

## ABSTRACT

Evelyn Waugh and *La Nouvelle Théologie*

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This dissertation seeks to provide a more profound study of Evelyn Waugh's relation to twentieth-century Catholic theology than has yet been attempted. In doing so, it offers a radical revision of our understanding of Waugh's relation to the Second Vatican Council. Waugh's famous contempt for the liturgical reforms of the early 1960s, his self-described "intellectual" conversion, and his identification with the Council of Trent, have all contributed to a commonplace perception of Waugh as a reactionary Catholic stridently opposed to reform. However, careful attention to Waugh's dynamic artistic concerns and the deeply sacramental theology implicit in his later fiction reveals a striking resemblance to the most important Catholic theological reform movement of the mid-twentieth century: *la nouvelle théologie*. By comparing Waugh's artistic project to the theology of the *Nouvelle* theologians, who advocated the recovery of a fundamentally sacramental theology, this dissertation demonstrates that the two mirror one another in many of their basic concerns.

This mirroring was no mere coincidence. Waugh's long-time mentor Father Martin D'Arcy was steeped in many of the same sacramentally-minded thinkers as the

*Nouvelle* theologians. Through D'Arcy's theological influence as well as the deepening of Waugh's own faith, he, too, developed a sacramental cast of mind. In reading some of the key works of Waugh's later years, I will show how Waugh realized this sacramental outlook in his art. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that Waugh's main contribution to the renewal of sacramental thought within Catholicism lies in his portrayal of personal vocation as the remedy for acedia, or sloth, which he considered the "besetting sin" of the age. Moreover, this dissertation also seeks to demonstrate how Waugh's increasingly sacramental outlook shaped the aesthetic characteristics of his later work. What ultimately becomes apparent is that Waugh's place within twentieth century Catholicism has been misunderstood: far from being a reflexive reactionary, Waugh championed the same profoundly sacramental vision of reality as the *Nouvelle* theologians, that which was later adopted and articulated by the Second Vatican Council.

Evelyn Waugh and *La Nouvelle Théologie*

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. EVELYN WAUGH'S THEOLOGICAL GROWTH	10
Introduction	
Waugh's Conversion	
Waugh's Dynamic Understanding of Faith	
Vocation and Sloth	
Style	
Waugh and Literary Modernism	
The Transformative Character of Waugh's Faith	
3. THE <i>NOUVELLE</i> THEOLOGIANS, MARTIN D'ARCY AND THEIR PREDECESSORS	38
Introduction	
Precursors to Nouvelle Théologie and Martin D'Arcy	
Martin D'Arcy's Sacramental Theology	
<i>La Nouvelle Théologie</i>	
4. "IT WAS NOT ALL DONE BY HAND": ARTISTIC VOCATION AND BEAUTY AS SACRAMENT IN BRIDESHEAD REVISITED	60
Introduction	
Critical Reception of <i>Brideshead Revisited</i>	

Beauty as a Sacrament of Being in Hans Urs Von Balthasar

Artistic Vocation and the Role of Beauty in Charles Ryder's Conversion

Charles Ryder's Gradual Conversion to Beauty

Secular and Sacred Beauty

Beauty's Sacramentality

Goodness and Truth in Ryder's Conversion

Conclusion

5. "THAT UNIQUE SPRINGTIDE"—OR—"THE COURSE OF HISTORY IS INDEED A REALITY" HISTORY, *NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE*, AND *HELENA*

91

*Helena's* Obscurity

Synopsis

*Helena's* Presentation of History: A Recent View

Waugh's View of History

*Nouvelle Théologie* and History

History and the Human Person

Providential Order

Vocation

Vocation and History

6. "SHOW ME WHAT TO DO AND HELP ME TO DO IT": SECULAR SLOTH AND SACRAMENTAL VOCATION IN THE *SWORD OF HONOUR* TRILOGY

122

Introduction

Sloth

Secularization and the Human Person

False Vocation

Guy Crouchback's Recovered Sacramental Vision

Vocation as a Weapon Against Sloth

The Death Wish

Conclusion

7. CONCLUSION 169

WORKS CITED 174

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To my parents, Dan and Cyndy

Yes or no. Does human life make sense, and does man have a destiny?

