merely abstract, pedantic or, as de Lubac characterized it, ‘shabby’ and ‘separated’ from culture and society.¹⁵ It had to refashion its critical perspective such as to cast it, as Mark Schoof observes, in three directions: at the authentic Christian past, at contemporary existential experience, and at the experience of other Christian churches.¹⁶ These new viewpoints became distinctive of the French Catholic theological revival in the twentieth century, which has been described in various ways. It has been called ‘*nouvelle*’, chiefly as a term of opprobrium by its opponents.¹⁷ Another term, now obsolete, depicts it as ‘Cisalpinist’.¹⁸ But what characterizes Bouyer’s theology best is the term ‘*ressourcement*’, meaning ‘re-sourcing’, or more clearly if less elegantly, ‘back to the sources’.

Bouyer is recognized today as a *ressourcement* theologian of great stature and significance. Marcellino D’Ambrosio places him squarely among ‘some of the greatest

¹⁵ ‘A shabby theology that is not even traditional. A separated theology, in the wake of a separated philosophy.’ Cf. de Lubac, ‘Apologetics and Theology,’ in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 95, quoted by Joseph A. Komonchak, ‘Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac,’ *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), 579-602, in 582. By ‘separated theology’ de Lubac meant (according to Komonchak) theology’s ‘exile’ and ‘alienation’ from contemporary culture, making it virtually, even totally, irrelevant. (Ibid., 580.)

¹⁶ Schoof, *Breakthrough*, 15.

¹⁷ It is generally thought that Pius XII’s 1950 encyclical, *Humani Generis*, was chiefly directed against the practitioners of *la nouvelle théologie*. Paul McPartlan perceptively writes, in defence of Henri de Lubac who was perhaps the most notable among the *nouvelle* theologians: ‘What was “*nouvelle*” was his understanding that we theologize in history and that teaching on nature and grace, as on church and Eucharist, has changed over the years.’ Cf. McPartlan’s entry on ‘Henri de Lubac,’ in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 157. Also cf. Aidan Nichols, ‘Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie’ in *Beyond the Blue Glass: Catholic Essays on Faith and Culture* (London: Saint Austin, 2002), 33-52.

¹⁸ Adrian Hastings describes Cisalpinist (in contradistinction to ultramontanist) theology as appealing, not to neo-scholasticism, but to a far more creative use of biblical and patristic sources; accepting the correctness of part of classical Protestantism’s critique of Roman Catholicism; adhering to the highest standards of modern scholarship though in a very traditional manner; and being open to Protestant scholarship and theology. Hastings also adds that very little of Cisalpinist theology was actually very modern in terms of the latter half of the twentieth century, and ‘hardly anything in it challenged in the slightest the more basic dogmas of Catholic theology, Trinitarian, incarnational and sacramental.’ Cf. his article ‘Catholic History from Vatican I to John Paul II’, in *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, ed. A. Hastings (London: SPCK; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1-13, in 10.

names in twentieth-century Catholic scholarship' such as de Lubac, Daniélou, Balthasar, Congar, and Chenu.¹⁹ It is to be noted that most, if not all, of the theologians he cites would not, strictly speaking, be considered 'original' thinkers, for it is by the very nature of *ressourcement* that the accent, indeed the primary inspiration, is on the foundational sources of the Christian faith. Theirs is the task of *re-presenting* the riches of the Christian tradition, recovered above all from sacred scripture though also from the Fathers and the liturgy, to a new generation of believers beset by new challenges and problems. While *ressourcement* might sometimes be caricatured as 'conservative', it is more correct and meaningful to speak of it as 'conserving', as preserving what is of incomparable worth. In doing theology historically, *ressourcement* does not simply entail 'digging up' the past, like some archaeological operation; it is, as Bouyer puts it, both a 'judicious adaptation' of the untold riches to new situations in the contemporary Church and world, and a 'new creation'.²⁰ Similarly, Congar would say that the task of theology is not a matter of 'restitution', but rather a creative hermeneutical endeavour in which the very sources of the Christian faith are 'reinterrogated' by the new questions of the age.²¹

Ressourcement theology aimed to make theology relevant to a contemporary ecclesial situation deemed inseparable from the wider societal context. For Bouyer, the theologian's task (*métier*) is essentially one of interpreting the Word of God in the light of the Church's experience, which itself may not be divorced from the experience of the

¹⁹ Marcellino D'Ambrosio, 'Ressourcement theology, *aggiornamento*, and the hermeneutics of tradition', *Communio* 18 (Winter 1991): 530-55, in 531.

²⁰ *Cistercian Heritage*, xii.

²¹ D'Ambrosio, 'Ressourcement theology', 532, citing Congar's *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'église* (Paris: Cerf, 1950), 335, 337.

rest of humanity.²² By going ‘back to the sources’, this theological movement endeavoured to re-establish contact between Christian and contemporary thought, and to rescue theology from its intellectual and cultural ‘exile’.²³ Theological *aggiornamento* was linked with an urgent, even critical pastoral necessity. In 1947, Emmanuel Suhard, cardinal-archbishop of Paris and long the protector of the worker-priest movement, exhorted the Catholic intellectuals of France in a pastoral letter: ‘Your task, therefore, Christian thinkers, is not to follow, but to lead. It is not enough to be disciples, you must become masters; it is not enough to imitate, you must invent.’²⁴ Moreover, *ressourcement* theology was considered, in Fergus Kerr’s view, one of the best ways to counteract anti-Protestant narrowness.²⁵ By returning to the common wellsprings of Church dogma and Christian life – indeed back to *the* source who is Christ himself – by ‘recentering’, in Congar’s words, ‘in the person of Christ and in his paschal mystery’,²⁶ *ressourcement* theology paved the way for much fruitful ecumenical rapprochement in the twentieth century.

2. Literary Corpus

BECAUSE IT IS unlikely that Bouyer will write another book, it is a fair assumption that his literary corpus is closed.²⁷ In all he has published forty-seven theological books and more than 120 articles.²⁸

²² ‘This experience which the Church has of itself ... is developed at the very heart of the experience of humanity in order to clarify it and lead it, under the providential direction of the Spirit, to that end which God, in creating the world, has assigned to it: encounter and union with Him.’ Cf. *Le métier*, 46.

²³ Komonchak, ‘Theology and Culture at Mid-Century’, 581.

²⁴ D’Ambrosio, ‘*Ressourcement* theology’, 547, citing Suhard’s *Growth or Decline?* 82. Unfortunately, Suhard died in 1949, and at his death the worker-priest movement was doomed.

²⁵ Kerr, ‘French Theology’, 107.

²⁶ D’Ambrosio, ‘*Ressourcement* theology’, 538, citing Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme*, 338.

²⁷ At the moment he is living in retirement at a nursing home in Paris, where he is being devotedly cared for by the good Petites Sœurs des Pauvres.

It is evident that Bouyer is a man of expansive interests, both theological and secular. A prodigious reader, he has the rare powers of understanding, assimilating diverse ideas, by turns praising or criticizing them, and re-presenting them in a synthetic whole.²⁹ His published works include patristic studies, hagiography, modern biography, ecumenical theology, even feisty polemics. He almost single-handedly wrote a *Dictionary of Theology*; out of 528 dictionary articles he was responsible for 525 entries. His years of teaching the history of Christian spirituality at the Institut Catholique de Paris bore fruit in numerous books.³⁰

Significantly, each of his first three major books represents one of the three main ‘sources’ of the French *ressourcement* project: a commentary on *The Fourth Gospel* (1938) shows the primary importance Bouyer attaches to scripture; a study on Athanasius’ theology of *L’Incarnation et l’Eglise* (1943) is his major patristic volume; and his celebrated *Le Mystère Pascal* (1945) is his first foray into liturgics. There is no doubt that all these are but essays and preparations for what would constitute his crowning achievement, what has been called a ‘triple triptych’.³¹ This consists of three sets of trilogies written, in all, over a period of thirty-seven years. There is, first of all, what Bouyer calls an ‘economic trilogy’ which considers creation under three inter-

²⁸ Cf. the Bibliography of this thesis. The count of his published books does not include a catechism to prepare Protestant children to receive first communion, entitled *Venez car tout est prêt* (1938); lectures notes taken from his courses at the Institut Catholique de Paris and subsequently printed; numerous contributions to collected essays and *Festschriften*; and four fictional works under various pseudonyms.

²⁹ Jean Duchesne recalls: ‘He had one of the best minds I ever came across, with extraordinary talent. He read quickly, assimilated and remembered what he read, organizing and synthesizing an amazing amount of materials. He did that when there were still no computers, and he kept very few notes. Everything was in his mind! He was somebody who could tell you that he had read this – he would quote it – in a book ten years ago, and then would give you the page number!’ Interview with Duchesne, 27 September 2002, Cardinal Lustiger’s residence, Paris.

³⁰ E.g., *The Cistercian Heritage* (1955); *Erasmus and His Times* (1955); *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (1961); his book-length article on Byzantine spirituality collected in *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (1961), co-authored with Jean Leclercq and François Vandebroucke; and *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality* (1965).

connected aspects: *Mary* as the prototype and perfection of the redeemed humanity, the *Church*, both finally encompassed in a synoptic vision of a *cosmos* glorified at the end of time. Secondly, there is a ‘theological trilogy’, which is his formal, dogmatic exposition of each of the three Persons of the Trinity. Because Bouyer has described these two trilogies in great detail in an interview in 1979, and because these are admittedly the most dogmatically substantial among his works, a third trilogy tends to be largely ignored. It is also the case that the titles of this third trilogy (*Mystérion*, 1986; *Gnôsis*, 1988; and *Sophia*, 1994) are not as immediately self-explanatory compared to the other trilogies, such that it is easily assumed that these are not interconnected. Bouyer himself, however, is adamant about their cohesion and interrelation. As he explains,

... I applied myself to show how, for the whole patristic tradition and the most ancient theologians, this revelation of the Christian mystery (*Mystèrion*) makes the latter that which must guide us in interpreting all of the Word of God, and which is in turn clarified by it. That was *Gnosis*: the word, in the Christian language of that epoch, signifies properly the knowledge of God drawn from all the scriptures in the light of the Gospel.

But that itself led me to *Sophia*: that divine Wisdom which is, as it were, the enveloping theme, the knowledge (*intelligence*) of the economy of creation and of divine adoption, in the vision of faith from the divinity itself.³²

3. Three Thematic Locators

SUCH A SUBSTANTIAL literary corpus as described above may make it a daunting task to determine the overall content and general thrust of his theology. Fortunately, Bouyer himself offers an answer. An interview he gave in 1979, together with a careful examination of his favourite themes and motifs, suggests three hermeneutical keys (what might be called ‘thematic locators’) which can serve as a compass to mark what is a vast theological terrain.

In his interview published as *Le métier de théologien*, Bouyer mentions that in reading the Russian Orthodox theologian, Sergei Bulgakov, he discerned an intuition of

³¹ Personal correspondence of Jean Duchesne with the author (23 October 2001).

what he would suggest is the fundamental problem of theology – the relationship between God and creation:

It seemed to me [says Bouyer] that there was in these books [of Bulgakov] a very interesting perspective, which put at the centre of the whole fundamental problem of theology, namely, the relationship between God – the life of God which he has in himself from all eternity, and which is manifested in the Trinity – and creation, considered not only as produced by him but as called to return to him, to enter into a relationship with him and to live in a participation in his own life.³³

This comment suggests a first thematic locator by which one can ‘place’ and interpret Bouyer’s prodigious writings: His entire theological enterprise may be described as being concerned above all with envisioning and articulating *the relationship between God and humanity*.

If one asks Bouyer *how* he envisions this relationship taking place, his answer would constitute a second thematic locator: *that the key term ‘Word of God’ is his primary motif for describing how that relationship is possible and how it is to be characterized: as creative, salvific, and unitive*. Most of Bouyer’s books are directly or indirectly concerned with the divine Word. ‘The sources of theology,’ he says, ‘can appear very simple at first sight: it is essentially the Word of God. Only the Word of God is presented to us, not by means of two sources, Scripture and Tradition, but by means of a complexity of approaches, which is nevertheless organically one, from one unique source.’³⁴ This statement undoubtedly links Bouyer’s *ressourcement* project with his desire to recover the full biblical and traditional meaning of the ‘Word’.

Finally, a third thematic locator of Bouyer’s theology is this: *the goal of the divine-human relationship, or the result of the divine intervention in human history, is divine adoption*. Human beings are made ‘sons in the Son’. In his books, Bouyer returns again and again to this theme by means of many other similar terms or images:

³² *Sophia*, 8.

³³ *Le métier*, 188.

recapitulation, divinization, the wedding-feast of the Lamb, or more simply, union with God. He says, for example: 'The Word of God is communicated to the Church in a vision inseparable from entering vitally into union with God the Father.'³⁵ Aidan Nichols, reviewing Bouyer's *The Invisible Father*, notes the centrality of this theme in his theology. Nichols writes: 'The doctrine of adoptive divine filiation lies at the heart of Bouyer's triadology: Cyrillism in modern exegetical guise.'³⁶

C. THE PLAN OF THE PRESENT WORK

THIS STUDY OF Bouyer's doctrine of the Church examines it under the primary motif of the 'Word of God', and secondarily, the motif of 'Wisdom'.

The first two chapters are prerequisite to a full articulation of his Word-centred ecclesiology: a preliminary exposé of Bouyer's theology of the Word of God (*Chapter One*), leads to his theological reflections on the Christian mystery and liturgy (*Chapter Two*).

On the basis of a perceived 'Word-Mystery-Liturgy' continuum, *Chapter Three* then argues that Bouyer's primary construal of the ecclesial community is what this thesis calls his 'Word-ecclesiology', the Church constituted by and inseparably linked with Christ, *the Word of God par excellence*.

Chapter Four claims that Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology, already penetrated by his manifest interest in the divine Wisdom, needs to be complemented and further deepened by a more thorough examination of the latter. Thus a 'Wisdom-ecclesiology' will be seen to provide a second aspect of his doctrine of the Church.

³⁴ *Le métier*, 212.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cf. Nichols' review in the *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 (2001): 81-82, in 82.

Because Bouyer envisions the Church responding to both the Word and the Wisdom of God primarily through liturgical, missionary and spiritual actions, *Chapter Five* aims to uncover the anthropological and cosmological presuppositions which undergird his construal of ecclesial action. This chapter, and some *Final Conclusions* thereafter, will bring the study to a close with an assessment of the major contributions of Bouyer's Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology.

Chapter One

BOUYER'S THEOLOGY OF THE WORD OF GOD

A. INTRODUCTION

THE PRECEDING DISCUSSION has proposed three thematic locators or hermeneutical keys with which to appreciate Louis Bouyer's entire theological project. This means that, to the question 'What is Bouyer's theology all about?', one might respond: firstly, that Bouyer writes extensively on the *divine-human relationship* which, he suggests, is perhaps the most fundamental and central concern of theology; secondly, that the *primary means of establishing that relationship* is the 'Word of God'; and thirdly, that the *goal of the relationship* is mutual encounter and union. These three thematic locators are closely interrelated, and they argue in favour of not only the importance of the Church in Bouyer's dogmatic purview (the 'human' side of the divine-human relationship) but also the centrality of the Word of God in precisely bringing about that relationship.

All Bouyer scholars have noted the preponderant use of the Word-motif which constitutes an integral part of and shapes his over-all theological vision. Henry Twohig observes that 'Bouyer's theology, and not just his Christology, is firmly anchored to what might be called a foundation-principle in his thought: the Word of God.'¹ The same is noted by Jean-François Hùe, for whom the evolution of Bouyer's Christology, as it is with his entire theology, is 'in its most essential form ... a response to the Word: a eucharistic response.'² Karin Heller situates her examination of the nuptial relationship (between man and woman, heaven and earth, God and humanity) in the context of a

¹ Twohig, *Christology of Bouyer*, 329-30.

² Hùe, *L'Incarnation du Verbe*, 25.

theology of the Word.³ Jan Chaim's study begins with what he considers to be the starting point of Bouyer's sacramental perspective, 'namely, the reality of the Word of God', and he writes:

Although the liturgical perspective is the first and fundamental characteristic of the sacramental thought of Louis Bouyer, this however is not the only one. In fact, what distinguishes it much more is the particular importance attributed to the Word of God. Coming from Protestantism, Bouyer was always particularly sensitive to the necessity of bringing in reflection on the Word of God in every theological discourse.⁴

Some authors have observed crucial links in the key ideas much used by Bouyer. Pierre Rakotomahefa's exposition of Bouyer's sacramental theology begins with the idea of the 'mystery', which requires the revealing 'Word' in order to make known the secret. Rakotomahefa writes:

But this 'Mystery' also remains a 'secret', as long as God does not reveal it. That is why God has spoken. The second part [of this dissertation] centres on the 'Word of God': from the God who speaks to the shared Word. [...] The advantage of a study of the Word of God in the theology of Father Bouyer is the fact that the connection between Word and Sacrament becomes more concrete.⁵

While Rakotomahefa is correct in noticing the link in Bouyer between Word and mystery, he is incorrect in reversing the order. As this thesis argues, the starting point for Bouyer is the *Word* which, in the course of its historical involvement in the life of Israel, finally and definitively reveals its core message: the *Mystery* of Christ. Similarly, Richard Walling's examination of the way in which Bouyer draws together religious anthropology, the mystery of the Incarnation, and the Christian liturgical celebration, highlights the connection between 'Word' and 'liturgy'. Walling rightly notes that the eucharistic liturgy is an actualization of the Christian mystery.⁶ Hence, by showing the relationship in Bouyer between the Word and the Christian liturgy, Walling makes a

³ Heller, *Ton Créateur*, 24.

⁴ Chaim, *La Dottrina sacramentale*, 32, 69.

⁵ Rakotomahefa, *Le Repas-sacrifice*, 18.

⁶ Walling, *Metamorphosis*, 220.

similar point as this thesis. However, Walling does not explicate the important and direct relationship between the Word and the mystery itself. As the following chapter will demonstrate, Bouyer's key terms follow the progression 'Word-Mystery-Liturgy'.

This thesis, concerned as it is with Louis Bouyer's ecclesiology, argues that an all-important Word-motif shapes his doctrine of the Church.⁷ The articulation of what might then be called his 'Word-ecclesiology' will require two necessary, intermediate steps. First, the present chapter will expound, analyze, and assess Bouyer's theology of the Word. Unless one appreciates the theologian's massive effort to recover the pristine and full meaning of the biblical 'Word', the significance of his account of an inseparable Church-Word relationship will be missed. The next chapter will then argue that Bouyer's depiction of the biblical 'Word' leads him to train his sights on the evangelical 'mystery', which for him constitutes the primary content, core and climax of the divine Word itself. It is in the Christian liturgy that the mystery of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (*1 Corinthians* 2:2) is actualized and, as it were, contemporized, made available to Christians and to the Church today, and thus it is in this straight line from Word to mystery to liturgy that Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology (the subject matter of Chapter Three) is to be found.

Bouyer did not formulate his theology of the Word in an intellectual vacuum. In his youth the so-called 'biblical movement' would have waxed strong among the Christian churches.⁸ As a Protestant (Lutheran) up to the age of twenty-six, he would have been steeped in the theological tradition of the 'churches of the Word', whose

⁷ Chapter Four supplements this view by making the claim that a Wisdom-motif, already perceptible and contained within Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology, likewise shapes and drives his doctrine of the Church.

⁸ Josef Jungmann notes that one of the reasons why the movement, which began in the aftermath of the first world war, soon lost much of its momentum, was that 'it was too academic and not sufficiently linked with the prayer of the Church.' Cf. his *Announcing the Word of God*, trans. Ronald Walls (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 159.

manifesto could be summed up in the words of his co-religionist of an earlier generation,

Hermann Bezzel:

How are Word and sacrament related to one another? [...] The Word has been the first and will remain the first. We do not read: Heaven and earth shall pass away but my sacraments shall not pass away; we read: But my words shall not pass away. [...] The Word is the primary thing. The Word existed before the sacrament was. The Word stands alone, the sacrament cannot stand alone. The Word is God's original essence, the sacrament is first aroused by our need. The Word will remain after our need, the sacrament will disappear after our need.⁹

The most outstanding example of a Protestant doctrine of the Word of God was perhaps that of Karl Barth; it is certain that Bouyer read at least the first volume of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.¹⁰

Similarly, in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic theology experienced a renewed ferment in the area of the Word of God. The 'Word of God', understood as Holy Scripture, had by then been critically studied by Catholic exegetes since at least the beginning of the twentieth century, endorsed by the highest authorities in the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943). But the 'Word of God', understood as divine revelation and self-communication in relation to the Church, received much less critical attention by Catholic theologians, prompting Karl Rahner to

⁹ Cf. Johannes Rupprecht, *Hermann Bezzel als Theologe* (1925), 369, cited by Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 Part 1 (henceforth abbreviated *CD I/1*), ed. Geoffrey Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 71. This quotation is intended to illustrate the extent to which word-sacrament polemics tended to polarize rather than articulate a rapprochement. Bouyer himself recalls that his Lutheran upbringing was, surprisingly for its time ('so exceptional before the war of 1914 in a French Protestant milieu'), very liturgically-minded. He would therefore not have taken such an entrenched position as Bezzel. As a Roman Catholic, he would have appreciated the sacraments even more, although his unique contribution (which this thesis intends to bring out) is his emphasis on the Word which, far from being opposed to sacrament, actually complements it. For biographical background on Bouyer, cf. *Le métier*, 11 ff. (the quotation in this footnote is taken from p. 11).

¹⁰ This is evident from Bouyer's extensive use of Barth's ideas, footnoted in his *Spirit and Forms*. It can be argued that Bouyer's polemical arguments in that book against Barth, compelling as they may be, nevertheless suffer from a common affliction among Barth's critics: a partial reading of an otherwise massive opus of thirteen volumes. On the one hand, Barth's theology developed as the theologian matured. On the other hand, Bouyer seems to have understood Barth not altogether differently from conventional Roman Catholic readings of the latter's theology, at least at that time.

lament, 'Alas, that there should still be no theology of the Word!'¹¹ Another contemporary, Yves Congar, explored the importance of the divine Word from the perspective of the primacy of 'hearing' over 'seeing'. Congar observed that the people of God, both Israel and the Christian Church, are called to 'hear' (*Shema*), and that biblical faith is more the result of hearing than seeing. From beginning to end, Israel is characterized and constituted by virtue of hearing the Word of God, and of accepting it with active faith.¹² More strikingly, Congar declared in the late 1960s that 'if in one country Mass was celebrated for thirty years without preaching and in another there was preaching for thirty years without the Mass, people would be more Christian in the country where there was preaching....'¹³

In short, both because of his Protestant background and because of the lacuna in Catholic dogmatics, Bouyer had justifiable reasons to be interested in developing his own theology of the Word. To be sure, if by 'theology of the Word' one simply means a treatise on the doctrine of revelation, such accounts were not lacking in Catholic theology. But this was not exactly what Bouyer had in mind. As he puts it:

Most of the time our theological manuals prefer to speak of 'revelation' rather than 'Word of God.' The Word of God seems to interest them only to the extent that it reveals certain truths inaccessible to human reason. These 'truths' themselves are

¹¹ Karl Rahner, 'Priest and Poet', in *Theological Investigations Vol. 3: Theology of the Spiritual Life* (Baltimore: Helicon; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 294-317, in 294. Rahner need not be so modest: his own contribution to a growing appreciation for the Word can be found in at least another article entitled 'The Word and the Eucharist', in *Theological Investigations Vol. 4: More Recent Writings* (1966), 253-86.

¹² Yves Congar, *Called to Life*, trans. William Burrige (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 23. The coming of Christ only reinforces the primacy of hearing over seeing. In the New Testament, although the verb 'to see' is used more frequently than 'to hear', nevertheless, 'faith is the operative factor in the New Testament and faith comes from hearing the Word,' Congar points out, citing *Romans* 10:14, 'How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?' Indeed, although John's Gospel makes much of the faculty (or grace) of 'seeing' Christ, does it not end with the beatitude, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe' (*John* 20:29)? Thus, he concludes, although 'seeing' is not totally excluded, 'hearing' now assumes the key role.

¹³ Idem, 'Sacramental Worship and Preaching', *Concilium* 3/4 (1968): 27-33, in 31. It is, however, worthwhile noting that Congar qualifies this statement by pointing out: 'However important preaching may be, one cannot make Christians with sermons only.' (Ibid.)

conceived as separate doctrinal statements, and the Word of God finally is reduced to a collection of formulas.¹⁴

In other words, the manualist tendency to subsume the 'Word of God' under the general rubric of *De Revelatione* despoils the former of its biblical richness and treats the latter only as 'things to be learned' from God.¹⁵ Throughout his exposition, Bouyer will return almost untiringly to this refrain: that God gives his Word in order that he might be 'known', not conceptually or merely intellectually, but in the biblical sense of the most intimate of relationships. The goal of God's Word, he says, is 'not simply the communication of a truth, but the communication of life'.¹⁶ But perhaps the most important reason why Bouyer underscores the Word-motif is that, for him, the 'one many-splendored mystery' of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ, the Word of God par excellence, who is God's total and indeed 'only possible' revelation to humanity.¹⁷ There is no doubt as to the centre of gravity in Bouyer's theology of the Word: at the very outset, his christocentrism is evident, consistent, and insistent.

¹⁴ *Eucharist*, 31.

¹⁵ Avery Dulles' *Models of Revelation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), by its very title, attempts to present the various ways by which Christian theology has understood and conceptualized the notion of 'revelation'. The starting premise is therefore the concept of revelation more or less understood as 'a permanently valid body of truths communicated by God in biblical times, preserved and commented on by the Church' (p. 6). Under the rubric 'revelation as dialectical presence', Dulles mentions the 'word-theologies' of Barth et al. (whom he summarily calls 'dialectical theologians') which highlight the 'Word' as the locus of revelatory and salvific encounter between God and humanity; overall Dulles is not satisfied with this model. Some of his criticisms, insofar as they may or may not apply to Bouyer's own 'word-theology', will be considered at the end of this chapter.

¹⁶ *Le métier*, 54. Bouyer candidly mentions a theological disagreement he had with Jean Daniélou, his co-faculty member at the Institut Catholique de Paris, over this very conception of the 'Word of God':

'On this point [says Bouyer] I found myself disagreeing with the future Cardinal Daniélou, for whom the Word of God was simply the revelation, and thus the communication of divine truth to our intelligence. On the one hand, there is this revelation; on the other, the historical facts and all that we have done up to the present. But according to him, these are two absolutely different, though related, things. I believe that when one shares this perspective and considers the Word of God simply as an intellectual communication ... one inevitably falls into a conception of the liturgy purely and simply as teaching (*didactisme*). [...] Cardinal Daniélou later came to hold more correct and traditional views....' (Ibid.)

¹⁷ *Eternal Son*, 13, 16.

A systematic exposition of Bouyer's doctrine of the Word of God must necessarily begin by making clear to what the term refers. In brief, the theologian has in mind three interrelated referents: divine revelation, scripture, and Jesus Christ.¹⁸ These are inseparably connected and share a unique historical progression. The Word first makes its appearance as the gratuitous and unexpected self-revelation of God in the history of Israel. It traverses uncounted years of living contact with the Jewish people in the oral tradition of the prophets, before finally being written down and subsequently venerated as Israel's sacred scriptures. Then appears the Word's definitive historical realization; as the Christian scriptures put it: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son' (*Hebrews* 1:1), a Son whom the same scriptures designate as *the* Word of God, full of grace and truth, shining forth with the glory of the Father (*John* 1:14). Hence, Bouyer's account will not only articulate a 'history of the Word' but also (what one might call) a 'pre-history': the Word as the trinitarian Second Person perfectly resembling and completely revealing the Father who, in Ferdinand Ulrich's felicitous phrase, utters forth his whole being in his Son 'without remainder'.¹⁹

In addition to clarifying the referents of Bouyer's use of the term 'Word of God', it may also be necessary to throw light on his methodological approach; *how* he goes about doing his theology may explain *what* he says about it. In his depiction of the Word, Bouyer employs three complementary methodological approaches or 'styles' of

¹⁸ This chapter will develop more thoroughly the first and third referents; the second, sacred scripture as the 'fixed form' (Bouyer's description) of the Word of God, will be discussed in Chapter Three in the context of scripture's ecclesiality.

¹⁹ Ferdinand Ulrich, 'The Unity of Life and Death in the Word of Life', in *Communio* 28 (Spring 2001), 99-111, in 99. Ulrich writes:

'The God whom in faith we call "Father" is a God who speaks. The God who speaks is, as such, the unoriginate origin of the Son, the Word in whom he utters forth his whole being without remainder. In giving the Son the whole wealth, the undiminished plenitude, of the divine life, the Father goes out of himself in his living Word. In himself, God is love eternally given away: the absolute unity of wealth and poverty.'

theologizing.²⁰ These are: a **phenomenological** approach, borrowing eclectically from the likes of Karl Barth, Martin Buber and others, which is not primarily historical but is more concerned with describing the Word's *esse*; an **anthropological-historical** approach culling extensively from *les sciences annexes* such as depth-psychology, mythology, cultural anthropology, and the comparative history of religions; and finally, a **biblical-historical** approach, more properly theological and scriptural. These permeate his whole account somewhat unsystematically, the shifts in point of view made without warning, and the result is more descriptive and narrative, rather than strictly analytical.²¹

This chapter will examine how Bouyer delineates his understanding of the Word of God under these three aspects or approaches. However, at the very outset it must be asserted that the third, the biblical-historical approach, is by far the most important and determinative for Bouyer, the one which in fact grounds and validates his entire theology of the Word, and which constitutes its essential content.

B. A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE WORD OF GOD

BOUYER'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION of the 'Word of God' begins with the simple observation that it is revelation given in words. It always expresses itself in human words,

²⁰ These three approaches, discernible in his exposition of a theology of the Word, roughly correspond to three 'contemporary philosophical acquisitions' which, according to Bouyer, are indispensable for a theologian. These are: the importance of a 'historical outlook', the contribution of the 'phenomenological revolution', and the proper place of a 'critical analysis of modern scientific thought and its location within the wider problem of language'. Cf. *Invisible Father*, 302-03.

²¹ Bouyer's tendency to intermingle these approaches in his account, apparently without warning to the reader, led one reviewer of his book, *Rite and Man*, to criticize him for failing to differentiate properly between a genetic (i.e., historical) point of view and a phenomenological point of view. As Walling, summarizing Boekema, puts it, 'he moves from one point of view to the other without accounting for his move'. Cf. Walling, *Metamorphosis*, 330, citing Cornelius Boekema, 'Pour une théologie anthropologique de sacrifice-Repas eucharistique. Réflexions critiques sur "Le rite et l'homme" de L. Bouyer', in *Eglise et Théologie* 4 (1973), 295-329.

Bouyer's trilogies are a good example of the simultaneous use of all three approaches: phenomenological, historical, and multi-disciplinary. As Bouyer expresses it in *Eternal Son*, 18, his intent was 'to develop an historical view of Christ that strives for integration and for an historical phenomenology which clarifies the unity to be found in Christ'.

for if God wants to speak to man, there is no other way of doing so except by using human words. You cannot have words between one being and another, especially from a superior being to an inferior one, if the superior being does not first consent to go down to the level of the inferior, in order to lift it up to himself. That is elementary pedagogy and psychology.²²

In other words, he says, 'If God had spoken to us in a divine language, we would not have understood anything.'²³

At first sight there seems little to distinguish, in Bouyer's conception, between the 'Word of God' and 'revelation'. While he will occasionally criticize a static model of revelation, one which is more conceptually oriented and which sees revelation as primarily, if not entirely, didactic,²⁴ for the most part he does not quibble with fine distinctions. 'Revelation', as he defines the term in his *Dictionary of Theology*, is both the 'divine action that uncovers for us the supernatural truths God has seen fit to have us know' and 'the totality of truths that are the object of the act of revealing.'²⁵ But then he announces an important qualification: Christian revelation, he says, is bound up with the more comprehensive fact of the 'Word' of God and cannot be understood except in relation to this. It is significant that Bouyer himself never attempted to produce a treatise on revelation, but almost from the first book he published the 'Word' has occupied a dominant place in his theological horizon. As has been mentioned, this is partly because of his Protestant heritage and theological formation; partly because the term 'Word' dovetails more obviously with two of its referents, Christ himself, and sacred scripture

²² *Le métier*, 92.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ For him, the major defect in a primarily conceptual approach to revelation (which is how manuals and treatises tend to present it) is the reification and thus the ossification of what should be understood as a dynamic and living reality. Although Bouyer does not object to the notion of the Word as didactic, as teaching supernatural truths, he insists that its pedagogical character must not lessen in any way its pre-eminently *relational* character.

²⁵ *Dictionary of Theology*, 390. In this regard it is similar to the theological meaning of 'tradition', which can refer to both the *process* of passing or handing on, and what is *itself* passed or handed on.

which, for Bouyer, is a source without peer for theological reflection.²⁶ Partly it can be traced to the fact that he believes that a theologian's essential task or craft (*métier*) is precisely that of 'interpreting the Word of God in the light of the Church's own experience, and which is not separated from the experience of the rest of humanity'.²⁷ But perhaps the principal reason why he manifestly prefers the term 'Word of God' over 'revelation' is because of his own more robust understanding of this key term, a term which can never be reduced to a mere conception or model, but which always denotes a living and dynamic reality.

Hence, in general Bouyer equates the divine 'Word' with divine 'self-revelation' or 'self-communication'. But it is vital to him that these concomitant terms should not be misunderstood. They should not denote mere speech or discourse, nor simply refer to instruction and the passing on of information. Being revelatory, God's Word does not set out primarily to reveal 'ideas and facts about God, but rather to reveal to us the very God who speaks.'²⁸ Likewise, the idea of 'self-communication' should be linked with the idea of 'communion' or 'sharing', the overflow of the divine Self into his creatures whom he loves: 'God, in speaking, gives and communicates His very Self'.²⁹ The very transmission of God's 'Word', 'full of grace and truth' and inherently powerful, fosters that *koinonia* of which the author of *1 John* speaks: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... that which we have seen and

²⁶ As Chapter Three will clarify, Bouyer's high regard for the Bible as 'the great Christian source of dogma and spirituality' (*Sacred Scripture*, 1) is qualified by the Catholic insistence that scripture is inseparable from tradition, which is its 'proper atmosphere, its living environment, its native light.' (*Ibid.*, 2)

²⁷ *Le métier*, 46.

²⁸ *Eternal Son*, 50.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship [κοινωνίαν] with us; and our fellowship [κοινωνία] is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1:1, 3).

This is to say that, for Bouyer, the Word of God is first of all performative or functional. Certainly it denotes a substantive reality, but it is no static and sterile 'thing', a mere set of straightforward facts – 'prophecy' conceived as a simple foretelling of the future, or 'law' understood as mere regulation of life. On the contrary, the Word is 'living and active' (*Hebrews* 4:12), effectively accomplishing that for which it was sent, and not returning empty-handed to God (*Isaiah* 55:11). It is supremely dynamic; its pre-eminent function is to disclose God himself ('to reveal to us the very God who speaks'), a disclosure which by its very doing also uncovers the true identity and nature of human beings:

God, revealing Himself to man as the All-Highest, the Sovereign in the most absolute sense of the word, will nevertheless reveal man to himself more clearly than could any exploration of his own conscience. For God will reveal Himself as the Creator of man, and, finally, as his Father, as the One Whose Word, that very Word which awakens in man a higher conscience, has created him according to the divine image.³⁰

God's Word has this power to 'reveal man to himself' both because it is *God* who speaks, and because it is his *Word* addressed to human beings, an address which is at once personal and global, that is, it encompasses the entire human person. 'God's Word is not heard as a purely informative abstract word because it is not an anonymous word addressed to no one in particular or addressed solely to the person's intellect, but rather it addresses itself to the whole of a person's being.'³¹

At the same time, the Word reveals the divine plan for creation. Bouyer says this is never simply limited to 'uncovering what already existed; quite the contrary, it determines and produces what God had in mind, which had remained hidden in him and now will be impressed in the world, in the course of things, by the sole power of his

³⁰ *Sacred Scripture*, 10.

Word.’³² In other words, God’s revelatory Word is not merely a *bringing to light*, but a *bringing about* what has eternally been in God:

The biblical Word never has as its object simply unveiling an eternal truth. It is always a revelation of a divine plan, undoubtedly eternal in God, which, in what concerns the world in which we live, is aimed at introducing and creating what was not there before. The Word of God is not so much the simple communication of this project as [it is] the power that had been destined to actualize it – and, we must immediately add, alone capable of doing so. God calls what was not and makes it be by his call.³³

At its most basic level of meaning, then, the Word of God is *the disclosure of the divine personality and the divine design*. As Bouyer summarizes it:

... there are two aspects, equally essential, to the revelation of the Word in Israel. One is the revelation of a providential design concerning the people – of a promise which is the creative source of its history, a promise the content of which is concentrated in the Covenant. The other is the revelation of God Himself, of His Personality, if we may venture to call it so, or, as the Semites would say, of His Name.³⁴

By connecting these two components, Bouyer anticipates his future moves to link more closely God in his immanent self and in his economic dealings with creation. It is moreover theologically coherent: revelation, for all its multiform content, must remain essentially one. As Israel is to discover, it is the ‘one Word of the one God’.

However pregnant with meaning might be the idea of ‘revelation’ as it has been embellished by Bouyer, he expands on his phenomenological account of the ‘Word’ by drawing from what may appear to be eclectic sources. Martin Buber’s dialogical model of authentic interpersonal communication gives him a vantage point from which to assert that God’s Word is ‘essentially a word of dialogue, of living dialogue between the divine “Thou” who communicates totally with a human “I”.... What is at work here is a word which, like every word that is truly a living word, reveals a personal intervention in and for life in its most personal aspects as well as for the one to whom the word is

³¹ *Eternal Son*, 48.

³² *Church of God*, 179.

³³ *Ibid.*

addressed.’³⁵ Note that, in this passage, Bouyer retains Buber’s original attribution of the ‘Thou’ even for God.³⁶ While this is coherent in Buber’s conceptual system, Bouyer would have done better to reverse Buber’s terms, such that it is the *divine* ‘I’ vis-à-vis the *human* ‘Thou’. This would be more consistent with his own account of a relationship sovereignly beginning with God’s initiative – the divine ‘I’ gratuitously addressing his creature precisely as a ‘Thou’. This then accords better with the biblical text he cites at the end of that same passage: ‘You, Israel, my chosen one....’³⁷ It is, as Bouyer points out, a collective call, a corporate vocation, which is nonetheless addressed to every individual.³⁸ Slowly the stage is being set for a Word-ecclesiology which integrates both the corporate and the personal aspects of the Church.

Another source for Bouyer’s more phenomenological description (compared with drawing strictly from scriptural material) is Barth’s first volume of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. There, Bouyer points out, is a doctrine ‘which undoubtedly in its essentials is but a magnificent expression of the best kind of Protestant and Biblical spirituality up to his time’.³⁹ Barth, in his estimation, has done full justice to what the Word of God means to the Protestantism of which it is the very life.⁴⁰ What exactly has Bouyer borrowed from the Swiss theologian? In the first place, Barth, in a determined campaign

³⁴ *Sacred Scripture*, 20-21.

³⁵ *Eternal Son*, 48.

³⁶ Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 99 ff. Buber’s starting point is the human subjective self-awareness which, if it is to realize itself, must reach out and acknowledge an ‘other’ in living relationship. Thus, the human ‘I’ is the one which recognizes and addresses the absolute or ‘eternal Thou’.

³⁷ In *Monastic Life*, 22, he in fact makes this qualification: “‘To seek God,’ to seek him as a person, as the Person *par excellence*, and not only as the “Thou” to whom all our love should be addressed, but as the “I” who has first approached us, whose word of love, addressed to the primeval chaos, drew us forth from it in the first place, and, spoken to us in our sin, draws us forth from it again....’

³⁸ *Eternal Son*, 48.

³⁹ *Spirit and Forms*, 134.

to rescue the 'Word' from both a deadening reification and a moribund demythologization, insists that it is an event in which it is not only God *acting* but, with equal force, *God* acting. As Barth puts it, 'We are speaking of God's Word. Therefore we have to speak of its power, its might, its effects, the changes it brings about. Because the Word of God makes history, as Word it is also act.'⁴¹ But because it is the Word *of God*, that makes all the difference, especially in comparison with mere human words:

The distinction between word and act is that mere word is the mere self-expression of a person, while act is the resultant relative alteration in the world around. Mere word is passive, act is an active participation in history. But this kind of distinction does not apply to the Word of God. As mere Word it is act. As mere Word it is the divine person, the person of the Lord of history, whose self-expression is as such an alteration, and indeed an absolute alteration of the world, whose *passio* in history is as such *actio*.⁴²

Bouyer, in his recapitulation of Barth's masterful description of the Word of God, sums it up as *act*, *presence*, and *person*:

The Word of God is an act, an act of God, a truly creative act. God has but to speak to act, to create; and this presupposes that the Word of God is God present, God coming to us and, ultimately, that it is God himself revealing himself to us in his Son, the eternal Word who took flesh to redeem us. That means that the supreme Word of God to men is Christ, and not only all he said, but all he did ... and finally all that he is for ever....⁴³

The Word's deeper reality consists in its capacity, not only to reveal or make certain things known, but precisely to make present the one speaking; in other words, in its power of actualization. It is 'the living act by which God comes to us in person', and because it cannot be separated from the living person of Jesus Christ, 'wherever the Word of God is authentically present, Christ must necessarily be there in person.'⁴⁴ This understanding of the Word of God as actualistic will be of immense significance (as Chapter Two of this thesis will bring out) when Bouyer relates it to the Eucharist.

⁴⁰ *Spirit and Forms*, 125.

⁴¹ Barth, *CD I/1*, 152.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴³ *Word, Church, Sacraments*, 74.

⁴⁴ *Spirit and Forms*, 125.

Bouyer also appreciates how Barth astutely reverses the roles of the dialogue partners. In defiance of the then theological trend to posit questions *to* the divine Word, ‘to examine and dissect it rationally’,⁴⁵ Barth insisted that it is the human being whom the Word of God questions, the human heart which the Word reveals for what it is, sinful and in dire need of salvation. Bouyer expresses astonishment

that we have had to wait for Karl Barth before arriving at a frank recognition that the Word of God does not restrict itself to answering our questions, whatever they may be, in the way we put them prior to hearing God’s Word. Rather, the Word begins by putting them in quite a different way, and by putting different ones, questions we had scarcely or never thought of. It begins by putting us, first of all, in question....⁴⁶

Once again this indicates how the Word of God, in the very revealing of the speaking God, also reveals the one addressed by God. Another way of expressing this is that it is a *living* Word; since God is personally active in his Word, his dynamism and life-giving power are everywhere present whenever his Word is spoken. There is found his power to create: God spoke, ‘and it was so’. By the same token his Word has the power to *re*-create, especially the one made in his image and now fallen into a ruinous mockery of that divine image. Bouyer repeatedly recalls the *salvific* character of the Word: ‘The Word of God is not given to satisfy a frivolous curiosity, but always to lead us to that salvation which is found only in encountering and being united with God.’⁴⁷ It is a ‘personal intervention in the life of those whom it addresses’, whose object is ‘not just to instruct a man considered as simply an intelligence but to save a sinner’.⁴⁸ And continuing with the image of intervention, he puts it vividly: ‘The type of human word to which one can compare it is, not the word of a schoolmaster, but rather that of a friend who cries out to his friend about to be consumed in his own ruin: “Watch out! Change

⁴⁵ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 41.

⁴⁶ *Invisible Father*, 258.

⁴⁷ *Le métier*, 220.

⁴⁸ *Christian Mystery*, 84.

your way, disaster's ahead!" From the beginning it is revealed, or rather, God who speaks reveals himself in it as the Saviour.'⁴⁹

It may be wondered at why Bouyer finds Barth's theological exposition so congenial. It is not only because Barth has given to the theology of the Word of God 'one of its ablest formulations',⁵⁰ in a language and literary form for which Bouyer would have had an immediate sympathy. It is not only because Barth's doctrine has found an audience among a number of eminent Roman Catholic theologians like Yves Congar and Hans Urs von Balthasar, thus indicating its essential harmony and compatibility with Catholic doctrine. A more fundamental reason for Bouyer's approval is that Barth's account resonates with Christian tradition. As he points out, 'This conception of the Word as an act of God, who seeks out and pursues us, as a creative and recreative act in whose very outpouring we encounter the world of the new creation in Christ; this discovery of the Word as the presence of God with us, and finally as the very Person of the Incarnate Son of God – all this springs from the great patristic tradition and from the living thought of Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers, St Gregory of Nazianzen and St Basil, as much as from the best of the strictly Protestant tradition.'⁵¹

This, in fact, indicates the determining factor amidst Bouyer's seemingly eclectic manner of gathering his theological sources. Whether he draws from Buber's deeply personalist *I-Thou* motif, from Barth's doctrine of the Word, or from other sources both secular and theological, what engages him most of all is what John Saward calls a 'blessed familiarity', a doctrinal resonance with the revealed data of scripture and the consensus of the received tradition.⁵² In other words, instead of bringing contemporary

⁴⁹ *Gnosis*, 33-34.

⁵⁰ *Word, Church, Sacraments*, 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

thought to bear on traditional doctrine, Bouyer makes the latter the critical standard by which the former is either accepted or rejected. As a case in point, there is another aspect of the Word which, at first sight, Bouyer also seems to draw from Barth: the Word as mystery. Barth's dialectical statement that 'Mystery is the concealment of God in which He meets us precisely when He unveils Himself to us, because He will not and cannot unveil Himself except by veiling Himself'⁵³ seems to find a parallel expression in what Bouyer calls the 'profoundly mysterious identity of the God who revealed himself in that way to Israel alone, yet revealed himself as supremely hidden: *Deus revelatus tamquam absconditus*.'⁵⁴ However, as Bouyer vigorously points out, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, the same truth, at once dialectical and paradoxical, is already brought out:

As Solomon says in dedicating the Temple: Yahweh is pleased to dwell in darkness [*1 Kings* 8:12]. It is here where God most fully reveals Himself that He appears more than ever as 'the hidden God.' It seems as though He comes so near to man only to make him understand, as would be said later on, that 'God dwells in inaccessible light' [*1 Timothy* 6:16].⁵⁵

Bouyer's phenomenological and descriptive approach to the Word cannot stand by itself. Because the term 'Word of God' indicates both a *relationship* between God and humanity, and the necessary recourse to *human words* to convey God's self-communication, a theological account of the Word calls for its insertion within, its place in, and its interaction with human history. For Bouyer this involves two aspects: first, a consideration of human history in general which, according to him, 'is primarily the history of our search for God', and second, a consideration of 'that particular history of

⁵² John Seward, *Cradle of Redeeming Love: The Theology of the Christmas Mystery* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), 14.

⁵³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 165.

⁵⁴ *Le Père invisible*, 177 (author's translation).

⁵⁵ *Sacred Scripture*, 45.

the people of Israel into which [Christ was] born and which can best be described as the history of God's search for us.'⁵⁶ This assertion clamours to be unpacked, and this is what the next two sections are intended to do: first, an anthropological perspective which will shed light on humanity's deeply religious search for God; and second, a biblical and more properly theological vision which will illuminate God's profoundly merciful search for humankind.

C. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE WORD OF GOD

WHY DOES BOUYER claim that human history in its totality represents 'the history of our search for God'? This assertion is rooted in his conviction that human beings, by their very constitution, are created with an irrepressible desire for God. St Paul observed this among the Greeks, whose sense of the transcendent carried them into polytheism, and whose reluctance to not overlook any deity led them to erect an altar to the 'unknown god' (*Acts* 17:23). In a classic formulation St Augustine summed up all that is deepest and most primordial in the human heart in his 'Fecisti nos ad te, Deus....' Closer to Bouyer's time, Henri de Lubac affirmed (though not without stirring up a hornet's nest of controversy) the traditional teaching on the supernatural finality of every human person and the sheer gratuitousness of that gift,⁵⁷ and Karl Rahner proposed a

⁵⁶ *Eternal Son*, 18.

⁵⁷ As to the first, de Lubac writes: 'The infinite importance of the desire implanted in me by my Creator is what constitutes the infinite importance of the drama of human existence. ... For God's call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And, by God's will, I now have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of "seeing God".' Cf. his *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 70. As to the second, the following quotations should dispel any doubts that de Lubac was advocating the idea that the beatific vision was somehow owed or due to human beings: 'Il exige que Dieu soit libre dans son offre, comme il exige d'être libre lui-même (en un tout autre sens) dans l'acceptation de cette offre' (idem, *Supernaturel: Etudes historiques* [Paris: Aubier, 1946], 483), and 'The supernatural is not owed to nature; it is nature which, if it is to obey God's plan, owes itself to the supernatural if that supernatural is offered to it' (*Mystery*, 123).

transcendental approach which appraises the human being as constituted by an unthematized longing for the absolute.⁵⁸

However strong, even decisive, these indications may be, Bouyer relies much more on the findings of scholars in the fields of social and cultural anthropology, the history of religions, and depth psychology, to buttress his phenomenological treatment of the Word of God vis-à-vis what he calls 'primitive' cultures, the early human civilizations which predated Israelite history.⁵⁹ Thus in his footnotes he adverts to the numerous cultural, anthropological, and religious studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But again it must be pointed out that his recourse to secular scholarship is not intended to replace but rather to support and complement the biblical and traditional teaching. Indeed, as one critic complains, in Bouyer's use of secular, scholarly literature,

Often enough the reality of the facts seems skewed in a way favourable to the thesis which he is defending... For the reader who is a little more specialized in these matters, this results in a disagreeable impression of an apologetic all the more polemical inasmuch as the thought of [Bouyer] proceeds by way of dogmatic affirmations rather than demonstrations....⁶⁰

In other words, while historians of religion and specialists in religious anthropology might fault Bouyer for 'inaccuracy and oversimplification' in dealing with specialized,

⁵⁸ Rahner's 'theological anthropology' may be gleaned, among other places, in his *Foundations of Christian Faith*. He writes, for example, that

'If man really is a subject, that is, a transcendent, responsible and free being...then basically this has already said that man is a being oriented towards God. His orientation towards the absolute mystery always continues to be offered to him by this mystery as the ground and content of his being. [...] At this point theology and anthropology necessarily become one.'

Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978), 44. In other words, the starting point for Rahner's *theological* reflections is *anthropological*: the basic apprehension of the human subject as transcendental, 'in the deepest origins and roots of his being' (ibid., 40), leads to the realization that the source and goal of that transcendence is God himself.

⁵⁹ By 'primitive' Bouyer means, not a pejorative valuation of the early civilizations, but the more etymological sense of being 'first' or 'early', and the phenomenological sense of a 'spontaneous total experience in a world that is uncomplicated and free from sophisticated abstraction.' Cf. *Eternal Son*, 48.

⁶⁰ Michel Meslin, 'Liturgie et science des religions: Note à propos d'un livre récent', in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 163 (1963): 53-76, in 56.

scientific data, they cannot accuse him of intellectual dishonesty or plain naiveté.⁶¹ Bouyer's very critics perceive (whether they agree with him or not) that the theologian makes use of secular data in order to advance dogmatic claims and to defend dogmatic *a priori*. As Walling puts it, 'the choice which Bouyer makes in retaining or rejecting arguments from the data of religious phenomena seems to be based on the ability of such arguments to support his thesis, which is a theological thesis'.⁶² What becomes apparent is Bouyer's method of marshalling perspectives both from the history of theology and from *les sciences annexes* to be at the service of *a priori* dogmatic positions.

If this analysis of Bouyer's interdisciplinary approach is correct, it presumably mitigates Barth's concern that the search for apologetic prolegomena with regards to the doctrine of the Word of God posits a pre-existing, anthropological point of contact between the divine speaker and the human hearer. The fatal flaw in this, as John Webster explains it, is that a dogmatics on the Word becomes hostage to 'axioms drawn from the worlds of history, religion, experience or disciplined inquiry, [rather than being] the sheer miracle of God's self-communicative presence.'⁶³ In Bouyer's hands, however, insights from the anthropological or religious sciences may not constitute founding principles for making truth-claims, for the latter can be proposed from the Word of God alone. At most, these other sources, whether secular or theological, can only claim a supportive or affirmative role; they are 'still inchoate and tentative, but already very fruitful'. One may not put them in the place of the authentic dogmatic sources; on the other hand, 'they can contribute to clarifying these sources and help to situate them in

⁶¹ Walling (*Metamorphosis*, 344 ff) gives a useful summary of critical literature on Bouyer's books. He observes that 'inaccuracy and oversimplification' with regards to secular scholarship are the two most obvious and frequent weaknesses in Bouyer's writings pointed out by his reviewers.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 334.

⁶³ John Webster, *Barth* (Outstanding Christian Thinkers series) (London & New York: Continuum, 2000), 54.

their proper historical context. That is absolutely essential.’⁶⁴ With these preliminary comments, Bouyer’s anthropological-historical account of the Word of God in human history may now be expounded.

In a statement of great hermeneutical importance for understanding what he is doing, the theologian says that

It is impossible ... to understand the Word of God without a very deep and richly informed knowledge of what the myths of the non-Christian religions, not directly touched by the Word of God, have produced, for they constitute a building material which has served to express man’s new vision of his relation to the cosmos and to the source of the cosmos, brought about by the Word of God and which would otherwise have been unintelligible to us.⁶⁵

To speak of myths as ‘building material’ for the Word risks the charge that Bouyer is subverting theology to mythology or ‘religion’. To counter this Bouyer must necessarily clarify what he means by ‘myth’; his phenomenology of myth will resemble his phenomenology of ‘Word’ or ‘revelation’ in that it consists in dispelling wrong notions and in restoring the term to its pristine and substantially rich meaning. In the process, he will show how the Word of God could not have arisen out of nothing or from nowhere; its point of departure can only be, for Bouyer, in the myths of primitive humanity groping almost vainly for ways to express the ineffable.

For Bouyer, myth does not mean fable, an unreal story nonetheless intended to teach something true. According to him, nineteenth-century thinking characterized myth as something symptomatic of humanity’s ‘infantile stages of development before coming to the use of reason.’⁶⁶ Bouyer finds this attitude of scientific condescension intolerable. Myth, for him, is the primary means by which human beings express their primitive sense of ‘something more’, of what may be called the supernatural. Using the medium of language, myth ‘forges the very language itself so that communication between the

⁶⁴ *Le métier*, 220-21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

divine Word and human wisdom is possible.’⁶⁷ In other words, myth makes use of what is uniquely human (namely, language) in order to express something equally and uniquely human (religious awe at the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*).⁶⁸ As Bouyer asks rhetorically, ‘what language could the Word of God have used in speaking to man except that in which man spontaneously expresses himself?’⁶⁹

Primitive myth then becomes the first linguistic link between two worlds, the divine and the human, just as primitive ritual is their performative and symbolic link. It is myth which expresses the ‘inner content’ of rites, interpreting and elaborating on human experience of the world, leading up to ‘one intuitive and all-inclusive vision, so that the world may then be formally acknowledged in its primordial unity, rather than being just mysteriously sensed.’⁷⁰ Both myth and ritual have an essential role in any culture, embedded in the very fabric of humanity, giving it both a teleological significance and an entry-point into the supernatural. ‘For rites ... are an activity of man in the world, through which he attunes his being and his life to the main coordinates of cosmic life and being. In ritual observance, human activity therefore tends to follow divine activity’.⁷¹ Indeed, for Bouyer, myth plays the important role of reminding human beings that all ritual, though celebrated as a human activity, remains fundamentally and properly a *divine* activity. Humans are not the main actors, only spectators or, at most, participants. Thus, paradoxically, it contradicts and works against

⁶⁶ *Eternal Son*, 68.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Sacred Scripture*, 70, citing Rudolf Otto’s *Le Sacré* (Fr. translation, Paris, 1949).

⁶⁹ *Christian Mystery*, 83.

⁷⁰ *Cosmos*, 14.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

any tendency towards magic, putting a check to the all-too-easy illusion that one is in control of the mysterious power he senses in ritual activity.⁷²

By insisting on this relationship between myth and Word, what does Bouyer accomplish? Stated differently, what is he so keen to protect?

First of all, Bouyer is concerned about the legitimate appropriation of 'myth' in theological discourse. In his time, the scientific study of myth was especially prone to two extreme interpretations or viewpoints, both concealing philosophical, even religious, assumptions. One viewpoint saw it as universal to all primitive cultures, *therefore* proving that there was nothing particularly special or 'inspired' with Christian revelation understood as mythical. The other viewpoint also assumed Christian revelation to be primarily couched in mythical and symbolic language, *therefore* needing to be demythologized and restored to its pristine meaning. Bouyer's approach is significantly different. He accepts the role played by myth in the historical unfolding of the Word of God; in other words, that there is a necessary anthropological component to the historical realization of the divine Word. Yet he hastens to declare that myth is at best only partially truthful. It cannot be taken at its face value, it is by its very nature distorted, and 'mythic consciousness is innately troubled by what can be referred to as the Fall'.⁷³ In Bouyer's account, this is one of the many places where anthropology and biblical revelation intersect, and when that happens it is the latter which controls and explains the former.

Secondly, Bouyer is securing a different basis or ground for affirming the human compulsion, apparently innate and universal, towards the transcendent. He is not unaware of the efforts of other contemporary theologians to make a similar claim, either

⁷² *Cosmos*, 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

on metaphysical grounds such as de Lubac,⁷⁴ or on transcendental-anthropological ones like Rahner.⁷⁵ It is not a question of proposing a more superior approach, but of taking seriously *les sciences annexes* insofar as they can provide anthropological data which are at once concrete, historical, and illuminative of Christian truth. These anthropological sciences may not replace the veritable theological sources, he says, but it is ‘absolutely essential’ that they contribute towards clarifying those sources and helping to situate them in their true historical context.⁷⁶

Finally, on a deeper level Bouyer wants to guarantee the interplay between human history and divine intervention. He wants to avoid what might be described as a ‘sporadic interventionist’ conception of divine action in the world, what Oscar Cullmann calls a ‘punctiliar’ model of revelation and salvation.⁷⁷ One of Bouyer’s favourite patristic images is that of Irenaeus, who said that the eternal Son’s invisible, i.e., non-incarnate, presence in the history of Israel precisely as its saving Word, is in order to become ‘accustomed to living with the children of men’.⁷⁸

To recapitulate: Myths become a ‘building material’ for the divine Word by being one of the first human artifacts to give it a means for self-expression. While human language in general is necessary for divine communication to be a concrete possibility, mythic language in particular is its first habitat. But there can never be any strict identification between the two: Bouyer repeatedly points out the necessity for a

⁷⁴ See footnote 57 above.

⁷⁵ See footnote 58 above. Bouyer notes that ‘Rahner invites us to attempt an ontological renewal that is anthropological in order that the traditional faith in Christ might be made assimilable by the people of our times’ (*Eternal Son*, 384).

⁷⁶ *Le métier*, 221.

⁷⁷ Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. Sidney G. Sowers et al. (London: SCM, 1967), 24. The context is Cullmann’s contrast between early Christianity and Marcion. Christian orthodoxy, he says, sees revelation and salvation in a *coherent* salvation happening, whereas for Marcion, the Gospel is a ‘punctiliar, unbound event, vertical and not horizontal. It comes unprepared; it is the gospel of the “strange God”.’

severe critique and radical transformation of myth by the Word of God itself, in order to convey it more truthfully. For in depicting divine personality and divine activity, myth can go only so far as the human mind can imagine them to be. Indeed, the divine is unavoidably 'downgraded' in myth.⁷⁹ In its encounter with myth, the divine Word will purify it, correcting what has been obscured by the Fall and bringing about 'not only some demythologizations, but also an explosion and rebirth of myths, as can be seen in the very beginning pages of the Bible.'⁸⁰

Already one sees in this last quotation the intersection between a strictly anthropological account and a more biblical exposition, the latter eventually dominating and giving his theology its overall architecture and significance. Following Cullmann, under whom he studied in Strasbourg in the 1930s, Bouyer does not see a problem in ascribing to the first part of the Genesis account the character of myth, if by that one refers to, *pace* Bultmann, historically unverifiable data dealing with humanity's primal beginnings, with creation and nature.⁸¹ His research into the mythical lore of the ancient

⁷⁸ *Demonstratio*, ch. 45, cited by Bouyer (among other places) in *Sacred Scripture*, 32.

⁷⁹ *Cosmos*, 19.

⁸⁰ *Eternal Son*, 70. In this quotation, Bouyer is using the word 'demythologization' somewhat pointedly. His treatment of the Word of God has involved him in objecting to Rudolf Bultmann's 'demythologization' project, especially of the New Testament. For him, not only is Bultmann's understanding of 'myth' naïve, but his whole undertaking is 'unintelligible' from Bouyer's point of view: 'what the Word retains from myth language, which the Word's own projection upon it had elaborated, keeps its irreplaceable value. It could not have been set aside without the divine's being lost, for man, in sheer ineffability. Yet it was enough for the Word to appropriate this language for the dispersal of the errors, the fatal confusions, which encumber all the myths.' (*Christian Mystery*, 84) It is this purifying and clarifying action of the divine Word, correcting what has been falsified by myth, which constitutes, for Bouyer, true 'demythologizing'.

In this regard Bouyer appears to be following in the footsteps of Cullmann. The Lutheran exegete likewise conceived demythologizing in terms other than that popularized by Bultmann and his followers. 'For the Bible [writes Cullmann], even the Old Testament, has already *demythologized* the myths by placing them on one and the same level with the historically controllable middle portion of biblical history, thereby *historicizing* them. [...] Demythologizing may, therefore, be recognized and required as one of the aims of exegesis, only it must be undertaken in the biblical sense, that is, in terms of historicizing the myths, i.e., interpreting history, and not adapting them to an extraneous philosophy, whether it be a metaphysics, as in Philo, or existentialism, as in the Bultmann school.' Cf. Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, 139.

⁸¹ Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: SCM, 1951), 94.

