

**Response to Christopher Ruddy:
What is the Opus Dei? Christian Humanism on the Eve of Vatican II**

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With his thought-provoking paper, Prof. Ruddy lays a solid foundation for our convention and identifies a range of significant threads that will frame our discussion in the days ahead. A theology of grace, he shows, is a true keystone in the architecture of Christian faith. It provides the conceptual hinge between theology and anthropology in the symbolic universe of Christianity and is therefore the ground on which we build our christologies, soteriologies and ecclesiologies. It is one of Prof. Ruddy's central arguments that this relation can be conceived in different ways, and he skilfully uses a specific *historical* moment to map some of the *constructive* options we have in building the theological edifice of Christian faith. I commend Chris for the balance with which he presents both positions. *Every* theology of grace, his historical approach shows, cannot but be *both*, revealing *and* concealing of the mystery of God's work in the world.

In the end, then, Chris does take a clear stance. Advocating for a "ressourcement of heaven," he positions himself within the "eschatological" paradigm (pp. 16–17), and he suggests a theo-anthropological constellation that conceives of heaven and earth as "complementary" (pp. 18–19). This stance, it seems to me, is motivated by a deep desire for integration— heaven and earth continue to drift apart, Chris feels, and our goal must be to reestablish space for heaven on earth. My short response cannot do justice to the depth of his argument. I have to be selective and will organize my comments around the question of the cross—and what's love/grace got to do with it. Chris, after all, has repeatedly stressed the central place that the cross occupies in the eschatological paradigm; at the cross, God's redemptive work, which has begun with creation, finds its ultimate and unique consummation.

I believe it has become clear from Prof. Ruddy's deliberations that any theology of grace implies a specific political vision. Each entangles "heaven and earth" differently, but always intimately; how we conceive of the relation between God and human, therefore, has direct ramifications for our conceptions of inter-human relationships. The imagination of the cross as a unique event in salvation history, then, also has political underpinnings. It provides a theological imagination that has clear advantages for the identity politics of the church. Conceiving of Jesus' death on the cross as an exclusive site for the revelation of God's grace allows the church to think of grace as clearly localizable, containable, and representable by the church. A theology of grace that centers around the exclusivity of the cross in the opus Dei provides the church with an absolute foundation which translates into clearly definable, and police-able, ecclesial boundaries. Yet, it is also a soteriological imagination that runs the risk of turning the cross into an instrument of exclusion.

I believe we can unearth this exclusive thrust in Prof. Ruddy's argument for an eschatological humanism, precisely as it strives to re-integrate heaven and earth. Chris has been clear in staking out the ecclesio-political ramifications of his call for "eschatological humanism": ad intra, it is conceived as a corrective of clericalism; ad extra, it aims to combat the modern "marginalization of heaven." While his concluding remarks thus remain silent on the status of the cross, they do unfold the exclusionary politics that grow from a soteriology which understands the cross as the definite

revelatory site of God's grace. What, precisely, is exclusionary about these suggestions?

A theology of grace that centers on sacrificial soteriology and a representation of the opus Dei in liturgy is prone to clericalism. Chris is clear in identifying and critiquing this theological pitfall. He widens it instead towards a vision of "mutual love of believers" (p. 18, in reference of LG 51). This, however, still falls short of Scripture's witness of God's unconditional, kenotic, excessive love that wants to find expression in our love of our neighbours, irrespective of their religious or cultural affiliation (Lk 10). Instead, it makes the experience of God's graceful presence dependent on active membership in the visible church as it celebrates the liturgy—a rather narrow interpretation of the extra ecclesiam nulla salus.

What's more, Chris' call for a de-marginalization of heaven is framed by language of non-competitive complementarity. We know this language well from debates about the role of women in the church; under the guise of mutuality, it perpetuates patriarchal gender hierarchies that deny women full participation in the ecclesial witness of God's saving grace. The language of complementarity, in short, is used for the purpose of exclusion and should make us vigilant.