—Maurice Blondel, *L'Action*

[D]oes not to be a *person*, if we take the old original meaning of the word in a spiritual sense, always mean to have a part to play? Is it not fundamentally to enter upon a relationship with others so as to converge upon a Whole? The summons to personal life is a *vocation*, that is, a summons to play an eternal role. Now perhaps it will be understood how the historical character that we have found in Christianity, as well as the social, emphasizes the reality of this role: since the flow of time is irreversible nothing occurs in it more than once, so that every action takes on a special dignity and an awful gravity; and it is because the world is a history, a single history, that each individual life is a drama.

—Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*

The form as it appears to us is beautiful only because the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that, in it, the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating. The appearance of the form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, *and* it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths.

—Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*

There must . . . be something within to chime with the sound of the Son of David's playing. . . . [T]he believer knows that his whole being is caught into a new order and that it is by the presence of the Spirit of wisdom and love that he can cry, "Abba, Father!"

And so it is that the pilgrim of eternity who wanders with heart uneasy—finding many roads but not *the* road, hearing many voices but not the one beloved voice he would fain hear despite his unworthiness—at a moment chosen by God sees stretching before him a way which he is sure is the only Way to a home beyond all his dreams, and hears unmistakably from without and from within the voice of Truth summoning him to that Life eternal which is union with the Godhead.

— Martin D'Arcy, *The Nature of Belief*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

On Easter Sunday, 1966, a few hours after attending a Latin mass celebrated by his friend Fr. Philip Caraman, Evelyn Waugh died. In one sense, the manner of his death seems fitting. This mass, as Martin Stannard relates, had been a joyous occasion (*Later Years* 490), and Waugh, whom his family believed had been praying for his death for years, might have been satisfied with such an arresting paradox: as he was made alive in Christ's death, so he died in Christ's resurrection. But the truth remains that in the last years of his life, the mass was a source of acute anxiety and pain for Waugh because of the liturgical reform enacted by the Second Vatican Council. Michael G. Brennan has described the council as the "final spiritual and psychological trial of Waugh's life" (*Evelyn Waugh* 133) The vernacular mass, the centralized altar, and the priest facing the congregation—all of this so horrified and distressed Waugh that he dreaded attendance and felt himself an exile in his own Church. In two recently published letters, Waugh's lifelong friend and mentor Fr. Martin D'Arcy tries to console and encourage a Waugh so distraught by the innovations that he had inquired about ways to avoid attending mass altogether:

I can well understand how nerve wracking and almost unbearable a Mass in the future in a small modern Church might be with the priest facing the people. But I think it a terrible loss to miss the central act of our faith and the divinely instituted means of worshipping God in Christ and through his Church; so I do hope you manage to put up with what may seem appalling. (Brennan, Thomas 75).

Despite D'Arcy's efforts, Waugh never completely got over the liturgical reforms. Throughout the years of the Council, he wrote vigorously against reform in the Church, becoming embroiled in a fierce but ultimately futile and alienating public debate.<sup>1</sup> As D'Arcy's letter makes clear, Waugh's objections to Council regarded externals. Though he did fear that the liturgical reforms were symptomatic of more substantive changes, his picture of the Council's substance was limited by his own mortality.

However, his objections to the conciliar reforms along with several problematic matters such as his self-described "intellectual" conversion and his close identification with the Council of Trent<sup>2</sup> might tempt one to label him as an obstinately reactionary Catholic sympathetic to the neo-Scholastic<sup>3</sup> establishment of the early and mid-twentieth century ("Come Inside" 368). However, careful attention to the arc of Waugh's career, his developing artistic concerns, and the theology implicit in his later fiction will show that to tag Waugh as a mere reflexive reactionary, or, worse yet, as misanthropic curmudgeon is to misread his work and do it a severe injustice. Though Waugh's complaints against the Council's reforms were deeply felt, his picture of the Council's

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of Waugh's protest against the Council, see Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Later Years* 465-69, 474-75, 479-80.