Near East convinces him of the universality of mythical consciousness, with some clearly similar patterns. One dominant theme involved kingship, the so-called 'royal myth', which began with a dim awareness of spiritual beings at work in the world called 'hierophanies'. The picking and gathering of food, hunting and fishing, agriculture, sedentary life, the transition from cultivation to civilization proper, i.e., the rise of cities – all these had their accompanying hierophanies.⁸² At the climax of this development was the king, who replaced the primitive shaman in his role of maintaining and ceaselessly renewing the contact with cosmic and hypercosmic powers. The king became the permanent link between the universe at large and the small world of the city. 'At this stage, myths reach what may be called their classical form, for the king provides a dominant hierophany which defines the relationship in human ritual ... with the various cosmic hierophanies'.⁸³

Israel, of course, came into contact with such royal myths, and it was one of the earliest impulses of the divine Word, one of the most primordial intuitions of the prophets, which asserted that, for Israel at least, there was to be no other king besides God. Not only that,

but also that the one who revealed himself to Israel is in fact also the king of all peoples, whether they realize it or not, and therefore the master of the entire human history. Nor is this all: it must be emphasized...that God is supremely the King of the cosmic powers themselves....⁸⁴

Israel's encounter with, and critique of, the royal myths will be replicated in its encounter with various other myths. Again, Bouyer will have his readers appreciate the inchoate truth-value in these myths, which Israel recognized for all their defects. But the fact remains that a massive overhaul of these myths had to take place. While human

⁸² *Cosmos*, 24-25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

wisdom can criticize myths in part, only the Word of God will be capable of freeing Israel from the contradictions of the myths, not by abolishing myths but by correcting a ‘threefold confusion’ in them. For the myths of the nations tended to confuse: (1) the world’s becoming with the divinity’s becoming; (2) creation with the fall; and (3) the divinity’s intervention with a ‘decreation’, that is, the annihilation or subjugation of creation *qua* creation.⁸⁵ Bouyer uses a particularly vivid simile: this ‘threefold confusion’ has the effect of warping human understanding of the universe, ‘like divers or the drowning, who, when they raise their eyes to the skies, cannot distinguish what is sunk in the waters which have engulfed them from what is soaring above them, in the air or up in the sky.’⁸⁶ Hence he concludes that, in the Genesis account of creation, one sees Israel borrowing (in this case) Babylonian and Canaanite myths and all their imagery, but subjecting them to a rigorous transformation in order to correct this threefold error. The divine Word to Israel will reveal: (1) God as absolutely transcending creation, having no need for it but nevertheless creating it out of pure generosity; (2) the Fall, not as the counterpart of creation, but as the sole responsibility of some of the highest creatures of God; and (3) salvation, far from abolishing creation and withdrawing God into a ‘sublime solitude’, is shown to be God’s condescension to the creation’s lowest level, in its state of rebellion against God, in order to return the whole of creation to himself.⁸⁷

Thus, with the twin affirmations of God’s sole kingship and of the corruption to which humanity has fallen, the stage is set for the ‘original’ and ‘fontal’ Word of God to ‘burst into’ the history of Israel. Bouyer’s anthropological-historical approach, drawing

⁸⁵ *Christian Mystery*, 82.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* See also *Cosmos*, 50, for a similar list of differences between myths and the Word of God.

from numerous interdisciplinary sources, now gives way to a more biblical-historical approach. This is the main substance of his theology of the Word, for by it one is led directly to the 'one many-splendored mystery' of the Christian faith, the historical incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God par excellence.⁸⁸

D. THE BIBLICAL HISTORY OF THE WORD OF GOD

ONE OF BOUYER'S statements, earlier quoted, must again be revisited. Christology, he says, 'must situate Christ clearly and precisely into our total human history, which is primarily the history of our search for God, and into that particular history of the people of Israel into which He is born and which can best be described as the history of God's search for us.'⁸⁹ The previous section has attempted to elucidate what Bouyer could have meant in portraying history as humanity's search for God; this section will now begin by addressing the second part of this somewhat programmatic text: how the history of Israel in the Old Testament can conversely be described as God's search for humanity.

Bouyer's anthropological approach, enlisting material from the comparative study of early religions, would have made plain the fact that Israel was at best only one of the many Semitic tribes in the so-called Fertile Crescent of the ancient Near East. It can even be described as the least impressive of those civilizations. Does not scripture itself affirm this? As Moses reminded the people, it was God who chose Israel to be his own possession out of all the rest of the nations on the face of the earth: 'It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD

⁸⁸ *Eternal Son*, 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers...' (*Deut.* 7:6-8). From first to last biblical history is the history of an enduringly patient divine *agape* reaching out to save a particular people, in order that through that people, sprung from the loins of Abraham, all the families of the earth might be blessed (*Genesis* 12:3).

In other words, for Bouyer, biblical history is 'salvation history'. As Brevard Childs points out, *Heilsgechichte* has many variants and practitioners, though the term generally refers to 'the theological appeal to history as the arena of salvation'.⁹⁰ Bouyer, however, shows himself the faithful student of Cullmann, whose *Christ and Time* (1945; ET, 1951) and *Salvation in History* (1964; ET, 1967) find numerous echoes in his account of the biblical history of the Word. Following the Strasbourg exegete, one of Bouyer's strongest affirmations is that Jesus Christ is the climax of human history, *before* whose coming all history was but preparation, and *after* whose death and resurrection all history now races towards its eschatological denouement. At the very mid-point of history stands, in Cullmann's words, the 'mighty Christ-event' which gives a new centre to time and a decisive meaning to everything else.⁹¹

By portraying biblical history, salvation history, as 'the history of God's search for us', Bouyer recalls to his readers the very *purpose* of the Word of God. It is not given, he has stressed repeatedly, simply to instruct and give information, much less to 'satisfy a frivolous curiosity', but supremely to save sinners. Through the vivid image of God himself searching for a humanity lost in sin, he shows how wise is that foreordination to grace, how gracious that divine condescension, and how great the cost of salvation. Moreover, by insisting that this search undertaken by God takes place within history, and specifically in the history of Israel, Bouyer makes two concomitant affirmations, seemingly paradoxical when first put together. First, that 'God's Word, of

⁹⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 16.

necessity, must come from outside a world coiled into a ball upon itself in order to achieve the openness necessary to save us from personal suffocation'.⁹² This shows that the Word is *transcendent*, and must be asserted if salvation is to be truly efficacious. But equally, he says that the Word cannot be purely and only transcendent, 'dropping out of the sky like a meteorite.'⁹³ Christ's appearance on the stage of history, however transcendent, was not that of a kind of meteor, 'sudden, unprepared and unannounced'.⁹⁴ This shows that the Word is *immanent*, and must be held to be so if salvation is to be a historical reality, an event true to humanity's temporal situation.⁹⁵ Bouyer expresses it thus:

We can thus begin to see how true it is that with the invasion of the divine word, of the God who Himself speaks, into sacred history, the sacred is effectively preparing to invade the whole life of man. [...It] is an historical, clearly dated, and completely individualized insertion of the divine word in the affairs of men, but which for all that, is not a mere miracle in which the divine word would strike the earth like a meteor. It is a slow germination, which is gradually to regain control of human history, beginning with a particular area of providential events in which the decisive coming event is prepared and outlined in advance.⁹⁶

To recapitulate: The incarnation, indeed the whole *event*, of Christ, has introduced a decisive turning-point in human history, so much so that everything before is to be considered as 'preparations' and everything after as 'proclamation' of the

⁹¹ Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 59, 86.

⁹² *Eternal Son*, 407.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹⁴ *Seat of Wisdom*, 108.

⁹⁵ That Christ the divine Word 'came down', rather than 'fell' to earth like an asteroid, also serves, for Bouyer, to make the doctrinal point that only a divine condescension motivated solely by *agape* can explain the Incarnation. As he puts it: 'If, however, these gods of the world have been the first to fall as we have fallen after them, there is Another who has not fallen but voluntarily descended. With the fall of the proud divinities ... is contrasted the free descent of the God-Savior, eternally impelled by love to give Himself for His creatures.' Cf. *Paschal Mystery*, 62.

⁹⁶ *Rite and Man*, 115.

fulfilment.⁹⁷ This paradigm will become manifestly clear in an exposition of Bouyer's biblical-historical account of the Word of God.

Bouyer gives an extended treatment of the relationship between the Word and Israel's history for the first time in *La Bible et l'Évangile* (1952). The title of its English translation, *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture* (1958), may give the impression of its being 'just another version' of so-called 'biblical theologies' then popular. But the book goes beyond such standard accounts by presenting a dynamic picture of (as its French subtitle puts it) '*le Dieu qui parle au Dieu fait homme*'. In other words, Bouyer is determined to depict the unified action of the eternal God who reveals himself as the speaking God of the Old Testament and the incarnate God of the New. *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture* has become a sort of textbook in biblical theology, and it is the *locus classicus* for Bouyer's theology of the Word from a scriptural perspective. But curiously, it was only in a more recent book, *The Christian Mystery* (1986), that Bouyer clearly spells out three successive phases of the divine Word in the Old Testament, corresponding to three different moments in Israel's history of salvation.⁹⁸ This perhaps indicates that his theology of the Word of God, long a recurring theme among his many books, has become more systematized and has finally, as it were, come of age.

The first phase, says Bouyer, is the 'primordial Word' in its purity and primitive originality, exemplified in the Exodus and the Sinaitic covenant, and corresponding to the first phase of the history of salvation, that of Abraham and Moses. The second is biblical 'Wisdom', sprung from the interaction between the divine Word and human wisdom, historically corresponding to the time of settlement in Canaan. The third is 'Apocalypse', corresponding to Israel's harrowing experience of defeat and ruin, the destruction of Jerusalem, exile, and return. In these three phases one sees the divine

⁹⁷ 'Les Préparations' and 'L'Annonce' are, in fact, the way Bouyer entitled the first two major sections of his christological treatise, *The Eternal Son*.

Word seizing and using an amazing diversity of human instruments, especially the prophets, who discerned that Word in the midst of Israel's encounter with the surrounding nations, in the midst of Israel's own collective experience as a nation.⁹⁹

1. The First Stage: The Primordial Word

BOUYER ASKS: WHAT did the Jews at the time of Jesus mean when they affirmed that they 'heard' a word of God, that *the* word of God had been addressed to them? Though there are several instances where apparently God's voice was literally heard (what the rabbis called a *bath qôl*, a 'daughter of the word'), such as by young Samuel and by Moses, for the most part to attribute a 'word' to God is to use an analogy; by it Israel meant a communication of divine thoughts or impulses capable of making use of various forms such as oracles, primitive divination, and prophecy.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the expression 'Word of God' was not peculiar to Israel, as attested by the ancient Sumerian hymns or Delphic oracles which celebrated such a belief. But what made it unique for the Jews was that it expressed their experience of the *one* word coming from the *one* God,

the Word of God in Israel is experienced as one, as a unity or the oneness of the unique One who reveals Himself as a transcendent personality both in and through the unity of a creative plan that cuts across and unifies not only the history of His People but also of the entire universe.¹⁰¹

Nowhere is this unity of 'the same Word of the same God' seen more clearly than in Israel's great prophetic tradition, especially in the exceptionally cohesive prophecies of Hosea, Amos and Isaiah. But this prophetic tradition owes its roots to an earlier and

⁹⁸ Cf. *Christian Mystery*, 81 ff.

⁹⁹ Bouyer himself uses the words 'seize', 'use', as well as 'take hold', 'possess', and so forth. Cf. *Sacred Scripture*, 9, 11, 12, among others. All this suggests prophetic action as ecstatic. But Bouyer also points out that the prophets 'discern' the divine Word, thus safeguarding the human and rational dimension of the prophetic action.

¹⁰⁰ *Eternal Son*, 41-42.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

much broader one, the Mosaic covenantal tradition, and even further back to Abraham himself: 'Abraham not only surpasses the prophetic context but transcends it completely. It is as father of the People, because father of its faith, that he incarnates in his destiny and in his person the first revelation of the Word.'¹⁰² By being the first to hear the Word of God and to respond to it with a resounding affirmation, Abraham marks the beginning of Israel's entire ancestral experience of the divine Word which would continue into the Mosaic and prophetic tradition. 'In the history of Abraham, the Hebrew people will come to recognize their own identity: a people whose King is the one God who spoke His Word to them and who reigns directly over them because of this Word.'¹⁰³

Abraham looms large in Bouyer's account of the historical evolution of the divine Word. In doing so, the theologian seems to go beyond a standard (perhaps primarily Roman Catholic) account which connects the divine Word only from the prophets onwards.¹⁰⁴ Where one chooses to locate the first or 'primordial' Word can be programmatically important: if among the prophets, then prophecy becomes the paradigmatic Word of God, intimating at what that Word essentially consists in. Bouyer, however, begins with Abraham for a number of reasons. He points out that in Jewish tradition, Abraham is hailed as the first to be addressed by the Word and to respond to it in faith. Theologically this address-response marks the beginning of salvation history as such, because for the first time God's personal act of revelation is reciprocated by an equally personal reception, the divine call met by a human 'Here am I' (*Genesis* 22:1). But there is another crucial reason: Bouyer finds it significant that the primordial Word

¹⁰² *Eternal Son*, 44.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰⁴ Jean Daniélou, for example, writes: 'It is in Israel, and through the mediation of the Prophets of Israel, that God first spoke.' Cf. his *God and Us*, trans. Walter Roberts (London: Mowbray, 1957), 83. More recently, Walter Kasper writes: 'Initially, God spoke to our fathers, i.e., the patriarchs, through the prophets. But this was a diverse and multifaceted word; it unveiled the mystery of God only imperfectly

to Abraham was a divine command to 'Go!', to leave the great but corrupt human cities which were contemporary to him. *The summons is to an exodus*. By obeying that Word in faith, Abraham becomes paradigmatic for what the entire people will be understood to be in relation to the Word of God:

[Abraham's] figure continually reminds us also of the most profound definition of the people of God: it is not only the people to whom was addressed the Word-Promise of the Covenant; *it is the people created by that Word*. Nothing is clearer than the insistence on this fact throughout Abraham's history: the Word of God, and it alone, has raised up a posterity to Abraham.¹⁰⁵

Already one sees here the intuitions which will eventually lead Bouyer to a full-blown Word-ecclesiology. But for the moment, Bouyer simply singles out the history of Abraham as the place where one touches the origin of the Word.¹⁰⁶

Moses is the second major personage in this first stage of biblical revelation. On the one hand, he receives the same call and summons by God, though pitched at a different though significant key: 'With Moses, taken from the people sprung from Abraham in order to be sent back to it as the second and supreme messenger of the Word, the history of [Abraham] is reproduced and transposed into being that of the whole people.'¹⁰⁷ For all Israel, in bondage in Egypt, are also commanded to 'Go!'. *The summons is now to a collective exodus*. On the other hand, the Word comes to Moses with an important addition. While with Abraham the Word comes as a call and a promise, with Moses it comes as law, Torah. The history of Moses, in fact, observes Bouyer, consists of a double revelation: to the man himself God revealed his *name* (*Exodus* 3); then to the entire people but still through this man, God revealed his *law* (*Exodus* 20). The priority of the first revelation makes Moses the 'prophet without peer',

and in fragments; and it was therefore temporary and not definitive.' Cf. his 'Jesus Christ: God's Final Word', in *Communio* 28 (Spring 2001): 61-71, in 61.

¹⁰⁵ *Sacred Scripture*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Eternal Son*, 44.

compared to which his status as law-giver occupies a mere second place.¹⁰⁸ But the two revelations considered together show that

there are two aspects, equally essential, to the revelation of the Word in Israel. One is the revelation of a providential design concerning the people – of a promise which is the creative source of its history.... The other is the revelation of God Himself, of His Personality...or, as the Semites would say, of His Name.¹⁰⁹

Predominant in this stage of divine revelation is the theme of God's sovereign kingship. Bouyer describes this as the most original and most fundamental biblical theme, predating that of biblical wisdom itself,¹¹⁰ and he elaborates on this theme with the use of two striking biblical images: the Shekinah and the Merkabah. Shekinah, from the Hebrew verb *schakan* meaning 'to dwell in a tent', captures the idea of God's presence with his people. Like them, he is a 'wanderer', accompanying them in their earthly sojourn. The image sums up Israel's appreciation of God's liberty and inaccessible transcendence, and at the same time his amazing condescension and immanence. Thus, for Bouyer, the Shekinah combines the ideas of the divine otherness and closeness, God as 'a traveller who is always a stranger to this earth, and nevertheless in very real fact is close to His Own as their travelling-companion in all their journeys.'¹¹¹ But it is a presence of a particular sort, a glorious one, a royal trait characterizing a king in his extraordinary vitality.¹¹² Thus the Shekinah in the Old Testament is found (among others) in the burning bush and in the pillars of cloud and of fire, symbols of God's 'effulgent supernatural light emerging spontaneously from [his]

¹⁰⁷ *Christian Mystery*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ *Sacred Scripture*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹¹⁰ *Christian Mystery*, 80.

¹¹¹ *Sacred Scripture*, 117.

¹¹² *Cosmos*, 33.

infinite vitality.’¹¹³ But alongside this presence of God conceived of as the people’s *protection* is another image of him as the *power* which sets them in motion and urges them on: the Merkabah,

the chariot of fire in which this God, the God of the Pasch or ‘passage’, traverses the universe. No one can stop him, bring him to a halt. And now he encourages his own to follow him. So the meeting on Sinai is only a stage, though a decisive one, on the journey to which their act of faith commits them.¹¹⁴

As already mentioned, monarchy and the royal myth came to Israel from its neighbours, and it was by the unique action of the divine Word working through the prophets, at once criticizing and transforming the myth, that ultimately there emerged the inspired affirmation of the supreme kingship of Israel’s God. Thus also, in this first stage of the Word of God spoken to Israel, encompassing the histories of Abraham and Moses, is found the emerging prophetic tradition. Moreover at this stage, along with the Mosaic identification of the Word and Torah, comes the identification of the Word with a *text*:

Under the influence of the deuteronomist editors, collecting and putting into circulation the heritage of the great prophetic preaching, one step further will be made. The written crystallizations of the ancient narratives of Israel will be generally recognized as the Word of God. And finally, later on, after the return from the exile and the dispersion, this idea will be applied to the whole collection of biblical writings, almost as we have it in our hands today.¹¹⁵

Bouyer agrees that there are always risks when the free and all-powerful Word of God is written down in a ‘fixed’ form, not least being legalism, which is the drying up of inspiration into a dead literalism. Yet there is a ‘priceless gain’ as well, that of communicating to all future generations the experience of faith of the prophets.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Cosmos*, 34.

¹¹⁴ *Christian Mystery*, 87.

¹¹⁵ *Sacred Scripture*, 23.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

2. The Second Stage: Biblical Wisdom

THE SECOND STAGE of the historical development of the Word of God in Israel is that of the Word's encounter with human wisdom, the critical use and transformation of which will bear fruit in biblical Wisdom. Human wisdom, in the sense of a systematic codification of practical rules and proper conduct, arose together with the monarchy. In the royal myths the king, either as divine or at least as representative of the divinity, possessed by direct inspiration a 'divine vision of the world' which humanity must achieve for its fulfilment:

The Egyptian kings were assumed to lead their kingdom in the same way the divinity ruled the world, since the Pharaoh partook in the *Maat*, the divine order immanent in all things. Similarly, the kings of Mesopotamia were supposedly able to carry out their duties as servants or adoptees of a tutelary god only because a divine accomplice had given them the *Me*, or tablets of destiny. These two related terms are best translated as 'wisdom'.¹¹⁷

Though the belief was that 'wisdom' was supernatural in origin, in actual practice it became increasingly humanized and mundane, concerned with the skills necessary for personal success, or with etiquette, or especially with the art of government.¹¹⁸ For wisdom was needed to govern the concrete details of human life in the cities that were burgeoning, and this was the task of the king's cohort of advisers and officials. 'Guided by royal oracles, supposedly divine, they apply them systematically, making a rational selection from the mass of experience inherited from their predecessors in this office. Thus there is a concretization and a progressive organization of the wisdom of the wise of this earth.'¹¹⁹

Arising as it did with the royal myth, human wisdom will immediately and for a long time arouse the same indignant prophetic objections as to the kingship. But as with

¹¹⁷ *Cosmos*, 51; also cf. *Christian Mystery*, 76-77.

¹¹⁸ *Cosmos*, 51-52; also cf. *Sacred Scripture*, 119-20.

¹¹⁹ *Christian Mystery*, 77.

the kingship it will be transformed in the prophetic tradition, against the backdrop of Mosaic teaching, and will give rise to the biblical wisdom literature, ‘shot through by the radiance of the Word’.¹²⁰ For eventually, ‘the divine Word will accept this introducing of human wisdom into Israel. Better still, it will take the initiative in making an alliance with it, and, in the end, its rival will become its witness’.¹²¹

A noteworthy biblical development at this stage is the personification of Wisdom, particularly in the books of *Proverbs*, *Wisdom*, and *Sirach*.¹²² Here, Israel combined the ideas of divine Wisdom, the divine Word, and the divine Presence.¹²³ Thus, personified Wisdom declares:

I came forth from the mouth of the Most High ...
I dwelt in high places ...
Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment,
and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent.
And he said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob,
and in Israel receive your inheritance.’ (*Sirach* 24:3-4, 8)

Understandably Bouyer attaches a great importance to Wisdom ‘pitching her tent’ in Israel, akin to John’s *Logos* doing exactly the same thing – echoes of the Shekinah, or better, the Shekinah coming to the full light of day. And he adds significantly that Wisdom comes to be personified in the biblical tradition ‘inasmuch as it is the total content of God’s Word.’¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *Christian Mystery*, 92.

¹²¹ *Sacred Scripture*, 121. ‘...as Samuel, moved by God himself, nevertheless finally accepted and consecrated a king and by this action gave a religious meaning to the settlement of the people of God in their country, so Wisdom, in the end, once it was planted in the soil of Israel, produces a fruit in which is found all the savor of the prophetic spirit.’ (*Ibid.*, 119)

¹²² Bouyer, being Catholic, naturally treats these two latter books as canonical and inspired scripture.

¹²³ Here one already has intimations of that ‘Wisdom’ which Bouyer will develop into a ‘sophiology’, with important consequences for his doctrine of the Church. Suffice it to observe at this point that (1) Bouyer’s account of the Word includes the notion of Wisdom, and (2) Wisdom in this particular treatment is understood primarily in its human sense, i.e., not divine Wisdom per se. Divine, or uncreated, Wisdom will be more properly the subject matter of his Wisdom-ecclesiology, to be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

¹²⁴ *Cosmos*, 70.

But then, again like the kingship, human wisdom will be so severely criticized by the divine Word, and will be shown to be totally bereft in the face of the question of evil and suffering, that the conviction will finally emerge that only God can be truly wise. 'At this moment, we see wisdom, like kingship, go back to heaven,' writes Bouyer, 'In other words, God is recognized as the one true sage as well as the one true King.'¹²⁵ The stage is now set for a new genre of prophecy to arise, that of Apocalypse.

3. The Third Stage: Apocalypse

IF THE SECOND stage of the divine Word's historical development finds it redefining itself in relation to human wisdom, in the third stage the Word will reveal itself as transcendent of any wisdom of this world. Historically, this latter stage corresponds to the greatly lamented fall of Jerusalem, the exile to Babylon, the return of the captives, and the reconstruction of the Temple and the holy city. 'The shift from wisdom to apocalypse had been prepared ... by the ordeal of the exile in Babylon. But the change took place only when it became clear that any hope of a restoration of the earthly kingdom of Judah and Israel had to be abandoned.'¹²⁶ Already in the latter phases of the second stage, human wisdom was being challenged by a growing pessimism, apparent even in Egypt and Mesopotamia where the wise could but puzzle despairingly at the human condition. Israel's wisdom would likewise need to come to grips with the mystery of evil and perhaps the even more perplexing mystery of innocent suffering, culminating in the lesson of Job.¹²⁷ Add to this the national catastrophe of a calamitous exile, and, despite the eventual rebuilding of Jerusalem, the 'agonizing distance between the earthly reality of Sion rebuilt and the supernatural reality dreamed

¹²⁵ *Christian Mystery*, 93.

¹²⁶ *Cosmos*, 55.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

of by Ezechiel'.¹²⁸ From this point onwards, the various apocalypses would make their entrance, emerging out of biblical wisdom 'like a butterfly from its chrysalis', beginning with the book of Daniel.¹²⁹

All throughout the history of the divine revelation to Israel runs the theme of God's monarchy. In the first stage, he is revealed as the *one* true king over all; the 'all' is absolute and universal. In the second stage, he is revealed as the only *wise* king. In this last stage, God's kingship will be definitively transfigured by apocalyptic literature, projected onto 'the last days' and indeed a fearsome 'Day of the Lord'.¹³⁰ 'Here, the lessons of the last prophets, and of the events that they predicted and illuminated in advance, has borne fruit. Israel knows that it is not in this world that its hope must rest, but in a new world which God will create.'¹³¹ In this new creation *only* God will reign victorious as king: 'At the end of history as at its beginning, God will thus appear as the Lord, the only Master.'¹³²

Two images in this third stage are important to highlight, as they will pave the way for the transition to the Word of God in the New Testament. These are the 'son of man' and the 'suffering servant'.¹³³ The Son of Man appears in the canonical scriptures only in *Daniel*, but recurs numerous times in apocalyptic literature in intertestamental times. In the book of *Enoch*, for example, 'the mysterious personage seen by Daniel

¹²⁸ *Sacred Scripture*, 162.

¹²⁹ *Christian Mystery*, 79. The simile is particularly apropos in light of Bouyer's determination to present the Word of God as developing *within* the history of Israel. The Word acts from within that history, using its experiences as raw material or building blocks with which to announce its purified and inspired themes. A butterfly is both like and unlike the caterpillar from which it emerged; similarly, there is a 'continuous discontinuity' between wisdom and apocalypse.

¹³⁰ *Sacred Scripture*, 164.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 46.

reappears everywhere as the great agent of God's designs, as the "elect" chosen by providence to accomplish the Judgment, to conquer the enemies of God and in his own person to cause the coming of the divine kingdom to the transfigured earth.'¹³⁴ Understandably this image fits in well with apocalyptic sentiments. But what is astonishing is the surfacing of another, more incongruous and even more mysterious figure, that of Isaiah's suffering Servant. For Bouyer, the theme of the suffering Servant can be described as 'a pure working out of the Word', 'the last word of the teachings of the great prophets in what for them is most *sui generis*'.¹³⁵

Both figures tended to converge throughout apocalyptic literature in the period immediately preceding the coming of Jesus Christ. Bouyer attributes this development directly to the persecution carried out by Antiochus Epiphanes, and the ensuing martyrdom of the Jews who refused to abandon their faith. In this situation of intense suffering mixed with profound hope for deliverance, the enigmatic Servant and the Son of Man will emerge in biblical revelation, just as, in the wider societal context, various messianic movements will escalate, and groups of pious Jews will gather together in their communities of the *habouroth*, ardently awaiting the fulfilment of Israel's hopes. But, as Bouyer points out, the Servant and the Son of Man will turn out to be but one, unexpectedly merged with the figure of the Messiah, to be fulfilled though altogether superseded in the person of Jesus Christ.¹³⁶

¹³³ By 'son of man' Bouyer is referring, not to the conventional Hebraism which means simply 'man' or 'human being', but to the enigmatic *figure* of a 'son of man' in apocalyptic and intertestamental literature.

¹³⁴ *Sacred Scripture*, 166.

¹³⁵ *Eternal Son*, 109. He contrasts this theme, for instance, with the messianic theme. This latter can be traced, via the kingship theme, to the most ancient of mythical themes. 'In the biblical Word, the messianic theme breaks through only in relationship to the divine Kingdom that wisdom will thrust into eschatology by turning itself to apocalypse' (*ibid.*). But the theme of the 'suffering Servant' appears to have no precedence.

¹³⁶ *Cosmos*, 57.

E. FULFILMENT IN CHRIST: JESUS, *THE WORD OF GOD*

‘THE MOST STRIKING characteristic of the preaching of Jesus about Himself is ... the fusion of the supernatural figure of the “Son of man” coming on the clouds of heaven with the humiliated figure of a humanity so close to our own and so sorrowful, that of the “Servant of Yahweh”,’ writes Bouyer.¹³⁷ For him this is conclusive proof that Jesus’ own preaching is the legacy of a continuous historical development of the Word, Jesus himself being a faithful ‘son of the commandment’ (*bar mitzvah*) steeped in the consciousness of the divine Word. In Jesus are combined a ‘profound fidelity...to all the lines that converge toward Him’, yet also the marvel of a ‘creative newness’.¹³⁸

While the New Testament *Logos* is not completely and simply equivalent to the Old Testament ‘Word’, there is no doubt that the Old Testament understanding was in the mind of the writer of the Gospel of John. This was already Bouyer’s contention in his very first book, *The Fourth Gospel*.¹³⁹ Johannine Christology will only make sense in the light of the traditional religion of Israel, says Bouyer.¹⁴⁰ And what is unique about this religion is that it is a *religion of the Word*, so unique in fact that many theologians doubt that it could be removed from the conceptual framework of Jewish religion without shattering that framework. Israel, then, is the ‘people of the Word’ par excellence, ‘the People to whom the Word was addressed and whom the Word uniquely formed and shaped.’ It was into such a religion, and precisely into such a people, that Jesus was born; ‘in Him that People found its ultimate flowering and a fruition which surpassed even the promise held by that flower.’¹⁴¹ One sees here Bouyer’s fusion of

¹³⁷ *Sacred Scripture*, 166-67.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Fourth Gospel*, 28 ff.

¹⁴⁰ *Eternal Son*, 41.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

ecclesiology and his theology of the Word; perhaps even more decisive and fundamental is the latter's inseparability from Christology.¹⁴² Bouyer describes that indivisible relationship in the following terms:

In the lineage of this People, Jesus, before He was ever recognized as the Word made flesh, was seen as the bearer of the Word, witness to it, and its most excellent spokesman. Only to the extent that He is seen as the ultimate expression of that Word, not only in what He did and said, but above all in who He was and continues to be, will He be understood as the Word incarnate.¹⁴³

In other words, before ever one could come to a *theological* understanding of Jesus as the incarnate and ever-living Word of God, one needs to appreciate his *historical* relationship, as a member of the Jewish people, to the Word of God in Israel. This has been Bouyer's aim as the culmination and climax of his biblical-historical account of the divine Word: everything points to Christ, or, in Cullmann's felicitous phrase, to the 'mighty Christ-event'.

What could Bouyer mean by Jesus being 'the ultimate expression of that Word'? On one level, the phrase recalls everything that he has written, phenomenologically speaking, concerning the Word with its 'surplus of meaning'. The Word of God is living, active, and dialogical; it reveals God and his loving plan for creation; it resists being questioned but rather questions and confronts human beings, thus revealing to them who they really are. The Word communicates the divine presence and restores fellowship with God; in a word, it *saves*. Now, all this, says Bouyer, is supremely summed up, even surpassed, in the person of Jesus Christ: in his words and actions, but 'above all in who He was and continues to be', that is, the resurrected and glorified Lord. While it may be a theological commonplace to say that 'Jesus fulfils all the Old Testament prophecies about himself', Bouyer goes further and insists that it is not simply

¹⁴² 'The evolution of the Word of God in the Old Testament must be studied as the primary and most basic introduction to any and all Christology.' (Ibid.)

¹⁴³ *Eternal Son*, 41.

a question of prophecy-fulfilment but of the *incarnation of the very Word of God*. Christ not only embodies the Word, he *is* the Word.

Theological reflections on Christ as ‘Word’ arise from this historical viewpoint. While the dogmatic statement that Christ is the Word par excellence is derived authoritatively from scripture, other dogmatic claims about the Word’s intra-trinitarian relations must rely on theology’s ongoing scrutiny of what it means for God to ‘speak’ his ‘Word’. For Bouyer, as for traditional trinitarian theology, in the eternal generation of a Son who perfectly resembles him, the Father fully projects himself in the Son, and the Son expresses him perfectly. This is why, says Bouyer, the Son is eternally the Father’s Word.¹⁴⁴ The ‘content’ of that Word who is the Son is nothing else but the Father. Put differently, ‘this Word is first of all the divine Name.’¹⁴⁵ Here Bouyer will have his reader appreciate the Jewish understanding of ‘name’, which is virtually equivalent to the person in his or her entirety. To say that the Son is the Father’s ‘Name’ is to say that it is by the Son that the Father is expressed, is ‘named’; it is this Son/Word who ‘names’ him.¹⁴⁶ But the ‘naming’ of God is destined for its expression in the saving economy, so much so that

... the sense in which Jesus ultimately will be called the ‘Word’ of the Father is derived from the certainty that not only does he authentically communicate, in his own words, the Word of the Father but the Father speaks in him, through him, by what he does and by what he is as much as by what he says.

The ‘Word’ of God, which is in the One sent by God, so strongly presupposes God’s personal presence in the One he sends that this ‘Word’ retains the creative and saving effect that it has in the mouth of God himself.¹⁴⁷

Christ as the ‘saving Word’ is precisely that ‘mystery’ of which Paul speaks in the New Testament and which Bouyer will belabour to clarify in his writings. A fuller

¹⁴⁴ *Cosmos*, 184.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Women Mystics*, 27.

¹⁴⁷ *Church of God*, 315.

account of this will be brought out in the next chapter of this thesis. Suffice it for now to mention one more description by Bouyer concerning how Jesus Christ sums up in his very person the entire history of Israel, a history indissolubly linked with the saving purposes of God. This is the idea of the 'systolic-diastolic' movement of history which Bouyer borrows from Cullmann.¹⁴⁸ In so doing, Bouyer recapitulates virtually all the essential elements of his 'history of the Word'. His account deserves to be quoted in full:

In a primary stage, the human multitude appears evil; it is *massa perditionis*, of St. Augustine, which verifies Origen's formula: *Ubi peccatum, ibi multitudo*. The elect must therefore be set apart, separated from this mass. Hence the succession of Abraham and the exodus of Israel from Egypt.

But from the settlement in Palestine, in the promised land, experience reveals that 'all Israel' is not 'Israel.' The trials that follow will be understood by the prophets as the necessary path of an interior segregation, as the only true path. In the last analysis, it is not the mass of the People but a 'faithful remnant' which alone will be saved.

The latter prophets had a vague notion that this remnant could be reduced, finally, to one unique 'faithful servant,' which we see actualized in Jesus, abandoned on the cross by the very People to whom he was bringing salvation. He and he alone is the true 'remnant' of Israel, the only faithful Servant, the unique progeny of Abraham, who contains the promises in himself.

But starting with Jesus, the movement will reverse itself. Systole is succeeded by diastole. And just as the first movement did not stop before it retrenched itself on the unique, the second will progressively know unlimited extension, universal expansion. Yet it is not at all to the same, original multitude, from which the movement toward unity was effected, that the movement toward fullness will tend. There is no question of some ordinary 'return,' for it is not a question of again fragmenting the unity that had been acquired with so much pain. Quite the reverse: it is a question of reintegrating the whole multitude into this unity. It is a question of 'gathering in the scattered children of God,' this whole, immense People for whom 'one only' died.¹⁴⁹

Once more, as the last part of this quotation shows, Bouyer's theology of the Word, finding its christological centre and climax, points to the Church for which both the Word and the Christ have been sent. From here one is not far from a full-blown Word-ecclesiology.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Cullmann, *La Royauté du Christ et l'Eglise dans le Nouveau Testament* (Paris, 1941), 36; *Christ and Time*, 116-17.

¹⁴⁹ *Church of God*, 242; cf. also 345-46; *Seat of Wisdom*, 61-62.

F. CONCLUSION

LOUIS BOUYER'S DOCTRINAL exposé of the Word of God is a richly textured account involving many complementary perspectives and borrowing audaciously from many disciplines. It is descriptive and narrative, concrete and historical, rather than conceptual and analytical. Bouyer has a horror of philosophical abstractions, and his depiction of the Word is largely free of epistemological or metaphysical terminology.¹⁵⁰ While philosophical presuppositions cannot but undergird Bouyer's theology, he consistently prefers a more biblical approach in pursuit of what is technically called a 'positive' theological exposition, and which leads, as he himself puts it, to the 'personalist realism of the biblical notion of Word.'¹⁵¹ This approach, when joined to phenomenological description and anthropological verification, generates a compelling account. Reading Bouyer, one gets the impression of handling a piece of tapestry: the threads are myriad and are ever weaving in and out of one another, and the overall picture is brilliant.

For those more accustomed to somewhat dispassionate depictions of a somewhat abstract 'revelation', Bouyer's theology of the Word can be startling. He frequently appears to hypostasize the 'Word', which can come across as unusual and even unsettling to the reader expecting to find simply a 'standard' account of 'revelation', until he or she realizes that Bouyer's account is far from standard. The depiction of the Word in personalized and hypostasized terms is no accident or careless usage. Bouyer really intends to show that the Word *is* a personal action of God, communicating the divine presence, until the coming of *the* Word who is complete Person, divine and human.

¹⁵⁰ The only exception seems to be the first two chapters of his book, *Cosmos*, where he treats the question of the world or cosmos in a more noticeably philosophical manner. There he first tackles epistemology and language theory before going into what is by now his familiar theology of the Word.

Bouyer's Word is extremely robust. It is, if one may say so, full-bodied and muscular, bursting with life and extraordinary vitality. One feels that his account is celebrative, joyous, transfixed with wonder at the richness, power, grandeur, and infinite mercy of condescending love. Consider the following passage:

We need to add that, in the traditional conception, first Jewish and then Christian, the reading of the sacred text is never a simple 'lesson' in the sense in which we understand the word today. It cannot be reduced, that is, to the merely didactic, to a form of instruction, like that given in a class or a seminar. The reading of the divine Word in the Church is necessarily a celebration: in the simple proclamation of His Word to the world, God is glorified. [...] It is a Word which of itself calls for sacred song: which is not to be uttered by any but pure lips, lips which express the holy joy, the religious fear of a heart that is not only believing and submissive, but adoring.¹⁵²

Such a description indicates both his repeated admonition not to reify and relegate the Word simply to instruction, be it from God, and his exalted view of the Word as cause for celebration, doxology, and worship. In another place, he perceives that the Church's reading of the Word of God is in its essence what is at the heart of every authentic human 'ritual': 'one understands that the essential rite of the synagogue liturgy, the reading of the scriptures, was nothing like a simple instruction. It was a rite in the strongest sense of the word: an action, in other words, by which man, lending himself to it, was seized, touched, possessed, we can say, by the divine word and presence, which are inseparable.'¹⁵³ In other words, Bouyer affirms the pedagogical and didactic value of the Word of God – how can he not, considering the emphasis placed on this by scripture itself, e.g., *Psalm 119*? – although it is clearly secondary to the appreciation of the Word as mediating divine presence and power.

Among the six 'models of revelation' proposed by Avery Dulles, Bouyer's theology of the Word might superficially resemble some of them: revelation as 'history',

¹⁵¹ *Dictionary of Theology*, 468.

¹⁵² *Introduction to Spirituality*, 41.

¹⁵³ *Gnosis*, 104.

as ‘dialectical presence’, and as ‘symbolic mediation’ which sees Christ as the ‘revelatory symbol’ par excellence.¹⁵⁴ Because of Bouyer’s acknowledged debt to Barth, one might be tempted to categorize his (what Dulles summarily calls) ‘word-theology’ among those of the other ‘dialectical theologians’, and thus see Bouyer’s effort as nothing more than another version of Dulles’ fourth model, revelation as ‘dialectical presence’. Concerning this, Dulles writes:

For a variety of reasons, the dialectical model of revelation seems unfavorable to interreligious dialogue. Barth and other members of the movement were given to making very negative statements about religion in general and the non-Christian religions in particular. They also indulged in a certain ‘Christomonism’ (as George Ernest Wright called it), denying that revelation could come in any other form than that of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.¹⁵⁵

This critique by the eminent American theologian could itself be countered at several points, most of them dealing with the question of how accurately he portrays Barth and the ‘movement’. What is relevant to this particular discussion is whether or not Dulles’ critique could apply to Bouyer’s theology of the Word: Does it foster a negative view of other religions? Is it in any sense ‘christomonistic’? To both these questions one must give a negative answer. The very fact that Bouyer takes non-Christian religions, especially the ancient (what he non-pejoratively calls ‘primitive’) ones, very seriously, indicates his desire to give an account which neither dismisses them outright as vain and valueless, nor canonizes them, conceding to them an equal footing with Christianity. Indeed, his word-theology has a powerful *ecumenical* potential, by this meaning its capacity to help to reconcile divergent claims by the different Christian traditions. In his largely conciliatory *The Word, Church and Sacraments in*

¹⁵⁴ Actually, Dulles enumerates five models, to which he proposes a sixth, ‘symbolic mediation’, which he in fact advocates as a more adequate and comprehensive model for understanding revelation.

¹⁵⁵ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 96.

Protestantism and Catholicism (1960), a work for which he opened himself up to attacks for 'protestantizing' the notion of 'Word',¹⁵⁶ he writes:

If this [Bouyer's more robust depiction of the Word] is so, it must be obvious that the Word of God the Church has to bring to the world cannot be merely a kind of instruction. Nor can its highest expression be found in teaching, in preaching.... The Word that is simply listened to, since it is the Word of God such as we have described, tends of itself to become an event, an event of our life in which the divine life encounters and possesses it. This divine fact, which comes to meet us by taking into itself our own personal acts, is precisely what, according to the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church, the sacrament is, and this is perfectly in accord with the teachings of St Paul and St John.¹⁵⁷

As to a possible charge of christomonism, it is more precise to describe his account as christocentric: the Father and the Holy Spirit have their place in it, but theirs is an admittedly minimal role. This, in fact, can constitute a serious theological liability, but, as the following chapters will argue, Bouyer compensates for this both in his discussion of the liturgy and spirituality (which gives his theology a more pneumatological accent) and in his treatment of divine Wisdom (which renders his account more properly trinitarian).

Finally, in considering Bouyer's theology of the Word, one needs to ask the question 'What is it *for*?' Or equivalently, 'what does it *do*?' The response that can be given is that his Word-theology is, in one important sense, merely a hermeneutical prolegomenon to other, more foundational doctrines. This is obviously the case in his

¹⁵⁶ As he reports in *Rite and Man*, 207-8, not without exasperation at his critics:

'In earlier studies dealing with the liturgy and the ecumenical movement, we have stressed the importance of a truly biblical and traditional theology of the word. But, as we have discovered on numerous occasions, not everybody agrees with us in this. We have been accused of trying to Protestantize Catholicism. When we have asked for a clarification, those who have taken the trouble to give their reasons say that we reabsorb supernatural facts and saving events into the word, which they understand only as an expressed thought, even though it is one that is divine. The complaint is quite naïve since it shows that those who see Protestantism lurking behind every theology of the word suffer themselves from a peculiarly Protestant inability, the inability to see in the word in general, and in the divine word in particular, anything more than an idea expressed by a sound. But if there is anything foreign to the Jewish and Christian biblical tradition, it is just such a notion of the word.'

¹⁵⁷ *Word, Church, Sacraments*, 74. The next chapter will consider in greater detail Bouyer's proposal, here suggested, that the 'Word' be seen as of its very nature 'sacramental'. If this is true, it can be valuable in countering the somewhat hackneyed opposition between the Protestant 'churches of the word' and the Catholic 'church of the sacrament'.

doctrine of Christ; this will also prove to be the case in his doctrine of the Church. Already Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology is imminent, but before such a move can be made, an intermediate step must be taken. For Bouyer's theology of the Word is incomplete and diminished without an account of the 'mystery' which comprises its essential content. As the next chapter will lay bare, Bouyer's account brings him to the heart of Pauline theology, the mystery of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (*1 Corinthians 2:2*) whose death and resurrection catapulted the world into a new age of grace, and whose perpetual memorial in the Church's liturgy is what perennially makes present and available that grace to become 'sons in the Son'.

Chapter Two

FROM THE WORD TO THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY AND THE LITURGY

AS THE FIRST chapter has demonstrated, Bouyer's theology of the Word depicts the progression of divine revelation precisely as the presence- and power-filled action of God throughout the history of Israel. In so doing, Bouyer claims that he is simply recovering the biblical notion of Word with its powerful 'personalist realism', by this presumably meaning the Word's power to make present the person of the divine speaker.¹ He is adamant that this does not occur in a merely incremental fashion, as if by a 'multiplied complexity of more and more diverse propositions', but rather by the 'deepening of truths, very simple and very rich,' which were given from the very beginning and which make up a unified whole.² He compares the divine Word's evolution to a musical theme enriching itself continually by taking on new harmonies, 'to the point where it finally takes possession of our whole mental and spiritual universe.'³ And now, the music has reached its crescendo.

'When I came to you, brethren,' wrote St Paul to the community in Corinth, 'I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (*1 Corinthians* 2:1-2). This Pauline single-mindedness constitutes, for Bouyer, not only the content of the apostle's personal preaching, but the very secret (*mystērion*) of the divine wisdom, which is God's eternal plan of salvation for his creation. In the same epistle Paul scoffs at the 'wisdom of the world' which the divine wisdom has exposed to be what it truly is – folly.

¹ *Dictionary of Theology*, 468.

² *Sacred Scripture*, 224.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (*1 Corinthians* 1:20-24)

The divine wisdom to which Paul alludes recalls the second stage of the biblical history of the Word in which it was revealed that God alone is wise. 'At this moment, we see wisdom, like kingship, go back to heaven,' writes Bouyer.⁴ God withholds his secrets from vain human speculations. It will only be 'in the fullness of time' (*Galatians* 4:4), in a display of utter divine freedom, that the divine wisdom will be divinely revealed. For Paul, as for all subsequent bearers of the Word of God, the apostolic preaching will consist in that 'secret (μυστηρίω) and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification' and has now 'revealed to us through the Spirit' (*1 Corinthians* 2:7, 10). 'For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to the purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (*Ephesians* 1:9-10). This selfsame mystery, 'hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest', is nothing short of 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (*Colossians* 1:26, 27).

In other words, a straight line runs through Bouyer's theology of the *Word*, and finds its climax in the evangelical *mystery*, which is its core and content. The mystery is 'only to be grasped through a theology of God's Word, and as the very summit of that theology.'⁵ It is God's Word par excellence,⁶ 'the final word the Word of God had to

³ *Sacred Scripture*, 224.

⁴ *Christian Mystery*, 93.

⁵ *Liturgical Piety*, 105.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

‘speak to us.’⁷ However, the line does not end there, but continues on to the *liturgy*. It is in the liturgical life of the Church that the mystery is proclaimed, celebrated, and perpetually actualized. Of this crucial interrelationship Bouyer himself writes:

The divine Word presents the Mystery to us as the substance of our faith. But it is in the sacraments that it causes us effectively to participate in it and that faith can make our own the Mystery here proclaimed. [...] The Word of God illuminated in the tradition of the Church is concentrated in the Mystery: Christ and His cross. But, in the Church, the Mystery is not merely proclaimed. Rather, with the very authority of God, it is proclaimed as present. It is then represented, rendered present for us, in us. It is for the sacraments to apply to us this permanent presence and actuality of the Mystery.⁸

This chapter will adopt the above quotation as its programmatic text. Taking its cue from Bouyer’s assertions, it seeks to answer the following questions: (1) In what sense is the evangelical mystery the substance of the Christian faith? (2) Why is the cross of Christ at the centre of that mystery, and what role does Bouyer’s *theologia crucis* perform, not only for his doctrine of the sacraments and of the Eucharist in particular, but also for his systematic theology? (3) How does Bouyer explain the traditional Roman Catholic teaching on the liturgical representation of Christ’s sacrifice, and in so doing demonstrate the relationship between the mystery and the liturgy? (4) How does what appears to be a marked accent on actualism bring together Bouyer’s understanding of Word and sacrament, thereby offering a means for ecumenical rapprochement?

In short, this chapter will show how Bouyer’s ‘Word’ touches and embraces other aspects of the *mysterium fidei*: sacramental/eucharistic theology, mystagogy, liturgics. Then it remains to be seen, in Chapter Three, how all these intermediate steps (spanning the first two chapters) are Bouyer’s prerequisite to a Word-centred doctrine of the Church. There also it will become clear how a theology of the Word can serve as a hermeneutical prolegomenon to an account of the Christian life as it is lived individually

⁷ *Word, Church, Sacraments*, 77.

and corporately; in other words, how the 'Word' determines not only Bouyer's ecclesial doctrine but also his understanding of ecclesial action.

A. THE MYSTERY AS THE SUBSTANCE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

WHILE LOUIS BOUYER is perhaps most well-known for his liturgical studies,⁹ one could argue that he has chosen to fight some of his most trenchant and polemical battles with regards to what he considers as the authentic meaning of the Christian 'mystery' and its derivative, 'mysticism'. Andrew Louth recalls that Bouyer had written some articles on these topics in the 1950s, so much so that the theologian's more recent *The Christian Mystery* (1986) appears as an expansion on his earlier claims. 'For the most part, what Bouyer sketched and suggested in his articles is now treated at length,' observes Louth.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, from as early as 1945 when he published *The Paschal Mystery*, Bouyer has repeatedly criticized what he calls the theory of the Christian dependence on Hellenism. It is a persistent idea which, judging from Bouyer's tenacity in refuting it, simply would not go away. 'Very few subjects are as delicate and difficult to deal with as mysticism,' he writes.¹¹

According to Bouyer, since the nineteenth century, with the contemporaneous rise of the scientific study of scripture and of religions in general, there has been a

⁸ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 105.

⁹ The editor of the Montreal-based magazine *Prêtre et Pasteur* writes: 'It is in the field of liturgy and sacramental theology that [Bouyer] has made extremely important contributions to our current appreciation of the Eucharist, especially in regard to the theology of the Eucharistic Prayer. His books and countless reviews allow us to grasp Bouyer's doctrine of the Holy Eucharist. [...] We should be aware of the fact that Louis Bouyer has contributed immensely to the renewal of eucharistic theology and liturgy promoted by the Vatican Council.' Cf. Jean-Yves Garneau, 'The Eucharistic Century – III: Louis Bouyer', in *Emmanuel* (June 2000): 259-65, in 259-60. Aidan Nichols likewise observes: 'Apart from his studies of the history of spirituality, Bouyer is best known in the English-speaking world for his work on the theology of Christian worship and, most notably, its background in that human phenomenon...which is *rite*.' Cf. Nichols' review, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 81.

¹⁰ Cf. Andrew Louth's review of Bouyer's *The Christian Mystery*, in *The Downside Review* 109 (October 1991): 304-08, in 306.

decided attempt to place Christianity on a par with other religions, to ascribe to it no more and no less supernatural content than that claimed by other faith-systems. Thus, the study of the history of comparative religions tended to 'reabsorb' Christianity into the common religious experiences of humanity. 'The same "scientific" trend in psychology and in history strove to reduce all the religious aspects of life and of the human soul to what was merely human.'¹² Among the historians of comparative religions, one way of doing this was to point out the similarities between the Christian 'mystery' and the various 'mystery religions' which arose in the Roman Empire at the same time that Christianity was coming to the fore.

The 'mysteries,' it is said, using this word as a common name for the Eastern religions which were being introduced into the Roman Empire at about the same time as Christianity, – the mysteries of the Syrian Adonis, the Asiatic Attis, the Egyptian Isis and Osiris, and the Persian Mithra, to quote only the most important – were all formed on the same pattern. Each of them was a 'dromenon,' that is, a kind of religious drama, a liturgical representation of the death and resurrection of a god. By being associated, in the actual performance of this representation, with the saving act of the deity, the initiates or 'mystes' were to be saved. They were to be thought of as born again to a new and divine life, the life of the god himself triumphing over death.¹³

Thus, researchers like Richard Reitzenstein and Wilhelm Bousset, with whom Alfred Loisy allied himself, concluded that there was nothing particularly supernatural about Christianity, seeing that it arose out of intuitions and sentiments that were but profoundly human.

This theory of the common origin of, or at least of the interlocking connection between, the Christian mystery and the various mystery religions, was accepted by Dom Odo Casel of the German Benedictine monastery of Maria Laach in his important book *Das Christliche Kultmysterium* (1932),¹⁴ although there he turned the anti-Christian bias

¹¹ 'Mysticism', 42.

¹² *Rite and Man*, 4.

¹³ *Liturgical Piety*, 87.

of Reitzenstein and company on its head. For Casel, the 'mysteries of antiquity' were a kind of providential preparation in human nature for what God was going to do for it in Christ. While these mysteries, strictly speaking, did not influence the beginnings of Christianity, they provided a frame for Christianity to fill with the fullness of the divine revelation in Christ.¹⁵ Thus, with Casel, for some time it appeared that one could reconcile the claims of the historians of comparative religions and those of Christianity.

The problem is that, with more recent research, it has become apparent that the original theory of Reitzenstein and others is no longer tenable. No serious scholar today, says Bouyer, whether opposed to or indifferent to Christian belief, would accept it as did Casel. Merely on methodological grounds their conclusion is already seriously flawed.¹⁶ But Bouyer also examines the alleged relationship on theological grounds, and pronounces the conclusion to be untenable.

In the first place, it would be unlikely ... that the Judaizing Christians who made such bitter reproaches to St. Paul and to his converts from paganism would have failed to condemn that 'paganization' of Christianity if it had existed. In the second place, it is inconceivable psychologically that St. Paul, in whose works the Christian mystery is for the first time so fittingly defined, could knowingly introduce elements that were the essence of that paganism against which he contended all his life, or that he could have been unwittingly impregnated with them to the extent of making them the center of his doctrine. Finally – and this invalidates the whole hypothesis – the pagan mysteries ... were almost without influence, indeed almost unknown, during the apostolic period when primitive Christianity was formed and propagated.¹⁷

Not only was this theory unfounded, says Bouyer, it was also prejudicial, arising as it did from an ideological intention to demote Christianity to a simply human and

¹⁴ ET: *The Mystery of Christian Worship* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962); citations below from the Crossroad/Herder & Herder edition (New York, 1999).

¹⁵ *Liturgical Piety*, 87; *Rite and Man*, 34. Casel in his *Kultmysterium* repeatedly calls attention to the 'mysteries of antiquity' which lend to Christian worship their 'language and form' (*Mystery of Christian Worship*, 7, 16, 32-33, etc.).

¹⁶ Cf. *Rite and Man*, 124, but especially *Christian Mystery*, 75-76.

¹⁷ *Paschal Mystery*, xvii. *The Christian Mystery* gives more detailed theological reasons, based on scripture and historical (liturgical and spiritual) sources, to refute the claim. Unfortunately, as Louth observes, the French subtitle 'du mystère à la mystique' (in Bouyer's original intention, meaning 'from the [Christian] mystery to [true Christian] mysticism') was inadvertently rendered in the English translation

natural religion, 'to belittle and try to reduce to nothingness the importance of primitive Christianity.'¹⁸ Hence Bouyer, politely but firmly rejecting Casel's *faux pas* of tracing the Christian mystery back to the 'mysteries of antiquity', makes two carefully nuanced assertions.

First, there is the indisputable fact, borne out by modern scientific research, of the human being's natural sacrality, a basic relation to the world in its totality and a mysterious apprehension of the unity and uniqueness of the sacred, the completely Other.¹⁹ There is simply no denying that the human being, even in his natural state, is shot through with aspirations for the transcendent. Thus, analogies *do* exist between the pagan mysteries and the Christian mystery:

Even the Fathers of the Church were struck by certain analogies between Christian rites and beliefs and their pagan counterparts. They reacted in different ways to these data which they were the first to gather. At times they were frankly optimistic. [...] But at other times, and often in the same authors, the reaction was negative. They stoutly maintained that such analogies were a diabolical trick, a devilish caricature of the works of God our Saviour.²⁰

The inherent ambiguity of these analogies, and the difficulty in interpreting them, are seen in the fact that the same patristic authors may present these two opposing opinions only a few lines or pages apart.²¹

Secondly, however, the most that can be said of these analogies is that, if carefully worked out, they can cast a great light on the grafting of grace upon human nature, demonstrating at one and the same time how wonderfully human is the Christian mystery, as well as how wonderfully divine.²² *Pace* Casel, who accepted the theory at

'From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism', the exact opposite of what Bouyer meant and what he has long laboured to refute!

¹⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 87.

¹⁹ *Rite and Man*, 56.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*

great cost to the originality and supernatural provenance of *the* mystery, Bouyer insists rather that, although there *is* a connection, it is 'only one of the most obvious and superficial manifestations of the deep relationship which God has established between divine grace in Christ and human nature in all of us', whether Christian or not.²³ Indeed, the *only* concession Bouyer is prepared to make is to permit that the mystery religions 'could have provided a sort of paradoxical propaedeutic for Christianity, not by the hopes, however inconsistent, which they had inspired, but rather by their inability to produce even an earnest of fulfilling them.'²⁴ In short, Bouyer damns them with faint praise.

It might be wondered at why Bouyer takes such a determinedly strong line of attack against the non-Christian mystery religions and, by extension, against the revered memory of Odo Casel.²⁵ As Louth points out, it is not that Bouyer cannot tolerate the possibility of any kind of non-Christian mysticism.²⁶ Neither can he be charged with a blatant disrespect for, or an utter unconcern with, non-Christian religions; much of his book *The Invisible Father* is devoted to outlining the 'human quest for God' perceived both in the primitive and in the great and enduring world religions. Chapter One of this thesis has, in fact, demonstrated Bouyer's appeal to primitive myth as the necessary, though radically metamorphosed, vehicle for divine revelation. The question might therefore be raised: What is to distinguish the Bouyerian appropriation of 'myth' from

²² *Liturgical Piety*, 86.

²³ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁴ *Christian Mystery*, 73.

²⁵ Bouyer's criticism of Odo Casel is repeated in several books, beginning with *Paschal Mystery*, 321-25 (Appendix A); *Liturgical Piety*, 86 ff.; *SNTF*, 524 ff.; *Liturgy Revived*, 15-16; and *Eucharist*, 16-17. His critique of Casel's position on *this* particular detail must therefore be taken seriously; with regards to the Benedictine's *Mysterientheologie* in its broad strokes, Bouyer has only praise and admiration.

²⁶ Cf. Louth's review in *Downside Review*, 308. Louth quotes Bouyer (*Christian Mystery*, 276): '...when one sees [non-Christian] personalities as admirably integrated, as critical of themselves and of all

the Caselian recourse to the 'mysteries of antiquity'? Bouyer's simple answer is that his own acknowledgement of myths respects and takes into account the legitimate 'anthropological antecedents of Christianity',²⁷ whereas Casel's approach tends to 'obscure our appreciation of the creative originality, and therefore, everlasting validity, of that great vision of Christianity.'²⁸

How fair is Bouyer in his critique of Casel? For the latter, the mystery cults contemporaneous with the origins of Christianity simply lent 'words and forms' to it in a manner akin to Old Testament 'types' acknowledged by traditional Christian exegesis.

As Casel put it:

They were only a shadow, in contrast to the Christian mysteries; but they were a longing, 'a shadow of things to come'; the body whose shadow they cast was 'the body of Christ' which showed itself beforehand in the types of the old Testament too. An analogy existed for them, as it did for the whole of nature and supernature, and so they were able to lend words and forms to the mysteries of Christ which belonged to that superstructure.²⁹

But equally adamantly he asserted that the non-Christian mystery religions could give neither existence nor content to Christianity; how, indeed, he asked, were the weak and poor elements of the world to attain of themselves the mystery of Christ?³⁰ In some respects, Casel's 'typological' appropriation of the pagan mysteries appears not too dissimilar from the following depiction by Bouyer:

Yet the almost sudden flowering of these cults at the very time when the old paganism was crumbling is a symbol of those aspirations of lost man which God Himself kindles because He wishes to respond to them. They are as a rough draft, very pale and inadequate, of what God is preparing to give man in answer to his deepest desires and infinitely in excess of his most sanguine hopes. In these mysteries, so often inconsequential, men sought, without yet realizing it, another mystery; just as, in their

their possible impressions as are those of the great contemplatives, one must be singularly unaware or imprudent to allow oneself to deny the reality of the objects of their experiences....'

²⁷ *Rite and Man*, 2.

²⁸ *Liturgy Revived*, 15.

²⁹ Casel, *Mystery of Christian Worship*, 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

false gods, they unconsciously adored the true God. One day shadows and symbols disappeared because the reality had come.³¹

Bouyer's principal complaint against the *Mysterientheologie* of Casel – a man whom he otherwise esteemed highly and whose doctrine in its essence he accepted – is what appears to be a flagrant disregarding of what, for Bouyer, must surely be obvious: 'When we see Dom Odo Casel's immense effort to find the antecedents of the mystery of Christian worship in the most incongruous pagan rites, and the small concern he brought to the least contestable Jewish antecedents of this same mystery, we wonder how such an open mind could have remained so little open to certain obvious matters of fact.'³² In other words, the origin of the Christian 'mystery' is none other than what St Paul had already taught in his epistles; as for the origin of the apostle's own use of the mystery-motif, one need not go farther back than the Jewish scriptures (the book of *Daniel* in particular) and the intertestamental apocalypses.

There are several important reasons why Bouyer is so antagonistic towards the theory of an alleged derivation, or at least the claim of an equality between the Christian mystery and the other mystery religions. Partly it is because the theory threatens the supernatural claims of Christianity. Partly it is because it completely falsifies the real state of affairs, as confirmed by phenomenologists of religion and even by depth psychologists.³³ Partly it is because he perceives the claim to be the bane of a rightful practice of an authentic Christian mysticism; a theory which regards Christian mysticism as 'only an intrusion into Christianity of a spirituality thought to be wholly Greek and pagan' is at least partially to blame for the scepticism and even derision accorded to it by

³¹ *Paschal Mystery*, xix.

³² *Eucharist*, 16.

³³ Cf. chapters two and three of *Rite and Man* for Bouyer's summary and assessment of (then) recent developments in both the history of religions and in psychology.

a number of Protestant theologians, Barth for example.³⁴ And partly it is because, in a certain sense, Bouyer's theology of the Word stands or falls on this point. For him, the Christian mystery is the core, content and climax of that divine Word which has been *uniquely* given throughout the course of Israel's history ('God's search for us'). To claim, or to accept the claim, that that mystery is somehow derived (even by means only of formal or linguistic analogy) from pagan mysteries would blatantly contradict Bouyer's depiction, one that he is moreover able to substantiate with remarkable erudition on the biblical, liturgical and spiritual parentage of the word *μυστικός*.³⁵

As to why Bouyer insists on the irreducibly christological content of the 'mystery', the reason is primarily theological and pastoral, not apologetic: 'What should emerge is a new understanding of our faith and of the way it should be lived,' he writes.³⁶ He is concerned that Christians fully appropriate the mystery, since it perfectly answers, 'not simply one particular need of man's, but his whole basic need', that is, salvation.³⁷ For the mystery is, 'above all, the supreme grace of God.'³⁸ It is the heart of the Word of God, and thus its supernatural provenance needs to be defended, its saving reality proclaimed for what it is, the *Word of God* and the *Mystery of Christ*.

To recapitulate: For Bouyer, the Christian 'mystery' is paramountly the Pauline denotation of the word; it is 'the mystery described by St. Paul as the great secret of the Word of God which it had finally proclaimed to the world.'³⁹ Bouyer's pithy description

³⁴ *Christian Mystery*, 264.

³⁵ Cf. 'Mysticism', 44 ff.

³⁶ *Rite and Man*, 5.

³⁷ *Liturgical Piety*, 101.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 302.

of it as 'God's Word *par excellence*'⁴⁰ demands a more serious enquiry as to how the relationship between these two concepts or realities can be more precisely articulated:

1. In the first place, the Christian mystery is most definitively *the* Word of God, 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (*1 Corinthians* 2:2). 'Christ both is and reveals the Mystery in its fullness'.⁴¹ This formulation brings out a double truth, first of all that Christ is himself the fullness (*to plerōma*) which is the very plenitude of God, and secondly, that he reveals the totality of what God intends to make of his creation.
2. Closely related to this, the mystery is Word because it is the revelation of divine love. Since the mystery is 'a personal love that desires to communicate itself to living persons', it must first be accepted by human beings under the aspect of 'word'.⁴² 'For what is a word,' asks Bouyer, 'if it is not the communication, the personal disclosure of a person to other persons? And what better realization of this definition can there be than the disclosure of God's love to us in Christ? Here, if anywhere, God speaks, and He speaks Himself, reveals Himself in a Word which is the most personal form of communication possible, since it is itself a Person.'⁴³
3. Finally, the mystery is related to 'Word' because it is intimately linked with the 'sacred word' which proclaims, explains, and makes it present. Here lies the greatest difference between the celebration of the Christian mystery and those of the pagan mysteries, observes Bouyer:

The mysteries of the Graeco-Roman world may have contained a *hieros logos*, a sacred word, but it played a very minor part. It was a more or less optional addition to a rite whose primary implications were merely those of magic. But in the celebration of the Christian Mystery everything depends on God's Word and on our hearing it with faith. No magic can find place in the rites which are performed in the

⁴⁰ *Liturgical Piety*, 101.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 105.