Chris is aware of this dualistic thrust and its hierarchical undercurrents—and he does not want to buy into it. His ressourcement of heaven, instead, strives to rediscover heaven as integral, or more precisely, as foundational to the world. And he argues that, once a doxological eschatology heals us from the current "immanentist restriction," we can begin to reappraise Christian faith as the spiritual foundation of Western culture. I agree that such a sacramental approach has a lot of potential for a theology in post-postmodern times. Yet, it is also at this point that the cross is most in danger of turning from an exclusive locus of grace to an instrument of exclusion. The rhetoric of the "Christian West" is running high in Europe these days, and it is a dangerous one that serves to other large groups of people and perpetuate unjust global distribution of resources. The cross in Western public spaces has become a sign and instrument not only of graceful love, but also of dangerous exclusion.

At the heart of the eschatological paradigm that highlights discontinuities between church and world, we can thus trace resources for a politics of exclusion. My point here is not so much to campaign silently instead for the incarnational paradigm. Rather, my aim is to underline the argument that Chris has made with his historical approach—and to perhaps push it further by unearthing its theo-political ramifications. As Chris has shown, our theologies cannot but be a dis/closure; any theological knowledge production is simultaneously revealing and concealing. Throughout most of ecclesial tradition, this has been a rather uncontested claim and the church has developed various frameworks that account for the foundational theological insight that God is greater than any of our imaginations of God. In dealing with the resulting theological differences, ideals of unity and stability have been the dominant organizing principles. Vatican II, for example, has adopted a theological epistemology that integrates inner-ecclesial differences into a linear narrative of dogmatic development.

Only more recently, an insight is beginning to grow that any God-talk is not only an epistemological, but also a political dis/closure. We realize that theological knowledge production is irresolvably entangled into power relations, that are always simultaneously including and excluding. In this respect, Prof. Ruddy's historical approach is in need of amendment; the world has indeed changed since the mid-twentieth century, but not only has it become more modern and secular. Not only has

the divide between church and world, heaven and earth deepened. Over the last few decades, a host of silenced voices have irrupted *within* the theological discourse that complicate the modern theological account of Christian humanism vis á vis the world. Feminist, queer, and non-white theologians have shown how Christian God-talk has been forged amidst patriarchal, white, heteronormative discourses. These voices have exposed a profound ambiguity at the very heart of Christian God-talk. Deeply entangled into asymmetries of power, it is profoundly ambiguous, both liberative and oppressive. Christian humanism is also a site of de/humanization, the church is—as Marcella Althaus Reid put it, provocatively as ever—also a church of Dis/grace. A theological reception of these voices is not so much a case of celebrating differences that can be neatly subjected to a linear narrative of dogmatic development. Rather, it calls for a power-critical vigilance at the heart of our theological practice that acknowledges the profound, messy, potentially violent contingencies of Christian theologies.

Such vigilant theology is not only a critical, but also a constructive endeavour: it searches for soteriological imaginations that can potentially resist exclusionary conceptions of grace. I would like to conclude by gesturing toward possible starting points for such a theology of grace. (1) It could find salvific meaning in the cross not because it is singular, but because it is universal. It would shift the focus from Jesus' sacrifice to Christ as one of countless victims of colonial violence and would discern grace as subversive ways of living-on in the face of absolute imperial power. (2) Such a theology might conceive of the church not only as the center and bedrock of a powerful culture but also as a field hospital at the margins of its battlefields, that takes place there where wounds are ad/dressed and healed. (3) Such a theology could pave the way for alternative discourses of salvation that offer less individualistic, less hierarchical, less human-centred ideas of grace, and instead make space for more cautious, and perhaps more daring imaginations of God's abundant love for all of God's creation—imagination that speak to the love, the hope and anger, the vulnerability and bravery that lie at the heart of transformation, at the heart of grace.

We have a lot of work ahead of us, and Prof. Ruddy has given us much to think about. Thank you.