<sup>2</sup> While the period during which neo-scholasticism became the dominant mode of Catholic theology is often viewed as a consequence of the Council of Trent, Guiseppe Alberigo has distinguished between Trent and "Tridentinism," in which the "theological creativity and pastoral vigor" of the former ossified into "ecclesiastical uniformity, aggrandizing expansion of papal authority, and cultural isolation" (Ruddy 191). Thus, sympathy for the council might not entail sympathy for the manualist tradition. More importantly, perhaps, Ruddy has identified a profound continuity between Trent and Vatican II, in which the "Christocentrism" issuing from Trent was rounded out by Vatican II into a "robustly Trinitarian ecclesiology" (199). Ruddy goes on to comment that the "*ressourcement* movement rightly saw the limits of post-Tridentine theology, but Vatican II integrated that theology's enduring insights into the broader Christian tradition recovered by the *ressourcement* theologians" (201).

<sup>3</sup> The terms neo-Scholasticism and neo-Thomism are often used interchangeably, but throughout this dissertation I will consistently use "neo-Scholasticism," as it denotes a more specific brand of Thomism distinct from other casts of neo-Thomism such as that exemplified by Etienne Gilson, whose insistence upon studying the authentic Thomas and, moreover, grounding his work in its historical context, flew in the face of the neo-Scholastic establishment's practices.

aims and accomplishments was incomplete. Waugh was most aware of the Council's more progressive side and their goal of immediate and sweeping changes to the celebration of the mass, yet he appears to have been unaware of another current within the Council seeking to recover a more authentically sacramental theology rooted in the teachings of the Church Fathers. Though many of the Council's more progressive members helped bring about many of Waugh's greatest fears, this second group, known loosely as the *Nouvelle* theologians, largely succeeded in their attempt to recover the more sacramentally-minded theology of the Church Fathers. This aspect of the Council's reforms, however, began to be felt widely only after Waugh's death, during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and as Pope Benedict pointed out in 2005, continues to be realized in the twenty-first century.

The Second Vatican Council was perhaps the most important event in twentieth-century Catholicism, and its effects will continue to influence the Church indefinitely. In light of the direction the Church has taken in the decades since the Council and Waugh's death, the time is ripe for a more thorough understanding of the relation of one the twentieth century's greatest Catholic writers to one of the central events in twentieth-century Catholicism. This dissertation will offer a radical revision of our understanding of Waugh's relation to Vatican II. By exploring the profound similarities between Waugh's artistic aims and *Nouvelle Théologie*, which, anathema in the 1940s and 50s, gained papal endorsement in the years before the Council, I contend that many of Waugh's theological and artistic concerns mirror those of the *Nouvelle* theologians. Through Waugh was not familiar with the works of the *Nouvelle* theologians themselves, *Nouvelle Théologie* nonetheless serves as an important and previously unused

hermeneutic tool for reading Waugh's mature fiction. Hans Boersma has persuasively contended that though the *Nouvelle* theologians were no homogenous group, the main thrust of their thought was characterized by a "sacramental ontology," a fundamentally sacramental outlook that aimed to "reconnect nature and supernatural" after centuries of theology that aped the Enlightenment's separation of the two (*Nouvelle* 5).<sup>4</sup> This endeavor manifested itself in a nexus of interrelated concerns: healing the rupture between theology and life, restoring mystery to its rightful place at the heart of the faith, retrieving history as a theological category, and recovering the Church's ability to engage the fullness of human existence in the life of faith (Boersma 31-34). These concerns, I will show, are also central to Waugh's later works.