Christian Mystery, for from beginning to end everything is ruled by the most free and most generous disclosure of God's heart to His children in His only Son.⁴⁴

From all this it might appear that Bouyer has blurred any distinction between the 'mystery' and the 'Word', and thus it is vital to clarify this point. These two realities are intimately related but may be distinguished in that the mystery, although wholly contained in the Word, shines forth from it in its unexpected and vigorous originality. In a crucial sense, here is the boundary between the Jewish and Christian scriptures, between the old and new dispensations. The mystery marks the place where the Word finds its 'discontinuous continuity'.⁴⁵ As the previous chapter has pointed out, the 'Word' is Bouyer's shorthand for God's dynamic action which is mightily creative and salvific, sovereignly intervening in the world in order to reveal who he is and what he is about doing. Put another way, the Word is both the divine speech and the divine deed, speaking and doing, form and content, an action that *has* a message and a message that *is* an action. In such a schema, the mystery, if it is to be strictly distinguished from the Word, denotes the supreme revelation of the Word, its 'gospel' which is eminently 'good news'. It comes to light as the very summit of a theological understanding of the Word of God,⁴⁶ the divine Word put in the spotlight, or, to use another image, scrutinized under a magnifying glass. Throughout the whole history of revelation, writes Bouyer, God has only one thing to say to humanity, and this 'one thing' is the Christian mystery.⁴⁷ But it

⁴⁴ *Liturgical Piety*, 108-09.

⁴⁵ The phrase is used by Bouyer in *Church of God* to describe the transition from the Old to the New Testament, and primarily in connection with the transition from Israel to the Christian Church (cf. pp. 110, 235).

⁴⁶ *Liturgical Piety*, 105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 210. Elsewhere Bouyer says that the mystery is the 'last word of the Scriptures, the unexpected conclusion of the history of Israel, and the solution to the enigma of human and cosmic history in Christ and his cross' (*Cosmos*, 56). Bouyer's 'last word' sounds strikingly similar to a passage in John of the Cross' *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (2, 22, 3): 'In giving us His Son, His only Word (for He possesses no other), He spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and He has no more to say.' Cf. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1973), 179.

is equally true to say that God has only one deed to accomplish in humanity, and that one great and mighty deed is, once again, the mystery. Thus the two are much more similar than dissimilar: the mystery, like the Word as a whole, is both a speaking and a doing, a gospel as well as a saving event.

As for the *content* of the mystery, it is at once simple and profound. One could give a one-sentence description of it, or just as well write volumes on it, as Bouyer has in fact done with his trilogies and other writings. He himself offers the following synthesis: The mystery is, first and foremost, the Trinity, ‘God Himself in His deepest nature which is so unfathomable by man’s reason, but which He has revealed to us: that is to say, the Mystery is basically the divine *agape*, the creative and redemptive love which is pure gift, which does not seek any good in what it loves, but makes it good because so loved.’⁴⁸

Then, the mystery is also to be understood as ‘the one and great design of God for the world’; more specifically, it is the unlooked-for miracle of adoptive sonship, God ‘adopting man as His child so as to reconcile all things to Himself in the Body of His Son.’⁴⁹ This divine plan or design must not be seen as something external to God,

but something in which He is, if we may say so, personally concerned as much as any workman can be personally concerned with what he does. But this is not all. Not only is God concerned with His work, so to say, but this work, especially in its final achievement, cannot be separated from Himself. What He does is not only a mysterious revelation of His ideas, but of Himself. He is, in some mysterious way...putting Himself into His work.⁵⁰

In other words, the mystery is that divine Wisdom which seems madness to human wisdom, precisely ‘because it transcends all created wisdom, even that of the Principalities and Powers, to whom the Mystery of God was only to be revealed through

⁴⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 127.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

the Church.’⁵¹ Here, ‘mystery’ coincides with ‘Wisdom’ and already anticipates Bouyer’s Sophia-centred ecclesiology, which will be expounded in Chapter Four.

Finally, in its historical realization, this mystery comes to its fulfilment in Christ and his cross; hence it is also called by Christian tradition the great ‘paschal mystery’. It is the event of the *pasch* or Passover of Christ from life to sacrificial death to glorious resurrection. For Bouyer, the remarkable thing about this once-for-all *pasch* of Christ is that it brings about and contains another one like it: By becoming united with Christ, human beings themselves ‘pass over’ from death to life; they pass through Christ’s death to the life of God.⁵² Not that there are two paschal mysteries, but in a sense Bouyer can speak of two ‘Passovers’, two ‘passages’ which are, in reality, only one. ‘The always-actual link between the two is the risen Christ, the Lord Who has been made life-giving Spirit.... And the goal of the second “Passover” is that we should reach the goal of the first’.⁵³ In the words of *Ephesians* 4:13, it is to attain to ‘mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’. It is because the Christian mystery is not merely objectively true for human beings but is subjectively real for them that *Colossians* 1:27 conjoins these two dimensions in a vivid description of what ‘the riches of the glory of this mystery’ consist in: it is ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’

Bouyer’s vigorous defence of the ‘creative originality’ and ‘everlasting validity’ of the inexhaustible paschal mystery is ultimately justified by the fact that the ‘mystery’ is nothing else than the unique Christian ‘gospel’. Little wonder, then, that, in the passage from the *Introduction to Spirituality* (which this chapter has adopted as its programmatic text) Bouyer describes the mystery as ‘the substance of our faith’.⁵⁴ The

⁵¹ *Liturgical Piety*, 127.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 192.

mystery, understood as gospel, cannot be removed from the divine Word to Israel without radically distorting its message and profoundly altering its destination as an address to a new Israel. As the next chapter will make clear, the Church of Jesus Christ is constituted as the new and definitive Israel precisely because, like the Israel of old, it has been gathered together to hear, not just *a* word that saves, but *the* saving Word come in substantial fullness. But this articulation of the content of the Christian mystery requires more focus and sharpening. Hence the next section explores more acutely what Bouyer means by saying that the Word is concentrated in the mystery of the saving cross of Christ.

B. THE MYSTERY AS CHRIST AND HIS CROSS

FOR BOUYER, AS for all of Christian preaching, the cross is all-important. Properly speaking, it is the focus of the whole saving mystery.⁵⁵ Did not St Paul declare: ‘But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’ (*Galatians* 6:14)? ‘The Cross is our salvation,’ writes Bouyer, ‘not because it is a cross, but only because, and insofar as, it is the Cross of Christ, the voluntary death of the living God by which He manifests His divine and creative love.’⁵⁶ Hence, in the Christian mystery, the meaning of the cross has been forever transformed from being an abhorrent instrument of torture and death, to being the supreme expression of divine love and the means of creaturely redemption. Neither does the cross mean only suffering and sorrow: ‘For the Cross is no longer seen as a sign of painful death and irretrievable loss, but rather as the sign of victory through

⁵⁴ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 105.

⁵⁵ *Liturgical Piety*, 131.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

the resurrection.’⁵⁷ This evangelical truth must not be overlooked, and in all subsequent treatment of Bouyer’s emphasis on the cross, one must remember that, for him, the cross always entails the resurrection and accounts for joy and gladness in the Christian life.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the rejoicing comes only after sorrow: ‘So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you’ (*John* 16:22). At the heart of the mystery is the paradoxical proclamation of a ‘good news’ in which a death is the central announcement: ‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,’ says Paul, ‘you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’ (*1 Corinthians* 11:26).

For Bouyer, Jesus’ cross, for all its centrality in the paschal mystery, cannot be separated from his entire life, what Cullmann has felicitously called ‘the mighty Christ-event’. At the outset, one must be on guard against what might be called a ‘crucimonistic’ view, a sort of *theologia crucis* gone berserk. Hence, for Bouyer, it is especially important to appreciate the cross in tandem with the Last Supper; Good Friday, in more senses than simply calendrically, takes place only after Holy Thursday. That is, Bouyer belabours to demonstrate how the Last Supper both fulfils all the Jewish *berakoth* and anticipates the saving cross. In so doing, it will be seen why, for Bouyer, it is not a question of asserting the priority of either Holy Thursday or Good Friday, of either the supper or the cross, but of restoring the continuity, complementarity, and inseparability of the two.

It will be recalled that the Word of God is the divine communication, God’s self-revelation in act and presence, not only speaking but decisively acting to save and recreate the humanity he wishes to restore to sonship. This *divine* Word elicits a *human* word of response ‘which acknowledges it in faith and which therefore welcomes its

⁵⁷ *Liturgical Piety*, 173-74.

coming in surrendering unreservedly to it.’⁵⁹ Under the old covenant, this human response was formulated in the Jewish *berakah* (Greek: *eucharistia*) and the synagogue and meal *berakoth*, as well as those of the Passover memorial, culminating with petitions for the coming of the Messiah, the full establishment of God’s kingdom, and the restoration in glory of the eschatological Jerusalem.

For Christians, this ardent supplication is summed up and fulfilled at the Last Supper, ‘when Jesus, who was to hand himself over to the Cross as the supreme fulfilment of the Passover, pronounced the *berakoth* over the bread and cup as a consecration of his body broken and his blood shed, in order to reconcile in his own body the “dispersed children of God,” and to renew them in the eternal covenant of his love.’⁶⁰ In other words, Jesus at the Last Supper offers the perfect *berakah* because it is the perfect human response to the Word of God. Indeed, in Jesus, the divine Word and the human word meet in perfect accord; in the thanksgiving *berakah* of Jesus,

an answer to the Word of God is at last given in full actuality, an answer which in perfect thanksgiving, in perfect acknowledgment of God’s love for man, gives back this love of God by a complete surrender of man. And such an answer is given in the Eucharist because it is Christ’s own thanksgiving, the thanksgiving which led Him to the Cross. Thus, the Word of God Itself made man creates in man the perfect response to that Word.⁶¹

Jesus’ *eucharistia* was no simple memorial of God’s mercies, no mere token self-offering to God, for at the same time he made of it the memorial of the mystery of his cross, a decisive consent to the sacrifice on the cross which he would undergo on the following day.⁶² Already in the Last Supper, the cross is both *anticipated* and *explained*.

⁵⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 173.

⁵⁹ *Eucharist*, 463.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 464.

⁶¹ *Liturgical Piety*, 145.

⁶² *Eucharist*, 464.

In fact, apart from the supper, the cross may well have proved incomprehensible. Like the unbelieving Jews who gathered at the foot of the crucifixion to mock Christ, one might behold only the ghastly sight of a condemned man being executed. But the Last Supper explains the mystery; it was there that the cross 'was decided upon and where it received its salvific meaning through the free and sovereign act with which Christ accepted it'.⁶³ In other words, on Holy Thursday, it may be said that *already* Christ handed himself over to the decisive action of Good Friday.

This is not to say that the cross is superfluous, or that Good Friday is of secondary importance – nothing could be further from the truth. For while the supper *anticipates* the cross, only the cross *fulfils* it – and in so doing fulfils the eternal plan of the Father. As Bouyer puts it in one of his early books, 'all that we have seen Christ suffer today in His Passion is, for believers, only the fulfillment of the act performed the day before in complete liberty. [...] Good Friday is only the culmination of Holy Thursday. But the event of Holy Thursday is itself only the actualization of eternal designs.'⁶⁴ The words 'only' should not mislead the reader into thinking that Bouyer is downplaying the necessity of the cross. Throughout his books, the saving cross occupies a major part of his theological reflection, and he frequently echoes St Paul's formula that *the* central mystery of Christianity is 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'. But it is imperative to view both Holy Thursday and Good Friday as *one saving event*, in just the same way as Jesus' entire life (birth, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension) needs to be seen. The 'mighty Christ-event' is so called to signify the complete unity and indivisibility of any aspect of Christ's person and work.

⁶³ *Eucharist*, 468.

⁶⁴ *Paschal Mystery*, 243-44.

However, it is undeniable that Catholics would tend to emphasize the Last Supper, and this in view of the Eucharist.⁶⁵ But Catholics should remember that the supper cannot be disconnected from the cross – that it is, indeed, the supper *of the cross*. Therefore it is more correct to give equal emphasis to both: the Christian eucharistic memorial recalls Christ's command, 'Do this in memory of me', given on Holy Thursday, just as it derives its *raison d'être* from Christ's sacrifice on Good Friday. The supper and the cross *together* provide the content of the Eucharist understood as a memorial sacrifice.

It is worthwhile stressing again the place of the cross in Bouyer's theological horizon. The cross is where the Christian mystery is found most concentrated. It is the supreme revelation of that seeming 'folly' of God which is ultimately wiser than all human wisdom. Hence, Christology, and specifically the cross, drives Bouyer's theology of the Word, just as the latter controls his anthropology, ethics, spiritual and liturgical theology, and ecclesiology. It must also be stressed that Bouyer's *theologia crucis* is indissolubly linked with a necessary *theologia gloriae*, and that the 'cross' is, for him, in true Johannine fashion, a shorthand for the 'cross and resurrection'.⁶⁶ He writes:

[We] must never forget...the fact that the Mystery does not bring the Cross into the world, but finds it here. [And the] second truth is that the Mystery does not transfigure the Cross by making death no longer death, no longer the enemy of God as well as of

⁶⁵ Joseph Ratzinger is a good example. In *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), 21-29, he notes that what Jesus announced at the start of his public ministry was not the Church but the kingdom of God. Highlighting Jesus' actions – his preaching of the kingdom, his parables, teaching a special prayer to his disciples, the calling of the Twelve, and especially the institution of the Eucharist – Ratzinger concludes that these are the 'acts by which Jesus founded the Church'. But it is the institution of the Eucharist that is, for Ratzinger, the ecclesio-genetic action of Jesus par excellence: Far from being a mere, 'isolated cultic transaction', the Holy Thursday meal is 'the making of a covenant and, as such, is the concrete foundation of the new people: the people comes into being through its covenant relation to God' (p. 28).

⁶⁶ 'But, for all that, a theology of the Cross, following Saint John the Evangelist, it will also be, at the same stroke, a theology of the Resurrection and Ascension: that is to say, of the full assumption of man in God, by a communion with the God made man of our fallen humanity, who will raise it up again and exalt it to the very bosom of the Father.' (*Women Mystics*, 124)

man, but rather by making death the death of Jesus Christ, that is, a death through which death itself is now to die in the triumph of the resurrection.⁶⁷

Moreover, his *theologia crucis* connects with his *theologia liturgiae*. A passage in one of his earliest books, published more than fifty years ago, is illuminating: ‘It is not ... the renewal of the Christian mystery which makes the cross an abiding memorial: it is the imperishable actuality of the cross which allows the sacramental mystery to be renewed indefinitely. Christ dies no more, but the fact of His cross henceforth affects all history.’⁶⁸ In other words, it is not the liturgy (important as it is for him) which in the first place gives meaning to and legitimizes the cross; it is the cross, as a once-for-all (ἐφάπαξ, *Hebrews* 10:10) event, which legitimizes and ‘fuels’ the liturgy. This said, Bouyer’s account of the liturgy must now be articulated, for it is a most important ‘bridge-reality’, the final link from his theology of the Word to his doctrine of the Church. These last sections will argue that Bouyer’s liturgical interests are driven by a paramount concern to ‘make present’ the saving reality of the incarnate, crucified and forever glorified Word of God.

C. THE MYSTERY RE-PRESENTED IN THE LITURGY

ONE IS NOW at the heart of Bouyer’s eucharistic theology, for which he has been esteemed as having made ‘extremely important contributions’ to current Roman Catholic appreciation of the Eucharist, and in particular, of the theology of the eucharistic prayer.⁶⁹ As Bouyer himself insists, his 1966 *œuvre* is not simply a theological reflection *on* the Eucharist, but *of* it: the difference lies in the fact that theologies *on* the Eucharist

⁶⁷ *Liturgical Piety*, 269; cf. also *Christian Initiation*, 139.

⁶⁸ *Paschal Mystery*, 43.

⁶⁹ Garneau, ‘Louis Bouyer’, 259

pay scant attention to it in its *primary sense*, that is, the ‘great traditional eucharistic prayer’, or, as it is called in the East, the anaphora.⁷⁰

Already one perceives the controlling influence of the ‘Word’ on Bouyer’s sacramental theology. He is not content to simply go over familiar and traditional ground, which focuses all too often on the consecrated elements, the Real Presence, and so forth. Important as these are, Bouyer would rather highlight what constitutes the *sine qua non* of the Eucharist, what comprises its ineradicable essence. For him, it is the Word: first of all, it is Jesus Christ *the* Word who is both the sublime offerer and sacrifice-offering; next, it is the anaphora as *prayer*, i.e., as the word of thanksgiving (*berakah, eucharistia*) to the Father; finally, it is the congregational word of faith, the Word finding ‘its echo in the perfect thanksgiving of men.’⁷¹ This section will systematically examine these three expressions of ‘word’ under the rubrics of memorial sacrifice, *berakah*, and the Church’s faith-filled *eucharistia*.

1. The Memorial Sacrifice of the Word

‘THEOLOGIANS AND HISTORIANS of religion readily admit that sacrifices constitute the most important religious rites,’ writes Bouyer, ‘But there is hardly anything on which they hold more divergent opinions than the nature of sacrifice.’⁷² Many in the Baroque Age, relying on Virgil’s equation of *mactare victimas* (‘to slay victims’) and ‘to offer sacrifice’, interpreted a sacrifice as synonymous with a ritual act of slaying, if not of complete annihilation. Modern theologians, reacting against this rather negative view which equates sacrifice with destruction, put the emphasis on oblation or offering, a transfer of the ownership of human goods to God; the reason, then, for the slaying of the

⁷⁰ *Eucharist*, 5.

⁷¹ *Liturgical Piety*, 139.

⁷² *Rite and Man*, 78.

victim is simply to send it from this world to the next.⁷³ Still others simply recall the word's etymology: *sacrificium* comes from *sacrum facere*, that is, to make sacred. To offer a sacrifice, then, would mean to make something sacred, that is, to set it apart, to make it holy, belonging henceforth to God.

However valid and theologically useful these interpretations of the nature of sacrifice may be, Bouyer finds them too refined, too highly moralized and spiritualized, bearing the obvious marks of an advanced stage of religious development.⁷⁴ For instance, the explanation of *sacrificium* as 'making sacred' ignores the fact that, strictly speaking, humans cannot produce nor manipulate the sacred.⁷⁵ With recourse to the anthropological sciences and appealing to the primitive 'natural sacrality' of humanity, in which the whole of reality was regarded as sacred, Bouyer notes that the 'profane' actually originated from a gradual loss of the sense of the sacred.⁷⁶ What is needed is an interpretation of sacrifice which has a concrete point of departure, and which respects the fact of man's natural sacrality and the 'common customs of mankind'.⁷⁷ In a word, Bouyer insists that sacrifice is nothing else than a *sacred meal*. Why the originality and primacy of a sacred meal?

It is an act that is inseparably social and individual. [...] Eating in common is the human act *par excellence*, where society is built up as from within, while each man perfects himself by integrating himself with the universe. It is moreover the first and supreme act in which man apprehends himself in his living relationship with God.⁷⁸

⁷³ *Rite and Man*, 79.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 82-84.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

This is not to invalidate the other interpretations of sacrifice (as immolation, as oblation, as making sacred); rather, they receive even greater clarity in this light.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Bouyer insists, primitive sacrifice was a complete meal, and ‘nothing more than a meal.’⁸⁰ This ‘nothing more’ can be disconcerting, and has in fact unleashed a torrent of scholarly protest and opposition.⁸¹ Again one suspects that Bouyer is here subordinating scientific data to theological *a priori*s, as his critics have often pointed out. By insisting on the primordial meal-aspect of sacrifice, he is perhaps attempting to secure a firmer, more ‘scientific’ ground for the traditional Christian view of the Eucharist as a meal. If true, this ‘strategic’ move need not invalidate the dogmatic position altogether, but it does limit the force of his arguments. As one of his reviewers has pointed out, ‘if sacrifice is a meal or even necessarily involves a meal, how is the death of Christ a sacrifice?’⁸² This is a pertinent question, for no stretch of imagination will permit Christ’s sacrifice on Good Friday to be seen as a ‘meal’. But to this Bouyer might perhaps respond that precisely for this reason Christ’s death on the cross must not be separated from his meal-offering on the eve of his sacrifice, and that during the Passover meal Christ had already anticipated his death by a perfect *berakah* pronounced over bread and wine.

One must keep in mind that Bouyer is referring to the *primitive* meaning of sacrifice rooted in a *natural* sense of the sacred. *Rite and Man*, after all, was written to sketch out the ‘anthropological antecedents’ of Christianity, and, according to him, it is only after one has grasped this original meaning that the extended, more theological and exalted sense of ‘offering oneself’ takes on a fuller significance. For without doubt,

⁷⁹ *Rite and Man*, 83.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸¹ Cf. Walling, *Metamorphosis*, 323-34.

Bouyer also understands sacrifice to mean ‘the offering of oneself, willingly given without reserve, to God who speaks to and calls us’.⁸³ Indeed, he concludes that, especially in Jewish religion, all sacrifice must ultimately entail the consecration of one’s entire life. The result is ‘not so much a moralization of the sacrifices as a sacralization of morality’,⁸⁴ the ‘ritualization of all existence’.⁸⁵ The Jewish *berakah*, originating in synagogue piety, became the pattern of blessing God throughout the day, and for all aspects of one’s life. The meal *berakah* of the faithful, messianic communities at the time of Jesus (the *habouroth*) was especially seen, not only as an equivalent of the Temple sacrifice, but the sacrifice itself in all its purity, the ‘pre-eminent sacrifice’.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, for Bouyer, the assertion that sacrifice is fundamentally a sacred meal is of paramount importance for his theology of the Eucharist. ‘Catholic theologians in modern times have taken great pains, but quite uselessly, to prove to Protestants that the Eucharist can *also* be a sacrifice, *even though* it is obviously a meal. [...] In antiquity the Eucharist was seen as the sacrifice of the Christians *because* it was the sacred meal of the Christian community.’⁸⁷ The meal aspect of the Eucharist needs to be especially stressed today in the light of Catholic liturgical deformations which stress the contemplation of, or devotion towards, the reserved elements, and not their consumption and reception in faith.⁸⁸ To this Bouyer declares that ‘the Cross is effectively redemptive

⁸² Walling, *Metamorphosis*, 329, citing Matthew J. O’Connell’s review of *Rite and Man* in *Theological Studies* 24 (1963), 305.

⁸³ *Monastic Life*, 184.

⁸⁴ *Eucharist*, 49; also 45.

⁸⁵ *SNTF*, 24.

⁸⁶ *Eucharist*, 464, also 178.

⁸⁷ *Rite and Man*, 82-83.

⁸⁸ Jungmann, too, criticizes what he calls that ‘tabernacle-devotion’, a type of piety which, though legitimate and justified, has led to extravagant practices and the most untheological ways of thinking: ‘We even hear people expressing pity for the silent recluse in his endless solitude. It is quite obvious that such

for mankind only insofar as men associate themselves with it through the eucharistic eating of [Christ's] flesh and his blood.'⁸⁹ Hence, this is the first reason he gives for the Catholic insistence on the Eucharist as a sacrifice, that is, understood as a sacred meal.⁹⁰

This lays the foundation for the second way of understanding the Eucharist as a sacrifice, that is, as Christ's self-offering: his self-offering to the Father in a supreme act of love and obedience, and his self-offering to humanity as spiritual food and nourishment for eternal life. Contrary to the popular notion of sacrifice as essentially destructive, one must understand the biblical view that what is offered in a sacrifice is not the death of the victim but its very life; what use does a death have for God or for human beings?⁹¹ It is therefore Christ's redeeming sacrifice, understood as the total giving of his 'life-giving life', first of all, to the Father, and then also to 'his own' (as food, but ultimately as embodied *agape*), that is ever celebrated in the Eucharist.

This leads to a third way of appreciating the Eucharist as sacrifice, that is, as a memorial. Nowadays the word 'memorial' simply means commemoration, a mental remembering, a 'strictly psychological and anecdotal notion' unfortunately and

meditations...are not so appropriate today when people have become more acutely aware of the fact that our Lord presents his body to us in his sacrament *chiefly to be offered and received.*' Cf. Jungmann, *Announcing the Word*, 120 (emphasis added).

⁸⁹ *Eucharist*, 465.

⁹⁰ While Catholic sacramental theology generally teaches that the eucharistic sacrifice is a meal, very few (if at all) authors have followed Bouyer in equating *every* sacrifice (phenomenologically and anthropologically understood) with a sacred meal. His blanket equation has provoked serious critique: O'Connell judges the chapter on sacrifice in *Rite and Man* to be its 'weakest part' (cf. Walling, *Metamorphosis*, 329). Michel Meslin, a historian of religions in his own right, says that '[even] if it seems correct that the solemn act of taking a meal constitutes one of the most primitive hierophanies perceived by man ... [still] I do not think that one can affirm that the sacred meal is fundamentally identical with sacrifice.' Cf. Meslin, *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 61. For its part, this thesis will not attempt to pass judgement on whether Bouyer is correct or, as Meslin finds him, forcing the conclusion on dogmatic grounds. It simply observes that Bouyer's intention is theological, and that his assertions are meant to undergird his construal of the supper *and* the cross as *one sacrificial event*.

⁹¹ Stephen B. Clark, for example, writes: 'A death, after all, is not a very good gift – especially not the bloody death of a beloved Son. But the death of Christ on the cross was not an offering of death to God. It was the way Christ gave his life in sacrifice to God.' Cf. his *Redeemer: Understanding the Meaning of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1992), 125.

uncritically inherited from the Middle Ages.⁹² Acknowledging the groundbreaking scholarship of Joachim Jeremias, Bouyer points out that the Jewish ‘memorial’ is in fact

a sacred sign, given by God to his people who preserve it as their pre-eminent spiritual treasure. This sign or pledge implies a continuity, a mysterious permanence of the great divine actions, the *mirabilia Dei* commemorated by the holy days. For it is for the Lord himself a permanent attestation of his fidelity to himself. [...] For our subjective commemoration is merely the reflection of an objective commemoration, established by God, which first of all bears witness to himself of his own fidelity.⁹³

In other words, when the Jew enjoins God to ‘remember’ his people, to ‘remember’ his promises of old, and so forth, he is not simply asking God to make a ‘mental note’ of the fact but to decisively act upon it, much as what people today intend when they send ‘memoranda’ to one another. A memorial, then, *makes present* a past action of God (who, in his eternity, has no past, present or future) because by it God is expected to act again. For the Jew, this is expressed most formally and liturgically in the *berakah*.

2. The Word of the Jewish *Berakah*

IN GENERAL, THE Jewish *berakoth*, whether in the synagogue service or in the meal prayers of the *habouroth*, comprise the following paradigmatic sequence: An initial *berakah* thanks God for the gift of creation, and especially the creation of life. A following *berakah* praises God for the gift of redemption, recalling especially the great acts of deliverance and the entrance into the promised land. Then, a third *berakah* concludes this recitation of the *mirabilia Dei* by supplicating for the eschatological fulfilment of the people in that Kingdom where God will be forever praised for the definitive building of Jerusalem.⁹⁴ It is in re-presenting to God the memorial, the pledge

⁹² *Eucharist*, 404.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

of his paternal fidelity, that the Jew is able to confidently remind God of his promises and to ask efficaciously for their fulfilment.⁹⁵

The same expectation is to be found in the Passover memorial. As the Haggadah, the explanation of the Passover still recited by Jewish families at their yearly commemoration, puts it: '*We, today, are saved from the Egyptians. ... We, today, are going through the Red Sea. ... We, today, are entering our inheritance...*'⁹⁶ Conversely, in celebrating the memorial of the Pasch, the reality of that saving event became a *present* reality in every one of its repeated celebrations, 'because God's coming down upon it and his intervention in it, through his freeing the People from ignorance and death, were perpetuated there for the purpose of the People's fulfilment.'⁹⁷

Christianity inherited this Jewish understanding of memorial. The goal of Bouyer's massive study on the history of the anaphora (his book, *Eucharist*, is the result of twenty years of research) is ostensibly to lend credence to the view of the Eucharist precisely as a *memorial* sacrifice, which 're-presents in order to make present' a saving deed.⁹⁸ At this point, the full-bodied actualism of Bouyer's 'Word', and the sacramental realism of traditional Catholic theology, happily embrace. Both are proclaimed to be irreducibly actualistic in nature. As Bouyer puts it: 'Therefore, just as to proclaim God's word, in the biblical fullness of the phrase, is to lead to its accomplishment, through its own virtue, that memorial of Christ's mystery which is the core of the Christian celebration is not opposed to its actual reality. It is rather the principle of it.'⁹⁹ And then, to make it clear that he is here speaking of the *divine* agency of both Word and

⁹⁵ *Eucharist*, 464.

⁹⁶ *Liturgy Revived*, 23.

⁹⁷ *Eucharist*, 468.

⁹⁸ For him, to state that the Eucharist is a sacrifice *and* a memorial would be erroneous and misleading (*ibid.*, 280).

sacrament, he says: 'Thus, when Christ's word is brought to us, it is not only His word materially which is echoed, but He Himself indeed who continues to speak it to us. In the same way, in the sacramental action, His action, the decisive action of His earthly life: the Paschal mystery, is extended to us by Him, or, if we prefer it, we are taken into it.'¹⁰⁰

3. The Word Echoed in the Church's *Eucharistia*

AS HAS BEEN mentioned, Israel's liturgical legacy, embodied above all in the *berakah*, was intended to sacralize all of one's life, to ritualize every aspect of human existence.¹⁰¹ By it the pious Jew consecrated every moment of his life, and by extension, was made capable of consecrating the world itself. In short, Bouyer observes, Israel saw its role as 'priest' of all creation. 'By the divine Word and the prayer which welcomes it, all things with man are restored, to their original purity and transparency, and the universe becomes a choir of divine glorification throughout the life of consecrated man.'¹⁰²

For Christians, all the hopes and dreams of Israel, thus expressed in its liturgy, are summed up and fulfilled at the junction of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Both at the Last Supper and on the cross, Jesus has offered the perfect *berakah* because it was the most perfect human response to the divine Word. Perfect divine love was matched by a completely devoted human love. To the Father's address and call, he has cried out with filial alacrity, 'Here am I!' (cf. *Genesis* 22:1). In fulfilment of *Psalms* 40, his was the definitive 'Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart' (cf. *Hebrews* 10:7).

⁹⁹ *Liturgy Revived*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Eucharist*, 45, 49; *SNTF*, 24.

Here Bouyer introduces a notion which locates Jesus' perfect *berakah* not simply on the eve of his sacrificial death, but within the dynamics of perichoretic, intra-trinitarian love. He envisions the Son, eternally generated by the Father in a ceaseless act of complete self-giving, returning that love equally completely to the Father. One could say, observes Bouyer, that the eternal state of the Son is basically eucharistic. The Son 'subsists in a perpetual and perfect oblation, an entire and unceasing act of thanksgiving, the final achievement of His filial possession of the whole paternal being.'¹⁰³ In this perspective, Christ's 'eucharist' at the Last Supper is but the image of the Son's eternal 'eucharist' transposed on the earthly plane. The main difference, for Bouyer, is that, while the trinitarian eucharist is totally devoid of any hint of immolation and blood-sacrifice, on the human plane 'it is *by death* that Christ offers Himself to His Father, and [this explains] why, under the species of bread and wine, offered as His separated body and blood, He offers Himself *as crucified*.'¹⁰⁴ As Bouyer says further: 'Only by accepting the immolation on the cross in which His incarnation was to culminate did the Son of God make of His eternal and divine "eucharist" the sacrifice of our reconciliation.'¹⁰⁵ Jesus, who is himself the Yes of the Father, in whom all the promises of God find their Yes (*2 Corinthians* 1:20), utters his own Yes on behalf of humanity. In this sense, Jesus' Yes to the Father is the last human responsorial word, after which no more need be said, since no more need be given.

¹⁰² *Eucharist*, 463.

¹⁰³ *Paschal Mystery*, 74. One might ask where the Holy Spirit is in this perspective. Following the classical construal of the Spirit as the substantial love between the Father and the Son, Bouyer can propose that this 'eucharist' within the Trinity, where all that the Son forever receives from the Father returns forever to the Father, is the procession of the Spirit (*ibid.*). (In the original text, Bouyer wrote '...all that Christ forever receives from the Father....' This is theologically imprecise, and has been amended by this author.) In his other writings, Bouyer develops this notion of the Holy Spirit being the eternal 'eucharist' within the Godhead. Cf. *Le Consolateur*, 449; *Sophia*, 198-99.

¹⁰⁴ *Paschal Mystery*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

In another sense, Jesus' Yes is paradigmatic. It demands a whole succession of what Bouyer calls 'echoes' in the continuing thanksgiving of human beings.¹⁰⁶ The divine Word continues to elicit a human word of response 'which acknowledges it in faith and which therefore welcomes its coming in surrendering unreservedly to it.'¹⁰⁷ The actualizing memorial does not only make present the unique sacrifice of Christ, which was offered once-for-all, it also makes possible the Christian's sacramental association with it. 'The result,' says Bouyer, 'is that we become offerers with and in the one priest, and offerings with and in the one victim.'¹⁰⁸ Of course, in an important sense, Christians can offer nothing of themselves to be re-presented to God, 'but only what Christ himself has first "presented" to him and [now] enjoins us to re-place before him: the "memorial" of his saving passion.'¹⁰⁹ In this way alone can Christ's sacrifice become the source of that 'reasonable worship' (*Romans* 12:1; λογικὴν λατρείαν translated 'spiritual worship' in the RSV) 'in which we offer our own bodies, our whole being, as a living and true sacrifice, to the Father's will, acknowledged, accepted and glorified.'¹¹⁰

In all this, the living faith of believing Christians plays a crucial role. As Bouyer explains it, the Christian mystery is present in the Eucharist because Christ, once crucified and forever glorified, is still present with his Church. However, the mystery is *not* present with the Church now in exactly the same way as it was present on Calvary; it is present today *only* as an object of faith, and 'as a pattern our lives are now to

¹⁰⁶ *Liturgical Piety*, 139.

¹⁰⁷ *Eucharist*, 463.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 467.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 467.

reproduce, so as not to be any longer merely our life, but Christ living in us.’¹¹¹ More lengthily, Bouyer explains:

This is to say that when we, in keeping with his command and by the power of his Word accepted by the faith of the Church, redo his eucharist over the bread and the cup, we there acknowledge by faith the efficacious pledges of his body and blood. Handed over for us to the Cross, they are given to us effectively *here and now*. In the eucharist, we therefore become one Body with him through the power of his Spirit. At the same time, the salvific act, immortalized in the glorified body, together with the perfect human response which is inseparable from it, becomes our own. It becomes, through the Spirit, the principle of our renewed life as a life of sons in the Son. This is present, objectively, in the eucharistic celebration, which merely actualizes in us the unique offering consecrated at the Supper, just as in the sacramental elements, the body and the blood are objectively presented to us so that we will from now on be but one with the One. But this is present in this way only in order that it might become *ours* through faith, a faith in which all our being surrenders to the Father’s will revealed in his Word, just as in the Word made flesh this will became a reality in our world.¹¹²

The above passage is important for two things that it brings out: One is a much-needed accent on the consecratory power of the Holy Spirit; this pneumatological slant has so far been absent in Bouyer’s account of the Eucharist. However, he does not stress so much the Spirit’s role in the transformation of the material elements on the altar, as his role in effecting the Christian’s union with Christ, making the believer ‘one Body with him,’ a ‘son in the Son’, and ‘one with the One’. The passage also highlights the Christian’s appropriation of the unique salvific act of Christ, and this by faith, that is, a perfect surrender to the Father’s will just as Christ surrendered his to the Father. What the Eucharist therefore achieves is not simply one’s feeding on Christ’s body and blood (‘given to us effectively *here and now*’), but making possible his sacramental association with Christ and his sacrifice (‘becomes our own’). This is the reason why Bouyer (and Catholic sacramental theology) could assert that ‘The result is that we become offerers with and in the one priest, and offerings with and in the one victim.’¹¹³

¹¹¹ *Liturgy Revived*, 39.

¹¹² *Eucharist*, 468-69.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 467.

D. THE ACTUALITY OF THE MYSTERY

ACCORDING TO BOUYER, it is the 'imperishable actuality of the cross which allows the sacramental mystery to be renewed indefinitely.'¹¹⁴ The French *actualité* does not simply mean 'reality'; it denotes a matter of present interest and current impact. This statement puts the accent on the ever-saving reality of an *ephapax* event: the death of Christ on a bleak mound of dirt outside Jerusalem on a day when even the sun hid its light (*Matthew 27:45*) has become the source of inexhaustible light and life for all creation ever since. In Bouyer's horizon, actualism is a recurring motif.¹¹⁵ As a theological term it is especially prominent at the intersection of his account of the mystery and of the liturgy, as the following passage is but one example: 'Of this mystery the liturgy forms the setting. It is in the liturgy that it remains perpetually actual, perpetually living and conscious'.¹¹⁶

Behind this is, of course, Bouyer's concern that the mystery, for all its 'everlasting validity', does not remain a dead letter, a thing of the past, having no link whatsoever with the present or with the people of this age. It is for this reason that the Church is commissioned to preach the Word, which is equivalent to saying, to proclaim the mystery or the gospel:

... as God's gift of Himself proclaimed by Christ the Word became by means of His Cross the actual reality of that new creation in this world of ours, so the Word of the Cross has to be [now] proclaimed through the Church by those whom Christ has sent, in order to speak through them to all generations, so that God may effectively be all in all.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Paschal Mystery*, 43.

¹¹⁵ Bouyer's actualistic motif, *qua* theological motif, might have been influenced, at least in part, by Barth. George Hunsinger's *How To Read Karl Barth* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) argues that actualism is one of six motifs in Barth's theology. It goes without saying that Barth, whose actualistic conception of the divine Word Bouyer picked up, would not have accepted Bouyer's (i.e., the Roman Catholic) equally actualistic conception of the sacrament.

¹¹⁶ *Monastic Life*, 173.

¹¹⁷ *Liturgical Piety*, 107. Chapters Three and Five of this thesis will give a more in-depth exposition of the Church's mission to the world through *kerygma*, *diakonia*, and so forth.

A little further Bouyer adds that ‘it is always by means of the proclamation...of the Word that the Mystery of the Cross is to be accomplished’.¹¹⁸ What does he mean by this? How does the *proclamation* of the Word/mystery *accomplish* it, and what is the significance of this accomplishment?

Again it must be recalled that the mystery (‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’) is the saving reality at the very heart of the Word of God. The word ‘reality’ is here used advisedly – the mystery is no mere message, but a veritable power to save. To consider it otherwise, to regard either mystery or Word as simply instruction or information, is to once more diminish their presence- and power-filled actuality. If Bouyer’s theology of the Word insists on one thing, it is precisely this. However, the actuality of the mystery needs to find its habitat or setting, its rightful place, determined not by arbitrary human decision but by a marvellous divine foreordination – in the liturgy of the Christian people which is itself the heir of the Jewish liturgy.¹¹⁹ St Paul has specified where the mystery is to be proclaimed: ‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’ (*1 Corinthians* 11:26). Not for this reason alone does Bouyer call the Mass ‘the *situs* of the Mystery, of its ever-active presence in the Church.’¹²⁰ For it must be remembered that the liturgy intimately links *speaking* and *doing*, that precisely in the sacramental order the words are efficacious and make present what they signify. Thus, the proclamation of the mystery in the liturgy is no mere word-play or exercise of speech, ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing’, but a representation of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice which makes present that saving reality and renews its gifts.

¹¹⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 107.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Bouyer, ‘Liturgie juive et chrétienne,’ in *Le Culte en Esprit et en Vérité*, ed. Lancelot Sheppard (Paris: Desclée et Cie, 1966), 45-62.

¹²⁰ *Liturgical Piety*, 158.

This is why Bouyer says that the mystery is ‘accomplished’ in the liturgy. He can mean by this, as he says elsewhere, the simple fact that the liturgy ‘places this Mystery within us.’¹²¹ But there is also an implication that the mystery is still somehow incomplete, awaiting its full realization. For Bouyer, this is the meaning behind the cryptic saying of Paul: ‘Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church’ (*Colossians* 1:24). It is not that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is in any way incomplete or insufficient. Rather, it is the mystery of the ‘whole Christ’, head and body, which suffers incompleteness as it awaits the full inclusion of the elect at the end of time. Thus, in the proclamation and actualization of the saving mystery in the liturgy, the Church itself is being built up and tends toward its final accomplishment in the *eschaton*.

It is important to appreciate Bouyer’s Word-based understanding of the liturgy. The liturgy, for him, is not simply the sacramental transformation of material elements into the real presence of Christ, however important that may be. Bouyer’s sights are trained not only on what is known as the ‘liturgy of the Eucharist’; in a number of passages Bouyer even argues for the primacy of the ‘liturgy of the *Word*’. He writes, for example, that ‘the fundamental ministry, the fundamental “service,” the fundamental *leitourgia* of the Church [is] the permanent proclamation, the *kerugma* of the Mystery, through the ever living and acting Word which is always present in its apostles as God is present in It.’¹²² And he goes on to say that ‘The first thing that the Church is to do when it assembles together...is to hear the full Word of God as given in Christ....’ Here is that distinctive Bouyerian emphasis on the *hearing* of the proclaimed Word, an act of the

¹²¹ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 125.

¹²² *Liturgical Piety*, 108.

Church which, by virtue of the presence and power of God in his very Word, makes the mystery into a sacramental reality.

The Word that is simply listened to, since it is the Word of God such as we have described, tends of itself to become an event, an event of our life in which the divine life encounters and possesses it. This divine fact, which comes to meet us by taking into itself our own personal acts, is precisely what, according to the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church, the sacrament is, and this is perfectly in accord with the teachings of St Paul and St John.¹²³

But perhaps his most audacious statement is as follows: 'Since [the] liturgy is predominantly the coming down of God's Word to us, it is fundamentally a liturgy of the Word.'¹²⁴ This is obviously true of the first part, he says, but 'the Mass is equally a liturgy of the Word in the second part, which we rightly call the sacramental and sacrificial [part].' And the chief reason he gives is that, since the time of Augustine, the sacrament could be understood as a *verbum visibile*, a word made visible (and necessarily so) by sacred actions and concrete realities. This is not to say that the sacrament is 'only' a *verbum*, and then, in a further reductionist move, *verbum* is understood as 'only' phrasing or verbiage, and thus *verbum visibile*, 'only' images.¹²⁵ In Protestant-Catholic polemics especially, the notion of *verbum visibile* runs the risk of being rejected out of hand by Catholics as 'too Protestant', or it is accepted by both but at the expense of emptying the *verbum* of its actuality. In other words, there is the constant danger of *verbum visibile* being thought of primarily as some sort of mystagogical pedagogy using visual aids or, in Bouyer's words, a kind of 'parable in action'.¹²⁶ It is not enough to say that the sacrament, by its very nature and content, is

¹²³ *Word, Church, Sacraments*, 74.

¹²⁴ *Liturgical Piety*, 29. A little further, Bouyer writes: 'Just as truly, then, as we can say that the whole liturgy is God's Word, we can and should also say that it is God's action' (p. 30). In other words, the entire liturgy can be described as the liturgy of the *Word* of God, while at the same time and with equal force, it is also the liturgy of the *Word of God*. And what is the divine 'action' of which Bouyer speaks? 'Since the Christian liturgy is, as we said before, primarily the place where is proclaimed God's Word of the New Covenant, the liturgy is also the place of the new Creation' (ibid.).

¹²⁵ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 105.

‘proclamatory’, that its actions and signs ‘announce’ and in their own fashion ‘speak’.¹²⁷

For Bouyer, because the sacrament is *verbum*, it performs what the Word says it does.

In an attempt at ecumenical convergence, Eberhard Jüngel¹²⁸ has suggested that sacramental ‘representation’ might perhaps be better understood as ‘testimony’:

It is possible [he writes] to understand the notion of symbolic representation in a different way, not as if the church, by *representing* Christ himself, *repeats* or *renders effectual* his reality. Barth himself can speak of the church as the (provisional) *representation* of the sanctification of the whole of humankind which takes place in Jesus Christ.¹²⁹ [...] This is certainly a possible way of translating *repraesentatio*. Accordingly, the Catholic church’s self-understanding as a representation of the definitive realization of the saving will of God in Jesus Christ, and the corresponding description of the church as a sacramental event, do not necessarily have to be repudiated *a limine* as contrary to the gospel. Testimony and representation are not alternatives.¹³⁰

But from Bouyer’s (and the Roman Catholic) perspective, such a *reductio* in meaning would be to empty the sacraments of their precise ontological content: as Catholic theology understands them, they are ‘efficacious signs’ which not only ‘point to’ another reality but already ‘contain’ some of that reality and ‘communicate’ that to others. ‘A sign could be a mere pointer to something that is absent, but a sacrament is a “full sign,” a sign of something really present.’¹³¹ As sacrament, the Church in its various actions ‘signifies what it contains and contains what it signifies. ... [It] confers

¹²⁶ *Church of God*, 58.

¹²⁷ This, too, has been noted in a recent papal encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003). Pope John Paul II observes with dismay that the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is at times ‘reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation’ (no. 10).

¹²⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, ‘The Church as Sacrament?’ in *Theological Essays*, trans. and intro. John B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 189-213.

¹²⁹ It is not always clear what Barth means that the Church gives a provisional ‘representation’ (cf. *Church Dogmatics* Vol. IV Part 2, ed. Bromiley and Torrance [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958], henceforth CD IV/2). Most of the time, ‘representation’ can simply be a synonym for ‘revelation’ (e.g., CD IV/2, 620) or ‘attestation’ (ibid., 697), or understood as ‘testimony’ or ‘witnessing’ in the sense of ‘presenting or declaring again/anew’ (ibid., 614, 622, etc.). But sometimes the meaning is more obscure: ‘In divine service [the community] ... exists and acts prophetically in relation to the world to the extent that ... there is a serious discharge of its commission to be a provisional representation of humanity as it is sanctified in Jesus Christ’ (ibid., 698). What does it mean for the Church to *be* a provisional representation of humanity, and not simply to *give* such a representation *to* humanity, as Barth would normally put it?

¹³⁰ Jüngel, ‘Church as Sacrament?’, 198-99.

the grace that it contains, and contains it precisely as conferring it.’¹³² Or, as Bouyer puts it vividly, ‘not only does it point out, as one might indicate with the forefinger something beyond one’s reach ... but it accomplishes the very thing it points out.’¹³³

In the face of this vexing ecumenical impasse with regards to sacramental representation, Bouyer’s theological reflections on the Word and on the eucharistic prayer seem to offer a possible solution. For Bouyer truly has an ecumenical goal in mind: he wishes to demonstrate the implausibility of opposing Word to sacrament, and thus to hammer another nail into the coffin of a supposed polarity between the Protestant ‘churches of the Word’ and the Catholic ‘Church of the sacrament’. At the outset, it is worthwhile noting that Bouyer can be ecumenical *because* he is evangelical; in other words, since his starting point is the full gospel of the Christian mystery (that is, because he is evangelical), his approach cannot help but be ecumenical.¹³⁴

Put briefly, his approach offers an attractive way of bringing together two powerful intuitions of both traditions: the actualistic understanding of ‘Word’ in Protestantism (via Barth), and the actualistic understanding of sacrament in Catholicism. It effectively reunites two historically divorced truths, making of them as it were ‘one flesh’ again. According to him, the mystery is actualized in the liturgy, not only in the second part (the Liturgy of the Eucharist) which, according to Catholic sacramental theology, is the locus of the re-presentation of the saving mystery of Christ’s sacrifice,

¹³¹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Image/Doubleday, 1987), 66.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³³ *Paschal Mystery*, xiv. In the immediate context, he is referring to the inability of the Old Testament Passover to accomplish anything beyond what it simply signifies.

¹³⁴ Avery Dulles, writing on method in ecumenical theology, points out that ‘Christian theology must always keep its primary focus on God and on Jesus Christ as the great revelation of God. It must be biblically rooted, ecclesially responsible, open to criticism, and sensitive to the present leading of the Holy Spirit. The rules for ecumenical theology, then, do not differ essentially from the prescriptions for any good theology.’ Cf. his *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 195.

but also in the *first* part (the Liturgy of the Word) where the mystery is also actualized and made present. Just as the sacrament (more specifically the Eucharist, and even more exactly, for Bouyer, the *anaphora*) ‘makes present’ what it proclaims, so also the Word of God ‘makes present’ what it announces. As he puts it: ‘For it is here [in the liturgy] that the Word retains its perpetual actuality; it is here, in the sacraments and chiefly the Eucharist, that the reality which is the object of the Word is communicated to us’.¹³⁵

In short, Word and sacrament make a happy marriage in Bouyer’s theology.¹³⁶ Word and sacrament, for Bouyer, depend on one another for finality and completion; they have a mutual co-inherence, each points to and demands the other. More systematically put, it is possible to delineate five ways of describing the relationship:

1. The Word *leads to* the sacrament. It is no liturgical fluke that the Liturgy of the Word makes its way toward the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Word announces and anticipates the sacrament, just as the Last Supper, on the eve of the first Good Friday, explained, anticipated, and inexorably led to the cross. Something of traditional church architecture can in fact give a helpful illustration, as Bouyer explains in his book *Liturgy and Architecture*. At the reading of the word of God and the ensuing prayers in response to that word, the congregation’s attention is first held at the *bema*, which corresponds to the modern podium or lectern. Then, he writes, ‘we are moved toward the altar, the table of the eucharistic banquet. The holy table in its

¹³⁵ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 274.

¹³⁶ Congar, too, observes that ‘Most Catholic theologians today attribute a certain sacramental structure to the word of God in the sense of being an observable sign through which the God of grace works our salvation. It is true that that happening of grace is less assured and more linked with the person of the minister than in the sacraments strictly so-called where Christ alone operates.’ Cf. his ‘Sacramental Worship and Preaching’, 27.

Among contemporary Catholic theologians, Michael Figura has written on the ‘sacramentality of the Word of God’. His article in the French edition of *Communio* (‘La sacramentalité de la Parole de Dieu’, *Communio* 26:1 [2001]: 11-28) depicts the Word as having a ‘quasi-sacramental saving reality’, and its relationship with the sacrament as one of reciprocity, of ‘differentiated unity’, and of ‘unity in tension’. ‘That relationship,’ he writes, ‘often described today as a “perichoretic unity”, has yet to be satisfactorily explained. Even if the *word of God* cannot be qualified purely and simply as *sacrament*, one nevertheless

turn points beyond itself to the symbolic East, the eschatological image of the *parousia*'.¹³⁷ Hence there is a continuum from *bema* to altar, word to sacrament, both of which are 'signs' already containing yet still pointing to the fullness of eschatological reality.

2. The Word *actualizes* and *activates* the sacrament. Every sacrament, says Bouyer, essentially implies the presence and action of *verba sacramentalia*. That is to say, the sacred actions need to be accompanied by sacred words which give to those actions their meaning as well as their inner reality.¹³⁸ This is the logic behind

Augustine's words:

Take away the word, and what is water except mere water. Word comes to the water, and the *mysterium* is there, itself like a word to be seen. Where does water have so great a power that when it touches the body, it should wash the heart? All of that from the mere word.¹³⁹

It also explains Bouyer's emphasis on the *anaphora* or the eucharistic prayer: as if proposing a twist to de Lubac's famous axiom, Bouyer could be said to claim that it is indeed the eucharistic prayer which 'makes' the Eucharist. In a similar vein, Rahner has pointed out that, in the sacraments of penance and matrimony, for example, there are strictly speaking no sacred actions, only sacred words.¹⁴⁰

3. The Word itself is *sacramental* or has a *sacramental reality*. This is what Bouyer's robust presentation of the Word comes down to: that what he calls the 'personalist realism of the biblical notion of Word' makes present the person of the Speaker.¹⁴¹

Quite contrary to alarms raised by otherwise unnamed Catholic critics, who feared

recognizes in it a sacramental character: in a sensible manner it produces that which it signifies – the knowledge of God's grace, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit' (p. 13).

¹³⁷ *Liturgy and Architecture*, 88.

¹³⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 29.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *Tractatus in Joannem*, 80, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Rahner, 'Word and Eucharist', 266.

that his theology would tend to reabsorb, i.e., diminish to the point of insignificance, the sacrament into the Word,¹⁴² Bouyer insists that ‘the biblical word in its primary authenticity tends, as of its own accord, toward the sacramental reality.’¹⁴³ Here one is back on familiar ground:

The Word of God is not... simply verbal expressions nor even ideas: it is always an act, in which Someone reveals Himself in giving Himself. Finally, it is this Someone Himself. This Someone, Christ, the living Word of the Father, remains present in the Church to continue to speak to us here ... and His Word, which remains His own in the very act of its being spoken, retains on the lips of His ministers the creative power proper to the divine Word. This is what happens in the sacraments.¹⁴⁴

4. The Word is *finalized or completed* in the sacrament. Bouyer speaks of the ‘two words’ contained in the eucharistic celebration: ‘In the Mass, we go quite naturally from the Mystery *proclaimed* by the word of the Gospel to the Mystery *made present* by the words of consecration.’¹⁴⁵ These two ‘words’, says Bouyer, are, indeed, closely related, for the first tends to the second. But significantly, he also adds that the word of consecration ‘is but the Gospel word in the fullness of its meaning and actuality’.

This is also why, conversely, we perceive the whole meaning of the proclaimed word only in the sacramental celebration. As St. Paul says: ‘Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *proclaim* the death of the Lord, until He comes’ (1 Cor. 11:26).

The Word that proclaims the love of the Father became act in the death of Christ. And the word that proclaims the death of Christ [the Gospel word] in turn becomes act in the [word of the] Eucharistic consecration. This, in return, is ‘the proclamation’ of that death, in the fullness of its meaning and its actuality, not only by us but in us.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ *Dictionary of Theology*, 468.

¹⁴² *Rite and Man*, 207-08.

¹⁴³ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 106.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* As Bouyer explains elsewhere, Paul’s somewhat enigmatic turn of phrase can also be translated and thus re-interpreted: ‘Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord *so that he will come.*’ The proclamation therefore actualizes the saving event. Cf. *Eternal Son*, 195. Behind this is J. Jeremias’ recovery of the Jewish notion of ‘memorial’. Hence Bouyer can write:

5. The sacrament is the *only proper response* to the Word. This is particularly true of the eucharistic celebration: ‘The eucharist can be understood only as a follow-up to and a consequence of the hearing of the Word of God. Properly, it is the response in word and deed, elicited in man through a divine word which is creative and salvific.’¹⁴⁷ The fact that the liturgy of the Eucharist follows in the heels of the liturgy of the Word is no mere ‘fortuitous conjunction of two barely related elements’; on the contrary, it teaches a most sublime truth – that *first* the divine Word speaks, *then* comes the human word of eucharistic response. But in this case, the human word is the most perfect response possible. As the author of the letter to the *Hebrews* puts it:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, “Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,” as it is written of me in the roll of the book.’ (*Hebrews* 10:5-7, quoting *Psalms* 40:6-8)

Jesus, at the Last Supper on the eve of his sacrificial death, makes the *berakah* over the bread and wine his *eucharistia*, that is, the thanksgiving offering, of his entire life handed over ‘for the forgiveness of sins’.¹⁴⁸ In doing so he offers the perfect *berakah* because it is the perfect human response to the divine Word. And now, in every liturgical celebration, the human participants in that eucharistic drama are themselves invited to associate themselves with it, to make Christ’s eucharist their own through faith in his Word and communing in his body and blood.¹⁴⁹

‘Every time Christians celebrate it, as St. Paul says, they “announce” or “proclaim” this death, not first to the world, but to God, and the “recalling” of Christ’s death is for God the pledge of his fidelity in saving them.’ (*Eucharist*, 105)

¹⁴⁷ *Eucharist*, 462.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 465.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

THUS FAR THIS chapter has discussed Bouyer's theology of the Word insofar as it traverses cleanly through the evangelical 'mystery', and on to the liturgy which permanently embodies that mystery,¹⁵⁰ and in which the creative and redemptive Word is supremely manifested in its celebration.¹⁵¹ It has become apparent that a cluster of terms and realities beloved of Bouyer are equivalent, or very nearly so, in meaning and significance: Word-Mystery-Gospel-Christ-Cross, all of which reveal and/or embody the divine *agape*. Above all, Bouyer is the theologian of the *Word*; as Jan Chaim puts it: 'The undisputed merit of Louis Bouyer...is that of having been one of the first theologians to have glimpsed the necessity of deepening the theology of the Christian Mystery with that of the Word of God'.¹⁵² The extent to which the Word shapes and controls Bouyer's mystagogical and liturgical theology has been the focus of this chapter, which has also brought to light one promising contribution of Bouyer to ecumenical theology. More generally, the Word of God, in its creative and inexhaustible vitality, determines the architecture and substance of nearly everything in Bouyer: theological discourse, historical actuality, personalist sacramentality, and, as the following chapter will demonstrate, ecclesiality and ecclesial action. The stage is now set, the characters are in place: the divine Word's journey – throughout Israel's history, its marvellous crystallization in the mystery of Christ, its embodiment in the liturgy in order to be perpetually celebrated with unutterable and exalted joy – has been traced. The time is ready for the articulation of Bouyer's grand vision of the Church vis-à-vis the mighty Word of God.

¹⁵⁰ *Liturgical Piety*, 88.

¹⁵¹ *Christian Mystery*, 252.

¹⁵² Chaim, *La Dottrina Sacramentale*, 69.

Chapter Three

BOUYER'S WORD-ECCLESIOLOGY

A. INTRODUCTION

WHEN LOUIS BOUYER identifies the relationship between God and creation as central to '*tout le problème fondamental de la théologie*',¹ he seems to be echoing a sentiment earlier expressed by Karl Barth who, in 1946, declared that 'The subject of theology is the history of the communion of God with man and of man with God', thus summing up in outline form his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.² However, the resemblance soon proves superficial, for while Barth would be anxious to radically distinguish the divine and human agents in an overarching motif of covenant partnership,³ Bouyer feels no qualms about bringing together God and humanity as closely as possible, a Catholic trait described by Richard John Neuhaus in the following vivid terms: 'Between the natural and supernatural, the ultimate and the penultimate, the heavenly and earthly, Protestantism accents dissimilarities and "otherness," while Catholicism generously, even promiscuously, embraces the similarities.'⁴ More to the point, while Barth's idea of the Church has been criticized for its doctrinal thinness,⁵ Bouyer's ecclesiology is a recurring theme in almost all his books.

¹ *Le métier*, 188.

² Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 5.

³ Cf. John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 33, who understands Barth's preponderant theological concern as 'God and humanity as agents in relation'.

⁴ Richard John Neuhaus, 'That Loud-Mouthed Irish Priest' [reviewing Andrew Greeley's *The Catholic Imagination*], in *First Things* (April 2001): 66-68, in 67.

⁵ See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas' 2001 Gifford Lectures, published as *With the Grain of the Universe*, in which he cites Joseph Mangina's pertinent comment [in Mangina's 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 52/3 (1999): 278] that with Barth, for all his emphasis on the Church's task of giving witness to Christ, 'it is not clear that the church...makes much difference to this task.' Hauerwas continues: 'As a result,

Strictly speaking, Bouyer wrote only one book which is specifically ecclesiological: *The Church of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* (1970). However, most of his writings, beginning with his 1943 *L'Incarnation et l'Eglise: Corps du Christ dans la théologie de saint Athanase*, are concerned with describing, some more directly, others less so, the Catholic vision of the Church. Even in his numerous books on spirituality and the liturgy, this vision can be glimpsed and retrieved. *The Church of God* is itself like the middle panel of a triptych on the economy of salvation, which complements another triptych constituting Bouyer's doctrine of the Trinity. These two trilogies, to be sure, speak extensively of the Church. Hence, it is by no means an exaggeration to say that, after Christology and the theology of the Trinity, ecclesiology is the prime subject matter of Bouyer's theological project, although this fact is often concealed by his established reputation in more specialized aspects of ecclesiological discourse: studies on monasticism, liturgical spirituality, the *anaphora* (eucharistic prayer), the history of Christian spirituality as well as the spiritualities of specific individuals, and the like.

Bouyer's major treatise on the Church is aptly named both in its French original and in its English translation, for the images of the Church as 'people of God', 'body of Christ', and 'temple of the Holy Spirit' are paradigmatically crucial for his account. Ostensibly taken from Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, these images first of all manifest the council fathers' earnestness to portray the Church in trinitarian terms.⁶ But Bouyer is not simply parroting conciliar teaching, and

according to Mangina, Barth's understanding of the church seems to oscillate between claims about what is essential...and claims about the merely accidental and empirical, that is, about those aspects of the church that, for Barth, are largely indifferent and without theological significance.' Cf. Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (London: SCM, 2002), 192.

⁶ *Lumen Gentium* nos. 2-4 mention, respectively, the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the divine economy of gathering together a people for the sake of their salvation. *LG* no. 6 goes on to say that 'In the Old Testament the revelation of the kingdom is often made under the forms of symbols. In similar fashion the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in various images.' While acknowledging the

The Church of God is hardly a commentary on *Lumen Gentium*. Rather, it should be clear by now, as the previous chapters have argued, that Bouyer's ecclesiology is primarily keyed to the historical action of God in relation to the world by means of his almighty Word, resulting in what could be called his 'Word-ecclesiology'. It is the construal of the Church seen as the 'people' gathered by God's sovereign action which is motivated solely by divine *agape*: the gathering of redeemed humanity who become members of Christ's 'body' and who are constituted as God's dwelling place or 'temple' by virtue of the Spirit's vivifying and sanctifying presence. As Bouyer puts it: 'It is because the Church is thus the People of God, becoming the Body of the dead and risen Christ, that she is the Temple of the Spirit, the earthly society in which the Trinity opens itself to us and gathers us to itself by making us share in its life in charity, in the divine *agape*.'⁷ The Church is therefore inescapably trinitarian in both its origin and its term:

[The] divine love, the *agape* of the Father ... is incarnate in the Son made flesh, is incarnate in him only so it may extend itself and be communicated to all flesh by the power of the Spirit. And the Church ... is precisely this community among men of the '*agape* of God poured out in our hearts by the Spirit which has been given to us.' [Romans 5:5] It is as such that the Church is reassembling herself today for the Word of Christ, and in this reassembling, which is the completion not only of his work but of himself, his Body, she is building herself as the Temple of the Spirit.⁸

The fact that Bouyer does not limit himself to a single biblical image or metaphor of the Church – indeed, besides the three already mentioned, he also capitalizes on a fourth, namely, the 'bride of Christ' image – excuses him from a weakness detected by Nicholas Healy with regards to Karl Barth's ecclesiology: Barth's reliance on a 'single systematic principle' (namely, the 'body of Christ'), rich as it is, renders his account

validity of such images as 'sheepfold', 'cultivated field', 'vineyard', 'God's building' and 'holy city', the conciliar constitution proceeds to chapter two with the decisive choice of one particular image: The People of God. This chapter itself ends with the words: 'Thus the Church prays and likewise labors so that into the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, may pass the fullness of the whole world, and that in Christ, the head of all things, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator, the Father of the universe' (no. 17). Finally, it is significant that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* devotes articles 781-810 to the same three images: People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit.