Furthermore, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that this mirroring is no mere coincidence. Though English Catholicism has traditionally been somewhat sequestered from theological trends on the Continent, Waugh's mentor Fr. Martin D'Arcy was steeped in many of the same sacramentally-minded nineteenth-century French thinkers as were the *Nouvelle* theologians: Maurice Blondel, Joseph Maréchal, and Pierre Rousselot key among them. It is admittedly difficult to determine from their correspondence and other primary sources the precise nature and extent of D'Arcy's influence upon Waugh, yet sufficient evidence—both biographical and textual—exists to demonstrate that D'Arcy's influence upon Waugh was both profound and permanent. Waugh, I hope to show, was a kind of theological nephew of the *Nouvelle* theologians. Through a combination of D'Arcy's theological influence and the growth of his own faith, Waugh

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<sup>4</sup> The *Catechism* offers this helpful description of the concept of a sacrament: "The Greek word *mysterion* was translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. In later usage the term *sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation which was indicated by the term *mysterium*" (774). Throughout this study, "sacrament" and "sacramental" refers to the visible manifestation of hidden realities.

developed a sacramental cast of mind closely akin to that of the *Nouvelle* theologians, and therefore sought to treat in his fiction many of their concerns.

Particularly, Waugh wished to better understand how the lives of individual believers—with their unique qualities, struggles, and gifts—intersect with the life of the Church. He especially sought to apprehend how his own artistry could participate in the Church's task. Waugh assigned to artists a humble place in the Body of Christ, rejecting a mysticism of art, while remaining certain that in their modest way artists did uniquely contribute to the mission of the Church. In a letter to his wife Laura dated three days after Epiphany, 1945, Waugh asks,

Have you ever considered how the Epiphany is the feast of artists. I thought so very strongly this year. After St Joseph and the angels and the shepherds and even the ox and the ass have had their share of the crib, twelve days later appears an exotic caravan with negro pages and ostrich plumes. They have come an enormous journey across a desert and the splendid gifts look much less splendid than they did when they were being packed in Babylon. The wise men committed every sort of *bêtise*—even asking the way of Herod & provoking the massacre of the innocents—but they got there in the end and their gifts *were* accepted. (197)

Indeed, for the latter half of his career, this question—how believers may offer their various gifts to the glory of God—remained central to Waugh's artistic concerns.

This same concern, how the supernatural destiny to which man is called manifests itself in the actions of everyday life, was central for the *Nouvelle* theologians. Indeed, the role of artists in the life of the Church was of particular interest to them, just as it was to Waugh. In his 1985 interview with Vittorio Messori, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI)—a younger inheritor of the movement's ideals and advisor to Henri de Lubac at Vatican II—discusses the role of art within the Church:

The only really effective apologia for Christianity comes down to two arguments, namely, the *saints* the church has produced and the *art* which

has grown in her womb. Better witness is borne to the Lord by the splendor of holiness and art which have arisen in the community of believers than by the clever excuses which apologetics has come up with to justify the dark sides, which, sadly, are so frequent in the Church's human history. If the Church is to continue to transform and humanize the world, how can she dispense with beauty in her liturgies, that beauty which is so closely linked with love and with the radiance of the Resurrection? No. Christians must not be too easily satisfied. They must make their Church into a place where beauty—and hence truth—is at home. Without this the world will become the first circle of hell. (129-30)

In this bold appraisal of the role of art in the life of the Church, Cardinal Ratzinger echoes language used by Hans Urs von Balthasar in *Seeing the Form*, the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*. For Balthasar—a *Nouvelle* theologian—and Ratzinger, beauty serves as a witness to truth and ultimately to Being. Because the splendor of Being is manifested in beautiful objects, beauty is sacramental in character. Though Waugh might have been uncomfortable with the role Ratzinger ascribes to artists, Waugh's view of the nature and function of art within the life of the Church nonetheless proves consonant with Ratzinger's. Each artist, in making beautiful objects through which we glimpse the Glory of the Lord, witnesses to the Gospel. In the same way, believers in all walks of life, in seeking to accomplish the good works they are called to perform, manifest the goodness, truth, and beauty perfected in Christ.

Ultimately, then, Waugh found the answer to the question of how believers may offer their gifts in the concept of Vocation: the calling of believers towards beatitude through the unique circumstances and purposes of their lives. Like the *Nouvelle* theologians, Waugh came to see that man's supernatural destiny is supported by the suffusion of the supernatural within the natural realm. Through close reading of some of the major works of Waugh's later career, beginning with *Brideshead Revisited* and culminating in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, I will show how Waugh renders this



sacramental outlook in his oeuvre. By reading Waugh through the lens of *Nouvelle Théologie*'s main concerns, this dissertation will put forward a more profound theological study of his later fiction than has yet been offered. Because Waugh's theological and aesthetic concerns are inseparable, it also aims to cast new light on the aesthetic characteristics of his later work.

Chapter Two will be devoted to tracing Waugh's theological growth, in order to clarify its relation to *Nouvelle Théologie*. Chapter Three will clarify the genetic kinship between *Nouvelle Théologie* and Waugh's work by examining their intersection in the theology of Martin D'Arcy and by describing some of the main concerns of the *Nouvelle* theologians themselves. In Chapter Four, by tracing the work of sacramental beauty and vocation in *Brideshead Revisited*, I will seek to answer the oft-made complaint that miracles intrude upon the narrative. Chapter Five will examine the interrelation of history and vocation in Waugh's neglected masterpiece *Helena*, offering a corrective to a recent, prominent study of Waugh's treatment of history in that novel. Chapter Six will be devoted to Waugh's crowning literary achievement, the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. *Men At Arms*, *Officers and Gentlemen*, and *Unconditional Surrender*, Waugh's chronicle of one soldier's experience of the Second World War, serve to richly embody a "sacramental ontology" in numerous ways. This chapter will therefore show how the insights of *Nouvelle Théologie* can contribute to our understanding of the trilogy. Ultimately, I will argue that Waugh's main contribution to the renewal of a sacramental ontology within Catholicism lies in his portrayal of personal vocation within the life of the Church as the remedy for *acedia*, or sloth, which he considered the "besetting sin" of the age ("Pioneer" 374).

In each chapter, but especially in my discussion of the trilogy as a coherent work, I will consider the relation between Waugh's theological concerns and his literary aesthetic. Douglas Patey, speaking of *Officers and Gentlemen*, notes that its "carefully fragmented plot [is] (designed to convey the disjointedness of wartime experience)." Yet, beneath this apparent disjointedness, "the novel is tightly organized: a web of parallel characters and situations, significant montages and historical allusions establish Waugh's central theme that Guy has been wrong in identifying modern warfare with a religious crusade" (328). Patey's correct identification of order beneath disorder contributes to our understanding of the Trilogy, yet I will suggest another reason for Waugh's seemingly chaotic plotting: namely: that the careful pairings of images of wartime chaos and the liturgical calendar are meant to signal history's ultimately *kairotic*—rather than chronological—nature. As the Trilogy traces the horrific events of 1939-1944, Waugh makes the feasts and fasts of the Church, as the calendrical commemorations of the major events of God's dealings with man, regularly appear as reminders of order beneath the apparent disorder of history. Guy's life, the life of the Church, and, ultimately the life of the world, has its organizing principle in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Only within the paradigm of the Suffering God can the terrible disasters that comprise much of human history find meaning and value.