⁷ *Church of God*, 162.

‘seriously one-sided and ... undermines his larger theological agenda.’⁹ Too systematic a use of a sole metaphorical principle, which treats the Church more like a speculative truth rather than a practical one (says Healy) is ‘methodologically misguided’. And he proposes instead a more *narrative* approach which focuses on describing the Church in terms of its *history*.¹⁰

This is exactly what Bouyer has done. As the next section will show, his account of the interpenetration of the divine Word in the biblical history of Israel, finding its christological climax, gives rise to the new history of the definitive People of God. Not only can a narrative approach integrate a greater amount of biblical material, it is also more concrete, by turns dealing with such practical issues as the place of the liturgy, the use of scripture, the role of ecclesiastical leaders, and the like. At the same time, its intelligibility is enhanced. As Eric Mascall wryly observes: ‘At a time when so much of the most penetrating post-Conciliar Roman Catholic writing has almost obsessively entangled itself with an existentialist philosophical idiom which is obscure in German and usually frustrating and infuriating in translation, it is refreshing to have a treatise like this [*The Church of God*], which, though elaborate in its plan and nuanced in its expression, is almost invariably elegant and lucid.’¹¹

Continuing the discussion begun in previous chapters which traced the divine Word’s journey throughout Israel’s history, its climactic embodiment in the mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’, and its sacramental embodiment in the Church’s liturgy, this thesis now considers the decisive transition from the Old Testament *qahalim* to the

⁸ *Church of God*, 257.

⁹ Nicholas M. Healy, ‘The Logic of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment and Proposed Modifications’, in *Modern Theology* 10/3 (July 1994): 253-70, in 253.

¹⁰ Healy, ‘Logic of Barth’s Ecclesiology’, 268.

¹¹ Eric L. Mascall, review of *The Church of God* in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (October 1971): 663-70, in 664.

Christian *ecclesia*. Showing himself wholly in line with conciliar teaching, at the same time displaying a flash of theological originality, Bouyer points out that, although it is manifestly correct to describe the Church *as mystery*,¹² it is perhaps more precise to speak of ‘the mystery revealed *in* the Church’.¹³ Not only is this totally consistent with his exposition of the theology of the Word, it once again demonstrates his christocentric interests – Bouyer is above all anxious to ‘replace’ (*remettre*) ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’ as the centrepiece of his ecclesiology. Because of the inseparability, in his theological vision, of Christ and the Church, his Word-ecclesiology will be articulated and analyzed using two descriptive phrases: ‘The Church of the Word’ and ‘The Word in the Church’.

B. FROM *QAHAL* TO *ECCLESIA*

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, says Bouyer, to understand anything about Christ, if one does not begin by following the progress of the Word of God in the Old Testament.¹⁴ This, the content of Chapter One of this thesis, underscores the vital connection between Christology and a theology of the Word. Bouyer continues: ‘Similarly, we cannot hope to understand the Church other than by the formation of the People of God in Israel. Furthermore, the two themes of Christ and the Church, the Word and the People, are constantly and innately associated. Christ is inseparable from the Church, just as the Church is from Christ.’¹⁵ These few lines comprise a succinct *précis* of the argument in this section, and highlight too the inseparable link between Christology and ecclesiology.

¹² *Lumen Gentium*, chapter one.

¹³ *Church of God*, 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

From the moment the divine Word burst into biblical history, the ‘primordial Word’ to Abraham (as Bouyer calls it), a repeated theme began to manifest itself: ‘Abraham heard a voice say to him: “Go then, leave your country, your family, the house of your father, and go to the country which I will show you [*Genesis* 12:1].” And he leaves without discussion. It is *in that* that he is the Father of believers.’¹⁶ The call of Abraham is echoed in the call of Israel to depart out of their land of bondage, but, as Bouyer points out, the summons to an exodus reveals a deeper divine motive, that of delivering and saving his people:

The exodus, first of all, is the recapitulation for the whole People of what happened with their ancestor: a voluntary call to separation, to a pilgrimage of faith through the desert to the promised land.

But the exodus from Egypt is more than a freely accepted separation: it is a deliverance. The children of Israel are touched by the new, divine call at a moment when their first situation in Egypt, as privileged guests, had changed to a situation of slaves. So [that] they can follow their vocation, it was necessary that God who called them, intervene in order to make them free.¹⁷

Bouyer observes that the New Testament *ecclesia* is the direct heir of this sense of being summoned. The purely secular, Athenian ἐκκλησία (the assembly duly summoned), from the root καλέω (‘I call to a convocation’), was formally called together by heralds (κήρυκες) in the name of the civil authority. In the same fashion, Bouyer points out,

In the New Testament, the Apostles will be prepared to introduce themselves as κήρυκες, the heralds of Israel’s King, whose task it is to call together by the Word of Jesus the new elect of God throughout the whole world, and to enable them, thus brought together, to hear what that same Word has to teach them. One of the most fundamental names for the preaching of the Apostles, therefore, will be the word proclamation (κήρυγμα), which was from the first associated with the idea of congregation or church (ἐκκλησία) in Greek.¹⁸

Thus far Bouyer’s theology of the Word has brought together a cluster of related terms and historical realities: divine revelation, Tetragrammaton and Torah, exodus,

¹⁶ ‘Christianisme’, 34.

¹⁷ *Church of God*, 186.

deliverance, assembly, to name but a few. According to him, throughout the Old Testament there has been, in the last analysis, only *one Word coming from the one God*, so that, despite its many prophetic witnesses, this one Word has gone forth in order to gather together and form a unique people, God's own possession. This unity of divine purpose characterizes all of biblical revelation and salvation history. Bouyer's analogy of many different harmonies comprising one musical theme is useful here: one discerns that Amos' announcement of God's *justice* was swiftly followed by Hosea's insistence on God's *mercy*; Isaiah's idea of God's *holiness* was richly complemented by Jeremiah's insight into God's *tender compassion*; Ezekiel's vision of the Shekinah departing from the Temple in repudiation of the corruption of its cult, would pave the way for the Shekinah's dwelling with his people wherever they may be, even (or especially) in exile. These prophets from the eighth to the sixth centuries before the coming of Christ are seen by Bouyer as the major figures through whom the Word of God resounded, not for their individual sake, Bouyer insists, but for the sake of their people. 'And, similarly, the Word is not so much a peculiar possession that distinguishes the prophets from their people, as it is the peculiar possession that distinguishes this people from all others.'¹⁹

Concurrent with the coming of the Word to Israel through the prophets is its institutional insertion into all of Israel's life. This, the work primarily of priests, shows that there is no inherent opposition between priesthood and prophetism. While nineteenth-century Protestant exegesis sought vainly either to devalue the former or to pit both against each other, Bouyer, culling from the research of Scandinavian exegetes such as Sigmund Mowinckel, shows this to be a groundless polarization. 'It is in no way a substitution of some sort of lay, secularized "prophetic faith" for the "priestly religion," the religion of the sacrifices. The imaginary opposition is a historical misunderstanding,

¹⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 24.

since prophetism originated in the priestly milieu and achieved its major expression only in the work of the two priests, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.²⁰ Thus the Word of God came to be embodied in ritual, in oral tradition, and in scripture, permeating the fabric of Israel's life, directing its faith, its worship, and its morality. It is in this sense that Bouyer confirms the sobriquet frequently ascribed to Israel as the 'people of the Word'; theirs, too, is the 'religion of the Word' if by that is meant that Israel's piety or spirituality, its cultic life, is shaped and nurtured by the Word of God.²¹

This fact is even more clearly seen when one examines the various *qahalim* (assemblies) described in the Old Testament. Bouyer selects three such examples as paradigmatic of the relationship between the Word and the people:

In *Exodus* 19, Israel arrives at the wilderness of Sinai after their departure from Egypt. There, the people assemble in solemn convocation before the holy mountain, Moses sets before them all the words which the Lord has commanded him, and all the people answer together, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (*Exodus* 19:8). Thus it is that the Word of God gathers the people, and indeed constitutes them as a people. To underscore its supreme gravity and solemnity, the covenant is sealed with the blood of animal sacrifices (*Exodus* 24).²²

In *2 Kings* 23, Josiah, king of Judah, attempts to renew the covenant by rededicating the people to God. Bouyer writes:

Here again we find precisely the same essential elements as in the meeting on Mt. Sinai. First, the people were called together to a convocation by God's Word as rediscovered by the High Priest in the Sanctuary. Then they heard a solemn reading of

¹⁹ *Sacred Scripture*, 18.

²⁰ *Church of God*, 212.

²¹ *Sacred Scripture*, 232.

²² It is striking that the author of the letter to the Hebrews also sees the Sinaitic *qahal* as a foreshadowing of the perfect assembly gathered together by 'Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant'. The whole passage (12:18-29) evokes the atmosphere and religious significance of *Exodus* 19, but insists that the latter is surpassed by the eschatological assembly.

Deuteronomy, as in the convocation on Mt. Sinai they had heard the Ten Commandments. After this reading, the people were led to agree, by exultant praise and prayer, to the Word thus newly expressed. And, finally, the renewal of the covenant of alliance and of the people's own agreement to this covenant was expressed and embodied in a solemn celebration of the fundamental sacrifice, that is, the Paschal celebration.²³

In a third *qahal*, described in the book of *Nehemiah* (beginning in chapter 8), the people are once more summoned by, in order to listen to, the Word of God. What they listen to in this instance is not simply the Decalogue, or the book of Deuteronomy, but the entire Pentateuch (or Torah). And then, something new and of great significance appears, different from the two earlier *qahalim*. At the conclusion of the solemn reading, there are no animal sacrifices such as has capped the previous assemblies. Instead, Ezra the priest offers a solemn *berakah* in which are mingled thanksgiving for the past and supplication for the future, calling upon God to fulfil his Word in, through, and for his people.²⁴

Three things need to be highlighted in this tracing of biblical history. The first is to note the primary role ascribed to the Word of God in summoning, gathering, and forming what would henceforth be known as *God's* people, a people uniquely his. To say that the people were in fact called by their leaders, be it prophet (Moses) or king (Josiah) or governor (Nehemiah), is beside the point, likewise to argue that they simply had 'parts of Scripture' read aloud to them. The truth that is being conveyed by these biblical accounts is that it is God himself who is calling his people and speaking to them, the 'Word' being nothing less than the very active presence of God mightily creating and saving his people.

These assemblies of Israel in the Old Testament, typified as they are by their complete dependence on the Word of God, and also significantly related to either blood

²³ *Liturgical Piety*, 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

sacrifice or eucharistic blessing, thus become for Bouyer the model for understanding the Church in the new dispensation, for, as described in *Acts* 2:42 ('And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.') all the elements of the new *qahal* can now be seen, which are the same as the elements of the old, but brought to an enduring perfection.²⁵ In other words, just as Israel of old was the *qahal* standing in vital relationship to the Word of God, a relationship so encompassing as to make Israel precisely a 'people of the Word', so does the new *qahal*, the Christian *ecclesia*, stand in living relationship to the divine Word, now incarnate in Christ who is its definitive revelation, calling into holy convocation the definitive people of God.

The second thing to highlight is the people's experience of a growing awareness of being formally constituted by God himself, of becoming in some sense a new corporate entity, and of therefore needing to be accountable to their covenant promises. For Bouyer, the Sinaitic assembly has a peculiar, normative import for the later history of Israel: 'In it, it can be said, the People will for the first time attain awareness and effective realization of what they are in the plan of their election. [...] The *Ekklesia* thus constituted ... it can be said that the People arrived at a fully conscious existence.'²⁶ This corporate awareness has tremendous sociological and cultural significance in the process of becoming a nation and people.²⁷

A third notable feature of this development of the Old Testament *qahal* is the transition, in terms of the climactic point of the assembly, from animal sacrifice to eucharistic blessing (*berakah*). Nehemiah's *qahal* inaugurated a new way of responding

²⁵ *Liturgical Piety*, 27.

²⁶ *Church of God*, 192-93.

²⁷ Theologically, the difference between simply *becoming* a people, and the *explicit awareness* of becoming one by sovereign divine action, is analogous to the relationship later drawn by Rahner between

to the Word of God, forming the basis of subsequent synagogue worship, marked by thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to God for his wondrous works, and calling him to redo his wonders of old in order to definitively fulfil his purposes among his people and in the world. Bouyer notes that, at the time of Jesus, there were present in Israel little pockets of *habouroth*, apocalyptic communities awaiting this divine consummation, who celebrated their ceremonial meals in anticipation of the messianic banquet. Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples was apparently one such community meal, in which it was customary to take bread and wine and to offer thanksgiving to God for them. But now there is a crucial difference, making this no customary meal: it is in fact Jesus celebrating the last *qahal* of ancient Israel, convoking the new Israel, the *ecclesia* of the new dispensation, speaking to them the definitive Word of God ('Take, eat; this is my body ... Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins') as much as he himself is *the* Word present with them, and sealing the covenant with eucharistic blessing as well as with the signs anticipating his sacrifice on the following day.²⁸

Bouyer's account of Israel's constitution by the Word of God attempts to present a coherent view of ecclesiogenesis which respects both divine initiative and human historicity, both the transcendent and the immanent. On the one hand, there is the Word of God, full of life and love, entering the world and inserting itself in the life of a sinful and undeserving people. On the other hand, there is this people, summoned to emulate the faith of Abraham in his response to the summoning Word, a people ever sustained in a wondrously supernatural manner by this Word, yet remaining a singularly *human* people: sometimes attentive and obedient, often rebellious and idolatrous. Bouyer

the mere experience of grace, and the experience of grace *as grace*. Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 129-33.

²⁸ *Church of God*, 229-30.

demonstrates that it is this divine-human interaction which characterizes the creation of Israel – the Word did not simply ‘fall like a meteor’ from heaven but, in the words of Irenaeus, ‘accustomed itself to living with the children of men.’²⁹ This same divine-human interaction is to characterize the Church of the new covenant, since it continues and culminates Israel’s salvation history, a history penetrated by the divine Word. It was to *Israel* that the definitive Word of God presented himself: ‘He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God’ (*John* 1:11-12). Thus it was that those ‘who received him, who believed in his name’ were constituted anew as God’s definitive people. This definitive Word likewise did not, to use Bouyer’s image once more, simply fall like a meteor from the sky. He was born into the Jewish people, and by all accounts lived as a Jew throughout his earthly life. But he had been anticipated in the Hebrew scriptures, promised and heralded in so many prophecies, and, if one takes Paul’s rabbinic *midrash* seriously, the supernatural rock from which the Israelites drank was Christ (*1 Corinthians* 10:4). In this sense Paul goes even further than the patristic adage, ‘the New (Testament) is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed’, for Christ was already among the people of the old covenant, though he (and they) had to await his definitive revelation in the flesh.

The relationship, then, between the Old Testament *qahalim* and the Christian *ecclesia* is one which Bouyer characterizes as a ‘discontinuous continuity’, in many respects similar to every key moment in Israel’s historical development.³⁰ Biblical history parallels scriptural revelation in that both entail a ‘movement of enrichment’ –

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, 4.10; 4.12.4.

³⁰ *Church of God*, 235. Elsewhere, Bouyer explains this ‘discontinuous continuity’ in terms of a ‘progressive spiral which causes the People to go back periodically over analogous (but not identical) experiences....’ (Ibid., 194; also 226-27) Bouyer’s depiction of Israel’s salvation history seems to correct or modify Cullmann’s thesis of a strictly ‘linear’ historical development; cf. Cullmann’s *Christ and Time*,

continuity is periodically interrupted by progress and new beginnings.³¹ It is vital to stress both the likeness and the dissimilarity. That the *qahal* was the Church's ancestor has been delineated above; what has yet to be clarified is the discontinuity, the radical progress that was achieved at Jesus' constitution of the definitive and eschatological *qahal*. For Bouyer, there are at least five major points of discontinuity.

The first has to do with the fact that the New Testament *ecclesia* is definitively revealed to be the creation of the entire Trinity: 'The Church, the Church of God in Jesus Christ, is ... the human community of the divine *agape*, of the love of the Father communicated to men by his Son in the Spirit. This is what radically distinguishes the People of God in the New Covenant from what they were in the Old....'³²

The second has to do with the Church's constitution as a new kind of *polis* or sociological entity. Bouyer points out that all other activities engaged in by ancient Israel (economic, political, cultural) have been abandoned by the Church. 'This is not to say,' writes Bouyer, 'that the Church is not concerned with these things, or that she gives up having any influence on them, but as Church, as the People of God "fulfilling" [Israel's] original vocation, she has no other function than receiving the Word and giving herself to it.'³³

A third major difference is its demographic composition. To be in the lineage of Abraham no longer matters in the Church. What, for Bouyer, now comprises its *sine qua non* condition for membership? His answer is illuminating, and once again shows his high regard for the Word: 'Listening to the Word, accepting it in faith, giving herself over to it in the eucharistic celebration of the memorial of the life-giving death of Jesus –

which Cullmann himself later amends to one that is 'fluctuating' and 'can show wide variation' (*Salvation in History*, 15).

³¹ *Monastic Life*, 175.

³² *Church of God*, 257.

this and nothing else is what makes the Church. Whoever hears this Word, whoever believes in it, whoever agrees to give himself to it, with and in Christ, belongs thereby to the Church.³⁴

Another discontinuity of great importance is the new ontological unity between Christ and the Church. It is true that the Word has always been inseparable from the people of Israel; Bouyer observes that it never had another interlocutor except Israel, and the Word's presence among the people was what shaped and gave meaning to their history.³⁵ He writes:

It is not enough to say that the Word is addressed to the People, or even that the People are fashioned by the Word. Rather we must say that the Word is so profoundly incorporated in their life that it is not separate from them. Reciprocally, the People are not simply the bearer of the Word: they are its witness and they bear this witness in their existence; they make one body with it.³⁶

Significantly, Bouyer says that Israel makes 'one body' with the divine Word. He wishes to underline the essentially inseparable relationship between the people and the Word such as to constitute a 'living tradition', one that touches the people's entire existence. This relationship, however, will make a quantum leap in the New Testament where Paul will bring the 'one body' idea to unheard-of heights. As the following sections will show, Christ and the Church now form, in Augustine's words, *una quaedam persona*,³⁷ which Bouyer will elaborate in a threefold vision of Christ's 'fullness'.

A final reason for the radical rupture with Israel is the presence of the Spirit. Bouyer's understanding of the Church, marked as it is by a dominant christological

³³ *Church of God*, 239.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 221-22.

³⁷ Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 30, 4.

emphasis, also recognizes the necessary presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, such as to assert that ‘the Church is no longer a people like other peoples, a carnal people, but the People of the Spirit’.³⁸ Here, ecclesiology follows Christology: just as the Spirit was present in fullness in Jesus during his earthly life, so is it present in the Church. The Holy Spirit revealed its ‘totalizing fullness’ throughout Jesus’ life, ‘bursting forth, so to speak, in his cross, in his resurrected and glorified body’, and now ‘gathers all of mankind in the Church, in itself.’³⁹ However, Bouyer is always anxious to situate his pneumatology within the all-encompassing person and work of Christ; ‘we inherit from the Spirit,’ he writes, ‘only by becoming coheirs with Christ, and to do this we must be incorporated in him. The Temple of the Spirit can be built in living stones only if we become “members of Christ.”’⁴⁰

In short, it is the trinitarian Church of the New Testament which, though heir to the Jewish *qahalim* which were likewise constituted by the divine Word, manifests its particularity as the definitive People of God gathered together by the definitive Word of God. However its very particularity is, paradoxically, universal in scope. As Bouyer puts it:

We do not, then, pass from particularism to universality by the dispersion of the people of God, but by an extension of it, in which, far from losing its distinctive characteristics, it communicates them to other men in making these characteristics more profound, in making them more interior. The multitude which is to become definitively

³⁸ *Church of God*, 239.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 250-51.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 307. He writes further: ‘Christ and Christ alone communicates the Spirit, so that he can be called (as in so many pages of the New Testament) “the Spirit of the Son,” “the Spirit of Christ,” “the Spirit of Jesus.” It may even be said that Christ is (in himself) the “life-giving Spirit” and that “the Lord is the Spirit.” [...] And this Christ, through the Spirit, comes to dwell in our hearts....’ (*Ibid.*, 309)

It must be admitted that Bouyer’s christological pneumatology insufficiently develops the ‘temple of the Spirit’ image. Congar’s *The Mystery of the Temple* may be cited as a piece of *ressourcement* writing which highlights both the ‘temple’ imagery and the work of the Holy Spirit, although this also ought not to be exaggerated: even Congar notes that the Old Testament’s pervasive sense of God’s Presence (of which the Temple is one of its prime motifs) is applied by St Paul to *Jesus Christ*. Cf. *The Mystery of the Temple: The Manner of God’s Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse*, trans. Reginald Trevett (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), esp. chapter VII: ‘The Christian and the Church as Spiritual Temples’.

the people of God, Israel according to the Spirit, will not be the same multitude which already existed before, Israel according to the flesh. The Church will be the flowering of Israel, a flowering which presupposes a most painful bursting forth, yet one which fulfills Israel and in no way destroys it.⁴¹

C. THE CHURCH OF THE WORD

BOUYER'S WORD-ECCLESIOLOGY, deriving its energy from a robust biblical and christological understanding of 'Word', can therefore be characterized as first of all asserting a 'Church of the Word' not unlike the Protestant emphasis on the Church as *creatura verbi divini*. Here is where Bouyer's Lutheran background has enriched his account in a manner both Catholic and ecumenical. However, one must be careful to transcend superficial, verbal similarities. Christoph Schwöbel, for example, writes:

The Church is *creatura verbi divini*: the creature of the divine Word. The Church is constituted by God's action and not by any human action. [...] And the way in which the Church is constituted by divine action determines the character and scope of human action in the Church. The Church is created by the divine Word insofar as it evokes the human response of faith.⁴²

Expressed thus, Schwöbel's contention can be interpreted in a Catholic fashion and, *à la* Bouyer, be accepted as Catholic truth: Bouyer would agree that the Church is constituted 'only' by divine action insofar as God, through his sovereign and almighty Word, has shaped and continues to shape the history, indeed the very life, of his people up to today. As the previous chapters have shown, the constellation of Word-Mystery-Gospel-Cross-Liturgy is, from start to finish, the work of God for which the Church can never cease to sing the *mirabilia Dei*. Yet Schwöbel's statement conceals a polemical thrust, and he is at pains to show that the Reformers' notion of *creatura verbi divini* forbids any identification of the Church 'with any human action in the Church or any

⁴¹ *Sacred Scripture*, 93.

⁴² Cf. Christoph Schwöbel, 'The Creature of the Word', in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, ed. Colin Gunton and Daniel Hardy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 110-55, in 122.

human form of church organization. [...] This applies to all attempts at incorporating God's action in human action.'⁴³

This section, and the one following entitled 'The Word in the Church', are intended to demonstrate how Bouyer could *not* agree with Schwöbel, a disagreement stemming from a fundamental difference between the Catholic construal of the Incarnation and that of some Protestants.⁴⁴ Simply put, the way a tradition approaches and makes use of the Incarnation, which is the absolute meeting point of the divine and the human, shapes the rest of its theology. For Catholics, the Chalcedonian description of the Incarnation is extended *analogously* to the Church, the scriptures, sacraments, and the like.⁴⁵ Catholic theology makes much use of the so-called 'incarnational principle', in which the unity of the divine and the human in Christ becomes a *threshold* which invites application to human realities. Some Protestants like Schwöbel, on the other hand, regard the Incarnation as the *border* beyond which absolutely no comparison or analogy to human realities may be made; the Incarnation's uniqueness and non-repeatability need to be vouchsafed at all cost. In other words, the Catholic tradition, which Bouyer represents, sees no contradiction between asserting the absolute lordship of Christ over his Church, and equally defending the Church's unique role *by the express will of Christ* to represent him and to repeat *his* actions for the salvation of the world.

⁴³ Schwöbel, 'Creature of the Word', 149.

⁴⁴ Cf., for example, Congar's *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, trans. M. A. Bousfield (London: Geoffrey Bles/Centenary, 1939). Congar observes that the 'Protestant' mindset (in a footnote, the translator indicates that Congar is thinking primarily of continental Protestantism) 'consists in continually setting in opposition things which ought to be held together, properly articulated and harmonized. [...] The Incarnation is the key to the whole mystery of the Church and the sacraments. In the degree to which Protestantism can school itself in a profound and realist contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation will it return to the sphere of apostolic Christianity and prepare itself for reunion in the Church' (pp. 274-75).

⁴⁵ Cf., for example, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8: The Church is 'one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. For this reason the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the incarnate Word.'

This fundamental ecumenical difference must be recognized at the outset even before Bouyer's understanding of the 'Church of the Word' can be articulated.⁴⁶

To claim that Bouyer envisions a 'Church of the Word' is equivalent to saying that he would answer the question, 'What "makes" the Church?', in several ways. It is, of course, fundamentally *Christ* who constitutes his Church, his body with whom he becomes the 'total Christ'; he is *the Word, the Mystery* apart from whom the Church can do absolutely nothing (cf. *John 15:5*). Secondly, similar to de Lubac, Ratzinger and others, he would affirm that the Eucharist 'makes' the Church; as he puts it, 'Nothing could be more decisive in making us realize that the Church is, first of all, the community built into one body by the actual celebration of the Eucharist. In that sense, the liturgical mystery is, indeed, finally the mystery of the Church herself, coming to life and manifesting herself in the liturgical celebration.'⁴⁷ What is again noticeable here is his characteristic accent on the 'mystery', which accords with other typical Bouyerian emphases: the primary action of Christ who speaks and acts in every eucharistic

⁴⁶ It is also worthwhile mentioning that the phrase 'Church of the Word' (which, this thesis contends, represents Bouyer's authentic *thought* if not his exact verbal *expression*) is also found in other Catholic theologians. Congar, for example, writes that 'the Church must be the Church, and she should be so via a renewed attention to the Word of God. [...] The Church of the Word!' Cf. his *Challenge to the Church: The Case of Archbishop Lefebvre*, trans. Paul Inwood (London: Collins, 1977), 66, 68.

John Ackley, in his dissertation *The Church of the Word: A Comparative Study of Word, Church and Office in the Thought of Karl Rahner and Gerhard Ebeling* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), observes that Rahner sought to 'correct a deficiency in Catholic theology which lies in understanding the Word in the sense that it is "about" something, rather than the "thing" itself' (p. 4). He begins by analyzing Rahner's understanding of 'word', and from there proceeds to correlate it with the Church. This methodological sequence points to the fact that it is the 'word' that engenders the Church: 'Rahner (writes Ackley) presuppose[s] a "Church of the Word" in the sense that the essential nature, function and structure of the church in the concrete are derived from the Word of God' (xiv). But anyone who is familiar with Rahner's symbolic understanding of 'word', and his whole transcendental and theological-anthropological approach, will immediately detect a huge difference between Rahner's and Bouyer's accounts.

Another Catholic theologian, Otto Semmelroth, has proposed the construal of the Church as *the Word of God* on the basis of its sacramental identification with Christ. He writes: 'Christ is God's word to men because in him the second divine person has taken human form and a bodily nature. So the church, because and insofar as it is Christ's body, is in at least a similar manner God's word to men in the world. [...] It] can be compared with him as the word of God because he does not utter his word in a passing act, but presents it in permanent form.' Cf. Semmelroth, *The Preaching Word: On the Theology of Proclamation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 94. While his reasons for proposing this peculiar phraseology may be defensible, the wording is nonetheless problematic. It is telling that neither Bouyer nor Vatican II has followed Semmelroth in this.

⁴⁷ *Liturgy Revived*, 59.

celebration, the centrality of the eucharistic prayer, the linking of Word and sacrament, and so forth. And thirdly, the 'Word' which brings the Church into existence must perforce embrace ecclesial life in its totality, lived in response to the Word. Hence, this section will now examine the Church of the Word under the rubrics of the 'total Christ', a 'eucharistic Church' in which the Christian mystery is encountered in the liturgical life of the Church, a 'proclaiming Church' in which that same mystery is lived out and irradiated in daily life, and a 'praying Church' which draws ever nearer to Christ in the Spirit to the glory of the *eschaton*.

1. The Total Christ

BOUYER'S SEMINAL PATRISTIC study, *L'Incarnation et L'Eglise: Corps du Christ dans la théologie de saint Athanase*, has doubtless set his way of thinking.⁴⁸ Athanasius' understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Church, of the effect of the Incarnation upon humanity, has decidedly shaped Bouyer's construal of the relation between Christology and ecclesiology. As he puts it, articulating the fourth-century theologian's vision, 'the fact is that, for Athanasius, he cannot have a Christology *and* an ecclesiology; the one and the other can only be distinguished artificially, for it is also true to say that, from his point of view, the Church is in Christ which is to say that Christ is in the Church'.⁴⁹

Briefly put, Athanasius' Christology begins with a powerful intuition of the divine life, which consists essentially in the eternal generation of the Word. God communicates this divine life through the Incarnation, and it is by participating in the Word, by virtue of the Incarnation, that creatures can participate in this life. What the

⁴⁸ Written as a thesis to earn his Protestant licentiate, although published in 1943 four years after his becoming a Roman Catholic, this book indicates that, among the Church Fathers, it is Athanasius who has influenced Bouyer's understanding of Christ and the Church to a great extent. It must also surely be more than coincidental that Athanasius is one more point of similarity which Bouyer shares with John Henry Newman, a fellow convert to Catholicism and a fellow Oratorian, whose own research into the fourth-century Arian controversy brought him one step closer to joining the Catholic Church.

Incarnation therefore accomplishes is the redemption of sinful creatures, not in the sense of making the cross superfluous, but in the sense of anticipating and including it.⁵⁰

Summing up patristic Christology, Bouyer says that

it is important to stress one last time its strong relationship to soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Indeed, modern historians of dogma say that for the Greek Fathers it is the incarnation itself that is redemptive. This is true, but only if it is rightly understood. It is not some kind of mechanical redemption that happens because the Word of God assumed our human nature, as Harnack and Seeberg have suggested.

Or to put it better, in the existential realism of the Fathers, 'to assume humanity' always means to assume a complete human life, especially one that involves suffering and ends in death.⁵¹

In other words, Christology is inseparable from soteriology, and among the Fathers a *theologia crucis* figures prominently. For them, 'from Irenaeus to Athanasius, but already and just as much among the Cappadocians, Saint Cyril and up to Saint Maximus, it is not the subjective sufferings of Christ which, in his passion, constitute the decisive element, but the objective fact that the incarnation led to his death. It is by this death, assumed by the master of life, that he was to conquer death for us, as much physical death as the death of sin which was its source.'⁵²

But Athanasius' Christology is also strongly ontological. For him, the Incarnation does not mean the Word's subsistence in an ordinary human individual, isolated from others, simply one more addition to the multiplicity of created intelligences, but rather, 'the mysterious and powerful leading of all humanity into the Word by means of *this* human individual'.⁵³ In the Incarnation, individuality is neither mutilated nor isolated from the rest of humanity; in other words, the Word-made-(this) man is exactly the same as the Word-made-(all) humanity:

⁴⁹ *L'Incarnation*, 91-92.

⁵⁰ *Seat of Wisdom*, 158. Bouyer pithily remarks that the outcome of the Incarnation is the cross (ibid., 137).

⁵¹ *Eternal Son*, 340.

⁵² *Le Fils éternel*, 435 (author's translation).

St Athanasius did not have to choose between a 'collective' incarnation and an 'individual' one, between a Word-made-humanity and the Word-made-man, because with regards to Jesus and humanity (let us state this precisely: the new humanity) of which he is the Second Adam, which is to say the Church, Athanasius always envisages them as not being two but one, without confusion certainly but without separation either.⁵⁴

Hence, an unbroken line connects Athanasius' Christology, soteriology and (by way of ontology) ecclesiology. According to Bouyer, Athanasius' unique source or centre (*foyer*) of contemplation is what he calls the σκοπὸς ἐκκλησιαστικός, that is, the inseparability of the Word-made-man and the 'verbified' (*verbifiée*) humanity, Christ and the Church.⁵⁵ However one sketches Athanasian theology, it comes down to this fundamental affirmation: Christians and Christ make up one sole being, the Church (that is, regenerated humanity) being the 'body of Christ', with all the force of realism in the original Pauline expression.⁵⁶

Just as the Pauline 'body of Christ' shaped Athanasian theology, so did it influence the Augustinian image of the 'whole Christ', the *totus Christus* inseparable as to its Head or its members.⁵⁷ Not only did Augustine describe this union ontologically, *una quaedam persona*, but also affectively, *unus Christus amans seipsum*.⁵⁸ Bouyer explains these terms in the following way:

Christ is not a part of the Church; rather, the Church might be called a part of Christ, grafted upon Him, living by Him and for Him, suffering with Him in order to rule with Him. The ultimate end of the Incarnation, according to St. Augustine, is the total Christ:

⁵³ *L'Incarnation*, 98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁷ Cf. Augustine, *Enarr. in ps.* 3, 9; 18, 2; 30, 2. Among other theological reasons, Augustine uses the *totus Christus* image to teach the properly Christian way of praying the Old Testament psalms. As he writes in *Enarr. in ps.* 91, 13: 'Sometimes a Psalm, and all prophecy as well, in speaking of Christ, praises the Head alone, and sometimes from the Head goes to the Body, that is, the Church, and without apparently changing the Person spoken of: because the Head is not separate from the Body, and both are spoken of as one....' This translation is from *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, ed. Philip Shaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 450.

⁵⁸ Cf. Augustine, *Enarr. in ps.* 30, 4; *Tract. in ep. Ioh.* 10, 3.

Christ Jesus the Head and we the members constituting henceforth but one in the ineffable interchange of grace between the One who gives all and those who receive all....⁵⁹

And he gives a striking parabolic illustration of this reality. Recalling Jesus' words in *John* 15:5 ('I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.'), Bouyer points out that Jesus did *not* say 'I am the vine-stalk' or 'I am the root', but 'I am the Vine', meaning the *whole* vine, branches included.

It might be put that Jesus thinks of himself not as an individual any more, but as a collective 'living being,' nonetheless perfectly one, comprising in himself all regenerate mankind. This corresponds to the Pauline doctrine of the Church as Christ's mystical body, as the body and the head are not two beings, neither are Jesus and his followers. But the parable of the vine pushes the parallel even farther: in 'I am the true vine' the thought is not of two complementary elements but of a single divine Person continuing the Incarnation from the stalk, which is Jesus the man, into the branches, the living unity of the whole, forming, in St. Augustine's fine words, the total Christ, head and members.⁶⁰

To recapitulate: Bouyer observes that both scripture and tradition repeatedly affirm the indivisibility of Christ and the Church. The Pauline 'body of Christ' corresponds to the Johannine 'vine and branches', to be echoed in patristic teaching, whether Athanasius' σκοπὸς ἐκκλησιαστικός or Augustine's *totus Christus*. All this is but to celebrate the unlooked-for goodness of God who did not deem it a loss to his own dignity in sharing it with his creatures. The Bible, after all, repeatedly depicts the divine mercy and condescension in often dramatic, even horrific terms: Hosea's marriage to (and ardent pursuit of) a temple prostitute (*Hosea* 1-3), and Ezekiel's description of the abortion cast on the wayside (an image of Israel), weltering in its blood before God passed by and caused it to live and to prosper in order to plight his troth with it (*Ezekiel* 16), are but eloquent examples of this.

⁵⁹ *Paschal Mystery*, xvi.

⁶⁰ *Fourth Gospel*, 191.

Nevertheless, such a characteristically Catholic move to posit a continuity between Christ and the Church is firmly opposed by some Protestant theologians. Jüngel, commenting on the notion of the Church as *Ursakrament*, as the primary sacrament of Christ, calls it ‘a bold usurpation – an apparently typical Catholic identification of the church with its Lord.’⁶¹ And Barth, ever fearful of confusing divine and human agency, writes: ‘Roman Catholic dogmatics is naturally aware of the lordship of Christ as a lordship not only in His Church but also over His Church. But where can this lordship of Christ over His Church take concrete shape in this system, where can it come into proper play, when all its power has already been fully transferred to the Church, when its power is simply present in the Church?’⁶²

Such criticisms, answerable as they may be from the Catholic side, have at least the chief value of reminding Catholic theologians not to overstep legitimate doctrinal boundaries between what is divine and what is human, and of warning the Church as a whole against that corporate *hubris* and triumphalism which can easily translate into what Bouyer calls an ‘ecclesiology of power’.⁶³ It is perhaps partly to allay Protestant concerns (as well as the simple pursuit of truth) that Bouyer first of all contends that the unity between Christ and the Church, although thoroughgoing and effectual, is nonetheless asymmetrical while remaining continuous. He writes:

From Jesus to us, there is the difference from the head to the body, but no discontinuity. Consequently there is no descent in him, then an ascent in us. From beginning to end, there is fundamentally an assumption of the human in God only through a condescension of God to man. Once this continuity is grasped, we must no longer allow ourselves to be deceived by a false symmetry: *never*, no more in Jesus than in us, *the Word is not made flesh in the same sense that we are made God*. We must not represent the incarnation and divinization, according to St Athanasius, as a destruction of the divine symmetrical to an exaltation of the human....⁶⁴

⁶¹ Jüngel, ‘Church as Sacrament?’, 193.

⁶² Barth, *CD I/1*, 97-98.

⁶³ *Decomposition*, 69.

⁶⁴ *L’Incarnation*, 98.

At the same time Bouyer will frequently make certain ‘balancing moves’ in his Word-ecclesiology aimed at counteracting a Catholic tendency (and a Protestant aversion) to reduce ‘Church’ to mere ‘authority’. He will, for example, on the one hand, reaffirm the necessity of apostolic tradition and ministry, and on the other, redefine the content of that tradition and ministry. At the very least, he insists, ministry must be situated in a position of service within the entire Church: just as papal authority is operative in the context of episcopal collegiality, and episcopal authority in the context of presbyteral collegiality, so too does ministerial authority in general require its insertion into the collegiality of the Church as a whole, its catholicity in the most profound sense.⁶⁵ This catholicity, universality, or comprehensiveness of the Church is seen in the first instance in its being a eucharistic community. For just as the ‘Church of the Word’ belongs to and is forever inseparable from Christ *the* Word, so is it constituted as the community assembled to perpetually celebrate that Word in the liturgy.

2. A Eucharistic Church

WITH BOUYER’S DEPICTION of the Church as a eucharistic community, it becomes even clearer why an account of his Word-ecclesiology necessitated preliminary discussions on the Christian mystery and liturgy. As Chapter Two has pointed out, the mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’ is, according to Bouyer, ‘permanently embodied’ in the liturgy and constitutes its very core.⁶⁶ In turn, the liturgical life ‘places this Mystery within us.’⁶⁷ Now Bouyer makes an important claim:

It is in this way that the Church is made and unceasingly maintained through the Mass, for the Mass is the assembly in which the evangelical Word is proclaimed, the Christian faith confessed, the Bread broken, the Cup shared, which this Word and the prayer that receives it have consecrated – where the Parousia is therefore hoped for, the

⁶⁵ *Church of God*, 407.

⁶⁶ *Liturgical Piety*, 18, 88.

⁶⁷ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 125.

coming of the reign is besought and accelerated. This is to say that the Mass is, and is only, the Church in act, the Church becoming, sustaining, and developing herself without ceasing.⁶⁸

At first sight, Bouyer's assertion seems to be no different from similar claims by other Catholic theologians. Henri de Lubac, for example, has written that 'The Church and the Eucharist make each other, every day, each by the other: the idea of the Church and the idea of the Eucharist must likewise be promoted and deepened each by the other.'⁶⁹ Ratzinger has likewise spoken along the same lines: 'The Church is the celebration of the Eucharist; the Eucharist is the Church; they do not simply stand side by side; they are one and the other; it is from there that everything else radiates.'⁷⁰ It is of course to be expected that Bouyer, like de Lubac and Ratzinger, would affirm such a theologoumenon long enshrined in Catholic teaching. But this is precisely where Bouyer's robust understanding of the Word comes to the fore and pitches what would simply have been a theological commonplace at a different key: The Eucharist is constitutive of the Church, he says, but meaning by this that 'The whole Church is made – and not only instituted but perpetuated – and exclusively concerned by and with the faithful hearing of the Word of God, attaining its evangelical fullness, the confession of the Divine Name revealed in Jesus, the celebration of this Name in the act of thanksgiving for the plan of salvation, brought about on the cross of the Messiah and the consecration of the Church to the consummation in her and by her of this plan, in her union with Christ and his cross.'⁷¹ The continuum of 'Word-Mystery-Eucharist' thus

⁶⁸ *Church of God*, 277.

⁶⁹ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'église au moyen age: Etude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944; 2nd ed., 1949), 292-93.

⁷⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 53, cited by Paul McPartlan, *Sacrament of Salvation: An Introduction to Eucharistic Ecclesiology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), xiv.

⁷¹ *Church of God*, 239.

comprises what most essentially determines the Church; conversely, it is what determines whether or not a particular community may be regarded as 'Church'.⁷²

A second distinctive feature of this eucharistic vision of the Church is Bouyer's recovery of the patristic sense of communal participation. When he says that the Church is constituted by the eucharistic assembly *in act*, he means by this that all the essential 'actors' need to be in place, the laity no less than the clergy. Far from espousing what Congar aptly calls a '*hiérarchologie*',⁷³ he repeatedly draws attention to Clement's Letter to the Corinthians, which teaches that the Christian laity are but heirs of the Old Testament *priesthood*:

There is no doubt that, for all of Christian antiquity, it is with the Christian *laos* that the function equivalent to the priestly function of the Old Covenant corresponds. Before the end of the patristic period, we never see *hiereus* (or its equivalent, *sacerdos*) applied to the 'presbyters,' our 'priests of the second rank.' At that time the word *archieus* was always applied to the bishop as president over the eucharistic synaxis, as was *hiereus* to *all the faithful*. The ancient *laos*, excluded from priestly functions in the Old Covenant, no longer have a corresponding term in the New. In the Church of the New Testament, all the laity are priests and exercise all the functions of priests.⁷⁴

Bouyer's goal is not simply to buttress the affirmation that all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, share and indeed participate in Christ's royal priesthood; he is even more desirous to show that, precisely because of this, lay people ought to

⁷² The ecumenical uproar caused by the document *Dominus Iesus* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000 might have been lessened, at least in part, by calling to mind the truths recovered by Bouyer. When the document asserts that 'the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery are not Churches in the proper sense' (no. 17), one must recall the Eucharist's intrinsic and never-to-be-separated connection with Christ. Unless the Eucharist is celebrated in genuine union with Christ, he whose Word is proclaimed and whose Mystery is re-presented, then the community's 'churchness' is called into doubt. As Bouyer writes elsewhere, 'The sacrament of the Eucharist cannot exist apart from the teaching of the faith, without which it would be reduced to pure magic or a contentless mechanism' (*Church of God*, 502). This is not to propound an 'occasionalist' conception of the Church, but simply to re-place the Eucharist in vital and necessary relation with Christ the Word and his saving mystery, apart from which the celebration might well be nothing but 'pure magic' or an act devoid of content.

⁷³ In its original context, Congar meant by 'hierarchology' an ecclesiology which consists almost entirely of a treatise of public law. Cf. his 'My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries', in *Jurist* 32 (1972): 169-88. Since then the term has been extended to refer to any tendency to reduce the Church to simply the ecclesiastical hierarchy and clerical authority, unfortunately tending to what Bouyer calls an 'ecclesiology of power'.

⁷⁴ *Church of God*, 290.

participate fully in the eucharistic celebration, *in priestly actions which correspond to their lay status*.⁷⁵ This is to say that the lay person, just as much as the cleric, has his own role to play within the totality of the eucharistic celebration, exercising his own activity for the good of all to its fullest extent.⁷⁶ Drawing from Clement, the ancient liturgies and the patristic commentaries on them, Bouyer indicates five liturgical actions, two of which belong only to the one presiding over the celebration, and the other three to everyone. These actions, however, ‘overlap and cannot exist independently from one another.’⁷⁷

To the ministry of the celebrant are reserved the proclamation of the Divine Word, with apostolic authority, and consecration of the eucharistic banquet. But this Word is announced only to be received in the prayer of all, and the consecration can have no other matter than the offering of all, nor can it prepare any other end than the communion of all in the unbloody sacrifice. To pray, to offer, and to communicate – these are always the three essential actions in the eucharistic celebration and they belong to the faithful.⁷⁸

Elsewhere, Bouyer elaborates on what the three common actions consist in. Every single member of the congregation is called to pray the prayer of faith, which is the heart’s openness to the Word of God, and which culminates in the eucharistic prayer. In the same way, all the faithful are called to offer the very thing which will be the matter of the eucharistic sacrifice: food and wine, symbols of earthly produce for the nourishment of one’s natural life. Finally, everyone is invited to commune in this food now transformed into the Bread of eternal life.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Bouyer writes that, by virtue of baptism, Christians are now to take part in the Eucharist, ‘not only to receive some spiritual gifts they could not receive before, but to be actively engaged in the celebration itself as component and integral parts of the wholly active body in a way really “priestly”.’ Cf. his article ‘The Sacramental System’, in *Sacraments (Papers of the Maynooth Union Summer School 1963)*, ed. Denis O’Callaghan (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1964), 45-55, in 52.

⁷⁶ *Church of God*, 8, citing Clement, *To the Corinthians*, ch. 4 ff.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Woman in the Church*, 83-84.

In other words, Bouyer simultaneously validates the existence and necessity of an ordained apostolic ministry, which alone is authorized in the execution of certain acts on behalf of the Church, and defends the place of the laity in the liturgical assembly, no longer seen as passively receiving but actively participating in order to corporately 'make' the Eucharist. Even more, Bouyer situates the laity *within the apostolic ministry*, not only, as already mentioned, by insisting that ministerial authority resides within the total collegiality (catholicity) of the Church, but by also saying that 'the laity are articulated with the apostolic ministry.'⁸⁰ By this he means that the laity are never to be separated from either the Church's sacrality (that is, lay people are not mere 'seculars') or its sacred functions and acts, including the necessity of proclaiming the Gospel (that is, lay people are not mere bystanders).⁸¹ With this last point, the discussion now turns on the constitution of the 'Church of the Word' as bearer of and witness to this Word.

3. A Proclaiming Church

ANOTHER PLACE WHERE one can perceive Bouyer's ecumenical balance is his claim that the liturgy (or the Eucharist), important and in a sense determinative as it is in the constitution of the Church, may not be divorced from the rest of Christian, indeed of *human* life. It is true that the Eucharist is the centre of ecclesial life, 'at the heart of that tradition of life in which truth itself is transmitted', yet it is in no way final, nor can it be isolated from either individual or corporate existence in the world.⁸² That is, if the paschal mystery is encountered in an unsurpassable way in the liturgical life of the Church, that same mystery needs to be lived out and irradiated into all aspects of life.

⁸⁰ *Church of God*, 408.

⁸¹ Bouyer writes: 'Consequently, not only are all active there [in the liturgy] together but they take part in what is most sacred in this "action." Even in the Church, when we single out the "lay person" as someone who does not exercise a particular ministry, the lay man is not therefore – in patristic theology, in any case – a "secular outsider" but, in his own way, a "consecrated person" like the bishop and, in a fully real sense, even a "sacrifier" [sic] as well.' (Ibid., 293)

⁸² Ibid., 340.

Not to do so would seriously, even mortally, cripple the very intent of God to pour out his Spirit on all flesh (*Joel 2:28*), precisely by pouring out his love through that Spirit who has first been given to his Church (*Romans 5:5*) and who is destined for the whole world through the Church's ministry. As Bouyer puts it,

Through the Sacrament, the reconciliatory power of the Word is introduced into our whole life and, through our life, tends to penetrate the world from top to bottom.

The world of the liturgy, of the Word and the sacraments; the world of prayer and sacrifice; the world of faith, in short, has no substance other than the world pure and simple: the substance of our day-to-day existence. It is *only* this existence....

It is therefore not in the liturgy – not even in the totality of its celebration – that the tradition of the 'mystery', the 'eucharistic' tradition which establishes it 'in us [as] the hope of glory,' is completed. It is in the whole of Christian life, individual and collective, and the Word is the source of inspiration for this life. The eucharistic celebration brings its effective fecundity, but its concrete existence, in every detail, is the sole ultimate realization. Here and only here does the mystery definitively find its complete expression, awaiting the perfect realization and, therefore, the supreme expression of 'glory.'⁸³

In other words, when all is said and done, the 'bottom line' of the Eucharist is Christian existence itself. The Christian mystery is fully expressed, writes Bouyer, insofar as this is possible at present, and is fully communicated, only on the level of existence 'in this world' while remaining 'not of it'.⁸⁴ While at the Eucharist the divine Word 'encounters human life and takes possession of it', that same Word now needs to drastically reorient the Christian's life, 'remodeling, from within, his intellectual and sensate life as well as his material existence and his professional, family, social, and political life.'⁸⁵ In this, too, the Church follows in the footsteps of the Old Testament *qahal*; as Bouyer observes,

one of the essential characteristics of synagogal piety was what we might equally well call the spiritualization of the sacrificial rite or the ritualization of all existence. For here less than ever does the spiritualization of the religious institutions of Israel mean any emptying out of their religious content, but rather, its permeating the whole of life. This is what tended to produce the *berakah*. Its purpose was to make every action of the devout Israelite a sacred, a truly liturgical action.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Church of God*, 340-41.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.

Hence, in exactly the same way that the pious Jew understood himself as ‘priest’ to the world, so now the devout Christian and the Church as a whole are to become ‘priest’, consecrating the world by bringing the light of the paschal mystery into it. At the same time, the world is to be drawn *into* the mystery. Bouyer envisions this as the final step in evangelization: what better way is there, he asks, to bring life into the world than to bring the world to Life itself? The missionary work of the Church, he says, is

to eventually lead former unbelievers not merely to some abstract acceptance of the Christian belief, but to that life of the faith which is embodied in the liturgy. Therefore, preaching which will be truly missionary ... will also always have to prepare [people] not for a diluted or altered Christianity [but for] that full and pure realization of the Christian faith and Christian life that is exhibited first of all in the traditional liturgy.⁸⁷

Bouyer’s vision of what is nowadays called a ‘fully participative’ Church is prophetic and laudable. Avery Dulles, in his review of *The Church of God*, notes with approval Bouyer’s attention to the role of the laity, even to the (polite) correction of Congar’s seminal work *Lay People in the Church*.⁸⁸ Yet one cannot help but feel that Bouyer’s vision is limited, partly by the specific aspects of theology and Church life he has chosen to focus on, and partly by historical circumstances. For fifteen years (1947-62) he taught courses on Church history and spirituality at the Institut Catholique de Paris, and his academic career is reflected in his published works, most of which are fine examples of *ressourcement* writing on scripture, patristics and liturgics. Because of this professional focus, there is correspondingly a paucity of attention to the practicalities of

⁸⁶ *SNTF*, 24.

⁸⁷ *Liturgy Revived*, 79. Cf. also ‘Quelques mises au point’.

⁸⁸ Dulles writes: ‘For a reanimation of the laity, Bouyer, works by preference with the category of “royal priesthood.” The mission of the laity, accordingly, is to consecrate everyday realities through participation in the Eucharist. While respecting Congar’s seminal study on the laity, he observes that that work might mislead the reader into separating the laity’s engagement in the world from their personal participation in the life of worship.’ A. Dulles, ‘A Half Century of Ecclesiology’, in *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 419-42, in 435-36.

Christian existence and to the particularities of Christian action. This possible weakness or lacuna will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Moreover, one could argue that Bouyer's insistence on the liturgy being the goal of evangelization, true as it is from one perspective, is, from another viewpoint somewhat inadequate. From a theological viewpoint it may well be that evangelization formally ends with the former unbeliever becoming a baptized Christian and participating fully in the Eucharist, but in more contemporary, and perhaps more pastoral, perspectives this *telos*, though theoretically admissible and attractive, is insufficient. It is noteworthy that Bouyer works within the framework of the traditional parish structure, understood as the smallest representative body of the local Church in which the Eucharist is celebrated. Meanwhile, other contemporary voices are proposing that, without abandoning the parish as the primary *locus liturgicus*, other forms of 'being Church' are necessary today in the light of the progressive fragmentation of the family, of society, and even of the Church.⁸⁹ These smaller 'covenant' communities which, as to spiritual ardour and committed Christian discipleship, are perhaps comparable to the Jewish communities (*habouroth*) awaiting the Messiah, are being put forward as the logical and practical *telos* of effective evangelization. Be that as it may, this lacuna in Bouyer can be mitigated by the fact that he was himself a man of his times. To press this critique further would be anachronistic and unjust.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Cf., for example, *Building Christian Communities* by Stephen B. Clark (Notre Dame: IN: Ave Maria, 1972). Since the 1970s Clark has been at the forefront of the so-called 'community movement', a lay, often ecumenical, effort which fosters personal renewal and Christian discipleship in a setting of committed and stable relationships.

⁹⁰ It is also worthwhile pointing out that, in the 1940s, Bouyer was well aware of various French Catholic movements (*l'Action catholique*, the worker-priest movement, among others) calling for the proper recognition of 'natural collectivities' within the ecclesial community, e.g., the family, the school, specialized movements. Bouyer agreed that these smaller groupings within the Church, 'besides participating in the essentially common liturgy without which the Church's unity would be broken', by conceiving their own so-called 'paraliturgies' have brought about 'an extremely fertile area (*champ*) of adaptation'. He conceded that the liturgy 'needs to be prolonged and completed by [these] new collective realizations: those within the Church, those upon its threshold or even farther from it (*sur le seuil, voire bien avant sur le parvis*), those which foster worship among Christians, and those which are more

4. A Praying Church

AS HAS BEEN argued above, for the ecclesial community to be truly a 'Church of the Word', not only must it be inseparably connected to Christ, it also behoves the community continually to celebrate his presence and re-present his saving act in the liturgy, and concretely to live out that 'word of life' in the 'world of daily life'. While Bouyer places the liturgy (or more broadly, worship) squarely at the centre of ecclesial life, he also envisions that through it the divine life would be introduced into the whole of the Christian's existence, irradiating into the world at large. To a great extent, this is accomplished by means of the spiritual life or the spirituality of the Christian believer.⁹¹ Simply put, this concerns the life of prayer and of 'everything connected with prayer in the ascetical and mystical life – in other words, on religious exercises as well as religious experiences.'⁹²

For Bouyer, Christian spirituality is grounded precisely in the historical fact of a God who has taken the first step to reveal himself to human beings. All Christian spirituality finds its indestructible *raison d'être* on this unshakeable basis:

No Christian spirituality worthy of the name can exist where the conviction has been weakened that God, in Christ, has made Himself known to us by His own words, His own acts, as Some One. The whole spiritual life of Christians is aroused and formed by the fact that, as they believe, God has spoken to us and that His living Word has been made flesh amongst us. In other words, in Christianity, the spiritual life does not start from a certain conception of God, not even from the idea that He is a personal God, but from

"conquering" (*conquérantes*; the language is that of *l'Action catholique*), that is, establishing contact, beginning Christian initiation, or giving progressive catechism.' These realizations, however, would all need to be penetrated by the *Spirit* of the liturgy. Cf. 'Quelques mises au point', 386, 389.

⁹¹ What is the meaning of 'spirituality'? There is a broad sense in which it can be understood as 'the integration of one's whole personality' (*Cistercian Heritage*, 39). This, admits Bouyer, is taking the word in its widest sense and corresponds to what may also be called the 'interior life', the life which takes on a conscious, more or less autonomous, personal development, as can be seen, for example, in the immensely creative lives of poets and artists. But unless the 'interior life' develops, not in isolation, but in the awareness of a spiritual reality that goes beyond the consciousness of the person, then it cannot be described, properly speaking, as a 'spiritual life'. What that 'spiritual reality' is, Bouyer notes, might not necessarily be apprehended as divine. However, the moment that 'spiritual reality' is recognized, not only as something but as *someone*, then the 'spiritual life' will be a 'religious life' as well (*Introduction to Spirituality*, 1-4).

⁹² *SNTF*, ix.

faith, the faith which is proper to Christianity: that is, the assent we give to the Word of God, to that Word which is made known to us, which is given to us in Christ Jesus.⁹³

Here is Bouyer's fundamental conception of the 'Church of the Word' lived out on the level of individual Christian existence: it is the authentic spiritual life which arises from faith – a faith, as he says, which gives an affirmative response to the divine Word.

How does Bouyer envision an authentic Christian spirituality? First of all, he describes it as *ascensional*, by which he means the persistent motif in the history of Christian spiritual writing that calls on believers to 'depart' from this world and be reunited with God. 'Any view of man's vocation which, in the last analysis, tied him down to earth would of necessity mean a disastrous mutilation of Christianity.'⁹⁴ As already seen in the primordial call to Abraham, a summons later repeated to the whole enslaved nation, this is identical to the 'exodus' motif of the old covenant, which appears paradigmatic of a continual invitation to 'depart hence'. As Bouyer writes: 'We must part from everything, leave everything just where it is, abandon everything without going back on our abandonment. [...] We must leave everything, for a quest that will have no ending.'⁹⁵ The reason for this radical departure from the world in which one lives is because that is the only adequate response to God's Word, his call and invitation which first spoke out of his overflowing generosity:

⁹³ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 6-7. Elsewhere Bouyer has found it necessary to distinguish between Christian spirituality and spiritualities (in the plural). The latter, explains Bouyer, developed out of the restoration of the Catholic religious orders in nineteenth-century France after their suppression during the catastrophic French Revolution. 'Very rightly, these restorations were not intended merely to reconstruct the great religious bodies of the past, but also to recapture the best of their spirit.' (*SNTF*, x) However, it is only 'with the greatest reservations' that Bouyer makes mention of Christian *spiritualities* in the plural, e.g., Franciscan, Ignatian, or Carmelite spirituality. The reason for this is Bouyer's conviction that, strictly speaking, there can only be *one* Christian spirituality: 'Basically, essentially, there is only one: the spirituality of the gospel, as it is expressed in the New Testament, and further developed through, first of all and above all, the traditional liturgy'. Cf. his 'Spirituality for the Coming Years', in *Catholicism and Secularization in America*, ed. David L. Schindler (Notre Dame: Communio, 1990): 80-92, in 80. More christologically put, the only spirituality deserving of the title 'Christian' is concerned with the problem of applying to human life the Gospel of Jesus Christ, 'the same yesterday, today and for ever' (*SNTF*, xi).

⁹⁴ *Monastic Life*, 25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

For the mystery is this: here on earth the word will never be heard, except to call us to go after it across a new silence into a deeper solitude. Not only once but continually and unceasingly does the attraction by which the Presence draws us after itself make itself felt. To have found the Presence, here on earth, will always mean seeking it more deeply. He who allows himself to be captivated by this voice will never again be able to stay still and settle down. He will have no alternative but to advance ever further into the night and silence of self-stripping, of emptiness, of nothingness.⁹⁶

It is in this last sense of a necessary ‘self-stripping, emptiness and nothingness’ that an authentic Christian spirituality is next described as *ascetical*. Bouyer admits that asceticism has been grossly misunderstood, not a little owing to some of its own excesses and abuses in Christian history. Asceticism, first conceived as a preparation for martyrdom and then, with the peace of Constantine, as a substitute for martyrdom, could be and indeed has been pursued for its own sake. It can become a refuge for neurotic personalities, or can easily turn into a hatred of creation and human culture.⁹⁷ But genuine asceticism bears no resemblance to that, inexorably bound as it is to the mystery of Christ. Quite simply, it is the ‘systematic adaptation’ of the Christian’s entire life to the mystery, ‘which should become its soul’; it is the strenuous effort to make life accord with faith.⁹⁸ True, asceticism entails renunciation of the world’s goods, but is that not simply the repeated call of Christ to ‘lose all’ for his sake that one might ‘gain all’? True, asceticism contains the element of suffering, but, as the New Testament attests, suffering is not simply the common fate of human beings but is especially the lot of true followers of Christ; nonetheless, Bouyer insists, it is not a dolorous suffering, but one tinged with joy because of the resurrection. And it is true that asceticism means a certain kind of death (‘mortification’), but that too is the message of the Gospel, a ‘dying to self’

⁹⁶ *Monastic Life*, 12.

⁹⁷ *SNTF*, 452.

⁹⁸ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 125.

in order that one might truly live. In short, it is a question of 'freeing oneself completely from what is not God *for God*.'⁹⁹

It is because of these considerations that Bouyer emphasizes that *every Christian* is called to live the ascetical life, although not everyone is called to consecrated virginity (seen as the perfection of union with Christ in this life), or to monasticism, which is the practice of asceticism in a life physically separated from the world (in a monastery or cloister).¹⁰⁰ Inasmuch as the cross of Christ is central to Christian doctrine, the cross must also be normative in the Christian life. 'The whole of the Christian asceticism of the patristic era, in spite of the risks of deviation continually threatening it, remains basically simply the concrete realization of that cross which the Servant of Yahweh invited his disciples to take up and to carry after him.'¹⁰¹

Thirdly, for Bouyer, normative Christian spirituality is *mystical*. Like asceticism, mysticism suffers too from much contemporary misunderstanding, to the extent that, as Bouyer sadly notes, it is regarded with the utmost suspicion among many Protestants.¹⁰²

He therefore takes pains to point out that

Christian mysticism is something entirely different from an extraordinary psychological experience. Neither visions, nor ecstasies, nor raptures, nor anything of the kind constitute an integral part of this mysticism. We should not even think that they are its necessary accompaniments.¹⁰³

This is a vital point for Bouyer, seeing that he wishes to affirm the 'ordinariness' of the mystical life, the fact that 'the mystical aspect ... is inherent in every Christian life [and] which, it would seem, normally tends more and more to predominate in it as it

⁹⁹ *SNTF*, 494.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 527.

¹⁰² Cf. *OSPAS*, 57 ff.

¹⁰³ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 298-99.

progresses.’¹⁰⁴ Far from being a singular and extraordinary occurrence, mysticism follows ‘the vital logic of a life of faith fully consistent with itself’ and must be considered as ‘the normal development of Christian perfection’.¹⁰⁵ The reason Bouyer can make these claims is simple: the adjective ‘mystical’ is decidedly *not* a term borrowed from Greek neo-Platonism or the pagan mysteries, but is directly derived from the biblical understanding of the Christian ‘mystery’. In a word, true mysticism goes straight back to the mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’.

Once again one encounters here what might be called the subjective implication of the Word-Mystery. Christian spirituality, insofar as it embraces the religious consciousness and experience of the followers of Christ, must necessarily find its *raison d'être* in the central Gospel mystery. It is the application of that saving mystery to all aspects of the believer's life, an application which, for Bouyer, must normally embrace both ascetical and mystical aspects: ascetical, because it seeks to emulate the *cross* of Christ, and mystical, because it seeks to be united with the *Christ* of the cross. This understanding of asceticism and mysticism explains why Bouyer finds fault with a classic Catholic exposition by Pierre Pourrat who, in the first of his four volumes on *Christian Spirituality*, describes ascetic theology as having for ‘its object the exercises to which every Christian who aspires to perfection must devote himself’, and similarly, mystical theology as being concerned with ‘extraordinary states...such as the mystical union and its secondary manifestations’.¹⁰⁶ The upshot of this is, of course, to relegate both asceticism and mysticism to the realm of a few specialists and saints. *Pace* Pourrat, Bouyer would want these to be understood as part of the normal Christian life, belonging to ‘everyman’ and within reach of all.

¹⁰⁴ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 287.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.

A fourth characteristic of an authentic spiritual life as described by Bouyer is that it must be *eschatological*. This has already been anticipated in the treatment on mysticism, for the true mystical life merely prepares one for the final consummation. The Christian mystic, which is to say the Christian believer, can never be satisfied until he or she is completely united with 'him whom my soul loves' (*Songs* 3:1), a union which, Bouyer hastens to qualify, is not an absorption into the divine to the point of the creature's annihilation, but one in which it will finally and completely find itself. This can only take place at the *eschaton*, but it is this eschatological dimension which accounts for the Christian's restlessness and unease in this present world (thus the ascensional motif). The songs of the Jewish exile 'by the waters of Babylon' are now transposed to a different key, that of longing for one's true and eternal home in heaven.

A final claim by Bouyer about Christian spirituality, one which is no less prone to misunderstanding, is his thesis that 'monasticism' or the 'monastic life' is simply the individual Christian life par excellence.¹⁰⁷ It is 'nothing else, no more and no less, than a Christian life whose Christianity has penetrated every part of it.'¹⁰⁸ While this might at first sight seem like a bald, even badly disguised, glorification of monasticism, Bouyer's intention is actually to restore the monastic ideal to one that is within the reach of every ordinary Christian. The monastic life – again, the point cannot be overstated, according to Bouyer, that this means *the Christian life that is lived to the full* – exemplifies that ascensional motif which seeks to 'rise up' above this world in order to be united with God; that ascetical life which 'loses all' in order to 'gain all'; that mystical life which finds its rest only when it rests in God; and that eschatological life which is oriented toward the 'new heavens and the new earth'. The monastic life is 'a Christian life which

¹⁰⁶ *SNTF*, vii.

¹⁰⁷ *Monastic Life*, 72.

is completely open, without refusal or delay, to the Word, which opens itself and abandons itself to it', for, as Bouyer points out, 'This is the response that the Word expects – expects and elicits, for it is the creating and re-creating word.'¹⁰⁹

Once again this lends credence to the claim that Bouyer's conception of the 'Church of the Word' as it is lived out on the level of individual Christian existence is the authentic spiritual life which gives an affirmative response to the divine Word. In typical Bouyerian fashion, the accent is consistently placed on the primacy of the Word, and then on the appropriate human and ecclesial actions it inspires. It is therefore important to note that all of Bouyer's writings on spirituality, even if they are ostensibly 'historical surveys', have for their purpose an invitation to the reader to 'go and do likewise'; in other words, a pastoral or hortatory goal motivates his numerous works on spirituality. It is apparently easy to miss this point. Philip Sheldrake, for example, approaches Bouyer's contributions to the series *A History of Christian Spirituality* and other works chiefly as 'historical' studies, and completely overlooks the pastoral intent of the writer.¹¹⁰ More perceptive is Dom Iltyd Trethowan; reviewing Bouyer's *The Church of God*, he praises it for not simply being a 'brilliant and powerful theological achievement' but also for its 'clarion call to genuinely Christian living'.¹¹¹ This comment characterizes not only Bouyer's theology as a whole, but is especially apropos

¹⁰⁸ *Monastic Life*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Cf. Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (London: SPCK, 1991, rev. 1995). Concerning Bouyer's *Introduction to Spirituality*, he notes its marked difference from manualist theology in terms of 'recognizing developments in liturgical theology and biblical study', as well as its ecumenical spirit (p. 55). That Sheldrake, as the title of his book indicates, is more concerned with hermeneutic and methodological issues in his treatment, is exemplified when he concludes: 'Although Bouyer's approach is now dated, it formed an important bridge between the constraints of a narrow neo-scholastic theological approach to spirituality and a more scriptural, liturgical and ecumenical approach after Vatican II' (*ibid.*). Sheldrake's later *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998), does not treat Bouyer at great length, although he points out that Bouyer 'was more aware than his predecessors that all theology has the potential to be "spiritual" if it does not limit itself to scholastic rationalism' (p. 55).

with regards to his spiritual theology: it is intended to exhort and instruct his readers in the art of *sequela Christi*, of Christian discipleship which, in Bouyer especially, necessarily implicates the cross. It is no exaggeration to say that his theology of Christian spirituality, with its characteristic accent on asceticism and monasticism, is essentially a spirituality of the cross.

Thus far, the claim of this chapter is that Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology can be represented in the first place as 'the Church of the Word'. The phrase is deliberately multivalent. It indicates first of all the Church's total dependence on Christ, connected to and consisting in the Word – *creatura verbi divini*. Secondly, the Eucharist – where the Word-Mystery is most 'concentrated' – 'makes' the Church. But thirdly, as Bouyer himself points out, the Word-Mystery-Liturgy needs to envelop and permeate all of human existence through other appropriate ecclesial actions, especially evangelization and spirituality. In a very real sense it is only when the Word-Mystery-Eucharist is 'shouted from the housetops' and brought to bear in the lives of men and women, only when the Christian's spiritual life involves him or her in intimate communion with Christ and living by the power of the Spirit, that the Church comes to be, that it becomes the 'Church of the Word'. Although Bouyer was not a professional missiologist and did not propound a 'theology of proclamation', his many exhortations in this regard cannot make him liable to the charge of 'neglect of the world'. While a more nuanced assessment of Bouyer vis-à-vis Christian mission and the 'world' is forthcoming in a later chapter, suffice it to say for now that his 'Church of the Word' is extremely robust and well-balanced. This will become even more apparent in the following section, where the fact that the Word is construed by Bouyer as being 'in the Church' does not mean the Church 'lording it over' or 'hoarding' the Word, but precisely, in the manner of the faithful and

¹¹¹ Cf. his review in *The Downside Review* vol. 89, no. 296 (July 1971): 250-54, in 254.

wise steward extolled in the Gospels, who safeguards the Master's possessions and distributes them in due season (*Luke* 12:42).

D. THE WORD IN THE CHURCH

IN A TELLING statement, Stanley Hauerwas, though generally sympathetic to Barth, observes that 'Barth, of course, does not deny that the church is constituted by the proclamation of the gospel. What he cannot acknowledge is that the community called the church is constitutive of the gospel proclamation.'¹¹² In the terminology used in this thesis, one could say that Barth would accept (gladly) that the ecclesial community is the 'Church of the Word', but that he would be extremely loath to agree that, conversely, the 'Word is in the Church'. To be exact, what would make Barth exceedingly nervous is the preposition 'in'. Did he not protest in his *Church Dogmatics* that the lordship of Christ over his Church is compromised 'when all its power has already been fully transferred to the Church, when its power is simply present in the Church'?¹¹³

As this section will argue, 'the Word in the Church' is another deliberately multivalent phrase. Simply put, the argument is that, as Bouyer expresses it, 'the Church is in Christ which is to say that Christ is in the Church'.¹¹⁴ That is, Christ not only 'dwells' or 'abides' in his Church by the power of his Spirit; he is 'one body' with it, inseparable from it, and (perhaps more startlingly) only finds his completion in it. Analogously, both the 'Word' of scripture and the ministry of the 'Word' are now entrusted to the Church, inseparable from that through which alone the Word finds its meaning and *raison d'être*. These are discussed below under the rubrics of the 'fullness' of Christ, the use of scripture, and the service of the Word.

¹¹² Hauerwas, *With the Grain*, 145.

¹¹³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 97-98.

1. The Fullness of Christ

BOUYER NOTES THAT the idea of ‘fullness’, *to plerōma*, is prominent in St Paul. Indeed one can glean three complementary meanings of the word, or more exactly, three different genitives which provide complementary perspectives to the notion of fullness. In *Galatians* 4:4, Paul speaks of the ‘fullness of time’ (πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου), translated by the RSV as ‘when the time had fully come’ and which Bouyer explains: ‘The mystery was revealed at *that* time because it was then that the People of God were ready to attain their fullness in Christ.’¹¹⁵ *Colossians* 2:9 then speaks of the ‘fullness of deity’ (πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος) which dwells in Christ; this means, says Bouyer, that God is fully revealed and communicated in him. A third level of ‘fullness’ is the one described in *Ephesians* 4:13, ‘until we all attain ... to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)’, while earlier in the same epistle the writer puts it thus: ‘and [God] has put all things under [Christ’s] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ) who fills (πληρουμένου) all in all (τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν).’ (*Ephesians* 1:22-23) The Pauline assertion seems to clearly indicate that the Church, Christ’s body, is likewise Christ’s fullness. Bouyer understands this to mean that the Church, just as it is filled with Christ’s divine fullness, becomes now the principle by which Christ himself is completed: ‘he finds in her, in return, his own fulfillment; he reaches in her the fullness of his perfect stature.’¹¹⁶

That the Church is the ‘fullness of Christ’ is an idea that Bouyer takes very seriously. In some ways it is an advance over the mere notion of the Church being the ‘body of Christ’, or even that the Church and Christ are ‘vine and branches’ together.

¹¹⁴ *L’Incarnation*, 92.

¹¹⁵ *Church of God*, 161.

These two latter images convey the idea that the Church is inseparable from Christ, and that, even more importantly, the Church is dependent upon Christ who is its head and indeed the whole vine. But what might arguably be *implicit* in these images is (apparently) made *explicit* by the letter to the *Ephesians*. For Bouyer, there is no getting around the truth being conveyed that, in thus becoming ‘the head over all things for the church, which is his body’ (1:22-23), Christ now finds ‘his own completion, his own fullness, so that the Church is not only filled with Christ and the fullness of his gifts but is herself the fullness, the completion, the complement of Christ’.¹¹⁷

Because this claim is so staggering and, in some ways, potentially problematic from an ecumenical standpoint, Bouyer makes it manifestly clear that Christ in no way owes it to the Church (considered as a subject radically distinct from himself) in order to become complete. Nevertheless, in a wholly mysterious and gratuitous manner, he has so joined himself to the Church that *he himself completes himself* in the Church. Bouyer writes:

It goes without saying that there can be no question of considering the Church (any more than any other created or creatable reality) as capable of bringing to Christ a perfection from without that would not belong to him properly. [...] We are talking, therefore, only about a perfection, a fullness, of which Christ remains the sole first author, although he finds it, rather actualizes it, only by coming out of himself, by ‘completing himself.’ [...] There is no question that the Church, once again as a distinct subject, fulfills or completes Christ, but ... that Christ is fulfilled and completed in her, so that she is that in which he brings about his own perfection.¹¹⁸

How does Bouyer defend this interpretation? How does he justify this viewpoint, based on a Pauline verse (*Ephesians* 1:23) that is admittedly difficult to translate from the Greek? First of all, he takes the exegetical principle of allowing scripture to interpret itself; this is even more methodologically fruitful if one considers the text within its very

¹¹⁶ *Church of God*, 161-62.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 254-55.

context or within the same biblical material. Bouyer bids his reader look at *Ephesians* 5:21-33, especially verses 29-32:

For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church....

That the author of the epistle says that the verse from the book of *Genesis*, in a mysterious way 'refers to Christ and the church', must mean, for Bouyer, that the two – like a married couple – become 'one flesh', *duo in carne una*. Moreover, according to the *Genesis* account, the woman is added to the man 'from without'. It was precisely because one part was taken *from* Adam, and made into another self *for* Adam, that he could finally find his helpmate, his complement. But it was a complement 'just as much *himself* as it is *another*,' points out Bouyer, and it was only by this 'autonomous development' which nevertheless 'proceeds totally from him' that the man sees himself as being complete.¹¹⁹

Ephesians 4:13 also lends support to this view: referring to the Church, the body of Christ, the verse speaks of the proleptic attainment of the unity of faith, the knowledge of Christ, mature manhood, and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. What the RSV translates as 'mature manhood' is, in Greek, *ἄνδρα τέλειον*, literally 'final man', which Bouyer alternatively translates as 'adulthood'. It is an audacious claim, to say the least, that Christ in his Church still needs to attain his adulthood, but if one appreciates that, since the Incarnation and especially since the salvific cross (in which some patristic writers discerned the Church springing from the pierced side of the crucified Christ, like Eve being drawn from the side of the sleeping Adam), Christ and the Church have become, in Augustine's expression, *una quaedam persona*, or *totus Christus*, then the Church is already, according to Bouyer, 'the fullness of Christ', that in

which he is accomplished and completed. But this completion, this accomplishment in the Church of the whole Christ 'must be pursued until the total Christ, which we are forming, has reached the fullness of his age or adult stature in each of us and in all of us.'¹²⁰

In a similar way (and likewise dealing with a notoriously difficult verse to interpret), Bouyer sees *Colossians* 1:24 as validating his exegesis. The verse, he says, cannot be translated in any other way than as 'I complete myself in my flesh what remains to be suffered of the sufferings of Christ for the Church which is his body.' For Bouyer, the author of the epistle is ready to say, not only that Christ completes himself in the Church, as in *Ephesians* 1:23, but that the Church, and even one simple member of the Church, may have to complete for him what he has left unfinished, 'even in what is, according to Pauline doctrine, the preeminent redemptive act: his cross.'¹²¹ Now this can be theologically and dogmatically admissible *only if* one understands the 'completion' of Christ's sufferings in terms of the *totus Christus*. Christ the *head*, forever glorified, has definitively completed his salvific work ('It is accomplished', *John* 19:30) and no longer needs to suffer further; the *whole Christ*, awaiting its eschatological perfection at the Parousia, continues to 'groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies' (*Romans* 8:23).

By thus arguing in this manner, Bouyer establishes an even stronger link between Christ and the Church. Not only is the Church 'of Christ' but, one could say, Christ is 'of the Church'; the relationship is not unilateral. Once again one perceives here the magnitude of the divine condescension similar to that displayed in the act of creation.¹²²

¹¹⁹ *Church of God*, 255.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

Moreover, faithful to the Athanasian vision of the inseparability of Christology and ecclesiology, Bouyer aligns himself against ‘the tendency of many earlier christologies, which wrongly thought they could exalt [Christ] further by separating him from the rest of mankind.’¹²³ In other words, Bouyer’s intention is not to exalt the Church but to exalt Christ further.¹²⁴ Once again, he affirms the long-standing Catholic teaching that Christ is not diminished when he shares his glory with his Church. In an important sense his ecclesiology *is* Christology, as this remarkable sentence demonstrates: ‘The Church is Christ revealing little by little the plenitude of His being.’¹²⁵ Thus, when Bouyer declares that the Church is the proper ‘fullness’ in which Christ ‘finishes revealing himself’, his goal is not to heap praise upon praise on the Church but to accent its dependence on Christ; it is he who is tending toward *his own* final perfection.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, the inseparable link, even continuity, between Christ and the Church may not be exaggerated. Not only is there the threat of a recurring ecclesial triumphalism, there is also the doctrinal danger of a neo-monophysitism, Christ and the Church becoming ontologically indistinguishable. Moreover, a certain distinction is necessary in the light of the Church’s present imperfection; Ratzinger’s insistence that

¹²² Bouyer writes in *Seat of Wisdom*, 135-36:

‘There is no doubt that, for the Fathers, creation implies a *συγκατάβασις* [condescension], and this view of theirs is in accord with Scripture. The Greek idea of a God who is indifferent to the world, to whom the world implies neither joy nor sorrow, of a God who, in fact, ignores the world, is thoroughly incompatible with the scriptural idea. [...]

Already in creation God gave himself, poured himself out. Human language falls lamentably short of expressing what is so strictly divine, but it is certain that, in his creative love, God underwent a kind of ecstasy, a kind of deliberate forgoing of himself, yet with no real loss or impairment, for it was the fulfilment of his inmost nature, whose property it is to give, and to give itself. If this is true of creation, it is still more so of the redemption, which is the re-creation of a creature in revolt, one that has set itself at enmity with God...’

¹²³ *Church of God*, 256.

¹²⁴ In this light one remembers a pithy remark of J. A. T. Robinson: ‘Have as high a doctrine of the Ministry as you like as long as your doctrine of the Church is higher; and have as high a doctrine of the Church as you like, as long as your doctrine of the kingdom is higher.’ Cf. ‘Forward’, *The Church in the Thought of Bishop John Robinson*, by Richard McBrien (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), viii.

¹²⁵ *Paschal Mystery*, 117.

‘the Church is not identical with Christ but stands over against him’ is intended to affirm the need for ecclesial purification and renewal.¹²⁷ More trenchantly, Hans Küng declares: ‘The Church always suffers shipwreck whenever it tries ... to “take over” Christ and his word as though it were its own “possessions”. [...] The Church does not need to be a “continuing Christ”; this is a role which exceeds its strength.’¹²⁸

How would Bouyer respond to these legitimate concerns? Perhaps his most insightful riposte is to put forward, in close proximity to the image of the Church as the ‘body of Christ’, that of the ‘bride of Christ’, a biblical metaphor especially valuable in showing the Church’s *separateness* from Christ – the two are ‘*in carne una*’ yet precisely ‘*duo*’:

[The] Church – however dependent upon Christ, however united in principle may be her activity with his, however *one* her being with his, to the point of forming one body with him, of being *his* body – remains, in another aspect, radically distinct from him, as one person is from another.¹²⁹

Bouyer also distinguishes, as perhaps no other theologian has, the Church’s present status as Christ’s *betrothed* (2 Corinthians 11:2), while awaiting its perfection as his eschatological *bride* (Revelation 21:2). The point is to allow that gross margin of defectibility and sinfulness still present among its members while defending the sinlessness of the Church *qua* Church.¹³⁰ In its ‘uni-totality’, according to Bouyer, the Church cannot cease being holy, by virtue of the presence within it of both Christ and his sanctifying gifts (the *sancta*, or ‘holy things’). ‘But [the Church] is stained, and will be

¹²⁶ *Church of God*, 297.

¹²⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, ‘The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council’, in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (Slough: St Paul, 1988), 16.

¹²⁸ H. Küng, *The Church*, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 241.

¹²⁹ *Church of God*, 491.

¹³⁰ Bouyer prefers the view that the Church itself is sinless; he would concur with *Lumen Gentium*’s vivid terms that the Church, ‘clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal’ (no. 8.3).

until the last day, by the numberless sins of her ministers and members, and even betrayed by the always possible defection not only of all her individual members but all the churches'.¹³¹

As for Küng's concern that the Church must not see itself as continuing Christ, 'a role which exceeds its strength', Bouyer would first of all agree that, strictly speaking, the Church cannot 'extend' the unique Incarnation. The Church, he says, 'is not an extension of the incarnation in the sense that it would be a homogeneous prolongation of it. It exists only by virtue of and in its historical continuity with what Christ was, willed, and did once and for all.'¹³² Nonetheless, Bouyer counters, following Thomas Aquinas and Johann Möhler, that one can admit a certain sense in which this is true, that is, not literally but sacramentally, 'the conjoint instrumentality of Christ's humanity, whereby ... his divinity saves us in the redemptive incarnation, [and] is extended to us in order to apply grace to us in the sacramentality of the Church'.¹³³ Together with this qualified meaning of 'extending' or 'continuing' Christ, Bouyer significantly also steers away from any depiction of the Church as a sacrament. Perhaps this is a conscious effort not to embroil Catholic ecclesiology further in ecumenical controversy, although it remains that Bouyer upholds the *notion* without necessarily using the *term* itself.¹³⁴

¹³¹ *Church of God*, 499.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 311.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 326, note 15.

¹³⁴ Dulles has noted several points of divergence, both in content and in method, between Bouyer and Küng, as might be perceived in their ecclesiological treatises which appeared in close proximity to one another: Küng's *The Church* in 1967, Bouyer's *The Church of God* in 1970. Dulles writes: 'Bouyer's book provides an interesting contrast with that of Küng. While the two agree in placing primary emphasis on the local church and on pastoral ministry, the differences are sharp. In terms of method Bouyer, without neglecting the biblical witness, differs from Küng in strongly emphasizing tradition, particularly the Fathers. [Etc.]' Cf. Dulles, 'Half Century of Ecclesiology', 436.

There are several other significant differences besides those which Dulles has pointed out. Küng categorically describes the Church as sinful (*The Church*, 174), something Bouyer would not do. The Swiss theologian has a keener sense of the Church's pneumatological dimension, affirming that 'The Church owes to the Spirit its origin, existence and continued life, and in this sense the Church is a *creation of the spirit*' (*ibid.*, 172). Küng has earned a reputation, perhaps even more so in recent years, for his

The expression 'the Word in the Church', taking 'Word' primarily to mean Jesus Christ, must now be examined under the aspect of the sacred scriptures. For equally, in Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology, the Bible has a determinative and constitutive function vis-à-vis the Church, while at the same time finding (and necessarily so) its *raison d'être* within the ecclesial community.

2. The Use of Scripture in the Church

WHILE THE 'WORD', for Bouyer, primarily refers to God's gracious (that is, motivated solely by divine *agape*) and revelatory act of communicating his salvific and recreative presence in creation, and specifically to the human creature made in his image, culminating in Christ *the* Word of God, the term of course also refers, secondarily, to the sacred scriptures. The order of the referents is important for Bouyer: for all his love for the Bible, greater still is his allegiance to the divine author of the Bible, and if Bouyer advocates the claim 'the Word in the Church' it is because he first understands it as Christ being forever joined with his body, his people, the Church, *then* comes consideration of the 'Word' as sacred scripture. As he puts it, 'it is not only the content

severe critique of the Church, a move already evident in his 1967 book where he distinguishes between the Church's 'essence' and its 'historical forms', the latter accounting for the Church's evil 'un-nature'. Generally speaking Küng, envisioning a rather wholesale reform of the present Church, continues to speak disparagingly and critically of it. Bouyer, by contrast, though known to have a cutting literary style (Jérôme Hamer says, with some understatement, that Bouyer does not have '*la plume tendre*'; cf. Hamer, *La Maison-Dieu*, no. 106 [1971]: 164-66, in 165) remains respectful. As will be seen in a later section of this chapter, even his severest criticisms of Catholic bishops are intended to be hortatory, if nothing else to harangue them to 'do their job'.

In a word, it is perhaps not an overstatement that Bouyer, compared with Küng, displays a more noticeable love for the Church, whether in its institutional or eschatological form. As Edward Gratsch puts it, in his review of *The Church of God*: 'Perhaps the chief value of B.'s book is that it contains the reflections of an immensely learned theologian upon the Church he loves dearly.' Cf. Gratsch, *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 316-17, in 317. So with Dom Illtyd Trethowan, who finds in *The Church of God* passages which combine 'theological precision with intensity of feeling in a quite extraordinary way.' Cf. Trethowan's review in *Downside Review*, 252.

However, one major point of convergence between these two theologians is worthwhile noting: both would place the Church's centre of gravity in its *worship*. As Küng puts it: 'The Church manifests herself most intensely during the act of worship, in the common listening to the word of God, and in the common participation in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.' Cf. Küng, *Structures of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (London: Burns & Oates, 1965), 15. The Eucharist, he says, is the centre of the Church, where it is 'truly itself, because it is wholly with its Lord' (*The Church*, 223).

of the divine Word which, in the inspired texts of which the Church is the guardian remains in the Church. It is that Word Itself, as living act, as presence.’¹³⁵

This primary meaning he gives to ‘Word’ cannot be overstated, and it has hermeneutical relevance to the secondary consideration of ‘Word’ understood as scriptures. From the first Bouyer begins arguing his case from the fact that Christ is present in his Church. It is always in the Church, writes Bouyer, that Christ, ‘always with the same actuality, the same personal reality, creative of life, proclaims the Gospel, the supreme Word of God which is Himself.’ *Therefore*, Bouyer continues, it is into the Church that one must be incorporated, in order to share in the Spirit of Christ, and consequently, ‘to receive His words, not as a mere dead letter, but as words which remain always life-giving because here they remain always living, always uttered by the very Word of God.’¹³⁶

It is in this light that one appreciates Bouyer’s inestimable regard for the place and necessary role of the scriptures. His classic 1952 book, *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture*, begins with the words: ‘Holy Scripture is always the great Christian source of dogma and of spirituality.’ Elsewhere, he says that, while the Word of God is sovereign for the Church, its expression in the Bible is of a fullness that is forever unsurpassable. ‘The entire Church, beginning with her bishops, is ever at the service of the Word and is subject to the incomparable formula that the inspired Word itself gave in the Scriptures.’¹³⁷ But it is always the scriptures *and* the Church, inasmuch as the Church itself can never be without the scriptures and the scriptures themselves are destined for and are the patrimony of the Church. Another way of expressing this is the relationship between the Bible and tradition.

¹³⁵ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 11-12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Since the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (itself prepared for by theologians such as Congar who not only played a key role in writing the document but also prepared the theological climate prior to the council with such publications as *La Tradition et les traditions*) the Catholic doctrine of the inseparability of scripture and tradition has become a theological commonplace. But, as the history of the drafting of *Dei Verbum* reveals, what was revolutionary was not the coupling of scripture and tradition but the recovery of the patristic teaching that there is ultimately but *one* source of revelation, which is the divine Word. Now, it is arguable that Bouyer helped to pave the way for this recovery. As already mentioned, the theologian, writing a decade before the inauguration of the council, expressed it succinctly:

Holy Scripture is always the great Christian source of dogma and of spirituality. The theologians of the patristic period and those of the Middle Ages did not hesitate to say that it was *the* source. [...] Since the sixteenth century...the Protestant tendency to oppose the Bible to the other documents of ecclesiastical tradition has put us on guard against such a simple formulation. We would prefer to say that the source of Christianity is, indeed, the Word of God, but that the Word of God is the Bible *and* Tradition. Such a way of stating this truth is, of course, nothing new. Christian antiquity always correlated these two terms. But if we are to retain their primitive significance, we must understand clearly that this correlation is not the mere juxtaposition, nor, still less, the opposing of one to the other.¹³⁸

Bouyer's point immediately becomes clear: scripture and tradition are, strictly speaking, not two independent 'sources' of divine revelation; rather, they are so indivisible that any attempt to do so would radically disfigure both.¹³⁹ 'To the Christians of antiquity, the Bible is so inseparable from Tradition as to be, in fact, a part of it: it is its essential element, its nucleus, so to say. But, on the other hand, if it were to be torn

¹³⁷ *Church of God*, 364.

¹³⁸ *Sacred Scripture*, 1.

¹³⁹ In a way, the notion that *ressourcement* theology endeavours to 'return to the *sources*' may foster the misunderstanding that there are many 'sources' of divine revelation. As is clear in Bouyer, it is more precise to view scripture, the Church Fathers, and the liturgy, as pointing towards the one indivisible font of divine revelation which is the Word of God.

from the living whole which is constituted by the many factors of Tradition, guarded and transmitted by the conscience of the Church, always watchful, always active – then the Bible would indeed become incomprehensible.’¹⁴⁰ Bouyer’s organic conception of the relationship between scripture and tradition is novel and insightful. Nucleus and cell are inseparable from one another: the nucleus (scripture) is impossible to wrench out of the living cell (tradition) without killing the cell, while at the same time the nucleus requires the entire living environment, the cellular ‘world’, in order to itself live. Expressed more broadly, both historically and theologically, there can be *neither* Church *nor* scripture if one was without the other.

The historical relationship should be apparent by now; as Bouyer puts it: ‘The Divine Word never had another interlocutor, properly speaking, than the People of God.’¹⁴¹ Even more forcefully he writes: ‘[The] history of the People demands the Word in order to be understood, not only because the Word alone explains it but because it constitutes its sole sufficient reason – just as the Word has no meaning nor even concrete existence, manifest in our world, except in a context inseparable from this history.’¹⁴² At this point, Bouyer is still speaking in general terms of the ‘Word’; in due course he will deal specifically with the place of the scriptures in the life of Israel:

Israel’s cult is the place where the living Presence is to be found, the place where the Word lives and gives life. It is there that one listens to the Word continually addressed to oneself and addressed not only to a few but to all, so that all might draw profit from it in prayer and a response of faith. [...]

Thus it is evident that the written Torah, all written Word, remained truly the Word for Israel only if it was proclaimed in the liturgical assembly as a word continually addressed to the People.... The written and non-written Word can never be divorced from the context of the people listening to the Word in faith, recognizing God’s ever-active, living and life-giving Presence and surrendering themselves to it in sacrificial prayer.

¹⁴⁰ *Sacred Scripture*, 1-2.

¹⁴¹ *Church of God*, 175.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 222.

This is so true that what eventually will become the canonical written Word will become so only in being disposed precisely in accordance with this liturgical reading.¹⁴³

Bouyer's argument is consistent all throughout. He has already demonstrated the succession of the Christian *ecclesia* from the various Jewish *qahalim*. These Old Testament assemblies were gathered by the divine Word, now understood more specifically as the reading and explanation of the sacred text in the context of synagogal liturgy. The sacred text has no other destination than to be proclaimed in the midst of the people, taking its pride of place in the reverential listening and responsorial praise of the congregation. 'Since it is for the assembly that the Bible came into existence, it is within it that the Word remains heard and received as the object of the response it demanded, of praise, supplication and *abodah*, that is, sacrificial service.'¹⁴⁴ Now, if the Church truly succeeds the *qahalim*, then it must approach and use its own sacred scriptures in the same way. Not only must the Bible have pride of place in the life of the Church, but its very use and interpretation must be inseparable from the community which lives from it.

Bouyer ruefully observes that, for too long, Catholics have tended to think that the reading of the scriptures is a 'Protestant thing'. Here he does not mince words, heedless of overstepping ecumenical politeness (after all, he is writing for Catholics):

This idea, or rather this prejudice, must be uprooted. The error of Protestantism lay not at all in the belief that the Bible is the Word of God and that it should be received as such. [...] The error was to wish to go back to the Bible while getting rid of everything that is essential to keep it living.... It is in the Bible, then, that we should look for the primary nourishment of our spiritual life, as the Protestants insist. But we should not use it as they do.¹⁴⁵

One is back on familiar ground: without in any way delimiting the personal and private reading of the Bible, Bouyer insists that the normative reading of scripture must be performed by being 'replaced [in the sense of "put back"]', or rather remaining, in its

¹⁴³ *Eternal Son*, 57-58.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁴⁵ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 27-28.

proper atmosphere, its living environment, its native light', that is, the living tradition of the Church.¹⁴⁶ This is especially so with regards to the liturgy, which illuminates the meaning of the Bible, preserving in its time-hallowed formulae the best living example of the axiom *lex credendi, lex orandi*. 'Only a personal meditation on the Word of God in the school of the liturgy itself will enable the Christian people truly to live in that liturgy, *to live that liturgy* again.'¹⁴⁷ In other words, Bouyer is offering a practical remedy for the (perhaps common) perception that the liturgy is 'dead' – his advice: read and meditate on the Bible. At the same time, a more scripturally-aware congregation will bring new life to the liturgy.

When Bouyer counsels the reading of the Bible 'with the Church', or 'in the school of the liturgy', he also means by this, access to and a growing familiarity with, the Fathers of the Church, who have made it *their* business precisely to read the scriptures *with* and *for* the Church. For Bouyer, the reading of the Fathers must go hand in hand with scripture reading. As he explains it:

It is not that the Fathers should be expected to furnish us with the explanation of all and every one of the detailed difficulties of interpretation raised by the text of Scripture.¹⁴⁸ But they convey to us the meaning of the great religious themes which form the unity and, as it were, the depth of the Scriptures. They accustom us to seek and find there what is essential to discover, the Mystery of Christ and of his Cross....¹⁴⁹

The last sentence is of central importance; by it Bouyer spells out all the difference in the world between the proper and improper use of scripture. If the content of God's saving communication to humanity is most essentially the word of the cross, then the latter not

¹⁴⁶ *Sacred Scripture*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Liturgical Piety*, 254.

¹⁴⁸ It is striking that even Augustine counsels his readers to be discerning with regards to the writings of those Christian teachers earlier than himself: 'We are at liberty [writes Augustine] to condemn and reject anything in their writings, if perchance we shall find that they have entertained opinions differing from that which others or we ourselves have, by the divine help, discovered to be the truth. I deal thus with the writings of others, and I wish my intelligent readers to deal thus with mine' (*Ep.* 148, 15).

¹⁴⁹ *Monastic Life*, 173.

only has to permeate the entire scriptures but must subordinate all other words to *this* one word of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'.

All this, admittedly, is still very generally described, although these underlying principles are of utmost importance. If Bouyer goes on to give recommendations on the practical and scientific side of biblical exegesis, it is these principles which surround the process at all sides and which control it. Hence, for example, he warns against the absurdity of mechanically repeating what the Fathers did, when they commented on the scriptures, in the end 'artificially producing more or less poor imitations of their own interpretations.'

It is essential, on the contrary [writes Bouyer], that we should draw from historical and critical methods all the responsibilities that our own age provides us with, as they in their era profited by the philology which they knew and practised. Without entering into, and above all, without losing ourselves among the technicalities of modern exegetical research, it would be unpardonable on our part to neglect what it gives us, not only by its detailed results, but by its general attitude in regard to the texts and problems it sets forth, in the measure in which all this contributes to a better understanding of the Bible. St Augustine, St Jerome, still more Origen, if they had had within reach all the possibilities we have, would have profited from them to an extent far beyond that with which the majority of us content ourselves.¹⁵⁰

Elsewhere Bouyer shares his thoughts on what he considers as the proper way of interpreting the Bible: the need to move from the literal sense to the spiritual sense,¹⁵¹ the approach to biblical prophecy,¹⁵² the inadequacy of simply accumulating individual explanations of texts and pericopes without synthesizing them in the light of faith,¹⁵³ what an authentic biblical theology consists in,¹⁵⁴ the impossibility of complete detachment in the interests of a putative 'scientific exegesis',¹⁵⁵ and the like. One may

¹⁵⁰ *Monastic Life*, 175.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Cf. *Paschal Mystery*, 7, 17-21.

¹⁵³ Cf. *Gnosis*, 145.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 179.

not ignore biblical criticism if one wishes to remain faithful to scripture and to Christ, he asserts, but *a fortiori*, 'true fidelity to the Christ of Scripture demands of us today, not a rejection of biblical criticism, but rather one that is more penetrating; that is, a criticism of the aims and accomplishments of biblical criticism up to our present time.'¹⁵⁶ In short, a criticism of criticism. Ultimately, he says, 'we must ask from the Bible and accept from it the principle of its own explanation, the only explanation which can be called scientific, provided that it draws from this principle a coherent application.' And what is this principle? It is the 'vision of the whole, a profound vision, of what makes up the very matter of the whole Bible, of what it says to us, which finds its fundamental expression in the traditional liturgy of the Catholic Church'.¹⁵⁷

With this Bouyer comes full circle: without spurning critical methods of biblical interpretation, as the so-called 'fundamentalists' are wont to do,¹⁵⁸ he bids his readers once again to train their sights on the liturgy; better, the Bible *and* the liturgy; and perhaps even better, the Bible *in* the liturgy. He writes:

This vision, this perception of the meaning of Scripture in all its fullness, as it has nourished, for the Fathers of the Church, all the traditional liturgy received from the primitive Church, has come to us, enriched by them, in this liturgy such as they have transmitted it to us. And this is why, for us today, the best way of adapting ourselves to their approach and of making ours their understanding of Scripture, is to plunge and plunge again (*plonger et replonger*) without ceasing our personal meditation in these living waters, always gushing forth from the liturgy of the Church.¹⁵⁹

3. The Service of the Word by the Church's Ministers

TO SPEAK OF the use of scripture in the Church would be incomplete, from a Catholic point of view, without reference to the *magisterium*. With regards to this Bouyer gives a rather standard account following *Dei Verbum* (no. 10.2). He points out,

¹⁵⁶ *Eternal Son*, 23.

¹⁵⁷ *Gnosis*, 144, 179.

¹⁵⁸ *Eternal Son*, 23.

¹⁵⁹ *La méditation contemplative*, 36.

for example, that ‘the magisterium is inside tradition and, far from dominating, can only recognize and authenticate it and thereby bring the Body of the Church to specify the awareness it already had in itself, even though it may have been in an imperfectly explicit way. For an even stronger reason, neither the magisterium nor tradition can rise above the Word of God, as Scripture has formulated it for all time.’¹⁶⁰ He also reminds his readers that ‘The entire Church, beginning with her bishops, is ever at the service of the Word and is subject to the incomparable formula that the inspired Word itself gave in the Scriptures.’¹⁶¹ But what is perhaps more interesting and dogmatically novel in Bouyer’s account is his recovery of Newman’s insight (in the latter’s *Prophetic Office of the Church*) that the *one* tradition has *two* aspects which are equally indissociable: the prophetic tradition and the episcopal tradition, the latter corresponding ‘exactly to what most modern theologians have the habit of calling the magisterium.’¹⁶²

It has been noted above that, probably in part out of a desire for ecumenical rapprochement, Bouyer makes certain ‘balancing moves’ not only to clarify Catholic teaching but to make that teaching more comprehensible, if not acceptable, to Protestants and Orthodox. Such is the case here, the reminder that ministerial authority in the Church must itself be completely immersed in the collegiality or catholicity of the Church as a whole. Another way of describing this is Newman’s dual vision of tradition; as Bouyer explains it:

The prophetic tradition remains the basic element, for it is the life of truth in the whole body of the Church. But since this body exists only in concrete persons, it comes down to saying that tradition is the truth lived by all Christians, each individually, and all together. For it is essential to their life, as it is for the truth from which this life proceeds, that it be a life in fellowship, and more precisely a life in the supernatural love that the Holy Spirit unceasingly spreads in our hearts. In this life of truth, each has his part, in proportion to his lights, nature and grace, and above all in proportion to his faithfulness to grace. It lives in the heart of the humblest faithful as well as in the heart of the most

¹⁶⁰ *Church of God*, 364.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Decomposition*, 92.

profound theologians. And in order to live it as we should, everyone needs one another. [...]

Nevertheless, this life of truth, received in frail, fallible and sinful spirits, even with all the helps of grace, grows only in a kind of mixed way. Its developments need unceasingly to be sorted out, verified and brought down to essentials. It is here that the episcopal tradition intervenes. It is not a tradition that is different from prophetic tradition, and it is not enough to say that it [is] plunged into it with all its roots: it is completely immersed in it and belongs to it. But since the bishops received the responsibility for the development of the whole body in the unity of divine love, they have also received a special grace: that of judging, evaluating and authenticating the faithful expressions of tradition. Hence, not only their power, when controversies arise, to give solemn definitions which obligate the assent of everyone, (although in a more habitual than *ordinary* way), but also their guidance in the formulation of these expressions, as well as supplying other expressions, especially by sanctioning the forms of worship in which the faith of all must be unceasingly regenerated at its source.¹⁶³

Thus once again, without in the least contravening what one might call ‘standard’ Catholic ecclesiological understanding, Bouyer brings in perspectives which not only enlarge but also counterpoise that understanding. In one move he simultaneously affirms the unique and necessary role of bishops, and drives that role firmly into the solid bedrock of the Church in its totality. Again he says: ‘These two ministries – the universal ministry of all the members of the body and the particular ministry of those who are the representatives of the perpetual presence of the Head without which the body would not be able to subsist – are so closely linked to each other that neither would be able to be exercised, or even to exist, without the other: neither the Church without the bishop nor the bishop without the Church.’¹⁶⁴

Related to this ‘balancing move’ is another insight he gleans from Pseudo-Denis, whose term ‘hierarchy’, introduced in the fifth or sixth centuries, has undergone such a complete transformation in meaning since the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries that the original Pseudo-Dionysian meaning has been overshadowed. Pseudo-Denis begins with a profound vision of the divine ‘thearchy’, what Bouyer describes as ‘an outpouring, an incessant circulation, a *perichoresis* of the flow of divine love’ within the Trinity which

¹⁶³ *Decomposition*, 93-94.

¹⁶⁴ *Woman in the Church*, 84.

originates from the Father, ‘the unique and universal principle’.¹⁶⁵ In turn, this thearchy emanates outward, transposed to the level of creation both angelic and material. This is the ‘hierarchy’, strictly speaking, which ‘has nothing to do with a division of the Church (or the universe, in the case of the “heavenly hierarchy”) between masters and subjects, in which the former were the only ones who were active and the latter were purely passive and dependent.’ Rather, the Dionysian hierarchy meant that ‘the most exalted beings in nature and grace could possess what they received (the divine *agape*) only by communicating it. [...] Consequently, in accordance with their individual response to the gift received, the least in the hierarchy could be raised as the most exalted and even higher.’¹⁶⁶ This has profound theological significance: at the least it corrects a disproportionately autocratic approach to authority in the Church, while more generally it espouses a powerful vision of the Church as a communion of love and service along the lines already found in the Gospels:

‘You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.’ (*Mark* 10:42-44)

But while the whole Church is ever at the service of the Word, Bouyer concedes that this apostolic task begins with the bishops. Neither Newman’s broader conception of ‘tradition’, nor Pseudo-Denis’ more dynamic vision of ‘hierarchy’, removes the dignity and duty of the episcopal office. And this very defence of episcopal authority leads Bouyer to make one of his severest critiques. ‘In the light of twenty centuries of Christian life and ecclesiology,’ he writes, ‘one point seems obvious, and is, in fact, found beneath most reform suggestions of Vatican II: what most encumbers the evolution of the Catholic Church is a deformation of pastoral authority.’ This is

¹⁶⁵ *Church of God*, 258.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40. Cf. also *SNTF*, 402-3.

especially true today wherever pastoral authority is ‘isolated from both the preaching of the faith and the celebration of the mysteries.’¹⁶⁷ In other words, bishops today, according to Bouyer, have become little more than diocesan administrators and bureaucrats, ‘mitered pen-pushers or chaplains general of Catholic Action’.¹⁶⁸ When one recalls Bouyer’s magnificent vision of the continuum ‘Word-Mystery-Liturgy’ (and now) ‘Church’, this phenomenon seems particularly grievous. For him, therefore, there is but one simple remedy: ‘reestablish the authority and every exercise of the pastoral function in the acts that should never have been adulterated – preaching the evangelical truth and the testimony it must awaken in all members of the Church, sacramental celebration, and life in supernatural charity...for the whole body of Christ.’¹⁶⁹ He also counsels bishops and priests to ‘immerse’ themselves in the Word of God, to study and be nurtured in it. Tellingly he adds: ‘It is also necessary that the bishops, and their priests after them, understand what an authentic liturgical life is.’¹⁷⁰

One reviewer, however, takes Bouyer to task for this assertion. It is lamentable, writes Henri Holstein, that Bouyer seems to be ignorant of the fact that today’s world ‘is no longer the tranquil world to which his affection remains attached, that world in which the bishop peacefully celebrates and preaches in his cathedral, and in which the good curate knows his parishioners and manages a human-size (*à taille humaine*) “church”. The hesitations and quests (*recherches*) of today’s Church, the malaise and suffering of priests, do not seem to be always perceived in these pages, which are somewhat doleful

¹⁶⁷ *Church of God*, 504.

¹⁶⁸ *Decomposition*, 108-9.

¹⁶⁹ *Church of God*, 507.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 508-9.

and where one finds the acrimonious tone of the polemicist.’¹⁷¹ What is one to make of this accusation?

Two things may be said in Bouyer’s defence. First, he is plainly convinced that legitimate authority entails the faithful execution of all the responsibilities that are part and parcel of that authority. Bouyer will defend episcopal authority tooth and nail, but he will also insist that ‘for their part, the leaders must realize that they cannot be faithful shepherds if they do not accept still more radical exigencies for themselves.’¹⁷² Especially in a Church which is *de facto* highly clericalized (whether this is a good thing or not is beside the point), one can accept the ‘rule of clerics’ more easily if they are, as Jesus puts it, ‘slave’ or ‘servant’ of all; as he also says elsewhere, ‘to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more’ (*Luke* 12:48).

But a second argument is a more substantial one: Bouyer is no more blind to the crisis in the Church than Holstein himself is, and it is exceedingly uncharitable of the

¹⁷¹ H. Holstein, review of *The Church of God*, in his ‘Bulletin d’Ecclésiologie’, *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 59 (janvier-mars 1971): 147-48, in 148.

It is worth pointing out that Bouyer’s ‘doleful’ and ‘acrimonious’ tone in *Church of God* (as Holstein characterizes it) is considerably mild compared with some of his more pungent expressions and terrible tirades in *Decomposition* and *Religieux*. There Bouyer writes, for example:

‘To say that Church ministers, beginning with the leaders, are servants has ... come to mean that they no longer need take their responsibility as leaders and teachers seriously, but rather follow the flock instead of leading the way. The following tasty morsel has been attributed to the colonel of the *Garde Nationale* at the time of its disbandment in 1848: “Since I am their leader, it is quite natural that I follow them.” Sometimes (should we not say “often”?) we get the impression that today’s bishops, and in their wake all our doctors of the law, have made this their motto.’ (*Decomposition*, 15)

In *Religieux*, 101, he identifies what for him is the primary cause of the contemporary malaise in the Catholic Church: ‘the first malefactors responsible for the present crisis in the Church, before the impious priests and the unworthy theologians, are the “religious”: that is to say, the witnesses claiming to evangelical asceticism, but who became its patented counter-workers (*contrefacteurs*).’ Further on, distressed at the upheavals among priests and religious in the post-conciliar years, he observes that

‘the remedy will not be found in running away from [the problem], which religious superiors and prelates have tried to bless, when the first fruits of their counsel have been defrockings *en masse* and a generalized confusing of the apostolate with apostasy. [...] It is not a question of substituting bourgeoisied (*embourgeoisés*) religious with religious seized by debauchery, or clerics who are blasé about what they are supposed to serve with clerics ready to occupy themselves with everything else rather than with the one thing necessary.’ (*Ibid.*, 122)

¹⁷² *Decomposition*, 97.

latter to imagine Bouyer living in a dream world. By calling bishops and priests back to their primary *evangelical* task, that of serving the Word of God in preaching and sacramental celebration, he is being entirely consistent with his robust vision of the biblical ‘Word’ and the evangelical ‘mystery’ finding their climax in the liturgy, which is ‘above all the very source (not *a source*, but *the source par excellence*) of the life of the Church.’¹⁷³ The present-day *disservice* of bishops and priests, according to Bouyer, is to have allowed the liturgy to degenerate.¹⁷⁴ ‘What would a Church have to bring to the world,’ he asks, ‘if it had no interior life, no life proper to it, even though it is not its life nor ours, but the life of Christ and of his Spirit in us?’¹⁷⁵ If the Church, beginning with its leaders, did not do its ‘job’, if it did not perform its missionary mandate, then the life of Christ in his Spirit already entrusted to it would not be irradiated to the rest of the world. If what Bouyer sadly and chillingly observes is true – that ‘The Church no longer dares to speak of converting the world: she thinks only of converting herself to the world.’¹⁷⁶ – then responsibility for this failure must first be laid at the door of its leaders.

4. The Service of the Word by Theologians

BY TAKING BISHOPS and priests to task for their failure to serve the Word, Bouyer is not thereby excusing theologians from a similar failure.¹⁷⁷ But more constructively, he envisions the doctors and theologians of the Church working hand in hand in the service

¹⁷³ ‘Quelques mises au point’, 383.

¹⁷⁴ In *Decomposition*, 105, Bouyer does not mince his words: ‘Once again, at this point, we must speak plainly: there is practically no liturgy worthy of the name today in the Catholic Church. Yesterday’s liturgy was hardly more than an embalmed cadaver. What people call liturgy today is little more than this same cadaver decomposed.’

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷⁶ *Church of God*, 527.

¹⁷⁷ *Religieux* castigates, by turns: pure transcendentalists and extreme immanentists, a-cosmic theologians, secular and ‘death of God’ theologians, those who are biased against ‘religion’ or ‘mysticism’, and so forth. While Bouyer is often perceptive and always passionate, the stridently polemical tone in this book is not always helpful or constructive. One can also fault Bouyer for sweeping judgements based on partial readings of those he is criticizing.

of the Word.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, in *Le métier* he clearly spells out what he considers to be the essential ministry of theologians; quite succinctly it is that of 'interpreting the Word of God in the light of the Church's own experience, and which is not separated from the experience of the rest of humanity, developing within this very experience of humanity in order to clarify and guide it under the providential direction of the Spirit, to that end which God in creating the world has assigned to it: to encounter and be united with him.'¹⁷⁹ One can detect in this passage at least three notable points: First, the material content, indeed *the* source par excellence, of theology is the Word of God; in this context 'Word' probably refers to the sacred scriptures which, as Bouyer says elsewhere, is 'the great Christian source of dogma and of spirituality.'¹⁸⁰ Second, the theological method, however one conceives it, must never be divorced from human experience, both ecclesial and societal. And not just in the contemporary milieu, but, perhaps even more necessarily, in its totality throughout human history.¹⁸¹ It was precisely because of such a divorce that de Lubac, already in his programmatic *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme* (1938), had railed against the 'separated' philosophy of recent centuries which has found its correlative in an equally 'separated' theology.¹⁸² And third, the final end of

¹⁷⁸ Cf. his 'Des théologiens et de leur(s) liberté(s)', in *Communio* 5:2 (mars-avril 1980): 89-93. Theologians and bishops need one another, Bouyer points out: 'Peter and his successors need the research (*études*) of theologians in order to exercise their own function in the best possible way.' At the same time, theologians need to work within the bounds established by the very nature of 'Catholic faith' which is not subjective but a matter of received revelation and faithful 'handing on' (*traditio*). However, 'in the name of seriously pursuing theology, one can formulate, respectfully but firmly, criticisms, even very vigorous ones, with regard to the way the authorities may or may not be fulfilling their responsibilities' (*ibid.*, 92).

¹⁷⁹ *Le métier*, 46.

¹⁸⁰ *Sacred Scripture*, 1. This is what constitutes, for Bouyer, the essence of 'positive theology' which he himself is attempting above all to construct (*Le métier*, 193). He defines positive theology as 'an inventory and an exegesis of the Word of God in its authentic documents' (*Dictionary of Theology*, 443). Cf. also *Le Consolateur*, 7-8, and *Cosmos*, 131.

¹⁸¹ Eric Mascall notes that Bouyer himself is 'altogether free from the intellectual snobbery which assumes that anyone who lived before us must have been culturally and mentally inferior, and also from that cultural philistinism for which nothing that was thought out in any previous age can have any relevance to the present.' Cf. his review in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 664.

theology is, not simply *intellectum*, nor even a rejuvenated *fides*, but encounter and union with God.

From his various writings on the nature and task of theology, the following portrait of an authentic theology emerges.¹⁸³ First of all for Bouyer, Christian theology can never be ‘a static science of verities, both celestial and intra-mundane, but allegedly timeless. Authentic theology, much to the contrary, is nothing but a meditation in faith on what has justly been called “salvation history”.’¹⁸⁴ In saying this, Bouyer immediately arrays himself against those theologians who do not share his particular *a priori*, which is that the sole determinant of saving truth is the Christian vision of faith – inexhaustibly appropriated from the ‘sources’, and safeguarded, lived out and interpreted by the ecclesial community.

Because, as already mentioned, Bouyer sees the theologian’s task or ‘job’ (*métier*) as essentially that of interpreting the Word of God in the light of the Church’s own experience, this is to say that theology must be ecclesial, that it cannot be divorced from the believing community from which, within which, and for which it exists. ‘Eliminate the Church, and Christianity will be no more than a dream which each one lives in his own way, and Christ will be no more than a myth.’¹⁸⁵ Even more vigorously he says:

This is why I believe that there is no graver condemnation which can be placed on the work of a theologian, however ingenious, than when one says that his work allows us to know his thinking. The work of a true theologian must allow us to know, not *his*

¹⁸² De Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Longmans, Green, 1950), 166.

¹⁸³ Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, in his article ‘Louis Bouyer the Theologian’, *Communio* 16 (Summer 1989): 257-76, lists similar descriptions of Bouyer’s theological style. See also Bouyer’s ‘Situation de la théologie’, *Communio* (French ed.) no. 1 (1975): 41-48.

¹⁸⁴ *Sophia*, 195.

¹⁸⁵ *Le métier*, 131.

thinking, but the *Noûs Christou*, the mind of Christ, which the *mens Ecclesiae*, the mind of the Church, alone transmits to us and keeps alive for us.¹⁸⁶

When Bouyer says that theology must lead to encounter and union with God, this is as much as to say that true theology must be mystical. By ‘mystical’, Bouyer means of course its origin in the mystery of Christ. ‘Progress in theology,’ he says, ‘even when it is authentic, would nevertheless be something quite questionable if it did not always bring us back to the essential, that is to say, to the mystery of Christ, always more profoundly assimilated and lived.’¹⁸⁷ Faced with a theology that is not in any way ‘mystical’, Bouyer says (somewhat whimsically) that the disappointment will be so acute that one feels like repeating the words of Mary Magdalene, ‘They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put him.’¹⁸⁸ Once theology has reached such a state, it would have to do two things: ‘take up dieting’ and ‘get more exercise’.¹⁸⁹ This means that theology would need to unburden itself of those (mostly philosophical) presuppositions and *a priori*s which hamper its authentic development, and it would also need to apply itself more rigorously to the full gospel message, one that entails suffering, martyrdom, asceticism, and above all, the cross. It must keep on directing people to the cross, to the Christian mystery par excellence. Here, a detail from Barth’s favourite painting, ‘The Crucifixion of Christ’ by Matthais Grünewald, is apropos, with its figure of John the Baptist pointing to the crucified Christ. Christian theology can do no less, and in this sense is always and necessarily ‘mystical’.

¹⁸⁶ *Le métier*, 208-9.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁸⁸ *Invisible Father*, 280. The actual reference here is to Suarezian theology, but the sentiment seems apropos to other kinds of theology as well.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

Theology conceived as such cannot help but be doxological.¹⁹⁰ It is closely allied to the first meaning of the Greek θεολογία, which designates a hymn, a glorification of God by the λόγος, that is, human expressed thought.¹⁹¹ Indeed, asks Bouyer, what could be more naturally the result of reflecting on the *mirabilia Dei*, the wonders of God in his work of creation and salvation?¹⁹² Conversely, the absence of doxology in a particular ‘theology’ betrays a fatal lack, the result being a ‘logorrhea’ not only confused and unbalanced but also denuded of sense.¹⁹³ Bouyer characterizes as doxological not only any theology worthy of the name, but also all biblical exegesis properly done, as well as all authentic spirituality.¹⁹⁴

Finally, theology, for it to be true to its task and mission, must be spiritual. This means, firstly, that theology must be impregnated with the presence and life of the Holy Spirit. Hence, secondly, it is a theology which leads to deeper spiritual life. For Bouyer, theology can never be separated from spirituality. As he points out: ‘A spirituality [like that of the *Imitation of Christ*] which holds theology in contempt and, in a flush of false humility, thinks itself able to exist without it *ipso facto* gives a blessing to a theology the principles of which will now be confined to narrow rationalism and which will show itself incapable of expressing the mystery while being all too adroit in travesty and

¹⁹⁰ *Sophia*, 196.

¹⁹¹ *Eucharist*, 5.

¹⁹² Bouyer’s characterization of theology as doxological is strikingly echoed in a similar sentiment of Hauerwas: ‘At best’, he says in his 2001 Gifford Lectures, ‘theology is but a series of reminders to help Christians to pray faithfully.’ Cf. *With the Grain*, 10.

¹⁹³ The immediate context of this vivid term is his critique of biblical exegesis. ‘In the final count,’ he says, ‘all attempt at explaining which does not inscribe itself in the intersection of those two lines – the history of the people and the design of God – far from being an scientific exegesis of the Bible, is from one end to the other only an organized nonsense, and leads not to a critical vision of the objects concerned, but to a logorrhea more and more cut off from reality’ (*Gnosis*, 146). What he says there about exegesis applies equally well to theology. Cf. also *Sophia*, 196.

¹⁹⁴ ‘In the final count,’ he writes, ‘the Bible is a collection of books whose very nature, as well as the vital principles which have presided over their composition, bringing them together and conserving them, is fundamentally a matter of worship (*une affaire cultuelle*).’ (*Gnosis*, 180)

emptying it.’¹⁹⁵ In contrast to this, it is the mark of the true giants of Christian spirituality – whether a Protestant like Johann Arndt or a Catholic like John of the Cross – that theirs is a solid ‘spiritual theology’ (or couched differently, a healthy ‘theological spirituality’), that is to say, ‘intrinsically theological by the very fact that it is constructed wholly from spirituality, and remaining at the heart of the latter’.¹⁹⁶ What Bouyer says about a thirteenth-century mystic, known to posterity as Hadewijch of Antwerp, describes well this marriage of theology and spirituality:

[She is] as theological as her spirituality may be in its foundation. The theology that is certainly, as it were, implied in her spirituality is not separate from it, and one can even say that, just as was true of the greatest Fathers of the ancient Church, it cannot be detached from it. It is a theology that remains spiritual in the whole of its substance. If Evagrius’ saying – that ‘theologian’ and ‘man of prayer’ are two synonymous expressions – ever had meaning, it is indeed the case with Hadewijch.¹⁹⁷

One might accuse Bouyer of subverting the nature and task of theology into *his own style* of doing theology.¹⁹⁸ There may be some justification for this remark: Bouyer’s corpus is itself a potent example of that salvation-historical, ecclesial, mystical, doxological, and spiritual theology which he espouses. But this is also to miss the point. While Bouyer holds a personal preference for a theological method that is based on the ‘sources’ and which is by that fact more concrete, historical and phenomenological, this is not to say that he disdains theology which is constructed along more metaphysical, speculative or systematic lines.¹⁹⁹ Besides, Bouyer is not saying ‘follow my example’

¹⁹⁵ *Invisible Father*, 279.

¹⁹⁶ *Women Mystics*, 124.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁹⁸ Congar, not criticizing but complimenting Bouyer, says that the latter’s ‘profound perception and conviction’ is the connection (*lien*) between theology and spiritual experience. Cf. his review of Bouyer’s *Le Consolateur* in ‘Chronique de Pneumatologie’, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 64/3 (juillet 1980): 445-49, in 446.

¹⁹⁹ As to phenomenology, Bouyer insists that his understanding is different from, say, the Husserlian method, which demands radical objectification and a conscious distancing from all preconceptions. To be without any presuppositions whatsoever is neither humanly possible nor scientifically desirable: ‘This is what the phenomenologists mean by that “empathy”, without which, they

but follow the example of the greatest and most profound theologians and spiritual writers Christian history has ever known. For him, *le métier théologique* is above all the sustained and attentive ministry of the 'Word of God', in all the senses of this latter term: the diligent enquiry into divine revelation, the faithful interpretation of sacred scripture, the authentic exposition of the *mysterium fidei* – in short, the humble and prayerful service of Christ who is the Word.

TO RECAPITULATE: THIS chapter has argued that Bouyer's vision of the Church is inseparably linked with the Word of God. His Word-ecclesiology works on several levels. The most important is the Church's relationship with Christ: the Church is forever joined to him to form the *totus Christus*, while conversely Christ has so united himself with the Church as to realize his own fullness there. This fullness, says Bouyer, or rather, the three forms of it – fullness of time, fullness of God, fullness of Christ – are linked with the work of the Holy Spirit. 'The center, the unity of this constellation of fullnesses, is evidently the totalizing fullness of the Spirit, that is, the presence of God in Jesus Christ. Revealed throughout his life – bursting forth, so to speak, in his cross, in his resurrected and glorified body – it gathers all of mankind in the Church, in itself.'²⁰⁰ At another level, the 'Word' is likewise 'in the Church': Christ in his Spirit forever dwells among his people, entrusting his Word, sacred scripture, to the ecclesial

have shown, it is futile to seek to understand whatever has for us a real importance. What would one think of a musicologist who, priding himself to be as it were much more scientific, would have no more taste for music and would not only sing falsely but would no longer have the ear for it?' (*Gnosis*, 179).

In the same vein, while Bouyer would have a high regard for Barth's systematics, and indeed the highest esteem for Aquinas', he himself would shy away from attempting his own 'systematic theology'. His two major trilogies, he says, do not constitute a synthesis, much less a theological system. Rather, they are 'a series of convergent and complementary approaches to the Christian mystery' presenting, not a 'unilinear and logical vision', but a 'glimpse of the riches and the truth' of it (*Le métier*, 193). In *The Invisible Father*, 309, Bouyer candidly admits to have attempted to do so, that is, to produce a systematic synthesis. But, en route, he has come to realize that 'the more we approach the divine at its source, which is the Father, the more we see how laughable must be any attempt at a system of theology.'

²⁰⁰ *Church of God*, 250-51.

community for the explicit purpose of both safeguarding and proclaiming it. Thus the actions that are most appropriate to the ecclesial body are those which directly respond to the Word: liturgy, preaching, and prayer. The responsibility of serving the Word, often unmet, of both the Church's official ministers and its theologians, has been repeatedly underscored by Bouyer, and serves as a constant reminder that the ecclesial community owes its existence to the Word, especially as it is announced and celebrated in the liturgy.

Bouyer's Word-driven ecclesiology thus traces an unbroken continuum which can be expressed as 'Word-Mystery-Liturgy-Church'. It demonstrates clearly that his doctrine of the Church is the obverse of his doctrine of Christ, indeed, of his doctrine of the Trinity. 'What was the Word's coming to us to achieve?' he inquires, 'It was to create the people of God in the mystical body of the Son of God made man, to reconcile man with the Father in his own body offered on the Cross.'²⁰¹ In other words, his ecclesiology is situated squarely in an overarching view of the dynamic relationship between God and the world, between the divine and the human. For Bouyer, this relationship has more to say about what it means *to be* the Church; hence this will be the concern of the following chapter, in which 'Wisdom' comes to the fore to enrich his vision. Then it remains to be seen how both the 'Word' and 'Wisdom' subject the ecclesial community to understand correctly its action in the world – what the Church (and Christians) can and ought *to do*. Chapter Five will therefore deal with how Bouyer construes the key ecclesial actions of liturgy, evangelization and spirituality against the backdrop of his anthropology and cosmology.

²⁰¹ 'The Sacramental System', 47.

Chapter Four

‘WISDOM’ IN BOUYER’S ECCLESIOLOGY

A. INTRODUCTION

THE PRECEDING DISCUSSION has brought to light the inseparable connection in Bouyer’s theology between the multivalent term ‘Word’ and the Church. It has shown that his Word-ecclesiology is above all an affirmation of the link between the ‘definitive Word of God’ and the ‘definitive People of God’. This vision effectively encapsulates what is most dominant and characteristic of Bouyer’s doctrine of the Church.