In the Introduction to *A Handful of Mischief*, a 2011 collection of new essays devoted to Waugh's work, Robert Murray Davis, remarks that the *MLA International Bibliography* lists over one hundred publications on Waugh since 2003, and that the freshness of the essays in the collection shows that "there is much more to be said about him" (13). Indeed, the freshness and cogency of many of the essays in the collection

shows that Waugh's works are far more subtle and rich than the stereotypes and generalizations surrounding Waugh's work allow for:

Four papers [in the collection] study the contexts in which Waugh's work was written and by which it can be better understood. Another five use recent theory to illuminate and, in some cases surprisingly, to defend Waugh against tired charges of snobbery, racism, religious intolerance, and other politically incorrect attitudes laid against him by Edmund Wilson, Conor Cruise O'Brien, and a host of less talented stylists going back more than sixty years. (13)

In this spirit, this dissertation will aim to further break down the oversimplified images that have calcified around Waugh since the early years of his career. The *Nouvelle* theologians viewed their theological task as a clearing away of the reductive theological methods of the neo-Scholastics and a re-opening of the eyes of the faithful to the vast and rich theological mysteries made manifest in their midst. In that vein, this study of Waugh refuses easy labels and reductive critical perspectives. Rather, it explores his work using *Nouvelle Théologie* as a lens with which we might better perceive its depths. In the spirit of the *Nouvelle* theologians, Waugh sought to portray Christians living in a world that is graced and suffused with supernatural mystery as its intrinsic *telos*, not as its extrinsic alternative.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Evelyn Waugh's Theological Growth

#### *I. Introduction*

This chapter traces the growth of Evelyn Waugh's dynamic and deep-seated faith. Considering Waugh's life, non-fiction, and fiction, I argue that, though Waugh's early understanding of faith was predominantly rational in character, it blossomed into a profoundly sacramental faith, lived as well as known. As Waugh would write in middle-age: "Faith expands year by year as some formulary, long implicitly accepted, suddenly takes life and becomes a matter of urgent personal importance" ("Occasional Sermons" 371). As his own faith matured, he came to see that Christianity was not simply a system of belief compelling enough to command his allegiance. Rather, he came to understand creation as marked by an innate longing for God, and faith as the product not merely of one's rational faculties, but as the transformation of one's entire life. The supernatural order is not something extrinsic to the rest of life, intersecting it solely at certain sacred moments. Rather, the supernatural order permeates and in fact gives rise to the natural order, and thus can be glimpsed working in and through it. Though as an orthodox Catholic Waugh recognized the unique sanctity and significance of the seven Sacraments of the Church, as did the *Nouvelle* theologians, Waugh came to see the sacraments as the most intrinsic expression of the fundamental relation of the supernatural and natural orders, not as extrinsic exceptions to it. Beyond the Sacraments themselves, the way this relationship most palpably made itself felt in Waugh's view was through Vocation.

Waugh came to believe that each person has a particular road to sanctity, and his highly personal view of vocation not only compelled him to seek his own personal sanctity, it affected his art in a two-fold manner. First, Waugh believed that he had discerned that his own vocation was to be a writer, a realization that prompted a drastic increase in his level of dedication to his art. Second, he realized he could no longer be content to remain in his early, mostly negative and satirical artistic mode. Rather than implying the existence of the supernatural by depicting a world in which it is absent, he must seek to infuse the supernatural—particularly in the form of Vocation—into his narrative. Just as he sought to live out his calling, he could also depict characters seeking to discern and fulfill their own vocations in a world that—far from the grim, hopeless scenes of his early fiction—were created with a supernatural foundation and endowed with a supernatural destiny.

## *II. Waugh's Conversion*

After more than a decade as a self-proclaimed agnostic, and following a childhood of devout, high-church Anglicanism, the twenty-six-year-old Evelyn Waugh was received into the Roman Catholic Church on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1930. Though in print Waugh was fairly coy about the events, experiences, and internal processes that led to his conversion, several interrelated reasons may be identified.