Within such a logocentric perspective, the following emphases have surfaced: it is strongly christological, it is concerned with the historical development of that Word in the life of the ‘Israel’ of the old and new covenants, and it endeavours to trace a continuum which might be summarily expressed ‘Word-Mystery-Liturgy-Church’. Hence, a Word-ecclesiology is concerned for the most part with the Church’s visible existence, its historical manifestations, and its concrete life of liturgical celebration, prayer, ethical witness and activity in the world. Such an ecclesiology is a prime example of that ‘positive theology’ which Bouyer has consciously attempted to reconstruct along the lines of the seventeenth-century theologians, the Jesuit Denys Petau and the Oratorian Louis Thomassin, that is, a ‘synthetic presentation of the whole Christian mystery’,¹ consisting of ‘an inventory and an exegesis of the Word of God in its authentic documents.’² Bouyer’s account of the Church, from this Word-oriented viewpoint, is almost entirely devoid of speculation, confining itself to what is given (*les données*), that is, the historical data of revelation.

¹ *Le métier*, 193.

² *Dictionary of Theology*, 443.

While a Word-ecclesiology has undeniable strengths, it can also suffer from built-in limitations. Its christocentrism can inadvertently lead to an unbalanced treatment of the Trinity in its tri-personal essence and existence. Its bias for history can fail to relate the Church's concrete realization in time with its place in God, in eternity. Its preoccupation with the actual community assembled to hear the Word of God and to respond to it in faith and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) can neglect the community's invisible dimension, the eschatologically constituted Church of 'innumerable angels in festal gathering and the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven' (*Hebrews* 12:22-23). And while a Word-ecclesiology can be in a better position to speak with practical relevance to what Nicholas Healy calls 'the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church actually is',³ its very attachment to the historical and the concrete means that all too often the teleological dimension of the Church is not sufficiently brought out.

These limitations intrinsic to a Word-ecclesiology are mitigated and balanced by what may be called a 'Wisdom-ecclesiology', which constitutes a second mode of Bouyer's theologizing on the Church. In his purview, 'Wisdom' ranks almost as high as 'Word' not only as a dogmatic prolegomenon but as a hermeneutical key to much of his doctrinal accounts. Similar to 'Word' (although not to the same degree) 'Wisdom' provides both the grammar and the substance of Bouyer's discourse on Christ, the doctrine of creation and salvation, the theology of grace, ecclesiology, and the like. As this chapter purposes to bring out, a sophiological approach to the question 'What "makes" the Church?' will highlight the activity of the whole Trinity, while maintaining in dynamic tension the conjoined yet distinct operations of the tri-personal God. This trinitarian perspective is at once immanent and economic, teleological and soteriological.

In Bouyer's hands, the sophianic legacy of Sergei Bulgakov is both extensively used and radically altered. An example of this is the manner by which he retains Bulgakov's emphasis on the 'dyad' of the Son and the Spirit, the economic activity of the 'two hands' of the Father (so vividly expressed by Irenaeus), but dynamically orients that dyad towards their Source who is the Father. Thus Bulgakov's dyadic centre of gravity is shifted to follow more closely the received tradition's due weight on the triadic character of the Trinity.

'If we are to know the true God, he must reveal himself as he is in himself,' writes Thomas Weinandy, 'The temporal missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit necessarily disclose the inner life of the Trinity itself.'⁴ Bouyer shows himself in line with theologians like Weinandy and others who explain the mystery of God in himself (*ad intra*) in terms of his relations with creation (*ad extra*).⁵ His Wisdom-ecclesiology, by which God's eternal, and not just his historical, relations with the world are disclosed, gives him the breadth of vision and fluidity of language with which to consider the relations of God in himself. Hence this chapter will endeavour to present Bouyer's account of the intra-trinitarian relations of God, with its accent on pneumatology which, as will be argued, is what constitutes one major addition to his Word-ecclesiology.

³ Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

⁴ Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 4-5.

⁵ Nonetheless, one must be careful not to equate, *in toto* and without qualification, the so-called 'immanent Trinity' and 'economic Trinity'. Weinandy is careful to observe that 'theologians continue to explore the correlation' between the two (cf. *Father's Spirit of Sonship*, 4 and footnote). Yves Congar agrees essentially with Karl Barth that

'to adhere, without making any subtle distinctions, to the principle according to which the economic Trinity is the same as the immanent Trinity and *vice versa* would be to contradict the *Filioque*. [Barth] rejected that conclusion, basing his argument on the fact that the actions of the Spirit in the life of Christ did not constitute the latter's existence, whereas, in the case of the Trinitarian processions, it was a case of making him exist. I have also pointed out elsewhere that this "*vice versa*" has to be treated with some reserve if we are to do justice to the transcendence of the intra-Trinitarian mystery.'

Secondly, a sophiocentric account of the Church will attempt to shed light on the theological problem of the relationship between God and creation. Concomitant to this are questions concerning the relation between God's transcendence and his immanence, between eternity and history, between what it means for creation to be united to God and what it means for it to remain distinct even in that very union, and the problem of what Bulgakov calls the 'identity and fusion of freedom and necessity' which Bouyer finds problematic. Bouyer's doctrine of Sophia or divine Wisdom will be presented as a way by which this seemingly unbridgeable gap may be seen to converge. In articulating Bouyer's Wisdom-ecclesiology, this chapter will demonstrate how the theologian both assimilates and transcends Bulgakov's seminal perspective. It will be argued that Bouyer could have constructed his own edifice only on a foundation laid by the Dean of Saint-Serge, although the construction of it required a significant amount of critique and rejection of, so to speak, inferior building material.

Finally, the Wisdom-motif will be seen to reintroduce two other elements of Bouyer's expansive vision: his Mariology, and what could be called his theology of the masculine and feminine (or paternity and maternity), both being linked with the idea of the Church as 'bride' and 'mother'. Thus, sponsality and motherhood, for Bouyer important dimensions of the Church which are not adequately elucidated in his Word-ecclesiology, here receive a wider hearing.

B. THE TWO TRILOGIES

BETWEEN 1957 AND 1982, Louis Bouyer published six books which constitute his veritable *magnum opus*. These are topically related to one another in sets of three, hence, trilogies. There is, first of all, an 'economic trilogy', concerned with creation in three

Cf. Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (London: Geoffrey Chapman; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 93.

successive levels or aspects: a so-called ‘supernatural anthropology’, *The Seat of Wisdom* (1957); a ‘supernatural sociology’, *The Church of God* (1970); and a ‘supernatural cosmology’, *Cosmos* (1982).⁶ The overarching theme of this trilogy is the consideration of the Creator-creature relationship from a micro to a macro perspective: the anticipation and perfection of that relationship in one particular individual (Mary) as the ‘supreme example’ of creation as intended by God, to its collective expression in the ‘entire conscious creation eschatologically assembled’, and finally to all spiritual and material creation.⁷ Even more significantly, what gives coherence to these considerations is the attention to ‘Wisdom’; this biblical and patristic theme will in fact connect the first trilogy with the second, since Wisdom (as Bouyer describes it) is both intra-trinitarian and economic. Hence, his first trilogy leads to a more ‘properly theological’ one, ‘oriented to the divine object itself’,⁸ ‘in the sight of God within the faith’,⁹ considering by turns each of the three persons of the Godhead: *The Eternal Son* (1974), *The Invisible Father* (1976), and *Le Consolateur* (1980).

These two trilogies are the primary locus for uncovering Bouyer’s Wisdom-ecclesiology. This is not to say, though, that the idea of Sophia or divine Wisdom is wholly absent in his other writings. As a matter of fact, his *first* book written in 1938 already makes explicit the connection between Word and Wisdom,¹⁰ and his *last* book published in 1994 is entitled, significantly and simply, *Sophia*, a book he describes as a study of the dynamics of the entire doctrinal exposé (*la dynamique de tout exposé*

⁶ Background source-material and Bouyer’s personal reflections on the trilogies may be found in *Le métier*, 187 ff.

⁷ *Le métier*, 191-92.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁹ *Church of God*, xiv.

¹⁰ Cf. *Fourth Gospel*, 31-34.

doctrinal) of the Christian vision of faith.¹¹ Moreover, the previous chapters of this thesis have demonstrated the place of ‘wisdom’ in Bouyer’s Word-ecclesiology: there it is shown that the mystery of Christ discloses the *divine* Wisdom before the ages, while *human* wisdom constitutes a decisive ‘moment’ in the biblical history of the Word of God.

As for the direct inspiration or predecessor of the two trilogies, Bouyer acknowledges the influence of the theologian Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (1871-1944), the brilliant and holy Russian Orthodox priest who articulated his profound theological vision in Paris between the two world wars. Bulgakov had woven a connecting thread from a first book on Mary (*The Burning Bush*, 1927), to one on John the Baptist (*The Friend of the Bridegroom*, 1927) and another on the angels (*Jacob’s Ladder*, 1929). A second trilogy began with Christ (*The Lamb of God*, 1933), continued with the Holy Spirit (*The Comforter*, 1936), and ended with the Church (*The Bride of the Lamb*, 1945).¹² For Bouyer, it was not a question of merely imitating the architecture of Bulgakov’s works, but of seeing in them ‘a very interesting perspective, which put at the centre of the whole fundamental problem of theology, namely, the relationship between God...and creation’.¹³ More tellingly, Bouyer was impressed with Bulgakov’s theology, constructed as it was ‘around the notion of the divine Wisdom, around the vision which God, from all eternity, has of the world in himself as destined to become distinct from

¹¹ *Sophia*, 7.

¹² It is the architecture of this second, so-called ‘greater’, trilogy that prompted Paul Valliere to observe that what *really* interests Bulgakov is not the divine monarchy of the Father but the dyad of the Son and the Spirit who, in the Incarnation and Pentecost, reveal the Father and thus reveal and actualize the divine Sophia. Valliere writes: ‘Bulgakov’s focus on the Dyad shapes the trilogy, *On the Humanity of God*. *The Lamb of God* presents a dogmatics of the Son; *The Comforter*, a dogmatics of the Spirit; *The Bride of the Lamb*, a dogmatics of the church, the community of Son and Spirit in the world. The dogmatics of the Father...appears only as an addendum to the second volume. *On the Humanity of God* is thus a dogmatics of the Dyad rather than of the Triad, a dogmatics of Trinity-in-the-world.’ Cf. Valliere’s *Modern Russian Theology*. Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: *Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 330-31.

¹³ *Le métier*, 188.

him, and at the same time to enter into such a relationship with him that it will be used (if one may say so) to express his interior life and to communicate it.’¹⁴ Alerted by the critique of Bulgakov by the two Losskys (father, Nicolas, and son, Vladimir) and by his own acute reading, Bouyer will avoid Bulgakov’s *faux pas* even as he follows the broad outlines of the latter’s sophiology.¹⁵

C. THE IMMANENT TRINITY

NOT ONLY IS Bouyer’s debt to Orthodox theology seen in his use of Bulgakov’s sophianic approach, it is evident in the very starting point of his trinitarian discourse: the invisible Father. This may seem to be contradicted by the fact that he begins his ‘theological trilogy’ with *The Eternal Son* rather than with *The Invisible Father*. To explain this apparently inverted sequence Bouyer appeals to the order of revelation: the Son, he says, ‘is the revealer, he who communicates the Truth and the Life which are inseparable, allowing us to discover God as Father, his Father who wanted to become our Father.’¹⁶ This demonstrates how, for Bouyer, the ‘economic Trinity’ shapes the grammar of discourse on the ‘immanent Trinity’. It also confirms that his theology, taken as a whole, is profoundly christocentric, and that Christology is the summit of his theology of the Word of God. Nonetheless, the Son is he who reveals God as *his* Father who wants to become the Father of *all*.¹⁷ Thus, both in the order of divine ontology and

¹⁴ *Le métier*, 189.

¹⁵ Cf. *Sophia*, 121.

¹⁶ *Le métier*, 192.

¹⁷ Elsewhere he would say that the *evangelium Christi*, the gospel preached by Christ (which is inseparable from the *evangelium de Christo*, the gospel concerning Christ himself, since it may justifiably be said that he *is* the gospel) is precisely the Father (*Christian Mystery*, 293). In other words, *ontologically* one might well begin trinitarian theology with the Father who is the source of all. But in the order of *history*, one would not have known the Father if not for the Son: ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ (*Matthew* 11:27).

in the mission of the Son there is one absolute Source. ‘Revelation is quite clear on this point: Christian monotheism is neither solely nor primarily that of a single divine essence. It is that of the divine monarchy, of the Father, the one principle of divinity as of all that has come from it.’¹⁸

The word ‘Father’, which is attributed to the First Person not by way of anthropomorphism but because of a sublime revelation, is pregnant with immense meaning. First of all, to be ‘Father’ is to be the source of everything, the very life of the Trinity included. Secondly, to be ‘Father’ means to have a Son. This is where the language of ‘necessity’ may be used, not to introduce any imperfection but to describe accurately what God is by his very nature: ‘God, as Father, is at the origin of all things, of eternal as well as temporal realities,’ writes Bouyer, ‘That is, he possesses his life, his being, only to give it to another. That other is the Son.’¹⁹ Even more precisely, the eternal Fatherhood consists in engendering eternally an eternal Son who is not just *any* son, but *the* Only-begotten, and further, one who is really an *alter ego*:

The production of all possible and imaginable worlds would not satisfy this infinitude of God’s love. Only by being entirely communicated and projected in his only-begotten Son is the paternity of the only God Who is Father, and only in this way perfected.²⁰

Athanasius long ago had said that the very fact that God is Father – a Father not by accident but by nature – has two necessary implications: first, that the Son is essential to

It is also wrong to suppose that, prior to the Incarnation, the Jews had no inkling of God’s fatherhood. Did they not repeatedly pray in their synagogues: ‘Adonai, Elohenu, *Abinu...*’, that is, ‘Lord, our God, *our Father...*’? (*Invisible Father*, 162-63) And yet, undeniably, Jesus at his coming introduced a startling novelty: he called God *his* Father, and thus claimed a unique and special relationship. At any rate, the point is that, in relation to humanity, the knowledge of God as personal Father came by way of his Son.

¹⁸ *Invisible Father*, 231.

¹⁹ *Monastic Life*, 88.

²⁰ *Cosmos*, 184.

his own life and eternal subsistence as Father; and second, that this Son is one with him in his terminus and his eternal self-realization.²¹

Beginning then with the divine monarchy, Bouyer specifies the Father's relation to the Son and the Spirit. The history of Christian theology shows the different ways by which such a relation may be conceived in analogical terms:

1. Using the language of 'love', as Augustine and Richard of St Victor have done: The Father loves the Son into existence. The Son in return loves the Father, with the same love with which he is loved. Their mutual love is consummated in a substantial union, which is the Holy Spirit.²²
2. Using the language of 'thought': The Father projects his 'living thought' into his Son, and this in turn returns to him in the Spirit as 'the thought of love'.²³
3. Using the language of 'act', as Thomas Aquinas has done: The Father is pre-eminently 'Giving', the 'pure Act' of self-giving. Reciprocally, that ever-actual Giving immediately attains its effect in a 'Given' (the Son), while the Spirit is the 'Gift' made by the Father to the Son and perfectly returned to him.²⁴

These formulations are, to be sure, mere analogies. Bouyer cautions his readers from taking them too literally, and points out (for example) that in reality, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all three simultaneously loving, loved, and love; 'they are the divine love in its three complementary and inseparable aspects of radical giving, giving in response to the first gift, and concordant union of the first gift and the response it arouses.'²⁵

²¹ *Invisible Father*, 231.

²² *Monastic Life*, 88.

²³ *Women Mystics*, 27.

²⁴ *Seat of Wisdom*, 141.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

All the above are but traditional ways of expounding on the Trinity. What is less noticeable is the way Bouyer goes beyond the tradition, particularly in his discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son, the Spirit he will repeatedly call the 'Spirit of sonship', following *Romans* 8:15.²⁶ Who is the Son? asks Bouyer. His answer: he is the eternal Only-Begotten, upon whom the Father has lavished such love as to 'produce' or engender another Self like unto himself, 'without any conceivable change or diminution from the first aspect to the second.'²⁷ The Son is himself only by being given, writes Bouyer, that is, he receives his divine being completely from the Father, and he in turn gives himself back to the Father, in an unending pulsation of mutual giving.²⁸ And it is precisely in this 'mutual giving' that Bouyer locates the Holy Spirit: 'God is Father because his life is concerned solely with one thing: engendering an Eternal Son, loving him and receiving his love *in the procession of the Spirit*.'²⁹ While affirming the classical description of the Spirit as 'substantial Gift', Bouyer gives greater prominence to the Spirit's dynamism and activity

²⁶ Bouyer's pneumatology may be said to have undergone development, from his first books in the 1930s and 1940s in which scant and cursory attention is given to the Holy Spirit in a theological style reminiscent of the 'manuals', to the more richly textured account in his later books. In *Monastic Life* (1950), for example, an entire chapter is devoted to the Third Person ('*In Spiritu*'). This shift in his pneumatology – to be exact, his growing interest in and appreciation for the Spirit, and consequently the incorporation of a vital pneumatology in his theological edifice – is so striking as to merit the question 'Why?' Short of an explanation from Bouyer himself, one could surmise that his development paralleled that of twentieth-century Catholic theology as a whole, in which painful steps began to be taken only in the middle of that century to redress the neglect of 'the unknown God' (as a book on the Holy Spirit was entitled). Even up until the Second Vatican Council, there was a general perception that the Spirit was still largely ignored. Bouyer himself notes that 'if the ecclesiology of the council is strongly Christological, it gives practically no place to the Spirit, despite a few preliminary statements in the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*. It would be hard to reproach the council fathers for this, when we observe that the theologians who ought to have advised them on this lapse seem not to have felt any need for development in this direction.' (*Church of God*, 172-73) Bouyer wrote this in 1970 before, among others, Yves Congar's magisterial *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint* (1979-80) appeared on the Catholic scene. It is also plausible that Bouyer was affected and influenced by the ecclesial phenomenon of the 'Catholic charismatic renewal' which occurred at precisely that time (late 1960s and following); both Congar's *Je crois* and his own *Le Consolateur* (1980) give some prominence to this renewal movement in the Church.

²⁷ *Seat of Wisdom*, 141.

²⁸ *Monastic Life*, 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 104 (emphasis added).

in a manner that answers Weinandy's perceptive complaint that, according to traditional formulations, while both the Father and the Son derive their subjective depth and personhood from their activity, the Spirit is often presented in purely passive terms and 'thus appears less clearly as an acting subject [and] has no defining activity as a person.'³⁰ It is towards redressing this apparent lacuna in the tradition that Weinandy set about writing his book. His thesis, his 'one simple objective', is to argue that, within the Trinity, the Father begets the Son *in or by the Holy Spirit*, who proceeds from the Father as the one *in whom the Son is begotten*, in short, that the Holy Spirit is truly that 'Spirit of sonship' attested to by St Paul. Weinandy writes:

The Father begets the Son in the spiration of the Spirit and so it is the Spirit that makes the Father to be the Father of the Son and makes the Son to be the Son of the Father. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and does so by conforming each to be in relation to the other, and so becomes distinct in himself in his mutual relation to them as the love by which they come to be who they are for one another.³¹

Even more boldly, he asserts that it is by this Spirit of sonship that the Father substantiates or 'persons' both himself as Father and the Son as Son; by the same Spirit, the Son is 'personed' in the Spirit of sonship, as Son of the Father.³²

Bouyer's own account of the role and activity of the Spirit strikingly resembles Weinandy's thesis, while at the same time going somewhat farther. 'The fatherhood of the Father is not perfected,' writes Bouyer, 'nor the sonship of the Son consecrated there, except by this proceeding of the Spirit from the Father, coming to rest forever in the Son.'³³ The Father transmits his very nature 'consubstantially to the Son and to the Spirit. And the Spirit *is* this transmission.'³⁴ Or again: the Spirit proceeds from the

³⁰ Weinandy, *Father's Spirit of Sonship*, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

³² *Ibid.*, 73.

³³ *Woman in the Church*, 38.

³⁴ *Cosmos*, 191.

Father at the same time (*en même temps*) as the Father begets the Son, and rests eternally on the Son as the Gift par excellence of self-giving.³⁵ The density of these passages, especially the last citation, needs to be unpacked:

Strictly speaking there is no 'time' in God; when Bouyer writes '*en même temps*' he means 'simultaneously', which again is a feeble way of speaking of eternity. For it is in eternity that the Son and the Spirit are produced, with no diminution to their perfection nor to their divinity. For Bouyer, the Spirit proceeds *from* the Father, *in* or *by* the Son (*du Père par le Fils*), an expression favoured by the East.³⁶ Bouyer uses this formula by preference, on theological grounds. He is aware that the Latin scholastics, replying to Greek objections to the Filioque, said that the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son '*tamquam ab uno principio*' (as from a single principle).³⁷ But this expression, proposed to alleviate fears of a double principle, itself confirmed the Greek suspicion that the Latins were espousing modalities within the unique essence.³⁸ In other words, the Latin explanation gave rise to fresh difficulties. Hence, for Bouyer, it is perhaps better to say that the Father is the sole principle in the Trinity, and that the Spirit who proceeds from the Father *remains in* the Son, and *together with* the Son is himself recapitulated in the Father.³⁹ This is what Bouyer means when he describes the Spirit as 'resting eternally on the Son', that is, the Spirit 'remains in' or 'indwells' the Son.⁴⁰ This

³⁵ *Invisible Father*, 231.

³⁶ Cf. *Le Consolateur*, 303-7, for a brief review of the problem of the *Filioque*, the disastrous theological formulations proposed by the Latins which contributed to the impasse, and its present insolubility.

³⁷ Bouyer simultaneously makes use of, and modifies the understanding of, this expression, when he writes, for example, that the life of the Trinity 'has no other principle than the Father, although the Son is fully associated with him, the Son on whom the Spirit rests eternally, to such an extent that the Father and the Son are, as it were, one single principle of the unique Spirit' (*Monastic Life*, 106).

³⁸ *Le Consolateur*, 305-6.

³⁹ *Seat of Wisdom*, 141.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

Spirit is precisely the ‘Spirit of sonship’, the ‘substantial Gift through which the Son perfects his resemblance to the Father’.⁴¹ This Spirit of filiation, while remaining forever in the Son, also ceaselessly returns with the Son to the Father, such that the relationship is never static, never still. It is this ever-vital, ever-actual reality which led the Greek theologians to describe the life of the Trinity as ‘perichoretic’, possibly meaning ‘to dance [χορός] around one another’.⁴² Equally picturesquely, Bouyer describes it as ‘the eternal pulse-beats of divine life.’⁴³ Indeed, the entire life of the cosmos can be likened to ‘the beating of an immense heart through which the same *Agape* courses, first poured out in paternal love, then gathered up in filial love.’⁴⁴

It is at this point that Bouyer makes a crucial move. The Spirit of sonship who eternally determines the relations between the Father and the Son, the very Spirit of the Father and of the Son ‘by whom the Father and the Son are one in their very distinction’,⁴⁵ is the selfsame Spirit by which humanity, in and with the Son, is ‘recapitulated’ in the eternal and invisible Father.⁴⁶ The idea of ‘recapitulation’ (ἀνακεφαλαιώσις), taken from *Ephesians* 1:10 and beloved of Irenaeus, is extensively used by Bouyer to describe the movement of all eternal and temporal realities back to the Father, in order that he might be ‘all in all’. Just as the Spirit eternally rests on (remains,

⁴¹ *Cosmos*, 188-89.

⁴² Kallistos Ware says that this explanation makes ‘good theology’, but is of dubious etymology!

⁴³ *Invisible Father*, 228.

⁴⁴ *Monastic Life*, 105.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁶ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 116. It may appear that Bouyer is here drawing a logical correspondence *from* the immanent *to* the economic; from what one sees taking place within God, to making similar inferences about how it must work with respect to humanity. But one must always bear in mind Bouyer’s methodological starting point in all trinitarian discourse, a starting point evident in his preponderant use of the hermeneutically critical ‘Word of God’, in the fact that his ‘economic trilogy’ precedes his ‘properly theological’ one, and in the fact that he begins the latter trilogy with *The Eternal Son*: discourse on the immanent Trinity is controlled by divine revelation on the Trinity’s economic activity.

abides in) the Son *and* eternally recapitulates the Son in the Father, so also the Spirit simultaneously abides in believers and recapitulates them in the divine monarchy. 'He abides in us as he abides in the Son,' writes Bouyer, 'In the Spirit we return to the Father as the Son himself returns in the same Spirit.'⁴⁷ In other words, and using more familiar Pauline terminology, Bouyer says simply that the *adoption* of human children by the Father in the Son is brought about by the presence in them of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

The point of enunciating this pneumatological accent of Bouyer is to prepare the way for another novel assertion by the theologian. Briefly put, he maintains that 'it is in the Son by the Spirit that are accomplished all the works of God *ad extra*'.⁴⁹ Positive theology has long contended that the creation is the work of the Creator-Father in and by his Son, as attested to, for example, by *John* 1:3, 'All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.' There are, of course, numerous other scriptural citations which indicate the joint work of the Word of God and the Breath of God in the act of creation: 'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth' (*Psalms* 33:6). What is striking, though, is Bouyer's formulaic '*in the Son by the Spirit*'. The significance of this will become clear when the Wisdom-motif in Bouyer's ecclesiology, in which the Spirit is to play a more pronounced role, is examined.

Because Bouyer himself suggests that the Creator-creature relationship may be at the centre of the whole fundamental problem of theology, this relationship merits closer attention. It is only after a consideration of the problem of what Gregory of Nyssa calls the *diastema*, the dividing line which radically separates creaturely life from the Uncreated Life, eternity from time, that biblical 'Wisdom' can be appreciated for what

⁴⁷ *Seat of Wisdom*, 184.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

Bouyer intends it to be: an image of how God and created reality can be both related yet distinct. 'Wisdom' is used by him to account for the divine transcendence and immanence, and to describe how the world of the Trinity correlates with the world of creation, the cosmos of order and beauty.⁵⁰

D. GOD AND CREATION

WITH REGARDS TO the Creator-creature relationship, there are at least two major areas of discussion. One concerns the relationship between God's transcendence and his immanence. Absolute positions are untenable, and it is doubtful if any theologian has ever held them: To deny the latter is ultimately to reject any possibility of salvation, while to deny the former is to 'make God into man's own image and likeness'; it is the 'death of God'. A second area of theological discussion revolves around the relationship between eternity and time. Because humanity exists in time and is inescapably bound to a historical unfolding, it can scarcely be imagined what eternity is *like*, much less what it *is*. 'He has made everything beautiful in its time,' declares the Preacher, 'also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end' (*Ecclesiastes* 3:11). Both these areas will necessarily entail theological speculation, which Bouyer will do so while remaining within the bounds of a positive theology.

1. Transcendence and Immanence

THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGE here is how to maintain the critical balance between two crucial affirmations: on the one hand, that God is fully transcendent, the God 'who laughs at the concepts in which we try to swaddle him', and on the other hand, that he is also immanent in the world, 'interested in the world and his creatures for their own

⁴⁹ *Seat of Wisdom*, 180.

sakes'.⁵¹ The balance must be maintained, often precariously. Tip one side too much and the whole thing founders; the history of theology is laden with the debris of such collapses. Some have espoused what might be called an 'extreme transcendentalism': either a neo-Nestorianism which radically separates the divine and the human, or a neo-monophysitism in which the divine swallows up the human; it is asymmetry pushed to its logical limit, making God 'a sublime stranger'.⁵²

But Bouyer finds equally unacceptable a 'transcendentalism without transcendence',⁵³ the divine conceived in such radically conjoined terms with finite beings as to become an extreme form of immanentism. He describes, for example, as '*confusionisme immanentiste*' the view which confuses and makes utterly symmetrical the human and the divine, a 'binomial God-cosmos in whom the cosmos is an aspect or necessary phase of the divine process'.⁵⁴ Another philosophical form of immanentist thought is what could be called 'evolutionary historicism', in which 'progress' or natural human development renders superfluous the divine.⁵⁵ Once historicity is falsely identified with a so-called 'immanent evolution of humanity', writes Bouyer, then God's transcendent intervention into human history will simply be explained away in terms of

⁵⁰ *Cosmos*, xi.

⁵¹ *Invisible Father*, 253.

⁵² *Eternal Son*, 399.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 302, 310.

⁵⁵ Richard John Neuhaus would be sympathetic to Bouyer's analysis. Neuhaus suggests that Teilhard de Chardin

'... was and is representative of a denial of transcendence that is at least equally influential in our own time. The reduction of the transcendent to the immanent, of the eternal to the temporal, and of the spiritual to the material is an error endemic to the modern theological project up to the present. That is the claim vigorously advanced in a recent book, *Ascension and Ecclesia*, by the Protestant theologian Douglas Farrow. [Jacques] Maritain would have little patience with Farrow's relentless, almost ruthless, Barthianism, but I have no doubt that he would share my delight in Farrow's concluding and devastating observation that all such modern theologies end up in our "arriving at Damascus without incident."'"

Cf. his article, 'Jacques Maritain and Vatican Council II', in *First Things* (January 2003): 76-82, in 78.

mere human immanence. 'This problem is central to Hegelian thought, especially, when it capitulates to the naïve forms of rationalism which, not content to reabsorb historicity into immanence, destroy it in simple permanence.'⁵⁶

God is 'the only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light' (*1 Timothy* 6:15-16). This and a host of scriptural affirmations make it impossible to deny God's transcendence, and it is understandable why theologians will want to defend it at all cost. However, says Bouyer, this can be pushed to such an extreme position that, instead of re-establishing God in his matchless grandeur, 'these theologies only evacuate him into the unknowable, unnameable, unbelievable, and in a word, unreal.'⁵⁷ The astonishing shift from an extreme transcendentalism to an equally extreme immanentism in the late nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, especially among some forms of Protestantism, is, for him, hardly surprising:

...the unilateral transcendentalism of Barthism, like all reactions, has caused the opposite reaction, which had long been predictable: an equally exacerbated immanentism. Belief in God, in his sovereign grandeur, so that the human being and every other created entity is denigrated, which resulted in a notion of salvation whose gratuity people felt could be maintained only by emptying it of any probatory content, caused a contrary belief: the 'death of God' and 'secular Christianity' theologies. Barth, unconsciously, had prepared men for this, simply by opposing the divine word to all 'religion,' to all humanly expressible sacrality.⁵⁸

In other words, a unilaterally transcendentalist position provokes a counterclaim, a unilateral immanentism which collapses God down to the creaturely level and confuses him with created reality.⁵⁹ Rather, theology must maintain that, in a certain sense, God's

⁵⁶ *Eternal Son*, 137.

⁵⁷ *Religieux*, 99.

⁵⁸ *Church of God*, 148. Cf. *Religieux*, especially the chapter entitled 'La Critique de la Religion' (71 ff.), in which he traces Barth's theological presuppositions back to Ritschl. Bouyer concedes that Barth himself, in his later writings, warned against pushing his statements to their dangerous limits (*il paraît s'être avisé du danger, de la ruineuse facilité de la formule*), yet by then the damage has been done (*ibid.*, 76).

⁵⁹ *Invisible Father*, 253.

transcendence is 'on a par' with his immanence in the world, a state of affairs described by Thomas Aquinas in *De veritate* as the presence of this world 'in God'.⁶⁰ 'The world is not God,' Bouyer declares emphatically, 'but the world is permeated *with* God ... because it is immersed *in* him. God besets the world on all sides, so to speak, to be finally all in all'.⁶¹ In this statement, the prepositions 'with' and 'in' are significant; one without the other would suggest either an unbridgeable separation or a complete and indistinguishable absorption. Note, too, the use of descriptive language to describe this relationship between God's transcendence and immanence: creation is hemmed in yet penetrated by and inundated with the divine. In the end, theology has recourse only to analogical or paradoxical language in order to express the ineffable, what is ultimately a mystery.⁶²

2. Eternity and Time

A SIMILAR CHALLENGE confronts the theologian who endeavours to unravel the mysterious relationship between eternity and time. The way Bouyer sets out the issues may be summed up in the following simple affirmations:

1. The words 'past', 'present', and 'future' have meaning only in relation to created, temporal existence. God simply *is*.⁶³
2. God, whose essence and existence are one, *is* and *exists* in eternity; 'it is in eternity that God creates us, sends us the Son and the Spirit, decides our adoption in the Son,

⁶⁰ *Cosmos*, 185-86, citing Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 4, a. 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 231 (emphasis added).

⁶² So, for example, Aquinas, describing the Holy Spirit's transcendent-yet-immanent presence in the Church, likens it to perfume in a porous vessel, which it penetrates entirely, little by little, with its own aroma and substance (*Church of God*, 534).

⁶³ One might be tempted to interpret the divine name YHWH as meaning 'I am the being who is always and forever'. Bouyer attributes such a static, purely essentialist interpretation, which Augustine gave in his *Soliloquies*, to the time when the latter was 'still wrapped up as he was in the cocoon of his Neo-platonism'. Bouyer prefers Thomas' more dynamic and existentialist interpretation: 'I am what I am; I am the only one capable of defining the infinite, ever-actual fullness of my existence.' Cf. *Invisible Father*, 252.

as well as his redeeming incarnation and the universal fulfillment in the gift of the Spirit, [and] it is also in eternity that he knows and loves us and, thus knowing and loving us ... changes us into everything we are called upon to become in time.’⁶⁴ In God’s eternity there is no distinction between *ad intra* and *ad extra*, his unchanging essence and his purposeful designs for the cosmos. The distinction comes into play, and is real, only when viewed from the side of creation, when one tries to understand the mystery ‘notionally’, by means of somewhat artificial mental constructs.

3. It is in eternity that the decision was made for the saving incarnation and the cross. It is striking that here Bouyer, perhaps following Barth, applies the language of predestination to *Christ* to describe the divine foreordination to *grace*: the Son, he writes, ‘was predestined for the incarnation even before creation so that creation might be truly free but also savable and finally saved’, just as he was ‘predestined for the cross.’⁶⁵
4. However, paradoxically, it is only in time that God can create, since time is ‘the measure of created life.’⁶⁶ Nevertheless this statement does not imply any temporality in God, and Bouyer, using a somewhat enigmatic turn of phrase, says that God ‘creates us in time, but out of and from within his eternity’. God cannot separate himself from eternity without ceasing to be God. ‘So God creates eternally even though His creation of necessity exists in time. He is eternally Creator.’⁶⁷
5. And what is time? Gregory of Nyssa maintains that biblical revelation understands the world and its history as the ‘creation of freedoms’, that is to say, of creatures who possess the power of freedom, including the possibility of a fall and an eventual

⁶⁴ *Cosmos*, 189.

⁶⁵ *Eternal Son*, 411.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 400.

salvation.⁶⁸ Historical time, then, is ‘the field of our freedom’,⁶⁹ ‘the mysterious transit in which the created freedoms signify their consent to the uncreated liberty, in a process of Love calling Love.’⁷⁰ In other words, what the creature experiences as time is the sphere of its existence as a free, created being, the boundary which precisely separates its creaturely life from uncreated Life. Only God is eternal, while his corporeal creation must necessarily exist in historical time.

Admittedly, this does not completely clarify the state of affairs, and the ambiguity highlights a theological problematic that has yet to be satisfactorily explained (if indeed that were possible) of the mysterious relationship of God and the world. Moreover, Bouyer’s theological method, as mentioned in previous chapters, does not lend itself to clear-cut solutions. His account is more descriptive and illustrative, rather than systematic and analytical. Given the vastness of the theological landscape he wishes to cover, but also given his unwillingness to write a formal systematic theology, he can only skim lightly over the surface of these issues of eternity and transcendence, topics which well require deeper and more sustained analysis. While Bouyer cannot completely avoid philosophical categories of elucidation, he has a pronounced horror of theology turning simply into metaphysics. For him, speculative theology, although capable of giving precision and rigour to theology approached as a ‘science of God’, has a real danger of both fatally separating theology from spirituality, and evacuating from theological discourse any sense of the mystery of God. Thus his account of God’s relations with the world uses more adjectival and metaphorical language. Put differently, Bouyer has recourse to what he sees the Bible itself doing, making use of mythopoetic

⁶⁷ *Eternal Son*, 401.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁶⁹ *Cosmos*, 224.

imagery, 'myth' understood as that human effort, sensing the sacred and the sublime, to express a truth 'too rich and too great to be exhausted or delimited by speech.'⁷¹

One of the mythopoetic images which scripture itself appears to use to describe both the otherness and the closeness of the divine (already mentioned in Chapter One) is that of the Shekinah and the Merkabah. Bouyer writes:

By his Shekinah, Yahweh comes down to Israel, He dwells in the tent with them in their earthly pilgrimage, He manifests Himself to them as far as is possible for man still held by earth. On the Merkabah of the Cherubim, Yahweh, however, remains free of all earthly bonds: He soars above the highest heavens. But the final hope is that He may call to join Him, carried up to heaven by fiery horsemen, the man whom He has condescended to allow, here below, to see something of Himself in the luminous cloud of His Shekinah.⁷²

In other words, the image of the Shekinah captures the sense of God's 'transcendent immanence', while that of the Merkabah highlights his 'immanent transcendence'. Again, what paradox! But only such a 'paradoxical myth,' writes Bouyer, 'could translate, however feebly, that profoundly mysterious identity of the God who revealed himself in such a way to Israel alone, yet revealed himself as supremely hidden: *Deus revelatus tamquam absconditus*.'⁷³

But there is another, no less mysterious, biblical image which the Word of God has caused to be taken up in Israel's prophetic tradition, and to be recorded as inspired scripture. It is an image, a 'myth', which could possibly bridge that chasm over which theology is seemingly helpless to cross: the seemingly insoluble problem of God vis-à-vis his creation. This is biblical Wisdom, and its appropriation by Bouyer will constitute his sophiological approach to understanding the Church.

⁷⁰ *Cosmos*, 231.

⁷¹ *Monastic Life*, 13.

⁷² *Sacred Scripture*, 153.

⁷³ *Le Père invisible*, 177 (author's translation).

E. THE THEOLOGY OF WISDOM

FOR HIS SOPHIOLOGY, and more particularly his Wisdom-ecclesiology, Louis Bouyer is without doubt proximately indebted to Sergei Bulgakov who, from 1925 to 1944 was dean of the Russian Orthodox theological institute of Saint-Serge in Paris and its most famous dogmatic theologian.⁷⁴ Bouyer considered himself a close friend of this colossal figure, his senior by forty-two years, and if not exactly a disciple was nonetheless his consistent admirer.⁷⁵ Many of Bouyer's works, especially those touching on sophiology, cite Bulgakov. But Bouyer is too good a *ressourcement* theologian to simply rely on the fascinating and provocative work of such a profound thinker as Bulgakov. While both would have arrived at their sophiological reflections via earlier philosophers and theologians such as the seventeenth-century Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme, the German idealists Hegel and Schelling, and the Russian sophiologues Vladimir Soloviev and Pavel Florensky, Bouyer shows a more adept hand in establishing his Wisdom-ecclesiology on the basis of a more exhaustive study of the Fathers and the towering medieval figure of Thomas Aquinas. Above all, his penetrating exegesis of a number of pertinent Old Testament passages grounds his understanding of Sophia.

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
 the first of his acts of old [...]
 then I was beside him, like a master workman;
 and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always
 rejoicing in his inhabited world,
 and delighting in the sons of men. (*Proverbs* 8:22-31)

⁷⁴ Bulgakov, whose reputation (not to say notoriety) was in no small part built up by the so-called 'Sophia Affair' which rocked the Orthodox theological scene in the 1930s, was recognized in the ecumenical movement as the most outstanding Orthodox theologian of his time. For helpful background information on Bulgakov's life and theology, see: *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, texts trans., ed. and intro. Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999); Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology* (previously cited); Aidan Nichols, 'Bulgakov and Sophiology', *Sobornost* 13/2 (1992): 17-31. For Bulgakov's involvement in the ecumenical movement, cf. Anastassy Galaher, 'Bulgakov's ecumenical thought', *Sobornost* 24/1 (2002): 24-55.

⁷⁵ 'Ce fut mon grand privilege ... d'être ... sinon le disciple au moins l'admirateur constant du Père Serge'; cf. L. Bouyer, 'La personnalité et l'œuvre de Serge Boulgakoff (1871-1944)', first published in the Swiss review *Nova et Vetera* no. 2 (1977), and excerpted in *Le métier*, 231-33, in 233. Bouyer, in this excerpt, describes three personal encounters (among presumably many others) he had with Bulgakov, which left an indelible mark in his memory.

In this passage, notes Bouyer, Wisdom describes itself, not simply and abstractly as an eternal idea of things in the mind of God, but in surprisingly personalist terms, as ‘like another self, God’s companion from the beginning, his partner in the work of creation.’⁷⁶ The book of *Ecclesiasticus* (or *Sirach*) takes a step further:

I came forth from the mouth of the Most High,
 and covered the earth like a mist.
 I dwelt in high places,
 and my throne was in a pillar of cloud [...]
 Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment,
 and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent.
 And he said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob,
 and in Israel receive your inheritance.’
 From eternity, in the beginning, he created me,
 and for eternity I shall not cease to exist.
 In the holy tabernacle I ministered before him,
 and so I was established in Zion. (*Sirach* 24:3-10)

It is here that Wisdom is first described in terms which identify it both with the divine speech (‘I came forth from the mouth of the Most High’) and the divine presence in Israel (‘Make your dwelling in Jacob’). It is thus not surprising that, since the earliest times, this text has been identified with the ‘Word of God’, and by a Christian interpolation, with Christ himself. The correspondence is even more striking when one reads the book of *Wisdom*: ‘For she [Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness’ (*Wisdom* 7:25-26; cp. *Hebrews* 1:3). At the same time, there are equally telling dissimilarities. As in *Proverbs* 8, Wisdom in *Sirach* 24 is said to be ‘created’. It is also significant that Wisdom appears as a *feminine* personality, an attribute which surely gives one pause about completely equating it with the Word. Meanwhile, other verses in the book of *Wisdom* suggest a closer identification between Sophia and the Holy Spirit:

⁷⁶ *Seat of Wisdom*, 25.

For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy,
 unique, manifold, subtle,
 mobile, clear, unpolluted,
 distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,
 irresistible, beneficent, humane,
 steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,
 all-powerful, overseeing all,
 and penetrating through all spirits
 that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. (*Wisdom 7:22-23*)

This was so much the case that both Theophilus and Irenaeus took this passage as referring to the Third Person of the Trinity.⁷⁷

Hence it cannot be denied that the scriptural references to Wisdom are ambiguous and difficult to reconcile with traditional christological and trinitarian formulations. For example, because scripture strongly suggests the *created* aspect of Wisdom (and thus it is understandable that the Arians would capitalize on this in their polemic), Athanasius had to admit that there is, in view of both the redemptive Incarnation and the Church in time, ‘a created Wisdom which came into being through the incarnation of the uncreated Wisdom, but is distinct from the latter.’⁷⁸ As Bouyer explains it, Athanasius’ response to the Arians was that

the divine Wisdom, which in God was uncreated, which is identical with His eternal Son, became created through the creation and redemption of which He is the principle. [...] This constitutes the best clarification of the key concept of *synkatabasis* in the thought of Athanasius, i.e., God’s condescension, or better, accommodation, to His creatures.⁷⁹

But even Athanasius, and Augustine after him, could only speak haltingly and incompletely of what remains shrouded in mystery.⁸⁰ As Bouyer puts it,

⁷⁷ *Seat of Wisdom*, 192.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 192n, citing *II Contra Arianos*, 77-78, 81-82.

⁷⁹ *Eternal Son*, 321.

⁸⁰ Bouyer writes in *Invisible Father*, 235-36:

‘And yet, at the point of departure, we find a remarkable conjunction between the Eastern and Western views. The sophiology, that is, in the biblical line and furthering it, the doctrine of divine Wisdom which St. Athanasius in the East and St. Augustine in the West developed in apparent independence of one another is essentially the same. Both strove to assimilate into orthodox thought whatever was legitimate in Arianism and, behind that, in second-century Gnosticism, and so doing admitted that the same divine Wisdom by which God eternally thinks

... Christian tradition, ancient and medieval, on this theme of the Wisdom of creation, finally and paradoxically divine although created, has not yet come to an acceptable synthesis. The profusion of modern lucubrations appears to be lost in uncertain bogs, as it was with Christology at the turn (*l'orée*, literally edge, border) of the fourth century. Nevertheless, [this profusion] carries numerous valuable observations or intuitions. And, one must add, these impasses themselves constitute warnings which it is good to not neglect.⁸¹

Acutely aware of the attempts of tradition at an adequate explanation, unwilling both to dismiss and to tamper with the relevant scriptural texts, fully cognizant that 'divine Wisdom' is enshrined and celebrated in the Church's liturgy, and taking his cue from the bold theological speculations of Bulgakov, Bouyer thus formulates the following synthesis: God's 'Wisdom' is nothing but the 'uncreated whole' in God, his very nature, what makes God 'God'. Here he is but echoing Bulgakov who, abandoning an earlier conception of Sophia as a 'fourth hypostasis',⁸² declared in his apologia that, 'using an abridged and simplified terminology, we can say: the Divinity in God constitutes the Divine Sophia (or Glory), while at the same time we assume that it is also the ousia: Ousia = Sophia = Glory.'⁸³ 'Wisdom is in God,' writes Bouyer, 'is of God, and nothing can be that without being God himself.' But he hastens to add: 'Yet Wisdom is [also] that in God whereby he is concerned in his creation, comprehends it in the fullest sense of the word, loves it with the very love by which he lives in loving himself.'⁸⁴ To ascribe *agape* as the divine motive par excellence for creation is common to Bouyer and Bulgakov. What will be markedly and even fatally different for an

himself includes his thought of everything he will ever create. This Wisdom of creation, in its end and in its origin, must be identified with the uncreated Wisdom.'

For Athanasius, cf. especially *II Contra Arianos*; also Bouyer's *L'Incarnation*, 132 ff. For Augustine, cf. *Confessions*, bk. 12, ch. 15.

⁸¹ *Sophia*, 115.

⁸² Bulgakov seems to have borrowed this conception from Florensky, and which he incorporated into his *The Unfading Light* (1917).

⁸³ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology* (New York: Paisley; London: Williams & Norgate, 1937), 56.

⁸⁴ *Seat of Wisdom*, 194.

otherwise perceptive thinker like Sergei Bulgakov is his subversive use of the language of ‘necessity’.

In *The Lamb of God*, Bulgakov had developed the idea of a certain ‘necessity’ for God to create the world. ‘God *does* “need” the world,’ he writes categorically, ‘and the world could not have remained uncreated – although God needs it not for himself but for *its* sake.’ He validates this claim by the fact that ‘God is love, and the property of love is loving and extending oneself by loving. [...] It is proper and natural for the ocean of divine love to spread out beyond its shores; it is proper and natural for the fulness of the life of divinity to transcend its frontiers.’⁸⁵ Creation is not the result of a ‘determinate necessity’ externally imposed upon God; God does not need the world to ‘become more God’. Yet, in a paradoxical ‘identity and fusion of freedom and necessity’, Bulgakov insists, there can be said to be a divinely driven ‘necessity of love’ to create, ‘not for himself but for the world’s sake’, ‘moved by love’, ‘determined by an internal structure’, a ‘law’ of love.⁸⁶

No less controversial is his claim that, in a certain sense and once again ‘for the sake of the world’, God may be said to be in the process of becoming: ‘Coming out from itself in the creation of the world, the love of God, in its kenosis, establishes time as a reality for God himself, so that God lives also in time and, in this sense, shares in the world’s life, its process of becoming.... The idea that God is in process of becoming, not for himself but for the world, along with the world’s process of becoming, is an indispensable consequence of whole-heartedly accepting the Christian revelation.’⁸⁷

⁸⁵ S. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God: On the Divine Humanity* (Paris, 1933), excerpted texts trans. Rowan Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov* (previously cited), 184.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

Bulgakov's assertions about God in relation to the world, disquieting though they may be to some of his commentators, are nevertheless driven by a strong anthropological interest. While seeking to preserve the divine self-sufficiency ('In his own life, God is absolute and divine, and does not experience in himself any need for the world.'⁸⁸), at the same time he wishes to rule out the view that creation is by that fact arbitrary, 'contingent' in the wrong sense of the word. Such a view is for him 'impious', that is, unworthy of God.⁸⁹ In other words, Bulgakov takes up the cudgels for what has been called an 'anthropological paradigm shift',⁹⁰ described by Barth as an approach *von unten nach oben* rather than *von oben nach unten*. As Paul Valliere puts it: 'Here theology takes as its starting point not the mystery of God but the enigma of the human being, not revelatory tradition alone but the complicated dialogue between tradition and human experience.'⁹¹ Strictly speaking Bulgakov does not begin his sophiology 'from below'; Sophia, by its very nature, is 'from above'. But insofar as he takes humanity very seriously, Bulgakov's anthropology is sustained and underscored; for him, a special characteristic of sophiology is its consideration of anthropology in its connection with cosmology.⁹²

Bulgakov's anthropological interests are even more fundamentally revealed in his attention to the notion of *bogochelovechestvo*, variously translated as 'Godmanhood',

⁸⁸ Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 183.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 183-84.

⁹⁰ Cf. Michael Aksionov Meerson, *The Trinity of Love in Modern Russian Theology* (Quincy, Illinois: Franciscan Press, 1998), 159-86. For Meerson, the anthropological paradigm shift in Russian trinitarian thought is framed by the figures of Soloviev and Bulgakov: 'What Solovyov [sic] introduced as a philosopher, Bulgakov completed as a systematic theologian.'

⁹¹ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 3-4. According to Valliere (p. 3n) the German phraseology is Barth's, as rendered by Wilhelm Pauck in his *Harnack and Troeltsch: Two Historical Theologians* (1968).

⁹² Bulgakov, *Wisdom of God*, 19.

‘divine humanity’, or ‘the humanity of God’.⁹³ *Bogochelovechestvo*, or the doctrine of the union of and relation between God and humanity, seems at first sight to be primarily, even only, concerned with the divinization (*theōsis*) of humanity, as Orthodox theology is wont to accentuate it. Valliere however argues, *pace* Frederick Copleston, that Bulgakov’s theology is not simply concerned with the divinization of humanity, but conversely, with the humanization of the divine. His theology of creation is more complex, involving what may be called a ‘two-way energeticism’, the cosmos viewed as ‘being governed not just by the condescension of the divine in creation and salvation but by the heavenward aspiration of all creatures’, especially human beings.⁹⁴

In other words, on a superficial level Bulgakov appears to be simply re-expressing traditional doctrine in sophiological language; instead of saying (as traditional Catholic and Orthodox theology would) that the human being, by his very constitution, is made capable of becoming like God (*theōsis*), he declares that ‘human nature already has the capacity for receiving an hypostasis, after the likeness of its prototype the divine Sophia’,⁹⁵ which accounts for man’s ‘sophianicity’:

It is precisely by virtue of this sophianicity of man, his conformity with God, that it is possible for him to be deified and to receive the Spirit. Sophianity is the ontological *a priori*, or precondition, of this deification and reception. Man is capable of and summoned to deification; and he himself summons it.⁹⁶

But deeper analysis of Bulgakov’s theological agenda shows a more fundamental and decisive realignment of doctrine on a new sophiocentric axis, one which gives more weight to the human side of the God-world equation. By doing so, Bulgakov thinks to

⁹³ For him, as a matter of fact, Sophia and *bogochelovechestvo* are closely related: ‘The dogma of God-manhood is precisely the main theme of sophiology, which in fact represents nothing but its full dogmatic elucidation.’ Cf. Bulgakov, *Wisdom of God*, 34.

⁹⁴ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 270, 307.

⁹⁵ Bulgakov, *Wisdom of God*, 119.

⁹⁶ S. Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 300.

ground the equation more metaphysically (ontologically) and dynamically, envisioning it as a two-way exchange. ‘Man as having God’s image is godlike, and God as having his image in man is manlike. There exists a positive relation between God and man, which may be defined as Godmanhood.’⁹⁷ Or, as he puts it in his apologia, *The Wisdom of God*: ‘This “image” is the *ens realissimum* in man, it establishes a true identity between the image and its Prototype, which involves not only the “divinity” of man on account of the image of God in him, but also a certain “humanity” of God.’⁹⁸

This excursus into Bulgakov’s theological agenda is important in order to appreciate how Bouyer both affirms and criticizes him. Like Bulgakov, Bouyer sets great store by the conjoined economic work of the Dyad; as he puts it, ‘it is in the Son by the Spirit that are accomplished all the works of God *ad extra*’.⁹⁹ Both of their accounts of the Creator-creature relation are asymmetrical and theocentric. Nonetheless, both are able to affirm not simply the concurrent union and distinction between God and creation, but even more so their primordial and teleological unity. Although the idea of union with the Creator is prevalent throughout the received tradition of the East and the West, by means of Sophia both Bouyer and Bulgakov have found a way of re-expressing that tradition in a new key. However, Bouyer does not magnify the ‘human side’ of the divine-human equation to the extent that Bulgakov does, and he will also consciously distance himself from some of the problematic positions taken by Bulgakov. This is especially true with regards to the latter’s claims, either that creation is in some sense ‘necessary’, or that God is in some sense in the process of ‘becoming’.¹⁰⁰ Such

⁹⁷ S. Bulgakov, ‘The Soul of Socialism’, in *Novyi grad* (1932-33), excerpted texts trans. Rowan Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov*, 279.

⁹⁸ Bulgakov, *Wisdom of God*, 117.

⁹⁹ *Seat of Wisdom*, 180.

¹⁰⁰ Besides these, Bouyer will also steer away from the pantheism for which Bulgakov and the whole sophiological project are frequently criticized. Bernhard Schultze, for example, writes: ‘[In

propositions, even if Bulgakov were to qualify his terms a thousand times, simply do not work because they enmesh him in antecedent theological (mis)understandings; these terms, despite their redefinition, will *always* sound as if Bulgakov was calling into question the absoluteness, perfection, and self-sufficiency of God. Bouyer, for all his admiration for the Dean of Saint-Serge, laments this ‘congenital weakness’ in Bulgakov’s sophiology,¹⁰¹ already perceptible in Soloviev, which is to not consider the

conclusion] Sophiology is a kind of intuition: universal, artistic, philosophical, theological, and in a certain sense, mystical. What is inconvenient about its intuitive method is the absence of precise distinction between subject and object, God and creature. [...] The concept of Sophia being too undetermined (*indéterminé*), seeing that the divine essence, the creaturely world of ideas, and the creatures themselves are confused, without sufficient distinction from pantheism, one inquires whether such a being, undetermined and not clearly personal, can be the object of an ecclesial cult.’ Cf. ‘Sagesse’, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité (ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire)* Tome XIV (Paris: Beauchesne, 1990), 125.

It is also worthwhile questioning the appropriateness of Bulgakov’s applying the notion of kenosis both to the intra-trinitarian relations and to the act of creation. ‘Kenosis’ for Bulgakov is an unmitigated ‘self-diminution’, even shockingly, ‘self-devastation’. In the Father’s eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit, and in their reciprocal relations, divine self-giving is expressed in terms of ‘self-emptying’; it is love ‘manifested in all its weightiness, its responsibility, its sacrificial and thus also tragic character: a love that sacrifices all it has in realising itself’ (*Lamb of God*, 196). Most commentators of Bulgakov (e.g., Valliere, Williams, Nichols) do not take him to task for this. Bouyer offers some background analysis and a restrained critique: He traces the kenotic ideas of divine ‘withdrawal’ or ‘contraction’ to earlier thinkers like Eckhart, Louriha and Boehme, taken up by the Russians Tareiv and Bukharev and which Bulgakov followed in his turn (*Invisible Father*, 306). It is very difficult, says Bouyer, not to see in a kenotic account of Christianity ‘an obsession not only with humiliation but with the sort of annihilation that Besançon identified as rooted in Russian consciousness and to which he rightly ascribed a character very doubtfully Christian’ (*Eternal Son*, 382). To Bulgakov’s credit, his kenosis is rooted in a ‘powerful metaphysics and a strong theocentrism’. He avoids Tareiv’s dolorism and nihilism by the grace of a vigorous optimism, in which the ‘loss’ of kenosis is simply the prelude to *theosis*, only a necessary moment for the realization of genuine love in a free reciprocity (*ibid.*, 383). In his *Dictionary of Theology*, 259, Bouyer also observes that ‘vivid expressions’ using the language of kenosis beyond what is intended by the letter to the *Philippians* might have some worth, ‘insofar as they indicate the unfathomable generosity of the divine *agape* as shown in creation, and even more so in the redemptive Incarnation’; nevertheless they may not be taken literally and are thus replete with equivocations.

However, this restrained critique of Bouyer must be pressed even further: In view of Bulgakov’s concurrent descriptions of the limitless and superabundant divine love – a love which is ‘insatiable’, which ‘transcends its frontiers’, and which ‘could not be restricted even by divinity itself, but which diffuses itself beyond God’ (*Lamb of God*, 184-85) – how appropriate or even necessary is the notion of kenosis? Indeed, does he not contradict himself by positing, on the one hand, a ‘superabundance’, and, on the other, a ‘self-diminution’ or ‘self-devastation’?

Can there be permissible, analogical uses of kenotic language to describe the unimaginable depths of the divine *agape* overflowing itself? To be sure, many contemporary theologians (including Bouyer) do. Walter Kasper, for example, writes: ‘Each of the three Persons is wholly God, wholly eternal, and yet at the same time, each gives the other space by handing himself over and thereby pouring himself out. In this kenotic fashion, God is unity in multiplicity. Since God is self-giving and self-emptying love between Father, Son, and Spirit from all eternity, he can wholly give himself in Jesus Christ without thereby diminishing himself or losing himself.’ Cf. Kasper, ‘Jesus Christ: God’s Final Word’, 69. For a summary of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s use of kenotic language, cf. John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (London: Collins, 1990), 28-34.

life of God except in his communication outside of himself, 'as if it were not perfect or total in the Trinity itself, in such a way that creation would not be simply a gratuitous gushing out (*rejaillissement*) of that life of God but an ineluctable necessity.'¹⁰²

To be sure, there is a sense in which, for the divine, 'freedom' and 'necessity' are but two sides of the same coin. Bulgakov's primordial intuition already attests to that, and Bouyer perceptively asks:

For God himself, what difference is there...between the life he begets in his Son and animates in his Spirit, and the life he creates in us to adopt us in him? The difference is simply that the former directly expresses the necessity inherent in his essence (which is to love), while the latter reflects foremost its sovereign freedom. And it is only from our viewpoint that this distinction involves an apparent opposition. Just as the necessity of the eternal unfolding of his love is in no way a constraint, the freedom of its communication to us is absolutely not fortuitous or accidental. All that we can say, without being able to conceptualize our insight in the slightest, is that in God freedom is but the obverse of the deepest necessity in his being, just as necessity is but the infinity of his sovereign freedom.¹⁰³

F. THE TRINITY AND DIVINE SOPHIA

FOR BOUYER, THEN, Wisdom, as already intimated by the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, 'is always related to the world and its historical course.'¹⁰⁴ It is the image and language used by scripture itself to attempt to express the 'what' (personalized into a 'who') which simultaneously relates and distinguishes God and his creation. This necessarily entails a *bipolar* understanding of Wisdom. On the one hand, it is inseparable from the Godhead, constituting the divinity's very essence and being, that which makes God 'God'. On the other hand, Wisdom also refers to his eternal and

¹⁰¹ *Sophia*, 121.

¹⁰² *Le métier*, 190. In *Eternal Son*, 383, he writes (in the context, regarding Bulgakov's kenotic Christology, although his comments can be more generalized): 'It is extremely difficult to judge Boulgakoff's kenotic Christology, of which the unity and beauty are assuredly sublime. All we can say is that it contains a number of intuitions of exceptional depth within a system that is dangerously ambiguous, in which divine transcendence seems constantly menaced and the supernatural dimension of revelation possibly undermined by rationalism or rather an uncompromising idealism.'

¹⁰³ *Cosmos*, 189.

perfect plan for his creation. It is God 'thinking himself' which, by that very fact, includes everything that is and ever will be. In God, this 'plan' is not something that God *has*, but what God *is*, much as all speaking of God's 'thought' or 'speech' or 'energies' are not references to parts or components of God, but to expressions of his very being.¹⁰⁵ But also, like these terms (thought, speech, etc.), Wisdom can be seen as something 'coming out' from God and reaching into creation. Hence, Bouyer can describe this divine Wisdom as already existing before the beginning of time in the eternal mind of God, while also destined to be fulfilled in history.¹⁰⁶ Wisdom is the divine design for world-history which God alone knows, and makes known, when and as he pleases. And in so revealing it, he brings it to pass.¹⁰⁷

In other words, Wisdom appears to be both *in and of* God, and *distinct from* God. As to the first, Wisdom is intra-trinitarian, divine, and uncreated. It consists of God's very essence, his very nature which is transmitted consubstantially from the Father to the Son in the Spirit. Wisdom is 'eternally begotten in the Son', 'projected into the Son through his eternal generation.'¹⁰⁸ In metaphysical terms, one might say that Wisdom is

¹⁰⁴ *Seat of Wisdom*, 193.

¹⁰⁵ Apparently the notion of 'energies' can serve the same purpose as 'Wisdom'. The Cappadocians developed a theology of divine energies, in which these are to be distinguished, though not separated, from the impenetrable, even inaccessible, essence of God. They are creative and salvific powers which touch the creature directly. Maximus the Confessor taught that these 'energies,' although they are common to the divine essence, are what is revealed to the creature and adapted to its understanding. 'It is through these [energies] that the [Son] takes on our flesh so that we might be incorporated into His filiation. [...] These energies are at work, in creation, in the Son by the Spirit, as well as in the recapitulation of creation, by the Son in the Spirit. This is how we are finally incorporated by Christ into His Body' (*Eternal Son*, 412-13). Thus, the 'energies', like 'Wisdom', are *notional* or *conceptual* distinctions which theology constructs in order to preserve the divine transcendence while allowing a full measure of divine immanence, without which the very ideas of creation and salvation would be meaningless.

The problem with this theory, which was articulated even more forcefully by Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century, was, as Bouyer points out, how to avoid ditheism, 'a radical opposition between God as manifested and communicated and God as totally ineffable, as incapable of issuing from his own transcendence, so that at the end we have two gods remote from one another' (*Invisible Father*, 234).

¹⁰⁶ *Cosmos*, 190.

¹⁰⁷ *Seat of Wisdom*, 24.

the Father's 'quiddity' shared absolutely and perfectly with his Son. 'It is communicated by the Father to the Son precisely as Wisdom, and is revealed by the Spirit as Glory, whenever the entire Trinity communicates life outside itself.'¹⁰⁹ Such is Wisdom examined under a first aspect as *indistinct* from God. And yet one must go on to say, asserts Bouyer, that God – being God and therefore possessing superabundant life and love – contains within himself an eternal plan for relating *ad extra*. It is under this second aspect of looking at divine Wisdom that Bouyer speaks of it as 'created' or 'creaturely', God's realizable plan for creation tending towards a succession of historical embodiments and appearances. God's eternal existence 'is extended, or rather transposed, in the temporal existence of the world, which is itself obviously incapable of adding anything whatsoever to God's own essence, but is destined to return to God'.¹¹⁰ In this sense, Wisdom can be said to be *distinct* from God.

Again, to express this differently, the uncreated Wisdom is, in God, 'realised only in the person of the Son, the Word, the living Thought of the Father, inasmuch as the Son himself is recapitulated in the Father through the Spirit.'¹¹¹ This statement underlines two crucial theological assertions: that the Father's Wisdom is properly realized *only* in the Son, thus designating the Son *as* Wisdom par excellence, and that this eternal realization in the Son is accomplished *through the Holy Spirit*. But that is not all: Wisdom, eternally realized in the Son and through the Spirit, is itself God's plan for the salvation of the world which is to be temporally and historically realized, again in the Son and through the Spirit. In order for this eternal plan in God's mind to 'happen', to

¹⁰⁸ *Cosmos*, 191-92, 208.

¹⁰⁹ *Eternal Son*, 403.

¹¹⁰ *Cosmos*, 191.

¹¹¹ *Seat of Wisdom*, 196.

be ‘real’ as far as creation is concerned, it is thus oriented towards a series of historical developments, i.e., embodiments, appearances, manifestations, or realizations in time.¹¹²

First of all, there are non-personal¹¹³ realizations of Wisdom, chief among which is the Torah, embodying the eternal Word’s progressive self-revelation to Israel, which is itself the revelation of God’s design for Israel and, through Israel, for the rest of humanity.¹¹⁴ Already for the Jews the Torah is so paramount a gift from God that, as Christoph Schönborn notes:

The Jewish tradition has its own feast of ‘*rejoicing in the Torah*’. One takes the Torah under one’s arm, as if it were a bride, and dances with it in the synagogue. The reason why joy in the law of God is so great is that it springs from his very own will, from his heart. According to a Jewish tradition, it is the *Torah* that is *the beginning* in which God created heaven and earth. It is the plan of God’s heart, the plan by which he created the world, the plan that he revealed to his people. That is why there is no greater happiness than being totally faithful to God’s law.¹¹⁵

In this perspective, the Torah is akin to the ‘Wisdom’ as elucidated by Bouyer. The *bridal* image, here associated with the Torah, is also significant, as will be seen below.

Closely related to the Torah, indeed completely encompassing it, is the more general interpersonal realization of Wisdom as the entire scriptures. Bouyer expounds this in an important passage:

For the monk, for the contemplative, for the [true] ‘gnostic’, [scripture] is not just a book, even one having the distinction of divine authorship. [...] It is a whole spiritual world, a whole new universe, a whole cosmos of living thoughts, which are the thoughts of God himself. To express this more adequately: it is the syntheses of the thought of God upon our world, taking possession of the world itself from within, in order to remake it after the pattern of the divine ideal – like a new creative word, only infinitely more effective. It is God’s plan revealing itself to the soul and imposing itself on it in flashes of fire. For this plan is in no sense an abstract idea, it is a mystery of life. It is the mystery of the Cross....¹¹⁶

¹¹² *Cosmos*, 190.

¹¹³ Bouyer prefers the description ‘interpersonal’ (rather than, for example, ‘impersonal’) which points to Sophia’s essentially relational or intermediary role between God and humanity (*Seat of Wisdom*, 197).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ C. Schönborn, *Loving the Church: Spiritual Exercises Preached in the Presence of Pope John Paul II* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 96, citing Bella Chagall, *Brennende Lichter* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1966).

This passage is important for re-establishing the connection, seen in previous chapters, between the 'Word' as the mystery of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified', and the 'Word' understood as the scriptures. What is striking here is the depiction of scripture as like a window into the divine mind, scripture revealing God's 'thought' upon creation, his 'plan' for the world – in a word, Wisdom. Thus into the cluster of already related terms 'Word', 'mystery' and 'scripture' is inserted the notion of Wisdom. The Word-Wisdom tandem, heretofore identified most fittingly with the Second Person of the Trinity, is now shown to apply equally well to the scriptures: the Bible is, in an important sense, both God's Word and God's Wisdom.

However, the Torah and the scriptures are themselves only intermediate stages in the historical unfolding of Wisdom, which inexorably tends towards two *personal* realizations, Mary and the Church. Wisdom takes the form of the eternal Son's successive union in time, first with Mary (through her maternity, by the power of the Spirit) and then with the Church (through being made 'one with Christ', again by the power of the Spirit). Since 'Wisdom', properly speaking, can be applied without qualification only to the eternal Son, Christian tradition has refrained from strictly identifying it with creaturely realities: both in the East and in the West, Mary has been accorded the title 'the Seat (or Throne) of Wisdom', and Bouyer describes the Church 'as the abode that this Wisdom throughout history, from the bosom of the Father, constantly builds for itself, into which it invites all to enter, as into the Father's house'.¹¹⁷ In other words, Wisdom is seen as realized *in* Mary and *in* the Church. However, Bouyer also asserts that, in another sense, Wisdom may also be identified with the Church; as he puts it: 'In eternity...Wisdom has but a single personal realization, namely, the Son.

¹¹⁶ *Monastic Life*, 72-73.

¹¹⁷ *Church of God*, 548.

Likewise, in time, or rather at the end and consummation of the ages, it will also have only one, namely, the Spouse, the Church made perfect, wherein all the predestined will have been gathered together in the Son, and the whole of creation made new....¹¹⁸

Both Mary and the Church are personal, creaturely realizations of this Wisdom which is the Father's eternal plan of salvation. As such, they partake of humanity's fallen nature, of the world's susceptibility to those 'inevitably possible errors arising from a created liberty'.¹¹⁹ In the case of Mary, by a singular grace of God she was preserved from complicity with sin from the moment of her existence. United to her Son by her maternity – again, a most singular divine favour, 'a gift of grace of incomparable excellence'¹²⁰ – by her personal *Fiat*, expressed in perfect freedom, she prefigures and 'pre-contains' that union with God which all the elect are to experience at the end of time. Mary is not the 'final' or 'complete' realization of Wisdom – this dignity belongs properly to the Church.¹²¹ Nevertheless she is its 'supreme' realization, 'in a single person, at the centre and, we might say, the culmination of history, of all that is most noble and perfect to be realised by the whole world at the end of history.'¹²²

In comparison, the Church has not been preserved from sin, and its existence in time consists in its pilgrimage from a 'real though imperfect holiness' (in the words of *Lumen Gentium*, no. 48) to its eschatological perfection. This Church is the 'abode' of Wisdom in this 'age between the ages', this in-between time when the 'already' and the 'not yet' of God's salvation may not be separated. This is the Church which actualizes in

¹¹⁸ *Seat of Wisdom*, 197. 'Thus Wisdom, if it identifies itself with Christ, is identified even more with the Church, in the sense that the latter is the fullness of Him who is completed fully in all. The great mystery that is at the heart of Wisdom is really this union and conjunction of Christ and the Church which make of the two one flesh, in the rending of his cross.' (*Monastic Life*, 205)

¹¹⁹ *Le Consolateur*, 445.

¹²⁰ *Seat of Wisdom*, 200.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

time, and will make perfect at the *parousia*, that Wisdom by which is accomplished God's eternal plan for the salvation of the entire cosmos *as cosmos*, 'as that whole in which the invisible Father must eventually be all in all through the incarnation of the eternal Son and his consummated union with the whole Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.'¹²³ It is here that Bouyer's Wisdom-ecclesiology formally comes into play.

According to him, in its created aspect, Wisdom is destined to be both 'mother' and 'bride'. In all personal, created existence, and particularly in human existence, writes Bouyer, there is a *maternal* aspect of cooperating in this creative work which must lead to 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' (*Romans* 8:21), as well as a *bridal* aspect of achieving this work and of 'ultimately resting in the divine sabbath towards which God desires to lead his creation, the glorious accomplishment in which the Son himself is completed all in all, in his body which is the Church.'¹²⁴ Behind this assertion stands Bouyer's theology of the feminine and masculine, in which *only* God can be said to be truly masculine, before whom everything else (i.e., all creation) has an essentially *feminine* status, by which Bouyer means not only its utter receptivity but also its prodigious fecundity, participating in God's primordial fecundity. It is, in other words, a theology of paternity vis-à-vis maternity. In brief, Bouyer says that *only God is Father in the true sense*, compared to whom all other expressions of fatherhood (e.g., in humans) are but a faint shadow. On the other hand, maternity is *proper to the creature*, that which corresponds to God's paternity in a posture of absolute receptivity; a receptivity which, yielding to God's absolute fecundity, leads the creature to become itself the source of ever new life, that is, its maternal vocation. As Bouyer expresses it:

¹²² *Seat of Wisdom*, 196, 200.

¹²³ *Invisible Father*, 310.

As St. Athanasius showed in a page of unforgettable profundity, God alone is the Father, properly speaking – that is, the primary source of life. Men never are, except through radically imperfect participation, for life is essentially derived, which is precisely contrary to the essence of fatherhood. This is why the more elevated and more spiritual the fatherhood that men exercise, the less it is theirs. The fatherhood of the priest, on the created plane, is the highest that can be conceived, since it engenders not only spiritual life but the life of the Spirit in us. For that very reason, it totally eludes the personality of the one who exercises it.

Motherhood, on the contrary, – the fact of being associated with the gift of life, even though one received it oneself – is absolutely proper to creatures. In this fact is our final vocation revealed: the vocation of exercising, in all truth, the divine love which created us. The high point of motherhood is thus the summit of a creature's possibilities as a creature: to live by a life received.¹²⁵

The 'femininity' of creation is expressed above all in its maternal and spousal (bridal) relationship with God. Or, expressed differently, humanity, because it is destined and called by God to find its true identity in a recapitulated filial relationship with the Father, thereby finds itself, in the historical unfolding of God's eternal plan, having both a maternal (cooperative/procreative) and a spousal (completive/unitive) character. This is especially true in the case of Mary (who is Bouyer's icon for a 'supernatural anthropology') and the Church (his icon for a 'supernatural sociology'). Bouyer does not hesitate to predicate sponsality of the Church, or indeed of every individual Christian. It is because of this bridal relationship with Christ, he writes, that one is made a son of the Father and a living temple of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁶ In a certain sense, the Church's *bridal* relationship with Christ is a participation in time in his eternal *filial* relationship with the Father. 'The Son's sponsal relation to the Church, and, in it, to us all, is but the development, in time, of what is, from eternity, comprised in his relation to the Father. But, since, in eternity, the relation of sonship is fulfilled in the Son's association with the procession of the Spirit, so is it, in time, in the case of the

¹²⁴ *Le Fils éternel*, 489 (author's translation).

¹²⁵ *Church of God*, 543-44. This perspective may also be found in *Seat of Wisdom* and *Woman in the Church*. Among contemporary theologians, Hans Urs von Balthasar also shares these views; cf. his epilogue to Bouyer's *Woman in the Church*, which he translated as *Frau und Kirche* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1977), 87-95.

¹²⁶ *Seat of Wisdom*, 185.

sonship by participation....'¹²⁷ Not only are filial adoption and the 'Spirit of sonship' once again linked together, but here the symmetry between the bridal and filial aspects of the Church (and of all Christians) is underlined. Moreover, Bouyer can speak of a 'nuptial mysticism' going hand in hand with the notion of recapitulation, as in this statement: 'It follows that nuptial mysticism (the union with the Son of every soul in the Church of the newly begotten whose names are written in heaven) and the mysticism of essence (the return to the Father of all that had emanated from him, in time as in eternity) imply, involve and consummate one another.'¹²⁸ It is evident from all this that one is again faced with various descriptive images juxtaposed one to another – 'bride' and 'son', 'wedding feast' and 'homecoming'.

Both the maternal and bridal imageries are drawn from scripture. Behind the designation of 'mother' is the figure of Eve, the 'mother of all the living' (*Genesis* 3:20). Yet, in her transcendent dignity as *mater Dei*, Mary is the perfect fulfilment of which the first Eve was merely a fallen and distorted image. Mary's motherhood of the One who in turn is the 'last Adam' (*1 Corinthians* 15:45) – that is, the principle of a new creation, humanity renewed in the image and likeness of its Creator – thus makes her the 'new Eve'. Conversely, because Mary herself must be seen as originating from this primordial Wisdom who is Christ, the creature coming forth from the Uncreated, she too is paradoxically 'the new Eve in the second Adam', just as the first Eve was drawn from Adam's side (*Genesis* 2:21-22).¹²⁹ But in an even broader and more encompassing sense, it is the Church which is now the 'mother of all the living', for by its indissoluble union with Christ it ceaselessly 'bears children for God' through baptism and nourishes them with sacramental food. The typological interpretation is further extended in the

¹²⁷ *Seat of Wisdom*, 185.

¹²⁸ *Christian Mystery*, 293.

patristic view of the Church coming forth from the pierced side of Christ on the cross, once again like a new Eve drawn from the sleeping Adam.¹³⁰ And while Mary's relationship with God is sometimes described, especially in the liturgy, in spousal terms, it is again the Church which is formally called the 'bride of Christ' (e.g., *Revelation* 21:2), whose relationship with Christ St Paul describes in marital terms:

For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church....
(*Ephesians* 5:29-32)

Hence the Church is, for Bouyer, the definitive historical realization of that Wisdom which 'reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other and orders all things well' (*Wisdom* 8:1). And, in a striking phrase, he says that, at the end of time, 'the Wisdom-Bride will be reunited to the Word-Bridegroom'.¹³¹

Here one sees the confluence of Bouyer's Wisdom-ecclesiology and his Word-ecclesiology. Not that the two are equivalent. To repeat what has been discussed above: *in eternity* 'Word' and 'Wisdom' are the same, both are denotations of the eternal Son; but *in time*, which is to say *in relation to the world* the two terms are distinct though inseparable. In Bouyerian parlance, 'Word' can never be completely reduced to 'Church', although 'Wisdom' can, in a certain sense, be identified with the latter. This is to say that it is perhaps more correct to perceive Bouyer's Wisdom-ecclesiology, rather than running parallel to his Word-ecclesiology, actually penetrating and complementing

¹²⁹ *Cosmos*, 190.

¹³⁰ Cf., for example, John Chrysostom, *Cat.* 3, 13-19 (*The Divine Office*, Office of Readings for Good Friday): "There came out from his side water and blood." Dearly beloved, do not pass the secret of this great mystery by without reflection. For I have another secret mystical interpretation to give. I said that baptism and the mysteries were symbolized in that blood and water. It is from these two that the holy Church has been born "by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit", by baptism and by the mysteries. Now the symbols of baptism and the mysteries came from his side. It was from his side, then, that Christ formed the Church, as from the side of Adam he formed Eve.'

¹³¹ *Eternal Son*, 404.

the latter. His Word-ecclesiology already hints at, indeed contains, a Wisdom-ecclesiology, which is but a more pan-cosmic account of the one Word of God reaching out from eternity into history and time. Wisdom-ecclesiology puts the accent on the Church as the final historical realization of God's plan for the perfection of his creation. More than a mere Word-ecclesiology, it stresses the Church's pilgrim status which finds its completion only at the *eschaton* when this same Church will consummate its union with the eternal Son, *the* Word of God, who has been, throughout the Church's historical existence, its living source, principle of being, and final end.

Does this render Bouyer's ecclesiology, especially its appeal to Sophia-Wisdom which unerringly and invincibly guides the Church towards its eschatological perfection, simply too idealized? Healy makes a strong case against standard Roman Catholic ecclesiologies which, according to him, espouse a 'blueprint' approach to the crucial questions 'What is the Church?' and 'What is the Church to do?' In general, he says, 'ecclesiology in our period has become highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than orientated to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church actually is. It displays a preference for describing the church's theoretical and essential identity rather than its concrete and historical identity.'¹³²

At first sight, many of Healy's perceptive remarks seem to hit the mark insofar as Bouyer paints a rather idealized picture of the eschatological Church, the community of the redeemed liturgically assembled, 'the whole Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.'¹³³ However, it must be recalled that Bouyer distinguishes the future bridal status of the Church from its present condition of being Christ's 'betrothed', with all that that entails: unfaithful and inconstant, the Church is 'stained, and will be

¹³² Healy, *Church, World, Christian Life*, 3.

until the last day, by the numberless sins of her ministers and members'.¹³⁴ Surely this is no rose-tinted view of the Church. Moreover, anyone who thinks that Bouyer only bids him cast his eyes on the future glory will do well to read the theologian's scathing depiction, after the first flush of post-conciliar optimism, of what he calls the 'decomposition of Catholicism'. Published in 1968, *La décomposition du catholicisme* describes the various ways by which, at least in Bouyer's estimation, the Church has been plunged into an 'unnameable abyss'.¹³⁵ The book ends with a paragraph both bitingly dismissive and poignantly hopeful:

As for what is called 'Catholicism,' a word which appeared only, if I am not mistaken, in the 17th century (if by this we understand the artificial system fabricated by the Counter-Reformation, and hardened by the cudgeling of modernism) it can die. There are even good chances that it is already dead, even though we do not perceive it. The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, over which Peter and his successors 'preside in charity,' has the promise of eternal life, and its faith shall not be deluded.¹³⁶

Far from merely spouting lofty, grandiose, and (for now at least) unreachable depictions of the Church, Bouyer's ecclesiological reflections can be brutally frank, bristling indignantly with what Chiffлот politely calls *l'ironie polémique*.¹³⁷

This is not to say that there is no place for somewhat idealized accounts of the Church. Healy is mistaken and rather naïve when he says that the preference of many 'blueprint' ecclesiologies for describing the Church in terms of its theoretical and essential identity 'may be one reason why ecclesiological reflection has fallen prey to ever-shifting theological fashions, and why some of it has become quite dull'.¹³⁸ One could argue that it is rather more the case that theologies which strive to be 'relevant' or

¹³³ *Invisible Father*, 310.

¹³⁴ *Church of God*, 499.

¹³⁵ *Decomposition*, 110.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Th. G. Chiffлот, *Approches d'une théologie de l'histoire* (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 55.

¹³⁸ Healy, *Church, World, Christian Life*, 3.

‘contemporary’ are the very ones which have fallen into disuse or disrepute after a brief spell of success. In the long run it is the ‘blueprint’ ecclesiologies which have a perennial value; they are those which are ‘rediscovered’ and deemed ‘prophetic’ for a new moment in history, for a new generation of Christians. While any ecclesiology must have some kind of ‘practical’ usefulness, a pedestrian pragmatism as it were, it equally needs a ‘theoretical’, even idealized, dimension in order to inspire, energize, and propel the Church forward from what it at present *is not* to what it *can and must become*.

This account of Bouyer’s Wisdom-ecclesiology will be incomplete without mentioning the special place it gives to the Holy Spirit. This pneumatological slant constitutes a decided advance over those ecclesiologies which are, for the most part, preponderantly ‘heavy’ on Christ. While the previous chapter has indicated several places in which the Holy Spirit’s role and activity in the Church are prominently mentioned by Bouyer, the mere fact that his is a *Word*-ecclesiology means that it is unavoidably and almost exclusively christological. Thus his Wisdom-ecclesiology can redress a possible imbalance for, as will be demonstrated, not only is Christology complemented by a necessary pneumatology, but both Christology and pneumatology will be oriented by Bouyer towards *theo*-logy, towards all discourse concerning the invisible Father.

G. THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

WITH A TOUCH of rueful irony, Bouyer recalls that the Spirit has been called the ‘unknown God’, or even the ‘forgotten Person of the Trinity’. With regards to ecclesiology, he admits that Vatican II has been sorely deficient, its Constitution *on* the Church far from giving a satisfactory account of the Holy Spirit’s role in the constitution *of* the Church. While the council’s ecclesiology is strongly christological, he says, it

gives virtually no place to the Spirit, except for a few statements here and there, more pious than they are doctrinal.¹³⁹

By 1970, when Bouyer wrote *The Church of God*, a more pneumatological ecclesiology was on the ascendancy in Catholic theology. Thus, this treatise contains such affirmations as: 'It is because she is the Church of the Spirit, the Church whose ingathering, convoked by the Word of the Son, is consummated by the communication of the Spirit of the Son, of the Spirit of the Father's love, that the Church leads us into the reign of Christ.'¹⁴⁰ Yet even there the Holy Spirit is strictly related to Christ. This is a theological principle of paramount importance: ecclesiology may not be constructed on a pneumatology that is independent of Christology, says Bouyer. If the West has tended to neglect pneumatology or to absorb it into Christology, the solution is *not* (as the East has tended to do in its turn) to substitute an independent pneumatological ecclesiology for an exclusively christological one. 'The genuinely traditional (and genuinely ecumenical) ecclesiology is faithful to the economy of salvation and implants a pneumatological development in a Christological ground.'¹⁴¹ In concrete, this means that Bouyer's ecclesiology will attempt to incorporate the presence and work of the Holy Spirit within the overarching theme of Christ's absolutely necessary salvific work.

One move that Bouyer makes in this direction is to recall Irenaeus' felicitous image of the Son and the Spirit as the 'two hands' of God:

One hand is the Son, who reaches and touches us as if from the outside, coming to meet us in the world, in the history in which our lives unfold; and the other is the Spirit, rising from our depths, from the deepest part of ourselves. It is not enough to say that the work of one of these 'hands' would be incomplete without the collaboration of the other; one hand cannot operate, no matter how minimally, without the other.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *Church of God*, 172.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 252-53.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 309; cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 4, preface, 4; 4.20.1; 5.6.1; 5.28.3. Irenaeus' image of the 'two hands' parallels an expression used in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that of the 'joint

Congar's celebrated axiom here comes to mind: 'No Christology without pneumatology, and no pneumatology without Christology.'¹⁴³

A second way of perceiving the distinct but inseparable way by which the Son and the Spirit are related to humanity is by the interchangeability of prepositions used. Christian theology has variably used the expressions '*in* the Son *through* the Spirit' and '*through* the Son *in* the Spirit'. Bouyer says that one need not be surprised at this fluidity of expression, since it results from different angles of vision which one might adopt, and only serves to underline the necessary complementarity of disparate human propositions to express mysterious and ultimately ineffable realities.¹⁴⁴

Pneumatology is related to Christology in a third move by Bouyer, by emphasizing that the Holy Spirit is precisely the 'Spirit of sonship'. It will be remembered that, in his account of the intra-trinitarian relations, he highlights the Holy Spirit as the 'substantial Gift' between the Father and the Son which properly makes the Father, Father, and the Son, Son. The Spirit is the principle by which sonship is conferred to the Second Person: 'From the Father in the Son proceeds the Spirit of sonship. This means, first of all, that to this Son who receives everything from him God even gives that which is the soul of his own life: the ability to give himself as he does, to answer the paternal love with a love that is not only its reflection, but its living image.'¹⁴⁵ Another way of expressing this is that 'the Father begets the Son only by producing in him the Spirit of filiation – the substantial Gift through which the Son perfects his

mission' of the Son and the Spirit: 'In their joint mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable' (no. 689).

¹⁴³ Congar, *Word and Spirit*, 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Invisible Father*, 220.

¹⁴⁵ *Cosmos*, 184.

resemblance to the Father by loving him, as well as everything the Father may ever love, with the same devotion lavished on him'.¹⁴⁶

Thus, within the eternal and mysterious relations of the Godhead, the Spirit, proceeding from the Father, eternally rests on the Son while unceasingly recapitulating the Son in the Father. So it is in the order of creation: the Spirit, sent by the Son whose mission he comes to bring to completion, abides both in believers individually and in the Church as a whole, and at the same time brings all back to the Father in the Son. The very same Spirit of sonship is poured out on creation – though always in view of the cross and as the completion of Christ's redeeming work – so that human beings might become 'sons in the Son', which means participating in Christ's unique sonship, Christ who is the Son *of* the Father *in* the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁷ The Spirit works in the world in the same way that he 'works' in the Son, by resting (abiding) upon creatures as he rests eternally on the Son and drawing them back to the Father, *through, with* and *in* the Son.¹⁴⁸ For Bouyer, the Holy Spirit's work of 'abiding' and 'recapitulating' are merely two ways of expressing one ineffable reality, being absolutely proper to him and accomplished in the order of exemplary causality (i.e., by participation in the Son's sonship) rather than in the order of efficient causality (by a distinct and special operation of the Spirit).¹⁴⁹ 'It can be said equally well,' he writes, 'either that we live in Christ

¹⁴⁶ *Cosmos*, 188-89.

¹⁴⁷ There is some ambiguity here with regards to the scriptural texts. *Romans* 8:14-16 says that 'all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God', and that 'it is the Spirit [who bears] witness with our spirit that we are children of God', thus suggesting that it is the Spirit who brings about this filial adoption. On the other hand, Paul in *Galatians* 4:6 says that 'because [we] are [already] sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts'. Cf. Bouyer's discussion of the simultaneity of this reality in *Church of God*, 253, and *Invisible Father*, 180. At any rate, what is clear is that the Spirit is inseparable from the creature's filiation, that is, its becoming a child of God.

¹⁴⁸ *Invisible Father*, 228. Note Bouyer's choice of these prepositions, and their configuration to the closing doxology of the great eucharistic prayers.

¹⁴⁹ *Seat of Wisdom*, 184. Congar, in his review of Bouyer's *Le Consolateur*, notes that Bouyer's preferred use of the conceptual model of 'exemplary causality', or what Congar calls the 'metaphysics of participation', is different from his own preference for a 'metaphysics of efficient causality'. Congar is

through the Spirit, or that Christ lives in us through the same Spirit.’¹⁵⁰ Once again, one must keep in mind that, from the perspective of eternity, this abiding and recapitulating of creatures in the Father are but one with the Son and Spirit’s recapitulation within the Father who is eternally ‘all in all’. But notionally or conceptually, that is to say also, from the perspective of time and history, the work of the Spirit in relation to the Church is distinct from his eternal procession, and takes the form of a ‘pledge’ or ‘guarantee’ (cf. *2 Corinthians* 5:5; *Ephesians* 1:14) by which the children of God experience their sonship as ‘already but not yet’.

As much as Bouyer highlights the role of the Holy Spirit, he is also quick to ground that role upon the more foundational work accomplished by the Son in the person of Jesus Christ. Pneumatological ecclesiology is articulated on the basis of a christological ecclesiology, he says, and the ‘economic working of the Spirit proceeds entirely from the work of Christ; it ‘consummates our union with Christ and our unity in Christ’.¹⁵¹ The presence of the Holy Spirit among believers is ‘not a substitute for the intervention of the Word in human history, but its consequence.’¹⁵² As he puts it emphatically: ‘We must...bring out the difference between our relation to Christ and our relation to the Holy Ghost. The former relation is the fundamental one; for it is due to this sponsal relation with him that we are made sons of the Father and living temples of

gracious and irenic, seeing in these two intellectual constructions (which, admittedly, do not overlap) the same reality that is being interpreted in equally legitimate ways. Cf. Congar, ‘Chronique de Pneumatologie’, 447. Walling (*Metamorphosis*, 342) correctly links this difference with Bouyer’s theological approach: ‘The rational, analytical element in human consciousness [writes Walling] is more to the fore in [Congar’s] approach while the mythopoetic element is given greater play in [Bouyer’s].’ But perhaps even more precisely the chief difference lies in the fact that Bouyer takes a more Eastern perspective, one that values union and divinization, rather than an approach that is more Western, which tends to be more metaphysical and speculative.

¹⁵⁰ Bouyer, ‘Some Charismatic Movements in the History of the Church’, in *Perspectives on Charismatic Renewal*, ed. Edward D. O’Connor (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 113-31, in 118.

¹⁵¹ *Church of God*, 492.

¹⁵² *Seat of Wisdom*, 182.

the Holy Ghost.’¹⁵³ Not for nothing does Bouyer insist, firmly echoing the received tradition, that Christians are made sons ‘in the Son’; the fact that this adoption is accomplished ‘by the Spirit’ is a necessary, though secondary, correlative.

Nevertheless, his Wisdom-ecclesiology does give more prominence to the Spirit’s activity in the world and in humanity. It is ‘in the Son by the Spirit’ that all the *mirabilia Dei* are accomplished ‘outside’ of God and in time: creation, filial adoption, final recapitulation.¹⁵⁴ It is by the Holy Spirit that Sophia enters the world, or what amounts to the same thing, that the world enters into God. In *The Meaning of the Monastic Life*, he describes the ‘perfect monk’ as one who is already living in another world, the world in God, the world of God. What then is ‘life in the Holy Spirit’? he asks. His response is that

The first result of this is that [the man of the Spirit] enters into a new world. It is not only that the tangible universe is no longer the true home of him who has received the Spirit, but that the new universe which is revealed to him, although it includes the created spiritual world, definitely penetrates beyond the sphere of created things. The world that he in whom the Spirit lives knows, is a world that is no longer the world as a separate object, in some sort existing outside God. It is the world such as when God sent it forth in the act of creation: a world in which all beings and all things are in communion with each other through their communion with God. It is the world, immense yet one, of the divine Wisdom, in which the measureless fecundity of divine life is revealed in the hierarchized multiplicity of creation, but without being broken up or separated. For all things are there found gathered up in the unbreakable unity of the life and thought of God. All things there become transparent to God. There God himself becomes all in all things.¹⁵⁵

Yet further on, Bouyer once again reminds his readers that ‘The great work of the Spirit is to carry us over into Christ, the Wisdom of God.’¹⁵⁶ Thus the christological priority is maintained, and the heightened pneumatological interest in Wisdom-ecclesiology, important as it is, may not be exaggerated. Throughout Bouyer’s account the Spirit’s

¹⁵³ *Seat of Wisdom*, 184-85.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁵⁵ *Monastic Life*, 78.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

activity is located within a soteriological framework, and its role remains grounded in the work and person of Christ. As Congar would similarly put it, ‘the vigour of a lived pneumatology is to be found in Christology. There is only one body which the Spirit builds up and quickens and that is the body of Christ.’¹⁵⁷

It is important to appreciate not only the theological balance and fidelity to tradition that are evident in Bouyer’s pneumatology, but also the dexterity with which he develops an aspect of trinitarian theology which, in Weinandy’s estimation, is ‘inadequate, even flawed’ as it is currently expressed by the received traditions of both the East and the West.¹⁵⁸ Especially in his Wisdom-ecclesiology, pneumatology offsets a natural tendency of any account of the Church to become too christocentric. At the same time, as he insists, pneumatology cannot be uprooted from its christological ground if it is to be faithful to the economy of salvation. But Bouyer takes this dynamic tension a step further and declares that, while the doctrine of Christ ought to reach its ‘end and completion’ in the doctrine of the Spirit, both indeed will need to be transcended ‘in the unfathomable vastness of the deity, in the luminous darkness of the source of all things: the invisible Father’,¹⁵⁹ thus reminding the reader that both Christology and pneumatology must lead to *theo*-logy, or what Aidan Nichols proposes as a neologism for the doctrine of the divine Father, ‘paterology’.¹⁶⁰

H. CONTRIBUTIONS OF ‘WISDOM’ TO BOUYER’S ECCLESIOLOGY

TO RECAPITULATE: BOUYER himself acknowledges that the theology of Wisdom did not originate with him. As soon as the earliest Christian interpreters have had to

¹⁵⁷ Congar, *Word and Spirit*, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Weinandy, *Father’s Spirit of Sonship*, 7.

¹⁵⁹ *Church of God*, xv.

wrestle with the meaning of biblical 'Wisdom', a sophiology had to be developed. Indeed, Bouyer thinks that the Pauline eschatological view of the Church, combining as it does bridal and sapiential images, indicates that Christian tendencies must have arisen very early to develop ecclesiology into a sophiology.¹⁶¹ Among the Fathers, Athanasius in the East and Augustine in the West could be singled out for attempting an initial theological account of Wisdom, but at some point,

they could only stammer when it came to defining more precisely how, in what way created and divine Wisdom could be one without confusion – how, in other words, the inner life of God, in the Trinity of its persons, includes human and cosmic life in itself from all eternity and will unite itself to them when history reaches its term, yet without absorbing them back into itself.¹⁶²

Other theologians in more recent times have tried to wrestle with this same question, but the results have been uneven and unsatisfactory. It was with the hope, then, of offering a more theologically defensible and balanced account, with both an eye on the scriptural data and an ear to the voice of tradition, that Bouyer constructed his sophiology. By doing so he is attempting to address what may well be the 'most fundamental problem in theology', that is, the divine-human relationship. Seen in this light, 'Wisdom' connects his two trilogies and may be regarded, together with 'Word', as one more hermeneutical key to his entire theological project.

This chapter has advanced the claim that Wisdom is Bouyer's solution to the problem of how the ineradicable *diastema* separating God and humanity can nevertheless be mitigated. The one Wisdom is both *ad intra* and *ad extra* which, when seen from different points of view, appears under two aspects, allowing for the simultaneous affirmation that God remains *totally transcendent*, that his absolute perfection is matched with absolute fecundity, his existence in eternity bursting with life, ever reaching out and

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Nichols' review in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 81.

¹⁶¹ *Seat of Wisdom*, 44-45.

ever recapitulating in a ceaseless perichoresis, and at the same time, that he is *wholly immanent*, infinitely involved in the affairs and lives of his creatures, yet whose immanence does not imperil his transcendence nor destroy creaturely humanity.

In Bouyer's grand vision of God in himself, in eternity, the Father is the 'all in all' who ceaselessly begets his Son and spirates the Holy Spirit. The trinitarian life consists in that life 'which eternally descends from the Father in the Son and returns to the Father with him, in him, through the Spirit.'¹⁶³ This interpenetration of life and love within the Trinity, 'the ebb and flow of love by which the Son is reunited to the Father' in the Spirit of sonship, overflows into creation and in turn draws creation back into the embrace of God.¹⁶⁴ The 'plan' of God for creation is that spoken of explicitly in *Ephesians* 1:9-10, 'For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to the purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite [literally: to recapitulate, to set as head] all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' It is none other than that Wisdom which is inseparable from God, but in relation to creation, becomes historicized, realized in time through its successive embodiments in Mary and in the Church.¹⁶⁵ At the end of time, Wisdom will be seen to be completely realized in the Church – and note: it is the 'Church' understood in its widest sense, in its 'catholic' and 'pan-cosmic' unveiling.¹⁶⁶ When Christ's body reaches 'its cosmic fullness, when the last of the elect have been absorbed and conformed to it, then Christ will have reached maturity in all his members, and his own

¹⁶² *Invisible Father*, 236.

¹⁶³ *Cosmos*, 189.

¹⁶⁴ *Monastic Life*, 108.

¹⁶⁵ Bouyer makes the pertinent observation that, while the Church is the 'final and complete' historical realization of Wisdom, the Church's 'collective personality is realised only in individual persons' and supremely in one particular person, Mary (*Seat of Wisdom*, 201).

¹⁶⁶ *Invisible Father*, 236.

Parousia, the event toward which this entire growth had been straining, will finally take place.’¹⁶⁷

All that has been, all that is, all that will ever be – all is contained in God for whom everything ‘outside’ is in truth ‘within’. Yet this is no pantheistic vision in which individual, created existences are swallowed up into a monad God. Creation is real, time is real, history is real – but real only for creation, whereas in God this realism is but found within the ‘supernaturality’ and dynamism of his own superabundant life.¹⁶⁸ That is to say, the realism of creation cannot and must not denigrate, replace, and overshadow the absolute realism of God: everything exists *in him*. The world’s realism is ‘relative’; it needs to be related to God. But neither can this divine realism absorb creation to the point of nothingness. It is for this reason that a theology of Wisdom relies heavily on the eschatological image of the ‘wedding feast of the Lamb’. Only analogical language and mythopoetic imagery can capture the sense in which humanity’s returning to God, as ‘Wisdom-Bride’ wedded to the ‘Word-Bridegroom’, consists in both the deepest intimacy and the most ineradicable distinction.

One suspects that the recourse to mythopoetic imagery is one reason why Bouyer is attracted to sophiology. It will be recalled that Bouyer understands myth from an anthropological and sociological viewpoint, valuing it for its ability to express religious and numinous truth, to grasp reality in ‘one intuitive and all-inclusive vision’.¹⁶⁹ Myth, he declares, *pace* Bultmannian demythologizing, must be appreciated ‘in the Platonic sense, not of legend but of poetry, not of the pathetic fallacy, but of truth too rich and too

¹⁶⁷ *Cosmos*, 230.

¹⁶⁸ Bouyer notes that the word ‘supernatural’ means that which is ‘sur-real real, the source-reality’ (*Invisible Father*, 46).

¹⁶⁹ *Cosmos*, 14.

great to be exhausted or delimited by speech.¹⁷⁰ In the order of divine revelation, mythic language is to be expected both in the earliest stages of salvation history as well as in its terminus. Cullmann's understanding of myth as historically unverifiable data which pertain either to primal beginnings or to the cosmic future is apropos in eschatology which, by the very fact of its being in the linguistically inarticulable future, is yet historically unverifiable and can only be accepted in faith.¹⁷¹ Myth in the Bouyerian sense thus dominates Wisdom-ecclesiology.

So does poetry. Bouyer's Sophia-driven account of the Church regularly allows him to indulge in flights of poetic lyricism. Rhapsodizing about the astounding architectural achievements of classical Greece, he writes: 'It is thus that man, who in his very search for God has in fact been sought by Him without his knowing it, already fashioned the [ancient] world according to the personal shape of his design. So limpidly and so radiantly beautiful is the spectacle given to those to contemplate who, like a prelude to their future quest for the divine face, will soon leave behind, for the sake of the Alone, those things which are His nearest and dearest images.'¹⁷² Or again, gazing with wonder at the dome of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, he compares it with the true Temple of holy Wisdom which could be built only from the inside, being elevated to meet the angelic choirs 'who alone are capable of bringing to it this crowning which will seem to materialize upon the earth the very harmony of this sphere, of this hyper-cosmic orb, from this court of sapphire where dwells the Inaccessible, the Invisible.'¹⁷³

It is arguable, however, that Bouyer is not simply driven by aesthetic considerations but by more profoundly theological ones. The last chapter has shown that

¹⁷⁰ *Monastic Life*, 13.

¹⁷¹ Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 151.

¹⁷² *Cosmos*, 378 (author's translation). Curiously the English translation does not incorporate a 'Postlude' found at the end of the original French edition (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 377-79.

Bouyer conceives any authentic theology (presumably including his own) as one which is wedded to spirituality. Lamenting the chasm that has opened up between the two since the ascendancy of medieval scholasticism, he applauds instead a theology which aims at spirituality without being less theologically rigorous.¹⁷⁴ Citing Evagrius, he insists that ‘theologian’ and ‘man of prayer’ should be synonymous,¹⁷⁵ although far too often the theologian fails in his primary task of ‘glorifying and giving praise to God’ – which was how the Church Fathers understood the theological task – so much so that Bouyer says, not without a touch of sardonic humour, one is tempted to repeat the words of Mary Magdalene: ‘They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put him.’¹⁷⁶ With Bouyer’s Wisdom-ecclesiology one knows exactly where ‘the Lord’ is: right at the very centre of the tableau, ‘reaching mightily from end to end and ordering all things well.’ This theology of the Church is ‘spiritual’ in a second sense: it is replete with the praise of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore important to recognize the primarily doxological, even mystical motives of Louis Bouyer in articulating his sophiocentric vision, for it at once intersects with his liturgical and spiritual interests and gives him free rein to sing the *mirabilia Dei* which is the primary task of theology.

This chapter has suggested that Wisdom-ecclesiology, being more attentive to the place and action of the Holy Spirit both in God himself and in the life of the Church, constitutes an addition to and an advance over a Word-ecclesiology. This assertion, if true, must not be exaggerated. One must keep in mind that Word and Wisdom are, from a certain perspective, equivalent.¹⁷⁷ Even Bouyer’s Word-ecclesiology, controlled as it is

¹⁷³ *Cosmos*, 379 (author’s translation).

¹⁷⁴ *OSPAS*, 171.

¹⁷⁵ *Women Mystics*, 52.

¹⁷⁶ *Invisible Father*, 280.

by the 'mighty Christ-event' which is the climax of salvation history, accords a necessary place for the Holy Spirit in the saving economy. It will be recalled that, in Chapter Two of this thesis, the Christian mystery is understood as nothing else but 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'. But in a remarkable passage, Bouyer says that 'the heart of the mystery' is the gift of the Holy Spirit, 'which forms the content or the very substance of our participated sonship and so of our union or, better, our unity, in Christ.'¹⁷⁸ In short, Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology both already contains a pneumatology and at the same time inserts it within a historical and economic framework. Wisdom-ecclesiology, on the other hand, has the added advantage of articulating the doctrine of the Spirit beyond such a framework, affording a privileged glimpse into the intra-trinitarian relations and a view of the divine plan in its pan-cosmic proportions. Both perspectives are necessary. The fact that Bouyer places the Holy Spirit squarely in the midst of an article of faith (the 'Word of God') which is by theological custom preponderantly christological should be a warning against cavalierly emptying the 'Word' of all pneumatological content.

Similarly, any ecclesiology must have an adequate trinitarian content, and a Word-centred account does not entirely fail in this regard. Nonetheless Wisdom can provide a means of discoursing more lengthily on the three divine Persons, with a view to 'summing it all up' *in* Christ, *through* the Spirit, *to* the everlasting Father. Moreover, if, by means of the Word-motif, Bouyer has managed to interweave Christology, soteriology, hamartiology, a *theologia crucis*, biblical theology, eucharistic theology, mystagogy, liturgics, anthropology, a theology of missions and of spirituality, with an additional Wisdom-motif he is also able to incorporate a coherent triadology, Mariology,

¹⁷⁷ Congar, among others, says that 'there exists in God a Word which is also his Image and his absolute Wisdom. If God is to express himself outside himself, in a world, it will be on that basis. It was by this Logos-Image-Wisdom that everything was (created).' Cf. *Word and Spirit*, 10.

a theology of creation, of the masculine/feminine, cosmology and eschatology. Thus, his all-pervading logocentric and sophiological perspective (the former much more dominant than the latter) provides a way of pulling together the various threads of his entire theology. John Saward expresses it aptly: 'Interweaving the mysteries is not just the business of poets; according to the First Vatican Council, it is the proper task of theologians. We attain a deeper understanding of divine revelation when we come to see how all its mysteries fit together as a true and splendid whole.'¹⁷⁹

Bouyer's Wisdom-ecclesiology reveals him at his most speculative. Why does Bouyer set such great store on such an elusive concept as Sophia? One reason is that, confronted with biblical allusions to Wisdom which are manifestly obscure and notoriously difficult to interpret – allusions which Christian tradition did not evade nor dismiss, but indeed struggled to understand and to integrate into the mystery of faith – one must find a way to reconcile the paradoxes contained in the sacred text itself.¹⁸⁰ As to why his account is admittedly complicated and difficult to follow at every point, one needs to remember that he is here dealing with divine ontology, cosmology, and eschatology – speculative topics which are never simple. For all its complexity, and despite the fact that Bouyer's train of thought is not the easiest to follow here, his account remains remarkably consistent, both in its internal logic as well as in relation to Christian tradition. However, compared with his Word-ecclesiology, Bouyer's Wisdom-ecclesiology appears more abstract, less 'positive' if by this is meant its relation to

¹⁷⁸ *Christian Mystery*, 127.

¹⁷⁹ Saward, *Mysteries of March*, xvi.

¹⁸⁰ Scholarly speculation on the nature and identity of biblical 'Wisdom' continues up to the present time. Cf. Philippe Vallin's 'La Sagesse en personne, ou comment la Trinité se fit désirer', in *Communio* 26/1 (2001): 47-60, in which Vallin cites the proceedings of the fifteenth congress of the ACFEB, published as *La Sagesse biblique* (Paris: Cerf, 1995). Vallin himself advances the thesis that Wisdom is best understood in light of the dogmatic concept of the divine 'missions' of the Son and Spirit, a position akin to Bouyer's in some points but which does not account as well as Bouyer does for the whole gamut of biblical, patristic and liturgical data on Wisdom.

positive revelation. The Church's relationship to the Word of God is doubtless more concrete, rooted as it is in history and in time. The Church's relationship to Wisdom also has a concrete, historical dimension, but in Bouyer's account, and against his very intentions, it sometimes appears more 'essentialist' than 'existential', metaphysical rather than incarnational, conceptual rather than experiential, timeless rather than time-bound.

Finally, to be fair to Bouyer, one must say that his ecclesiology does not comprise a sophiology *in toto*. The theme of Wisdom runs through his account, penetrating and complementing the theme of the divine Word, but is by no means the primary leitmotif or his most consistent affirmation. Between the two accents of his ecclesiology the Word of God is the more dominant voice; it is, as Chapter One of this thesis has argued, *the* hermeneutical key to unlocking his theological project. But beyond all construals, whether based on Word or on Wisdom, what is most profound in Bouyer's vision is also what is most simple: that the trinitarian God is truly, as scripture affirms, wise and good and loving beyond imagination. And, in a way that the creature can only dimly begin to grasp, God has included it in his divine life, first by creating it, then by saving it. At the end of time, on the threshold of eternity, no matter *how* it will exactly happen – after all, sophiology can but give *one* picture of the final consummation – the creature will find itself forever united with God. This is what Bouyer affirms most of all, and his theology, his 'hymn of praise' to the Almighty, the mystical language of his Wisdom-ecclesiology in particular, is meant to be, in the end, doxological, in praise of the divine Word and Wisdom.

Chapter Five

WORD, WISDOM, AND ECCLESIAL ACTION

A. INTRODUCTION

ECCLESIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE, LIKE all theology, may be said to consist in two components: what the Church *is*, and what the Church *does* or *ought to do*. The first is concerned with the Church's nature and constitution, its existence in time (the primary horizon of Bouyer's Word-ecclesiology) and in the eternal plan of God (the pan-cosmic horizon of his Wisdom-ecclesiology). The second tackles the question of the Church's mission and its tasks, its place in the world and its activities in it. In short, theory and praxis, doctrine and action, Christian belief and the Christian way of life.¹

Thus far this thesis has presented Bouyer's account of what it *objectively* means for the Church to be historically and eternally bound up with the creative and redemptive 'Word' and with the maternal and bridal 'Wisdom'. As for the *subjective* implications of his Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology – what might be termed his construal of appropriate ecclesial action – Bouyer's primary focus has been on the liturgy, chiefly the Eucharist, as the divine-human action par excellence which is as it were the jewel of the Church's life. To carry the metaphor further, the setting for this jewel is the totality of the Church's action which, from the perspective of Word and Wisdom, most fittingly consists in its missionary impetus and its spiritual life. Hence the two previous chapters

¹ There are many other ways of laying out the architecture and grammar of Christian theological discourse. In Pauline terms (or in the manner by which some exegetes schematize the apostle's letters), one might speak of an 'indicative' which issues in a corresponding 'imperative' – St Paul is, as it were, saying: 'As God in Christ has done, so must you now do....' Protestant theology, especially in the line of Barth, speaks of a 'dogmatics' and an 'ethics' which must co-exist in any adequate account. Catholic theology, on the other hand, sometimes employs the framework of 'Creed-Cult-Code', or more frequently (and correspondingly), dogmatic, sacramental, and moral theology. One of the best places to see this framework is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. According to Bouyer, dogmatic theology studies or describes the objects of belief 'as it were in the abstract', whereas moral theology 'examines all human acts in reference to their ultimate end' (*SNTF*, viii-ix); sacramental theology is, of course, concerned with the liturgy and its effects on human life and existence.

have elucidated Bouyer's vision of how the Church is to respond to the divine action disclosed in the Word-Wisdom, whether understood as Christ or as sacred scripture: active seeking after 'him whom my soul loves' (*Songs* 3:1), attentive listening, faith and obedience, proclamation and celebration of the paschal mystery, ongoing renewal and purification – in a word, the service of the divine Word and the praise of the divine Wisdom. For Bouyer, the dynamics of the Word-Wisdom in relation to the Church places the ecclesial body in the inescapable position of a respondent. The fact that the Word not only creates and sustains the Church, but is itself forever united with it, 'embodied' or 'embedded' within it; the fact that Wisdom historicizes the eternal divine plan for a creation proceeding out of and destined to return to God, a plan in which the Church is to be the final and complete realization of Wisdom – all this calls forth the key ecclesial actions of liturgical celebration, missionary proclamation, and spiritual intimacy with Christ in the Spirit.

This chapter endeavours to explore more deeply the underpinnings of these ecclesial actions in response to the divine initiative, the presuppositions which undergird and control such action. What considerations affect and shape Bouyer's attention to those activities of the Church which he judges to be its key actions (liturgy or worship, evangelization, and spirituality)? Put differently, if Bouyer envisions an 'imperative' (demand, command) which the Word-Wisdom imposes upon the Church, what 'indicative' do the theological 'sources' (scripture and tradition) provide which, for Bouyer, necessarily determines the Church's posture and the scope of its activity?

At the outset, it must be pointed out that Bouyer did not write any major treatise on moral theology as such. Since he argues that one cannot make strict distinctions between spirituality and moral theology, and that 'spirituality is located far more within the heart of morality than alongside it', in an important sense Bouyer's numerous works

on spiritual theology may be seen as his contribution, in its own fashion, to Catholic moral theology.² He occasionally contributed short articles on ethics.³ He would sometimes offer his views on the ethics of marriage and sexual love.⁴ However, he himself denies being a specialist in moral theology, and in general confines his writings to the positive data undergirding moral reflection.⁵

Nevertheless, one can argue that an ethical system *does* exist in his theology; indeed one can go so far as to say that an implicit moral purview runs parallel to his dogmatic assertions. Just as it is arguable that Bouyer's ecclesiology is the counterpoint to his doctrine of the Trinity and of Christ (concerned as he is with the divine-human relationship), so it can be asserted that in his theological vision the divine action is met by human action, though clearly in a subordinate and asymmetrical position. This asymmetry is rooted not only in the fact that human beings can perform only *creaturely* acts, but also because of the upheaval caused by sin. In other words, had human beings remained sinless, still their actions would be incommensurate to the largesse and perfect freedom of the divine will. The disproportion is magnified by the actual presence of sin

² *SNTF*, ix. He writes: 'Since human life is characterized by unity of consciousness, and since this unity is found to be enhanced, as it were, as soon as there is any reference to God, it goes without saying that we cannot make strict distinctions between studies in spirituality and studies in moral theology. Just as a truly Christian morality is never really external to dogmatic theology, so spirituality is located far more within the heart of morality than alongside it. But, although it can never be separated from the whole moral problem, spirituality constitutes a sufficiently specific part of moral theology – by reason of its formal object as well as the method required by this object – to demand special treatment.' (Ibid.)

³ Cf., for example, 'The Christian Mystery and Christian Ethics', in *Principles of Catholic Moral Life*, ed. William E. May (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981), 73-87; 'The Ethics of Marriage', in *Christian Married Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981), 33-53.

⁴ Cf. *Christian Initiation*, 129 ff.

⁵ In 'Christian Mystery and Christian Ethics', 86, he admits that moral theology 'is not my special field of research'. This article was Bouyer's contribution at a workshop held at the Catholic University of America in 1979. It is telling that he was asked to speak on 'the ecclesial, doctrinal, and biblical sources' of Catholic morality. Similarly, and much earlier, in a collection of theological essays on the question of religious freedom and political tolerance, *Tolérance et communauté humaine: chrétiens dans un monde divisé* (Paris: Casterman, 1952), Bouyer, together with Lucien Cerfaux, was asked to write on the scriptural and traditional 'norms' governing the problem (cf. Bouyer's article, 'Les données de l'enseignement patristique sur le problème de la tolérance', 57-73). The point of mentioning these is to indicate where

in the human agent, and even when he has been redeemed by Christ and is now living by the power of the Spirit of Christ, his actions are no less relativized by the transcendent action of God.

Thus, any attempt to elucidate Bouyer's treatment of ecclesial action must incorporate his views on the human agent; consideration of *who* the human agent is determines *what* he is capable (or incapable) of doing. Similar attention must be given to the theologian's understanding of the 'world'. Bouyer's cosmology, like his anthropology, is a study in chiaroscuro. It is shot through with the biblical and evangelical picture of contrasting shades of black and white, of sin and salvation. It is for this reason that his appreciation of the action of the Church and of the individual Christian is frequently bipolar in vision: exodus and return, asceticism and mysticism, 'losing all' that one might 'gain all', dying in order that one might truly live. Hence, the following sections will be devoted to analyzing and assessing Bouyer's anthropological and cosmological construals which undergird Church action and Christian behaviour. A concluding section will tender a final verdict on whether his treatment of ecclesial action is sufficiently 'activist'. Briefly put, the conclusion to be proposed is that the key actions of liturgical celebration, evangelical preaching and witnessing, and prayerful *sequela Christi* are wholly consistent with an ecclesiology such as Bouyer's which is governed by its overarching christological and trinitarian horizon.

B. ANTHROPOLOGY AND APPROPRIATE HUMAN ACTION

For BOUYER, THE doctrine of the human person is inseparable from the doctrine of the Church. As he points out, the Church exists 'only in concrete persons',⁶ while

Bouyer's reputation and expertise chiefly lay – in clearly expounding the positive data underlying ethical reflection, and not in addressing specific moral questions.

⁶ *Decomposition*, 93.

conversely, 'the life of the individual Christian can never be isolated from that of the Church, to which it is bound organically'.⁷ Using the language of biology, he observes that the processes of 'ontogenesis' reproduce those of 'phylogenesis', that is, 'the development of each individual of a species goes through the same stages as did the whole species during its whole evolution'. Applied to the Church, Bouyer means by this that 'the process of history by which the Mystical Body has been developed from natural humanity at the call of God's Word is the process which every one of us must undergo in order to become a living member of that Body.'⁸

Bouyer's anthropology is already foreshadowed in his theology of the Word. God, in revealing himself to man,

will [also] reveal man to himself more clearly than could any exploration of his own conscience. For God will reveal Himself as the Creator of man, and, finally, as his Father, as the One Whose Word, that very Word which awakens in man a higher conscience, has created him according to the divine image.⁹

What God's Word uncovers is fundamentally the reality of sin. From the first pages of the Bible, sin has dogged the steps of human individuals and communities. The divine admonition to Cain, that sin is couching at the door of his heart and which he must master, is repeated throughout the history of Israel, itself a microcosm of the human condition. The prophet's declaration that 'the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt' (*Jeremiah* 17:9) is no rhetorical flourish, and is ever the refrain of scripture. That the contemporary world, according to Bouyer, has lost its 'sense of sin' is both short-sighted and tragic: 'The truth is that we believe so little seriously in the Creator that we no longer come to believe in the creature.... It is because we do not believe in the terrible grandeur of creation that we no longer come to believe in the

⁷ *Church of God*, 10.

⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 211.

⁹ *Sacred Scripture*, 10.

immensity (*grandeur*) of the Fall. It is not by a true optimism that we see in Evil no more than an epidermal “sore” on the face of the world.’¹⁰ The naiveté which regards the presence of evil only as a superficial ‘sore’ flies in the face of scripture’s uncompromising depiction: sin cuts deep, has grievously affected human nature, and is inescapable as far as human efforts are concerned. Hence St Paul’s desperate cry: ‘Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ And hence his *theologia*, his ‘hymn of praise’: ‘Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ (*Romans* 7:24-25)

For Bouyer, there is a world of difference between the ‘humanism’ that is ever the aspiration of ‘humanists’, and that ‘true humanism’ which is concerned with fostering ‘the true interests of human beings as they actually exist in the real order’.¹¹ All other forms of humanism which, pitting themselves against Christianity, claim to bring humanity back to paradise are, for him, better called ‘infanticisms’, since they all but keep humans forever trapped in an immature stage of development. True humanism, the humanism of (in Tertullian’s words) the ‘*anima naturaliter Christiana*’, grasps the intuitive truth in Terence’s phrase ‘*Homo sum et nil humanum a me alienum puto.*’ This must not be translated, as the humanists of the Renaissance did (‘I rejoice that I am human, and all that I want is to be more fully what I already am’), but rather (says Bouyer) what Terence himself intended: ‘I am a sinner, weak as are all men, and there is no weakness of mankind that I have any right to pretend to ignore.’¹² In other words,

¹⁰ ‘Christianisme’, 28.

¹¹ *Liturgical Piety*, 269.

¹² *Ibid.*, 268-69. In *Church of God*, 432, Bouyer refines his interpretation of Terence’s statement even more clearly: ‘If Terence’s phrase ... is not taken only in the negative sense he gives it (“Human only insofar as one has all human weaknesses”) but in the richest and purest sense, “Human such as God willed man to be,” with the tendency both in oneself and in others to develop all human virtualities, it is (or ought to be) the motto of the “man of God,” who is called and consecrated to proclaim God and bring Him to his brothers.’

true humanism begins by correctly recognizing the human condition, the unvarnished truth of the human existential situation:

As to the meaning of man himself [writes Bouyer], of his fullness, and of the value in the eyes of God of the full development of his original nature, it is obvious that this can take on a completely Christian sense, as long as it is not confused with any form of too facile an optimism that would not recognize either the actual reality of the fall or the consequent need for giving up certain things even with restoration and fulfillment in view.¹³

Only when humans remember that they are but creatures will they call to mind the Creator, and only when they recognize their need for salvation will they acknowledge a Saviour. And this is exactly what the Word-Mystery-Liturgy brings to bear upon human beings: 'the order of grace, sin and redemption.'¹⁴ Wisdom, too, leaves its imprint on this type of humanism; in a word, true humanism is radically eschatological.¹⁵ Bouyer writes: 'Christianity asserts quite unambiguously that neither the individual nor the collective salvation of humanity is possible either on earth or in any possible prolongation of the present state of affairs. Christianity is, as they say, eschatological.'¹⁶ This corresponds somewhat to the twin aspects of Bouyer's ecclesiology. On the one hand, the Word-motif stresses the 'already' aspect of salvation-history, and envisions authentic humanism as a present reality and an ongoing project. On the other hand, the Wisdom-motif highlights the 'not yet', and beckons humanity toward its final perfection.

In short, Bouyer's anthropology is what he would claim to be the authentic biblical picture of humanity: bleak and desperate insofar as sinful human beings left on their own cannot ever hope to gain salvation, it is at the same time unexpectedly lit up by

¹³ *Dictionary of Theology*, 213.

¹⁴ *Liturgical Piety*, 269.

¹⁵ *Monastic Life*, x.

¹⁶ *Christian Initiation*, 113. This statement must be understood contextually: Bouyer is here criticizing what has come to be known as the 'incarnationalist' position (to be discussed below) which, according to him, optimistically envisions the temporal salvation of humanity. In contrast to this, Bouyer emphatically says that authentic Christianity teaches that 'human history must end in a catastrophe, that it

the revelation of the gratuitous love of their Creator in the mighty Christ-event. The gospel announcement is double-edged; it requires the simultaneous recognition of human sinfulness and of the dire need for a salvation from without, and the acceptance that such salvation is in fact being offered precisely as pure gift. Gospel 'ethics', therefore, can be nothing other than confession and faith, humility and joyful obedience, discipleship and thanksgiving. For Bouyer, appropriate human action – more exactly, appropriate *Church* practice – can only mean actions which respond or correspond to the action of God in Christ, to the *agape* which 'has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (*Romans* 5:5). In the face of a modern tendency to exalt human achievements and to think that 'heaven' could be built on earth by sheer human genius, Bouyer reminds his readers that all this is an illusion:

For a century now, how many times has it been repeated to us *ad nauseam* the capital lesson, we are told, of Karl Marx: that it is not a question of simply understanding but of making history. But to make history, in such a way that the face of the world, *a fortiori* its profound reality, be changed – a biblical theme if there is one – presupposes that only God can be the agent of this transformation.¹⁷

It will be recalled that Bouyer has insisted that 'God's Word, of necessity, must come from outside a world coiled into a ball upon itself in order to achieve the openness necessary to save us from personal suffocation'.¹⁸ In this asphyxiating existential situation, the Word can affect or confront human beings only in two ways: it reveals them for who they truly are, that is, sinners in need of salvation, and it calls from them a response which given their plight can only be right and seemly. Put another way, the very revelation that God desires to consummate his union with humanity 'reveals [the] dissymmetry to the fullest.'¹⁹ What symmetrical action could a human being ever hope

will be interrupted by the supremely miraculous event, the return of Christ and the universal judgement and resurrection. After that, but only after that, the salvation of humanity will be possible.' (Ibid.)

¹⁷ *Gnosis*, 143.

¹⁸ *Eternal Son*, 407.

to return to God? Well does the psalmist ask: 'What shall I render to the LORD for all his bounty to me?' And his ready response: 'I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people' (*Psalm* 116:12-14). In other words, the psalmist recognizes the absurdity of giving back to God measure for measure, and the realization that all that is asked of him is perfect surrender and praise of God's goodness brings unbounded freedom and joy. As Bouyer observes, the divine gift can only give rise to an 'unreserved surrender', that is, 'a disappropriation of self: recognition of our poverty in the superessential richness which becomes infinitely poor to enrich us with itself – complete and total surrender to the love with which we are loved, in the pure joy of no longer belonging to ourselves but of being his, his alone and without reserve.'²⁰ The same passage continues with a cluster of what might be called other appropriate human actions or dispositions: faith, humility, service of God, giving oneself to others, fraternal charity, thanksgiving and worship.²¹ By far, Bouyer appears to give the greatest attention to two in particular: faith and thanksgiving.

Not just any kind of 'faith'. Dietrich Bonhoeffer might rightly rail against that 'faith' which is divorced from authentic discipleship and which 'cheapens' grace; for Bouyer it must be faith arising from a living and existentially critical encounter between a saving God and a sinful creature. As he points out,

... biblical faith is not a simple subjective discovery of the nontemporal 'fact' that one is saved. It is quite the contrary: the discovery that we were not saved but that God intervenes in the world, in our life, so that we become saved. [...] It is this salvation – not as accomplished but as being accomplished ... that elicits [the 'decision' of faith]. In this regard, faith is nothing by itself. It is valid only as surrender, as handing over oneself, to the Word, bursting into our history. [...] It is the divine intervention in the world, and thus in our life, which will create a new life for us here, which we could never have hoped for and which, at the same time, will make a new world.²²

¹⁹ *Church of God*, 262.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 262-63.

²² *Ibid.*, 180.

Behind this assertion is, once again, Bouyer's robust depiction of the Word, one which 'bursts into' and 'intervenes' in human history. Faced with such a divine reality, a 'faith-filled' response is salvific only to the extent that it is genuine encounter. Like Abraham, one must 'touch the Word'; like the prophets, one must be 'seized' by it.