First, there is ample evidence that the Catholic Church appealed to Waugh's artistic—though not his aesthetic—sensitivity. In his view, the oft made charge against converts that the appeal of Rome lay in its beauty, was nonsense where Englishmen were concerned: all the finest architecture as well as the best ceremonies and liturgy in the land were Anglican, not Catholic (“Converted” 103). Nevertheless, the fact that the Mass

centered on the priest accomplishing a task greatly appealed to Waugh's fascination with craftsmanship:

When I first came into the Church I was drawn, not by splendid ceremonies but by the spectacle of the priest as craftsman. He had an important job to do which none but he was qualified for. He and his apprentice stumped up to the altar with their tools and set to work without a glance to those behind them, still less with any intention to make personal impression on them. (*Diaries* 792-93)

Waugh, who had tried and failed at a number of arts-and-crafts professions, who refused to view himself as a writer until his eighth book, and who continued to view writing as the execution of a structure in words, felt drawn to a Christianity in which the central event of its ceremonies was the performance of a craft for which the priest was uniquely qualified.

Second, the Church offered the stability he felt keenly lacking in his personal life. After leaving Oxford in 1924, Waugh led a life whose only consistency was its inconsistency. He attempted several failed professional pursuits: art school, calligraphy, fine book-making, and carpentry—only to be forced by a combination of poverty and extravagant spending into several school-mastering positions that he mostly found intolerable. Several times he was forced to slink back to his parents' home to seek financial help and, in some cases, temporary lodging. Added to his financial instability were both personal insecurity and frustration in his attempts to find a fulfilling relationship with a woman. By 1928 his fortunes seemed to look up: the publication of his biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti was received warmly by critics, and his marriage to a young socialite named Evelyn Gardener in June seemed to augur a happy personal life. Within months, she-Evelyn, as she had become known, told Waugh that she was in love with another man. His eventual divorce left him even hungrier for permanence than

before, and, despite his belief that he would never again be able to marry, he saw in the Church a refuge from the chaos everywhere evident in his own life.

Yet he also sensed that such chaos was not limited to his own life, nor to his immediate social circle. Rather, the dissolution surrounding him was symptomatic a larger chaos that characterized certain aspects of modernity. As the young and newly-established author of his debut novel *Decline and Fall*, Waugh occupied a strange place as both a critic of and member of the Bright Young People of 1920s London. His conversion in 1930 was noted by his friend Tom Driberg in the gossip columns of the *Daily Express* and, like other high-profile conversions of the day, drew a variety of public reactions, many of which considered suspect the motives of the new convert (Stannard, *Early* 229). In an article entitled “Converted to Rome: Why It has Happened to Me,” Waugh categorizes these negative reactions into three types: “*The Jesuits have got hold of him*”; “*He is captivated by the ritual*”; “*He wants to have his mind made up for him.*” After pointing out the flaws of each of these assumptions, Waugh argues that his conversion largely stemmed from his recognition that European civilization rests squarely on the shoulders of the Catholic faith. His line of thought is worth quoting at length, for it offers a personal historical conspectus that influenced his thought and writing for the rest of his life:

It seems to me that in the present phase of European history the essential issue is no longer between Catholicism, on one side, and Protestantism, on the other, but between Christianity and Chaos. It is much the same situation as existed in the early Middle Ages. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries conflicting social and political forces rendered irreconcilable the division between two great groups of Christian thought. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the choice before any educated European was between Christianity, in whatever form it was presented to him in the circumstances of his upbringing, and, on the other side, a polite and highly attractive skepticism. So great, indeed was the inherited

subconscious power of Christianity that it was nearly two centuries before the real nature of this loss of faith became apparent.