The Word 'remains' or 'abides' among its recipients only if they have a faith corresponding to it (cf. *John* 5:38). At the Last Supper, Jesus said, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him' (*John* 14:23), thus indicating the relationship between faith and obedience on the human side of the equation, and the abiding presence of the Trinity on the divine side. Bouyer insists that faith is the necessary response, the *only* possible response which *remains* a response – faith cannot even be said to 'make' the Church:

[As] the Pauline Captivity Epistles demonstrate so forcefully, the Church, in a sense that is as strong and true as the one we have just explained, is the 'body of Christ' only to the extent that Christ is its effective Head, its leader. This emphasis means that the Church is not constituted by the 'determination' of man or men.... We are not the ones who, through our act of faith, are able to give faith its content, to constitute this 'body of Christ' which the Church must be. Our faith can only adhere to the reality that is given to us, a reality that is brought to us by the historical Christ and by him alone. It is to him, not to us, that the existential 'determination' belongs in that sense. Our faith, insofar as it is ours, is not substituted for some uncertain or empty history, nor can it in any way create on its own the history of salvation.²³

As for 'thanksgiving', Bouyer's emphasis on the *eucharistia* as the Church's divine-human action par excellence has already been discussed at length. From the perspective of 'Word', the Church offers its Eucharist as a thanksgiving memorial *in* time and *until* the end of time. From the *timeless* perspective of 'Wisdom', the Church's Eucharist is a present participation in, and anticipation of, the Son's eternal *eucharistia*

²³ *Church of God*, 310. On this point Bouyer (representing the Catholic tradition) and Schwöbel (espousing the position of the Reformers) would seem to agree. The latter, writing on the Church as *creatura verbi divini*, argues that 'The Church is created by the divine Word insofar as it evokes the human response of faith.' That is to say, the Word of God (divine action), in the creation of the Church, also creates faith among its recipients (human action); both divine agency and human agency are upheld while at the same time critically distinguished. Hence, Schwöbel is careful to say that the Church is *creatura*

to the Father, which is itself effected 'in the Spirit'.²⁴ Recovering a patristic teaching that the human race was created in order to fill up the space in the cosmic choir deserted by Lucifer,²⁵ Bouyer paints a vivid picture of the Church of the redeemed humanity reinstating the 'cosmic eucharist into the eucharist of angels',²⁶ thus offering a vision of pan-cosmic praise of the Creator. It will also be recalled that, for Bouyer, the *berakah*, forerunner of the eucharistic prayer, is 'a prayer whose essential characteristic is to be a response: the response which finally emerges as the pre-eminent response to the Word of God.'²⁷ It is pre-eminent because it is fundamentally a prayer of offering one's life fully to God. For Bouyer, this is commensurate to the divine self-delivery that is present in his Word: 'All this makes the most sense, for, if the word of God is a word of life, a word of the creative and saving intervention of God in the life of man, it is precisely in order to arouse in man, from man, a response, and a response in which he delivers himself entirely, the same way God delivers himself entirely to man in his word.'²⁸

Because Bouyer assigns to human beings the place of a *respondent*, his theology can be (and has been) construed as being unbalanced with regards to the divine-human relationship. Walling, for example, faults Bouyer for downplaying the function of

verbi divini insofar as it is 'made possible by the Word of God and in which true faith is made possible'. Cf. his 'Creature of the Word', 122, 127.

²⁴ In *Le Consolateur*, 449, Bouyer writes that it is in and through the Eucharist that 'all creation and the entire history of salvation returns to the Father, in and with the Son, in thanksgiving and acknowledgement. The acknowledgement of that love, which has known and loved us from before the creation of the world in the one Beloved, is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in God from all eternity and which he accomplishes in us, precipitating the movement of the time of our history towards the eternal cataracts, returning to its source which is the love which makes up the very life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity.'

²⁵ '...we see how man appeared in the universe as an angel of substitution. A new Lucifer, he was to occupy the place left empty by the first Lucifer in the choir of the universal eucharist. Born of the very world that its first prince had involved in his ruin, Adam, the world's new master, was destined to reintegrate it into the *pleroma* of divine love, to bring it once more into the kingdom of light and love.' (*Monastic Life*, 32)

²⁶ *Cosmos*, 224.

²⁷ *Eucharist*, 30.

human intentionality in the encounter between God and human persons. According to him, the theologian is 'so concerned lest human activity and reflection distort that encounter, that he minimizes the role and value of such activity.' Walling conjectures that Bouyer's 'aversion to any promotion of human autonomy in relation to the divine' gives the theologian that trenchant and polemical tenor to his theology.²⁹

Another way of phrasing this critique is to say that, in Bouyer's theology, there is an apparent lack of positive content attributed to the Church's task. A critic might take Bouyer's ecclesiology to task for stressing so much the divine action that correspondingly very little emphasis is given to the Church's action. While it has become a theological commonplace today to say that the Church is both a gift and a task, in Bouyer's ecclesiology, 'gift' is stressed. The Church's absolute dependence on God is underscored like a refrain. From Protestantism Bouyer borrows the strong sense of the ecclesial body as *creatura verbi divini*; from Orthodoxy he culls the idea of the Church as *creatura sapientiae divinae*. Stressing the Church as *creatura* is not the problem; what is worrying (so the criticism goes) is his corresponding lack of attention to what the creature *can and must* do given (or in spite of) its creatureliness. Neither the human task of 'building up' the Church, nor the Church's task of being 'salt of the earth' and 'light of the world', is considered in any great detail, contrary to Healy's contention that

It is ... not enough to discuss our ecclesial activity solely in terms of its dependent relation upon the work of the Holy Spirit. The identity of the concrete church is not simply given; it is constructed and ever reconstructed by the grace-enabled activities of its members as they embody the church's practices, beliefs and valuations.³⁰

A first response to this criticism is to observe that Bouyer's theology of the divine Word, despite its tri-angular perspective (phenomenological, anthropological, and

²⁸ *Gnosis*, 105.

²⁹ Walling, *Metamorphosis*, 345, 350.

³⁰ Healy, *Church, World, Christian Life*, 5.

biblical), the seriousness with which it takes human historicity, and its ample use of the human sciences, is at root a theology of the *divine* Word. The same may be said of his attention to the *divine* Wisdom. Put even more simply, his theology is thoroughly *theological*. This is not a tautology; it merely echoes what Bouyer says, in another place, that the seemingly varied ‘sources’ of theology are reducible to one simple and essential thing: the Word of God.³¹ In other words, Bouyer is unrepentant so far as the *asymmetry* of the divine-human relationship is concerned. The place which he assigns to human agency and intentionality is wholly governed by biblical revelation and evangelical considerations. If he relativizes human action, it is because (so he would say) the Bible does the same thing; if he seems frankly ‘pessimistic’ about the human condition, it is because that is what the Gospel teaches, in order that the Gospel might truly be ‘good news’. ‘For the world to be saved, in the evangelical sense of the word, we have first to believe that it needs to be,’ he writes, ‘We must then believe not that *we* have the means but that God has them....’³²

Nevertheless, one could counter that the asymmetry can be maintained without prejudice to a fuller consideration of the human condition: its hopes, fears, aspirations, struggles and concerns. In this regard, Christopher Twohig’s critique of Bouyer’s doctrine of Christ might equally apply to his doctrine of the Church. According to Twohig, Bouyer’s ‘high’ Christology is ‘somewhat removed from that appreciation of God’s reality which accepts active participation and involvement in history.’³³ What Twohig is seeking is a sense of ongoing historicity, a continuing involvement both of Christ and the Church in the lived history of flesh and blood human beings, and its absence ‘explains the lack of sympathy in Bouyer’s Christology for categories such as

³¹ *Le métier*, 212.

³² *Decomposition*, 99.

liberation and justice'.³⁴ As he puts it: 'To place in relationship Christology and the political order is to accept a certain social implication for it. The danger, inversely, is a return to a more or less disguised, if not misguided, form of messianism, restricting salvation too hermetically to the reality of interior grace, confining Christ to a "heavenly" role.'³⁵ To some extent a similar danger may be present in Bouyer's 'high' ecclesiology, which runs the risk of 'restricting' Church action to a 'religious' or 'churchy', rather than socially active, role.

In this connection Bouyer's missiological paradigm is illuminating. Following what he sees as the biblical and early Christian pattern, he will have the Church *first* remove itself from the world *and then* reach out to it.³⁶ 'Since the world where we find ourselves has become what it has [sic], we must begin by escaping from it, freeing ourselves from it, in order to be able to contribute to saving it...'³⁷ Unfortunately, it seems that Bouyer frequently pays more attention to the aspect of 'escaping' to the detriment of that of 'contributing'. The result may be, as Walling points out, a minimizing of the role and value of human activity. It is not as if Bouyer completely ignores human activity; rather, such activity is considered in his own terms, which is to say, in terms of how he sees scripture and tradition defining it. While he will occasionally speak of charity and justice, these are painted in very broad strokes, so that in general one must admit that he attends but little to the specificities of ethical action as

³³ Twohig, *Christology of Bouyer*, 400.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 401.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 395.

³⁶ Cf. his study, *La Vie de saint Antoine: Essai sur la spiritualité du monachisme primitif* (Abbaye S. Wandrille, Editions de Fontenelle, 1950). Bouyer recommends the early monastic ethos exemplified by Anthony of fleeing *from* the world, of seeking God in the desert, before returning *to* the world in order to more effectively serve it.

³⁷ *Church of God*, 466.

such. This need not be counted as a serious liability on Bouyer's part; the last section of this chapter will present a more conclusive assessment of this issue.

Mention of Bouyer's missiological paradigm takes the present discussion to the question of his perspective on the mission of the Church (inseparable from the mission of its individual members) vis-à-vis the 'world' as viewed by Christian tradition. It will become clearer in the next section why so much hinges on the perception of the proper 'place' which Christians and the Church occupy in the world, and whether they ought to love or hate, flee from or immerse themselves in, the world.

C. THE 'WORLD' AND THE CHURCH'S MISSION

THE CHURCH'S ACTIVITY with regards to those who are not Christians, its 'mission to the world', requires, for Bouyer, a more careful delineation. In an important sense, he writes, there are 'two worlds' which are at enmity with one another. There is 'the world in which we live when we are in church', the sacramental world which brings about a 'paradoxical meeting point between this world of everyday life and the world to come, the world of the resurrection into which Christ has led the way.'³⁸ And then there is the world in which one lives outside the liturgy, the 'world of everyday life'. Bouyer is not playing a word-game here; he is aware of the multivalent meanings of 'world' in scripture. On the one hand, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (*John* 3:16). But does not the same Johannine corpus speak of *not* loving the world? 'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him' (*1 John* 2:15). Bouyer explains:

For the word which we translate by 'world,' (κόσμος), does not mean simply the beings and things in the world, which are all God's creatures, but rather the reorganization, the order in which they are now arranged; and that order and organization are those of the Prince of the world, the rebel angel who has become the Enemy of God.³⁹

³⁸ *Liturgical Piety*, 257.

Hence, he appeals to the whole biblical and patristic tradition which enjoined both ‘the love of the world as the divine creation and the hatred of the world as the instrument of the devil’, for which he says that Christian spirituality can neither settle down in any compromise nor make a choice.⁴⁰ Rather, one must heed the evangelical call, a necessarily bipolar one, of a paradoxical ‘separation from the world and openness to the world, flight from the world (even radical condemnation of the world) and love of the world.’ Like Christ, Bouyer points out, ‘the Church seems to have instigated hatred of the world only so she could tell it: “When you have lifted me up (on the cross), I shall bring all men to me.”’⁴¹

It is against this backdrop that Bouyer underscores a crucial distinction: the Church’s mission is not so much to ‘serve the world’ in a blithe, naïve and uncritical manner, but to serve the *men and women* in it, so that they may be saved from their condition which is alienated by sin.⁴² The Church is called to engage in a ceaseless rescue operation; its destiny is to continually effect the transferring of people from one kingdom to another, as *Colossians* 1:13 puts it: ‘He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.’ ‘For the Christian,’ writes Bouyer, ‘his whole activity has no final purpose other than that of gathering all men, insofar as this depends on him, into the communion of God’s charity.’⁴³ It is therefore mistaken to accuse Bouyer of fostering a lacklustre engagement with or service to the world, but such engagement or service, from a theological viewpoint, is always one of announcing the kerygma; it is ‘to proclaim Christ, to make him live in people’s

³⁹ *Liturgical Piety*, 258.

⁴⁰ *SNTF*, 453.

⁴¹ *Church of God*, 15-16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 466.

⁴³ *Introduction to Spirituality*, 169.

hearts by the power of the Spirit, and thereby to prepare the transformation, the transfiguration, of the entire world.’⁴⁴

Notwithstanding this nuanced approach to the ‘world’ and the Church’s mission to it, Bouyer’s heightened sense of the Church’s futurity and its consequent relativizing of the here and now have engendered the criticism that such a view of human history, stressing as it does sacramental realism in the present life and an absolute eschatological finality, ‘apparently serves to weaken the commitment of the Christian in the world.’⁴⁵ This was a particularly vigorous charge set against an immensely lively debate in mid-twentieth century French Catholic theology, pitched between so-called ‘incarnationalist’ theologians who defended the thesis of an unbroken continuity between the values of the present world and those of the future Kingdom, and so-called ‘eschatological’ theologians (among whom Bouyer had emerged as perhaps the most articulate and vociferous) who upheld a radical discontinuity.⁴⁶ In an article written in 1948, Bouyer castigates the ‘incarnationalist’ theologians for their woeful neglect of the reality of sin and the necessity of the cross, their ‘monistic’ view of human history opening up cleanly into the Kingdom of God, their unjustified optimism for the ‘world’, and their arrogance

⁴⁴ *Church of God*, 468.

⁴⁵ James M. Connolly, *Human History and the Word of God: The Christian Meaning of History in Contemporary Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 180.

⁴⁶ Among the theologians with ‘incarnationalist’ leanings Connolly cites, among others, Henri de Lubac, Teilhard de Chardin, Paul Henry, Christopher Butler, and Martin D’Arcy. Those with a ‘moderated incarnational’ position include Marie-Dominique Chenu and Th. G. Chiffot. Bouyer and Cullmann represent, for Connolly, the extreme eschatological position, while straddling the two positions are the likes of Congar and Léopold Malevez. Cf. Connolly, *Human History*, 155 ff. It must be said that such labeling of certain theologians as ‘incarnational’ or ‘eschatological’ is at best tenuous and at worst misleading. Unless a particular theologian has clearly aligned himself in the debate, it is often difficult to assess where exactly he lies in the theological spectrum. Positions can also shift and be moderated in time, as in the case of de Lubac, whose pre-conciliar optimism significantly changed in the years after Vatican II. In the case of Bouyer, he has been judged most severely on the basis of his 1948 article, ‘Christianisme et eschatologie’. Largely because of the trenchant position Bouyer espouses in this essay, he is cited by Jean Galot as the representative ‘eschatological theologian’; cf. Galot’s ‘Eschatologie: eschatologie et vie spirituelle’, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité (ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire)* tome IV (Paris: Beauchesne, 1960). Cf. also Chiffot, *Approches* (previously cited). A less polemical tone and a more nuanced viewpoint may be gleaned in Bouyer’s other writings, to be discussed below.

in thinking that it is up to the Church to 'make Christ reign over the world', to which Bouyer retorts: 'Yes, he must reign, but it is not up to us to make him reign!'⁴⁷

Bouyer's vigorous 'eschatological' position, coupled with his rejection of an extreme 'incarnationalist' position, tends to make him taciturn with regards to the Church's present activity (except for the key ecclesial actions of liturgy, worship, evangelization, and spirituality) and loquacious with regards to its future or 'ideal' form, as his Wisdom-ecclesiology demonstrates. Jean Galot, citing Bouyer's 'Christianisme et eschatologie', writes:

His historical perspective is concentrated on the end of time. It is in the last day that the day of Yahweh is reported, and it is at that final moment that the reign of Christ will be established. In that end of time, the catastrophic aspect is strongly underlined. Louis Bouyer sets up the picture of a world which will writhe in convulsions, whose carcass will be corroded, whose frames will crumble like an iron scaffolding in the conflagration....⁴⁸

This horrific end-time scenario comes from Bouyer himself, and confirms Galot's suspicions that the 'eschatological' theologians, gleefully foretelling gloom and doom, condemn to destruction all of the world's values of civilization.⁴⁹ And, as Chiffot puts it, Bouyer appears to assign to the Church and to the Christian a role which seems to be more that of a '*huissier*', a door warden or subpoena-server, rather than that of a herald of glad tidings.⁵⁰ In other words, the critique is that a rigorous and heightened

⁴⁷ 'Christianisme', 26. Cf. also his article, 'L'œuvre exégétique d'Oscar Cullmann et le problème eschatologique', *La Vie Intellectuelle* 16 (mars 1948): 22-24. How correct is Bouyer in his critique of the opposing position? An objective reading of his 'Christianisme et eschatologie' must admit that the theologian succumbs to exaggerated depictions of the incarnationalist position, as it is likewise true *vice versa*. In the heat of the debate, both sides painted largely unrealistic pictures of one another's position, while the truth is nearer this: the dichotomy is a false one. Both the 'incarnationalist' and 'eschatological' theologians are seeking to emphasize certain elements against a wider tableau of commonly-held beliefs. All of them admit the value of present meritorious works (so observes Galot, 'Eschatologie', 1052), as they also accept the inevitability of a future *dénouement*. While it is true that both camps differ greatly in emphasis and thus in their practical, existential and ecclesial implications, what is false is having to choose between the two.

⁴⁸ Galot, 'Eschatologie', 1052, citing 'Christianisme', 18-19.

⁴⁹ Galot, 'Eschatologie', 1052.

⁵⁰ Chiffot, *Approches*, 55.

eschatological sense inescapably spawns *contra mundum* attitudes. How justified is the criticism?

It cannot be denied that Bouyer's view of both the world and of fallen (though redeemed) humanity makes him anxious to dispel all extravagant notions of 'transforming the world': the transfiguration of the entire world, he says, cannot be effected now, regardless of how diligent the Church is or despite all the progress and breakthroughs in almost all fields of human endeavour.

Again, this transfiguration cannot be brought about ... except with and through the return of Christ in glory. [...] In other words, [the Church] cannot make the present world into the reign of God. But by proclaiming the coming of this reign, as Christ did, and its coming *in Christ*, who is dead and has risen, she can prepare men for it in this world.⁵¹

This quotation is Bouyer's reminder to his theological opponents, those 'incarnationalist' theologians who are 'straining towards a spirituality of impassioned adherence to the world',⁵² that it is not their business to cause to happen what God has reserved for himself alone. He rejects the extreme incarnationalist view in which 'God will only have to gather, like a ripe fruit which falls on its own into our hand, all that we will have prepared.'⁵³ To such a view both scripture and tradition consistently oppose the figure of the Almighty One, master of all histories and destinies, apart from whom human beings can do nothing and whose prerogative it is to 'make weal and create woe, I am the LORD, who do all these things' (*Isaiah* 45:7).

⁵¹ *Church of God*, 468.

⁵² *Cistercian Heritage*, xiii.

⁵³ 'Christianisme', 31. This statement appears to allude to Martin D'Arcy's glowing affirmation of Christopher Butler's (what Connolly calls) 'full-bodied incarnationalism'. D'Arcy writes: 'In saying that history is the flowering of the seed whose fruits will be garnered at the end in the kingdom of God, Abbot Butler brings together as closely as possible human life to its supernatural end. No longer have we to accept the discontinuity laid down by Père Congar and Père Malevez. The Christian has not to arrive personally safe but without luggage; he has to take with him all that he acquires on the road.' Cited by Connolly, *Human History*, 167.

But could there similarly be an extreme eschatological position into which Bouyer himself could inadvertently fall? Chiffлот criticizes Bouyer, not for the objective truthfulness of his statements, but for his 'attraction' to some 'extreme attitudes'.⁵⁴ One of these *attitudes extrêmes* could be, as Galot points out, that of ascribing to the evil one 'such an ascendancy in the world that the latter is condemned to destruction with all its properly earthly values, its values of civilization.'⁵⁵ This 'extreme attitude', without doubt a danger worth heeding, *may* be found in Bouyer's 1948 essay, what with the unfortunate impression it gives of gleefully awaiting the eschatological conflagration, and the several instances where a *theologia crucis* seems to dominate in an unhealthy or unbalanced manner, as in this passage: 'Christ did not give birth to the redeemed people by the divine virtue of his resurrection as by dying upon the cross'.⁵⁶ Or he appears to betray his predilection for the cross over and above the resurrection in using the phrase '*le Crucifié ressuscité*', in which the substantive is *Crucifié* and *ressuscité* a (mere) qualificative.⁵⁷ Rather, it is more correct to say that the cross and resurrection form a seamless garment, one indivisible salvific event. It is not to be wondered at that an over-emphasis on the cross, at the expense of the resurrection, can often degenerate into pessimism and the morbid expectation of a catastrophic finish to the present world.

However, in fairness to Bouyer, it must be pointed out that, on the whole, his theology shows a remarkable balance between a *theologia crucis* and a *theologia gloriae*. There is an obvious danger in drawing conclusions from one article (not even a monograph) which is limited by space and written polemically in a general ambiance then prevailing of acrimonious theological controversy. Such circumstances will

⁵⁴ Chiffлот, *Approches*, 50.

⁵⁵ Galot, 'Eschatologie', 1052.

⁵⁶ 'Christianisme', 31.

understandably generate, as Chiffot indicates, not *modération*, but *extrémisme*. For apart from that article written in the ‘heat of battle’, Bouyer’s theology as a whole is captivated by an irrepressible sense of confidence in Christ’s victory over death and with that, his ascendancy and lordship over the world. And he shows elsewhere that the divine *agape* which instigated the Incarnation, the cross and the resurrection, is determined to bring about, not the world’s annihilation, but its complete transfiguration:

In a word, what we expect in this world is not that the world, with our body, which is part of it, vanish or be annihilated, but that they, together, be transfigured – transformed from top to bottom by the resurrection, wherein they are clothed by the glory of God. And we prepare ourselves for it, we prepare the world for it, by struggling against the power of sin, first in ourselves, by living faith in Jesus Christ, ‘our victory over the world.’⁵⁸

It is often claimed that the incarnationalists are humanists, with the implication that the eschatologists are not. Bouyer is only too aware of the pitfalls of an uncritical and unrestrained ‘humanism’, but he is far from denying its positive significance.⁵⁹ As the discussion on Bouyer’s anthropology has brought to light, his own position is more aptly called an ‘eschatological humanism’, an expression he borrowed from Dom Clément Lialine.⁶⁰ What the phrase affirms is the paramount importance of fulfilling one’s duties, responsibilities and tasks in this world, *seen in the light of eternal life*. A healthy eschatological perspective cannot and does not ‘involve even the slightest devaluation of this life, and in particular of the purely human tasks which it imposes

⁵⁷ ‘Christianisme’, 23.

⁵⁸ *Church of God*, 467-68.

⁵⁹ As he recounts in *Le métier*, 183: ‘Many years ago, I presented as imminent the present-day crisis [in the Catholic Church] when I wrote *Christian Humanism*. In an article written for the review of the Catholic theological faculty of Strasbourg entitled *Où en est la théologie du Corps mystique?* I indicated the dangers which threatened us and which, alas, have fully revealed themselves to be real since then. It was essentially a question of a humanism opposed to authentic Christianity in that it minimized revelation and the cross, seeing in the Incarnation only a sort of immersion, God disappearing into a purely human humanity.’

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 167. Bouyer also dedicated his book, *The Meaning of the Monastic Life*, to Lialine, ‘to whom he [Bouyer] owes not only the notion and term “eschatological” humanism, but the idea which has prompted this book....’

upon us'. This is because 'eternal life is only promised to the Christian on condition that he makes a right use of this life. He will be judged, not by the faculty he has shown for escaping from his human tasks and responsibilities, but, on the contrary, according to the fresh meaning which he has discovered in them and the renewed devotion with which he has discharged them.'⁶¹ Further, Bouyer points out that

Life in the Church, of which baptism has made [the Christian] a member and to which every celebration of the eucharist leads him back, is not a life of escape. The Church is not outside the world, it is at the heart of the world. In fact, in order to save the world it must become *the* heart of the world.⁶²

Bouyer's position will move little in the ensuing years. In 1958, the same year that he published *Christian Initiation*, he also released *Christian Humanism*. The latter constitutes a kind of foundational ethics, touching on such anthropological data as dependence, freedom, action and self-development. But the criteria with which he subjects these existential givens remain unchanged: they are what he believes to be the gospel emphases on God's transcendent sovereignty, the overarching divine plan for creation, the divine address and the human response, humanity's eternal destination, and so forth. Bouyer the eschatological humanist is thus also Bouyer the divine command ethicist for whom moral action is construed in terms of a response to God's personal call, and obedience becomes the hallmark of appropriate Christian behaviour.⁶³ As Christopher Steck has pointed out, a divine command theory of moral action emphasizes such motifs as divine sovereignty, divine freedom, and interpersonal encounter between God and the human agent – themes which are eminently highlighted in Bouyer's Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology. At the same time, such a theory can be seen as antithetical to

⁶¹ *Christian Initiation*, 114.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶³ Christopher Steck has argued for a similar way of construing the ethics of Hans Urs von Balthasar. 'For von Balthasar,' writes Steck, 'God's personal address to the individual makes a claim on the individual and is important to that one's identity. The centrality of this divine address gives von

traditional Catholic moral theory which, building upon natural law, stresses moral reasoning, objective and universal standards of right and wrong, and the rule of justice.⁶⁴ It can thus come under fire for promoting obedience at the risk of undermining those 'goods' generally associated with human fulfilment, such as freedom, autonomy, and moral reasoning.⁶⁵ In Bouyer, however, personal obedient response to the divine will is not incompatible with the exercise of the proper human goods, but because he takes seriously the biblical and patristic injunctions on the limits and ambiguities of such goods, he posits a more dynamic interplay between the divine will and the human agent. It is surely significant that Bouyer more frequently connects divine action and human action than he does human action construed in its own terms of autonomy, intentionality, and teleological fulfilment.⁶⁶

James Connolly perceptively observes: 'Catholic thinkers working in the theology of the Church and concerned about the nature and the mission of the Church in the world tend to fall almost totally within the incarnational camp. Catholic biblical and patristic scholars concentrating upon the historical working out of the divine economy of salvation, and deeply affected by the final and decisive event of human history in the parousia, seem to tend totally toward an eschatological orientation.'⁶⁷ This sheds a great deal of light on Bouyer's mindset and theological emphases. He is not so much a hands-

Balthasar's thought an orientation to divine command ethics.' Cf. his *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Herder & Herder/Crossroad, 2001), 58 ff, in 59.

⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 1-2; also André J. Bélanger's *The Ethics of Catholicism and the Consecration of the Intellectual* ([Liverpool]: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 19 ff; and *Principles of Catholic Moral Life*, ed. William E. May (previously cited).

⁶⁵ Steck, *Ethical Thought*, 72.

⁶⁶ In 'Christian Mystery and Christian Ethics', 74, Bouyer identifies three root causes of the contemporary 'crisis' in Christian ethics: the reduction of Christian ethics to mere matters of casuistry; the divorce between ethics and spirituality; and the loss of a sense of the continuity between belief and way of life. As the title of his article indicates, ethics is always keyed to doctrine, in this case, the foundational doctrine of the Christian 'mystery' which in turn determines 'human life and its widest possible fulfilment' (p. 78).

on pastoral worker as he is a professional theologian, one whose primary work in the 'sources' makes him highly suspicious of slogans such as 'evolution' and 'progress', and whose salvation-historical biblical worldview makes him nervous about extravagant claims of what humans can do. Notwithstanding his interdisciplinary approach, he is not as 'modern' as he is traditional. Bouyer the eschatologist is also Bouyer the traditionalist who bids the Church look to the past, to what God has already done, as it does to the future, to what God will do. Thus he would say that the past and the future determine the Church's stance toward the present, whereas those whose eyes are fixed only on the present end up fixated upon it.

D. CONCLUSION

IF BOUYER'S ETHICAL thought were to be evaluated more generally in terms of attention to human activity as such and to specific moral actions, it would quickly become clear that his 'ethics' is quite 'thin', and that he has little by way of a moral theology to speak of.⁶⁸ However, what is being considered here is not so much his ethical system broadly speaking, but his understanding of ecclesial action in response to the Word-Wisdom. In this regard, one must say, *pace* Walling and Twohig, that Bouyer's treatment is remarkably coherent and consistent with its christological and ultimately trinitarian horizon. The Church's fundamental ministry and service, indeed its most basic 'liturgy' (understood etymologically as that 'public service' which the ecclesial body renders to the world at large) is the permanent proclamation of the

⁶⁷ Connolly, *Human History*, 158.

⁶⁸ This is also Steck's critique of von Balthasar's ethical thought: 'Von Balthasar rarely, if ever, reflects at any length on difficult, concrete ethical situations. One can wonder if von Balthasar's reluctance to ponder particular ethical dilemmas contributes not only to the ambivalent status of moral reasoning but also to the high and possibly excessive rhetoric with which he describes Christian love.' Cf. *Ethical Thought*, 158.

Christian mystery.⁶⁹ In other words, the *leitourgia* is for him the Church's most important *diakonia* to the world. This is the action which is most distinctive of the Church and of Christians, one which brings together in one sublime act the different harmonies of the entire Christian ethos: memorial and sacrifice, creation and redemption, announcement and fulfilment, earthly participation in heavenly worship, death and life, asceticism and mysticism, the cross and everlasting life. In short, ecclesial action, for Bouyer, consists in an attentive response to the divine initiative, exhibited above all in the service of the divine Word and in the praise of the divine Wisdom.

In more personal terms, ecclesial action translates into the individual Christian's charitable and just actions towards his neighbour, in his social responsibility towards others. It may be admitted that Bouyer does not expound at any great length on this subject; in a few rare passages he writes (somewhat vaguely): '[W]hat is Christianity's contributions to the fresh efforts made by every generation to build a habitable city, to organize the world in a way that will satisfy the needs of every individual member of humanity? In the first place, by its ideal of justice, by its assertion that justice itself can only be the fruit of a charity as generous as it is clear-sighted....'⁷⁰ Does this furnish another 'proof' that Bouyer's eschatologism renders him speechless with regards to the Christian's present activity? Does it make Bouyer less 'committed', in a society described by Rémy Rieffel in which the notion of an '*intellectuel engagé*' is tautological since the essential condition for being an '*intellectuel*' is to be '*engagé*', especially in the political arena?⁷¹ Not necessarily.

⁶⁹ *Liturgical Piety*, 108.

⁷⁰ *Christian Initiation*, 134.

⁷¹ Bélanger, *Ethics of Catholicism*, 6, citing Rieffel, *Le Tribu des clercs* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, CNRS, 1993), 16.

However one interprets this apparent lacuna, assigning some weight or significance to it either in favour of or against Bouyer, what is certain is that he has chosen, not the path of Christian social theory and moral discourse, but the way of scripture and tradition, that is to say, an emphasis on *personal conversion and conformity to Christ*. Again and again Bouyer reminds his reader that ‘the Christian’s action and his influence draw their effectiveness above all from the transformation of his own being which [the] knowledge of Christ has made possible for him. He will never succumb to the illusion of a transfiguration of the world effected by himself, or rather effected with his assistance, independently of this transfiguration of himself.’⁷² Indeed this conviction becomes the keystone upon which is built Bouyer’s theology of Christian spirituality, and provides the reason for his emphasis on it. Even more precisely, spirituality springs from the centrepiece of his ecclesiology – Christ who is Word and Wisdom. Christian belief in the mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’, says Bouyer, in and of itself involves a spirituality, and the latter in turn generates an ‘ethical program’. It is only on the basis of the Christian mystery, he writes, that

we can and are right to build not only a spirituality but an ethics. The spirituality has no other ultimate end than our filial assimilation to God. The ethics, while fully Christian in its inspiration and aspiration, is in no way artificially grafted onto the face of our nature; but instead, it is a revelation or elucidation of the inner law of its own *physis*, in the exact meaning of this Greek word for nature, i.e., its dynamic self-realization.⁷³

For him, it is in the very effort of personally becoming more like Christ, becoming as it were *alter Christus* – Christ who is the Word of the Father and Wisdom of the divine mind – that the Christian will be able to serve the world, bringing the radiance of Christ’s life and light to it.

From one perspective, ecclesial action as conceived by Bouyer can appear deficient or ineffectual. One might almost hear the dismissive reproach, ‘*only* liturgy,

⁷² *Christian Initiation*, 135.

evangelization, and spirituality?’ and the objection that these actions are neither adequately practical nor sufficiently ‘activist’. In other words, while on the one hand identifying ecclesial action primarily with the celebration of the Eucharist, the preaching of the Gospel, prayer and *sequela Christi*, and on the other hand espousing a somewhat unspecified ‘charity’ and ‘justice’ toward others, Bouyer might become vulnerable to the charge that his recommendations are either ‘not enough’ or ‘too ideal’. What response may be given to these two criticisms?

In the first place, it must again be recalled that nowhere does Bouyer dismiss or belittle concrete human action in the world. As Dulles has observed, his polite critique of Congar’s construal of the lay state aims at restoring lay people to their proper ‘priestly’ participation in the Church’s *sacred* actions without for that denying their uniquely *secular* role in the world.⁷⁴ As to why he manifestly does not devote more attention to specific human actions as such, one must reply firmly that this must not be demanded of a theologian who neither specialized in moral theology nor deemed it his life-work to construct a complete theological *summa*. Moreover, Bouyer’s emphasis on the liturgy, evangelization and spirituality as the most constitutive actions of the Church is eminently consistent with the motifs of Word and Wisdom. To fault him for recommending ‘only’ the liturgy, for example, is indefensible when one recalls his extremely robust understanding of the ‘Word-Mystery-Liturgy-Church’ continuum, his appreciation of the liturgy as the permanent and continuing locus of God’s salvific action in and for the Church, in and for the world, and his vision of the Church here and now already participating in the pan-cosmic Eucharist, the ‘liturgy’ of the ‘innumerable angels in festal gathering’ and ‘the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven’ (*Hebrews* 12:22-23), indeed, in the ‘eternal Eucharist’ ceaselessly offered by the Son to

⁷³ ‘Christian Mystery and Christian Ethics’, 86.

the Father in the Spirit. Only apart from these considerations will Bouyer's ethical agenda seem thin, ineffectual, abstract and deficient.

What of the second criticism, that such construal of appropriate ecclesial action appears 'too ideal'? This description is often intended in a pejorative sense, 'ideal' as contrasted with 'realistic', the latter being reduced to what is 'normally' experienced in 'real life'. As Bouyer puts it, among some people today the idea of spirituality might at first appear as 'an ideal and a generous goal, [but] it is soon regarded as not only gratuitous but unnecessary, not to say useless or totally unreal.'⁷⁵ However, if that were the fundamental meaning of the word 'ideal', then even the content of Christian dogma would also have to be deemed 'ideal'. What is one to do, for example, with Paul's theology of baptism (being 'dead to sin' and 'alive to righteousness') in *Romans* 6, or his theology of the body (becoming 'one body', 'one Spirit' with Christ) in *1 Corinthians* 6 – do these not sound equally 'ideal'?

This indicates the need for construing a more positive, perhaps a more fundamental, way of understanding the word – 'ideal' as something that is based on God's 'idea' or plan, his eternal designs and ultimately triumphant purposes for creation; in a word, the divine Wisdom. In this sense, to be 'ideal' is to conform to that Wisdom which projects human existence to the divine plane, ever raising it higher to what God himself envisions and requires of humanity. Hence all of Christian faith can be said to be exceedingly 'ideal'; indeed, the divine 'idea' for the salvation of the world – something inconceivable as far as humans are concerned – constitutes that 'good news' which, were it not true, would have sounded fantastic. If Christian dogmatics is, in this sense, ideal, then in a certain sense so is Christian ethics. The imperative follows from the indicative; St Paul gives no hint that the moral response to the objective action of

⁷⁴ Dulles, 'Half Century of Ecclesiology', 435-36.

God in Christ is impossible – difficult, yes, but not beyond human reach by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why he says, in *Philippians* 3:12, ‘Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own....’ Thus the charge that ecclesial action as envisioned by Bouyer is ‘too ideal’ loses its pejorative force. More affirmatively, his Wisdom-ecclesiology can be appreciated for orientating the Church, in a profoundly necessary manner, towards fulfilling its true tasks in the light of the divine ‘idea’ or plan for it.

It has been noted in an earlier chapter that Bouyer envisions the happy marriage of theology and spirituality, that his spiritual theology is keyed to the mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’, and that his theology of Christian spirituality, with its characteristic accent on asceticism and monasticism, is therefore essentially a spirituality of the cross.⁷⁶ Indeed, one can go so far as to assert, finally, that Bouyer construes ecclesial action as fundamentally a response to the cross, that for him ecclesiological ethics ultimately reveals itself as an ethics of the cross. This should come as no surprise if ecclesial action in response to the Word-Wisdom can be summed up in *the life of Christian discipleship*. As Jesus said: ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me’ (*Luke* 9:23). In Bouyer this translates, on the one hand, into a commanding sense of the awful presence of sin in the world, an existential reality that must never be belittled or brushed aside. This is seen in numerous occasions: his criticism of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et spes* as ‘naïve’, in no small measure because of its failure (for all its optimism and openness to the world) to help it

⁷⁵ ‘Christian Mystery and Christian Ethics’, 75.

⁷⁶ It cannot be repeated too frequently that for Bouyer, ‘cross’ is as it were a shorthand for the entire content of the paschal mystery. He writes: ‘The mystery of Christ [is] the mystery that, according to St. Paul, was fundamentally the mystery of the Cross, but of the Cross as seen in the perspective of the resurrection and the communication of the Holy Spirit’. (Ibid., 80)

‘to ask the real questions’,⁷⁷ that is, to confront the world with its sinfulness; his oft-repeated theme of exodus (separation, passage, *transitus*) in his theology of the Word of God; his stinging rebuke of the ‘incarnationalist’ position as teaching a ‘mysticism without asceticism’, or more vividly, a ‘redemption without tears’.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the cross is seen to permeate and thoroughly flavour his anthropology, his theology of mission, and his account of the spiritual life. As he says, it is only in a life of true asceticism, taking the form suitable to each particular person, that the cross, which is celebrated in the liturgy, is introduced into all the affairs of one’s daily life.⁷⁹

These twin accents of sin and the cross are, in the end, simply two sides of one coin, related as cause and effect, problem and solution. They are combined in the following passage: ‘We do not ... get to the heart either of the problems of the world or of the task of Christianity until we seriously face the problem of sin and accept, not the way of some illusory reconciliation with the world, but the way of conflict which is the way of the Cross, the way of voluntary death in and with Christ.’⁸⁰ There is nothing doleful, nothing unhealthy or ‘neurotic’ in this preoccupation: by it Bouyer offers a robust and virile approach to both corporate and individual Christian living that is definitely not for the faint-hearted, but which is as true discipleship should be.

Moreover, the claim that Bouyer concentrates his treatment of the Church’s action under these two rubrics – a thoroughly evangelical viewpoint, if there is one – is wholly consistent with his Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology. As this thesis has repeatedly argued, both the biblical ‘Word’ and ‘Wisdom’ are finally distilled in the paschal mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’, sent by the Father according to his

⁷⁷ *Decomposition*, 40, 43.

⁷⁸ ‘Christianisme’, 16, 35.

⁷⁹ *Liturgical Piety*, 254.

eternal plan into the world in order to deal with sin once and for all. Thus the Church itself, if it is to conform its existence to that of Christ, must likewise continually struggle against sin – in its members, in itself, in the world at large – and embrace the saving cross; better, to struggle against sin *by* embracing the cross. Put differently, both sin and the cross are *sine qua non* to both Christian dogmatics and ethics. If the Church should ever cease to take them seriously, as matters central to both its belief and its behaviour, then one wonders if it still *is* the Church of the almighty Word and Wisdom, that is, the integral body and beloved bride of Jesus Christ.

⁸⁰ *Liturgical Piety*, 268.

Final Conclusions

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN LOUIS BOUYER

This thesis has argued that the doctrine of the Church is among the core concerns of Louis Bouyer's theology, indeed that this doctrine is central to his project, second only to his preponderant gaze upon the mystery of the Trinity. At the end of *The Christian Mystery*, one of his last books, Bouyer declares: 'It seems that the perspective of mystery is the only one which allows us first to grasp the linking up of Triadology (the doctrine of the Trinity) with Christology and then that of this with ecclesiology.'¹ And he enquires: 'What was the Word's coming to us to achieve? It was to create the people of God in the mystical body of the Son of God made man, to reconcile man with the Father in his own body offered on the Cross.'² Despite his having written only one major treatise, *The Church of God*, his ecclesiological perspective is scattered among his many writings. It is hoped that what has emerged is a faithful and coherent rendition of that vision.

'Word' and 'Wisdom' are the two motifs which shape the architecture of Bouyer's doctrine of the Church. His Word-ecclesiology is the primary one, and is linked in no uncertain terms to Christ *the* Word of God, and to the paschal mystery at the heart of the 'mighty Christ-event', in Cullmann's excellent phrase. The mystery of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' is in turn perennially actualized and made present for every new generation of Christians through the liturgy of the Church; it is, in the words of Vatican II, the 'source and summit' of all of its life.

¹ *Christian Mystery*, 292.

² 'The Sacramental System', 47.

It is the Eucharist which most perfectly ‘makes’ the Church in time as it journeys toward its final union with Christ. First, because every gathering of the Christian people to hear the Gospel proclaimed, to offer their gifts of self, to pray with the priest-presider the eucharistic prayer, and to partake of the eucharistic body and blood of Christ, both fulfils the liturgical assemblies of the Old Testament people of God, and anticipates the festal gathering of the eschatological community of praise gathered before the Throne. Second, because the Eucharist is the unsurpassable locus of divine presence, where both in his Word and in the sacrament the glorified Christ is present in mystery, offering himself anew as heavenly food and spiritual power to his people. Third, because each Eucharist is itself a recommissioning for the Church to bring the eucharistic and radiant life of Christ to the world. And fourth, because by it is effected a wondrous foretaste of that eternal Eucharist ceaselessly offered by the Son in the Spirit to the Father. As Bouyer puts it eloquently: ‘Incarnate image of the eternal Son in this worldly flesh, vivified by a breath of life capable of being caught up and carried away in the very breath of divine life, man was thus to reinstate the cosmic eucharist into the eucharist of angels, and even in the eternal ascent [recapitulation] of the Son through the Spirit to the bosom of the Father.’³

Bouyer’s Wisdom-ecclesiology provides a necessary complement to what a Word-centred perspective offers, so that *together* a fuller and double-sighted vision emerges: the Church as linked to Christ and rooted in the Trinity, visible and invisible, historical and eternal, the unfaithful ‘betrothed’ in search of her Bridegroom and the virginal ‘bride’ in everlasting bliss.⁴ While Bouyer’s more dominant Word-ecclesiology

³ *Cosmos*, 224.

⁴ Such a bipolar vision is necessary to fully appreciate the mystery of the Church. Two examples, one from the early Fathers and another from conciliar teaching, reinforce this view. Tarsicius van Bavel writes that Augustine’s ecclesiology

already contains intimations of Wisdom, it requires a closer examination of the latter to highlight the trinitarian, pneumatological, mariological and eschatological aspects of his total ecclesiological vision.

The deep dogmatic material that lies at the heart of Bouyer's Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology is the Church's inseparable bond with Christ, who in his person is the very Word and Wisdom of God. Hence the rock-bottom assertion: without Christ, there is no Church. This, of course, is hardly an original claim.⁵ What makes Bouyer's vision unique and compelling, however, is the robust theology of the divine Word and divine Wisdom underlying that claim. One is hard pressed to name another theologian who has drawn a similar continuum of 'Word-Mystery-Liturgy-Church', or who has offered a sophiological account of the pan-cosmic Church (without for all that losing sight of the concrete and time-bound ecclesial community) which is by turns traditional and novel, dogmatically coherent and mythopoetic.

It is significant that Bouyer articulated his vision of the Church in the very century which Otto Dibelius fittingly called *das Jahrhundert der Kirche*, and of which Romano Guardini prophesied: 'A religious process of incalculable importance has begun

'...is not a static but a dynamic one. Many meanings and levels are interconnected without coinciding completely. The most important distinctions are: the terrestrial church and the celestial church; the church in time and space and the church as the city of God, reign of God, or kingdom of heaven; the pilgrim church and its eschatological fulfillment; the church as institution and as body of Christ; the church as sociological entity and as lived relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit; the holy church and the sinful church.'

Cf. his article 'Church', in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 169-76, in 169.

Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (no. 8) expresses it thus: '[The] society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. For this reason the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the incarnate Word.'

⁵ As early as the beginning of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch already declared: 'Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church' (*To the Smyrnaeans* 8.2).

– the Church is coming to life in the souls of men.’⁶ Bouyer himself noted, at the time of his writing *The Church of God*, that reflections on the Church have become ‘central in the preoccupations of Christians of our age.’⁷ Roman Catholic theology, never hesitant or reserved when it comes to speaking about the Church, has in the twentieth century developed a number of ways of construing it. In the years since the Second Vatican Council, two in particular have been promoted in theological and ecclesiastical circles – eucharistic ecclesiology, and communion ecclesiology. In addition, especially prominent among some Protestant theologians is what has come to be known as kerygmatic ecclesiology. It may be worthwhile to briefly examine these construals of the Church vis-à-vis Bouyer’s account as a way of more thoroughly assessing the contribution of the latter to contemporary ecclesiological discourse.

Kerygmatic ecclesiology, or the construal of the Church as herald, emphasizes the proclamatory nature and task of the Church. In some ways this is summed up in a memorable statement of Pope Paul VI in 1975: ‘Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.’⁸ Avery Dulles has noted that many of this ecclesiology’s chief proponents are Protestants who are understandably stressing what is most distinctive in their tradition: a high regard for the Word of God matched by an energetic zeal to proclaim it.⁹ Bouyer, coming as he did from this tradition, has been one of the most tireless expounders of a rejuvenated theology of the Word, one which drives and controls almost all aspects of his account of the *mysterium fidei*, the Church included. Yet his is no mere echo of, for example, Barth’s theology. As Chapter Two has pointed out, Bouyer attempts to recover the

⁶ Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic* (German original: *Vom Sinn der Kirche*, 1922) & *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. Ada Lane (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 11.

⁷ *Church of God*, xiii.

⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14.

biblical notion of Word with its powerful 'personalist realism': 'personalist' because it is inseparable from the personal presence of God and is ultimately rooted in the person of Christ who is the Word, and the 'realism' stemming from its vigorous actualistic conception. This motif of *actualité* is another enrichment of the 'standard' kerygmatic description of the Church: the way in which Bouyer depicts both Word and sacrament as realizing what they announce and performing what they proclaim, not only mitigates but indeed proves false the polemical pitting of the one against the other. Moreover, Bouyer remains true to the Catholic position by affirming that the 'Word', dynamic and actualizing as it is, must lead to and be completed in the sacrament, the Eucharist in particular.

Does this make Bouyer's doctrine of the Church simply another version of what has come to be known as eucharistic ecclesiology? According to Paul McPartlan, the starting point in this type of ecclesiological discourse is, as the name implies, the Eucharist, how it 'serves as a standard around which gather not only the multitude of Christian people but also the many facts of Christian life into an ordered unity.'¹⁰ Put even more simply, it is 'an understanding of the Church strongly centred upon the Eucharist.'¹¹ If kerygmatic ecclesiology can be appreciated as a meeting point between Roman Catholics and Protestants, eucharistic ecclesiology in turn has become a *locus theologicus* for fruitful ecumenical dialogues between Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians, for, as Adrian Hastings has pointed out, the 'fundamental causative and verbal relationship between Eucharist and church has remained at the heart of Christian experience and public history, something insisted upon by countless patristic and

⁹ Cf. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 77 ff.

¹⁰ McPartlan, *Sacrament of Salvation*, xv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

medieval writers.’¹² Many theologians would say that the Church is most fully itself in the Eucharistic celebration.¹³

The discussion in the previous chapters should have indicated the many ways in which Bouyer’s ecclesiology both enjoys similarities with, and makes important additions to, the eucharistic ecclesiologies as they are normally construed by their authors. Bouyer does not simply draw a line *from* the Eucharist *to* the Church; rather, the continuum begins with the Word, becomes christologically concentrated in the ‘mystery’ – which is itself (in Bouyer’s words) ‘the ultimate statement of the divine wisdom’¹⁴ – and is embodied and perpetually actualized in the Eucharist. Only in this Word- and Wisdom-enriched soil does Bouyer’s ecclesiology take root, and if he confirms the Catholic intuition concerning the inseparability of the Eucharist and the

¹² Adrian Hastings, ‘Communion,’ in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Hastings et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126.

¹³ Besides de Lubac, Ratzinger and Küng, all of whom have been cited above, another example is Jean-Marie Tillard. Cf. his *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R. C. De Peaux (Collegeville, MN: Glazier/Liturgical, 1992), 105.

The recent encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, is a resounding affirmation of eucharistic and communion ecclesiology. ‘The Church draws her life from the Eucharist,’ the document begins; even more positively it asserts that ‘the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist’ (no. 26), closely echoing de Lubac’s famous axioms. In many ways, too, the encyclical affirms a number of Bouyer’s central arguments: that the institution of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday anticipated the cross (no. 3); that the paschal mystery is ‘gathered up, foreshadowed and “concentrated” for ever’ in the Eucharist (no. 5); that the motive of the Incarnation is ultimately doxological (‘The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing’, no. 8); that an ‘eschatological thrust’ profoundly characterizes the celebration, the Eucharist ‘straining towards the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ’ (no. 18). To be sure, what the pope means by ‘Eucharist’ is above all the sacramental body and blood of Christ, and his emphasis all throughout is on Christ’s eucharistic presence which constitutes ‘the Church’s entire spiritual wealth’ (no. 1). Hence the exhortations to eucharistic adoration (no. 25) and the warnings against illicit intercommunion (chapter four). There is also a welcome section on what might be called the social dimension of the eucharistic celebration (‘it spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us’, no. 20), although its treatment of ‘apostolicity’ is too much tied to the hierarchical ministry (chapter three), to the neglect of what the *Catechism* rightly acknowledges as the apostolicity of the whole Church (cf. CCC, 863-864). While the pope’s fervent christocentrism, his desire to rekindle what he calls ‘Eucharistic amazement’ and a seeking after the ‘Eucharistic face’ of Christ, are surely welcome, the encyclical says virtually nothing of Christ’s presence in his word (no. 15; cp. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7) and indeed warns against reducing the celebration to ‘its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation’ (no. 10). In this context Bouyer’s dynamic linking of the Word and the sacrament, and his Word-Mystery-Liturgy-Church continuum, can perhaps offer a perspective that is more holistic, more comprehensive of the scriptural and traditional teaching, and more ecumenically convergent.

¹⁴ ‘Christian Mystery and Christian Ethics’, 84.

Church, it is because the Eucharist for him has first of all been linked with both Word and Wisdom.

Because eucharistic ecclesiology keeps an unwavering eye on the Eucharist, such a steady gaze can itself be self-limiting in vision.¹⁵ It will be recalled that Bouyer himself stresses the need to move *from* the Eucharist *to* the heart of the world. If the saving mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is encountered in an unsurpassable way in the Eucharist, that same mystery needs to ever be lived out in ecclesial existence and action in the world. 'The world of the liturgy,' writes Bouyer emphatically, 'has no substance other than the world pure and simple: the substance of our day-to-day existence. It is *only* this existence....'¹⁶ Hence, eucharistic ecclesiology is often linked with and complemented by the view of the Church as 'communion'. Dennis Doyle describes communion ecclesiology as the theological framework which focuses on *relationships* in order to understand the Church. 'This theological approach begins with "communion" among God and human beings, and then applies this concept analogously to sacrament, ministry, ecumenism, and church-world relations.'¹⁷ Dulles observes that 'people of God' and 'body of Christ' are the two preferred images of communion ecclesiologists, since these bring out most fruitfully the notion of the Church as communion or community.¹⁸ Since the Second Vatican Council, communion ecclesiology has become the most favoured model among many Catholic theologians,

¹⁵ McPartlan, in some of his personal discussions with Henri de Lubac, reports the latter's comment that '[La] question du rapport entre l'Eucharistie et l'Eglise ne préjuge en rien l'idée que l'on peut se faire de la structure visible de l'Eglise.' McPartlan says further that de Lubac 'later reiterated the comment, adding that, although it must be said that "without the Eucharist there is no Church", the term "eucharistic ecclesiology" is "too short". The Eucharist cannot explain *everything* in the Church; in particular, it cannot explain the Church's *structure*, which exists to meet the need of the Church in history to *spread*.' Cf. Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 98.

¹⁶ *Church of God*, 340.

¹⁷ Dennis M. Doyle, 'Journet, Congar, and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology,' in *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 461-79, in 461.

¹⁸ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 55.

and the idea that *communio* best sums up the council's ecclesiology is vigorously defended. Jean-Marie Tillard, for one, says that 'at Vatican II *communio* – however rarely mentioned – represents the horizontal line on which the major affirmations about the Church and its mission stand out clearly.'¹⁹

One might be tempted to describe Bouyer's doctrine of the Church as another version of communion ecclesiology *tout court*. In some ways his book *The Church of God* may reinforce this impression. It reveals, among other things, his concern for Christian unity, his manifest approval of the Russian Orthodox concept of *sobornost*, and his extensive use of 'people' and 'body' imagery. Indeed, with his Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology, one need not go far to discern the central place of communion: the unity of Christ and the Church, the unity of Christians *with* one another *in* Christ, the anticipated unity of the Church *in via* with the Church *in gloria*, and so forth. But it is also evident that Bouyer enlarges on the theme of communion, first of all by *dynamically* linking the Church with Christ, so that both are forever and inseparably the 'total Christ': the body can never be without the Head, and the Head can no longer be removed from his body, in which he 'completes himself' or 'realizes his fullness'. Bouyer's account is particularly enriched by a vigorous defence of the full participation of the entire Church in its most sacred action, the Eucharist. Lay people are neither liturgical bystanders nor 'secular outsiders'. Indeed, the body of the faithful constitutes that 'prophetic tradition' into which the 'episcopal tradition', necessary as it is, must itself be incorporated. By recovering the Pseudo-Dionysian idea of a 'hierarchy' which exists in order to share the

¹⁹ Tillard, *Church of Churches*, xi. The encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* also notes that 'The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an "ecclesiology of communion" the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council' (no. 34).

Not all Catholic theologians, however, would agree that 'communion' best describes Vatican II's ecclesiology. Avery Dulles, for instance, says that 'Since 1974 I have had occasion to study the documents of Vatican II more carefully, and have been struck by the fact that the Council never clearly called the Church a communion (if one looks carefully at the Latin text) but that on a number of occasions said that the Church is a sacrament, which is intended to bring about interpersonal communion through the grace of the Holy Spirit.' (Personal letter to the author, 28 November 2000)

life of the divine 'thearchy' with all creatures, Bouyer hopes to dismantle an 'ecclesiology of power' which ever threatens to usurp the Church's true communitarian nature.

When these different ecclesiological emphases (kerygmatic, eucharistic and communion) are laid out side by side with Bouyer's Word- and Wisdom-ecclesiology, one can therefore conclude that his doctrine of the Church, because it is drawn from the 'sources' of the inexhaustible scriptures and the living tradition,²⁰ hardly claims to any real material originality. Hence it should not be wondered at that his account bears strong resemblances to other traditional and classical construals. Besides, as Bouyer avers, 'The work of a true theologian must allow us to know, not *his* thinking, but the *Noûs Christou*, the mind of Christ, which the *mens Ecclesiae*, the mind of the Church, alone transmits to us and keeps alive for us.'²¹ On the other hand, precisely because his ecclesiology is keyed to the controlling motifs of Word and Wisdom, and because Bouyer combines with such skill anthropological (secular) and *ressourcement* (sacred) data, the account has a far richer texture and a more breathtaking scope: a vision of historical unfolding, of divine promises fulfilled in time, of eternity and eschatological consummation.

Perhaps one last question needs to be addressed in this appraisal of Bouyer's doctrine of the Church: what is it for? Gabriel Flynn, for example, in his examination of Congar's so-called 'total ecclesiology', concludes that the theologian was above all concerned with redressing the causes of unbelief both within the Church and in the world.²² Citing Congar's article 'Vœux pour le concile: enquête parmi les chrétiens'

²⁰ Indeed, following *Dei Verbum*, 9, it is better to say that both scripture and tradition flow 'from the same divine well-spring'.

²¹ *Le métier*, 208-9.

written on the eve of Vatican II, Flynn says that there, ‘Congar states emphatically that unbelief provides the inspiration for his most important studies on the Church and, in addition, constitutes the *raison d’être* for his entire programme of ecclesial reform.’²³ It is therefore not only reasonable but also important to enquire into the purpose(s) of Bouyer’s effort.

A first answer is indicated in Bouyer’s consistent desire for ecumenical unity, for the gathering of all Christians together in the one Church of Jesus Christ.²⁴ He is convinced that one of the necessary tasks of any theologian, though especially a *Catholic* one, is that of maintaining in the whole ecclesial body (which is in principle catholic) a ‘*de facto* Catholicism’, that is, of ensuring that all the elements and charisms which are essential to the life of the one Church are harmoniously developed.²⁵ Bouyer laments the fact that the splintering of the one Church has meant losses to all sides. Because of the separation of the Orthodox and the Protestants, for example, the Roman Catholic Church itself has suffered grievous losses – in the eleventh century it was severed from the wellspring of the Greek Fathers and the liturgical and spiritual tradition of the Christian East; in the sixteenth century it lost the Bible as the basis for the spiritual life of its members and a certain personalism of faith versus a piety based on externals and structures.²⁶ In his appreciative survey of Christian spirituality in all its forms and across all the major traditions, he arrives at the following judgement: ‘The conclusion of all this is undoubtedly that Protestants belong to the Catholic Church by what is best in them, and that what is most rightfully dear to them can only flourish in a certain and lasting

²² Cf. Flynn, *The Church and Unbelief: A Study of Yves Congar’s ‘Total Ecclesiology’* (unpublished thesis: Oxford University, 1999).

²³ *Ibid.*, iii.

²⁴ Cf. *Church of God*, 510-22.

²⁵ *Le métier*, 162.

way in her bosom, while the split between Orthodoxy and Catholicism is a misunderstanding, an absurd and scandalous nonsense.’²⁷ Chapter Two above has argued that Bouyer’s actualistic account of both Word and sacrament has vast potential for ecumenical convergence; it must not be supposed that this is all a providential and accidental ‘discovery’, rather it is a determined effort at rapprochement by one who thinks it is ‘absolutely necessary for the Catholic theologian, precisely for him to be fully Catholic, to have this sympathetic contact, open and even at times critical ... with the different Christian communities which are presently separated from Rome.’²⁸ And it is even arguable that some of his best contributions to Roman Catholic ecclesiology are derived precisely from non-Roman Catholic sources: from his Lutheran background is perhaps drawn the intuition of the Church as *creatura verbi divini*, and his contact with the Russian émigré diaspora in Paris and especially with Sergei Bulgakov undoubtedly led to the view of it as *creatura sapientiae divinae*.

Secondly, one might well argue that Bouyer envisions his ecclesiology to be both prophetic and practical.²⁹ It is apparently not enough for him that his account be simply

²⁶ *OSPAS*, 216-17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

²⁸ *Le métier*, 162-63. Bouyer offers this biographical insight: ‘I should say that the works, such as those of Ramsey among Anglicans, of Cullmann, Jeremias, Riesenfeld and his school, Mowinckel among the Protestants, Bulgakov, Lossky, Florensky among the Orthodox, have not only been for me intellectually and spiritually exciting, but veritable sources. If I have drawn above all from the Catholic tradition such as it has been expressed in the Latin Church, if I owe much to the rediscovery (in our modern times, notably by Etienne Gilson) of St Thomas Aquinas in particular, I owe yet more to the Fathers of course, and to Scripture. But what has helped me the most to understand the Fathers and Scripture are the works of Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox authors. That is why, for that matter, I am without doubt much more well read in certain Orthodox, Anglican and even Protestant milieus than in Catholic milieus. That is also why, I don’t hesitate to say, I am totally at ease with the Orthodox, Anglicans or Protestants who have a true ecumenical spirit, those who rediscover that catholicity which is not one sect among others, which would be true as against all others, but truly *the* truth tending towards all its plenitude....’ (*Ibid.*, 163)

²⁹ These are characterizations especially sought after by Healy in his *Church, World, Christian Life*. In an unpublished article, he notes that ‘those who talk about church “practices” have an agenda; they seek not only to describe the church but to change it in some way’; cf. his ‘Misplaced Concreteness? “Practices” and the New Ecclesiology’ (St. John’s University, 2003). In the same vein, Dulles observes

descriptive; it must also direct the Church towards its genuine nature, its authentic tasks, and its true goal. Hence his 'clarion call to genuinely Christian living',³⁰ his flair for devastating critique and penchant for *l'ironie polemique*, and his persistent exhortations to bishops in particular to discharge well their properly cultic and pastoral responsibilities. This thesis has argued that ecclesial action as understood by Bouyer is, in its own terms, sufficiently 'activist'. Within the purview of the 'Word' which invites the believer and the entire Church to dine at the eucharistic table,³¹ and 'Wisdom' which seeks to lead the believer and the entire Church to the 'marriage feast of the Lamb', ecclesial action that is concentrated on celebration of the liturgy, preaching of the Gospel and communion with Christ in prayer, is eminently meaningful and, against the total panorama of human existence and its finality in God who is to be 'all in all', supremely 'practical'. Bouyer's many writings on Christian spirituality are thus intended to help the ordinary Christian to draw ever closer to Christ, and in the same vein, his numerous works on the liturgy are meant to foster what Pope John Paul II has recently and eloquently called 'eucharistic amazement'.

Finally, as important as it is that Bouyer apparently intends his doctrine of the Church to be ecumenically fruitful, and to prophetically remind the Church what it is and what it must do, perhaps even more central to his theological agenda is the proper pursuit of praise of the divine munificence. His ecclesiology, like the rest of his theology, indeed like all theology as he conceives it, is intended to be doxological. Beginning with his signature theology of the Word, his account presents a God who is ever seeking a

that 'paradigm shifts' in ecclesiological models are frequently motivated more by practical and pastoral reasons, rather than primarily speculative ones. 'Changes have been accepted because they help the Church to find its identity in a changing world, or because they motivate men to the kind of loyalty, commitment, and generosity that the Church seeks to elicit,' he writes (*Models of the Church*, 31).

³⁰ Cf. Trethowan's review in *Downside Review*, 254.

³¹ Another conciliar expression is here, once more, apropos: that the faithful are nourished 'from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ' (*Dei Verbum*, 21).

faithful interlocutor or dialogue partner, a role which Israel fulfilled in the Old Testament and which has been succeeded by the Church of the New Testament. But more than a dialogue partner: the Word seeks a people among whom to pitch its tent, and Wisdom, an abode among the sons of men. The astounding disclosure is of a Bridegroom-God going in search of a bride, a Father seeking children who can give him praise. Bouyer's doctrine of the Church, on one level a competent and thoroughly Catholic account, is, on another and perhaps less suspected level, a catholic (i.e., universal) call to worship. Both the 'Word' and 'Wisdom' invite the Church to be 'amazed' at the depth of the divine *agape* revealed in the mystery of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified', and they summon the ecclesial community to that eucharistic life which, in Bouyer's excellent description, is the 'life of discovery in exultant praise of the fullness of God and the fullness of his design for us; it is the surrender of ourselves to the totality of the divine gift itself.'³²

Once again a full circle is traced: Bouyer's ecclesiology, keyed to the principal motifs of 'Word' and 'Wisdom', is but the converse of his trinitarian theology, a consideration of the creature so generously loved by its Creator that the latter will stop at nothing less than the bestowing to it of 'every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (*Ephesians* 1:3). Indeed, as St Paul expresses it, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?' (*Romans* 8:32). Faced with such a love – of a uniqueness and magnitude that the New Testament had to virtually invent a term for it, *agape* – the Church, as Bouyer conceives it, can in the end do no more (for nothing 'more' is asked of it, nothing 'more' is more fitting to it) than to sing, to celebrate, and to eternally memorialize the *mirabilia Dei*, the wondrous works of its Creator God, giving – and causing others to give – worship to the Father, in the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

³² 'Christian Mystery and Christian Ethics', 87.

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