Today we can see it on all sides as the active negation of all that western culture has stood for. Civilization—and by this I do not mean talking cinemas and tinned food, nor even surgery and hygienic houses, but the whole moral and artistic organization of Europe—has not in itself the power of survival. It came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance. The loss of faith in Christianity and the consequential lack of confidence in moral and social standards have become embodied in the ideal of a materialistic, mechanized state, already existent in Russia and rapidly spreading south and west. It is not longer possible, as it was in the time of Gibbon, to accept the benefits of civilization and at the same time deny the supernatural basis upon which it rests. (103-104)

The decay of civilization corresponds directly to loss of the Christian faith. Waugh goes on to argue that “Christianity exists in its most complete and vital form in the Roman Catholic Church” and that “other religious bodies, however fine the example of certain individual members, show unmistakable signs that are not fitted for the conflict in which Christianity is engaged” (104). Though that analysis and reasoning are at once sincere and astute, Martin Stannard points out that conversion on these grounds—and for that matter on grounds of needing personal stability—might prove no less suspect than those he rebutted: “The Catholic hierarchy might well have been suspicious of so pragmatic a belief in the supernatural. We cannot maintain civilization without Christianity, he seems to say, therefore we should choose the most competently organized system of Christian philosophy” (*Early Years* 231). Yet even at this early stage, Waugh’s reception into the church was not based solely upon any such pragmatism. Though he shied away from speaking publicly of the essence of his move to Rome, we have enough hints to conclude that it was founded on authentic belief. In his 1949 essay, “Come Inside,” Waugh reveals more about the thought process that contributed to his conversion:



It was self-evident to me that no heresy or schism could be right and the Church wrong. It was possible that all were wrong, that the whole Christian revelation was an imposture or a misconception. But if the Christian revelation were true, then the Church was the society founded by Christ and all other bodies were only good so far as they had salvaged something from the wrecks of the Great Schism and the Reformation. . . . It only remained to examine the historical and philosophic grounds for supposing the Christian revelation to be genuine. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to a brilliant and holy priest who undertook to prove this to me, and so on firm intellectual conviction but with little emotion I was admitted to the Church. (“Come Inside” 67-68)

His own account thus testifies against a merely pragmatic adherence to the Church’s teachings born out of the desire to preserve European civilization. Even so, a largely intellectual acceptance of the Church’s doctrines still falls short of the Catholic understanding of “conversion,” in which the action of the Holy Spirit enables the transforming faith of the believer.

Again, we have clues that such a conversion did take place at the time of Waugh’s reception into the Church. Douglas Patey has suggested that Waugh did not discuss this inward conversion because he saw the effort to describe such inward action as fruitless—just another manifestation of psychoanalysis, a discipline to which he maintained a widely-known and permanent aversion (Patey 35-36). However, “Come Inside” offers clues that, whatever its exact nature, a change occurred in him that could not be reduced to practical or rationalistic sources. Waugh writes that the ten years of his agnosticism and the hedonistic world “into which [he] exuberantly launched [himself] . . . had sufficed to show [him] that life there, or anywhere, was unintelligible and unendurable without God” (“Come Inside” 367). Here we see that Waugh’s entire being had, through God’s perceived absence, been prepared for God’s presence. Though Waugh did not yet possess the richly personal faith that grew with the years, he

nonetheless understood that what he lacked was not only the stability of the Church as an institution, nor even the truth of its teachings, but God Himself made manifest in its sacraments. That understanding, that posture toward God, was to prove fertile soil for the seed of faith.

### *III. Waugh's Dynamic Understanding of Faith*

At Waugh's request for her to find him a priest for his instruction, his close friend Olivia Plunket-Greene sought out Martin D'Arcy, S.J. in July 1930 (Sykes 107, *Diaries* 320). After several discussions together in which Waugh simply sought to have the grounds of the faith explained to him, Waugh was received by Fr. D'Arcy into the church. Twenty-one years after the fact, Waugh saw his younger self as grossly unprepared for his entry into the Church, and yet he agreed that D'Arcy saw more in him than he himself could: "I look back aghast at the presumption with which I thought myself suitable for reception and with wonder at the trust of the priest who saw the possibility of growth in such a dry soul" ("Come Inside" 368). Throughout Waugh's life, D'Arcy was to play a prominent role both personally and spiritually. Perhaps more than any other person, it was D'Arcy who was to water that dry soul and to nurture the seed of such faith. In the ensuing years Waugh and D'Arcy were to meet often in a variety of circumstances: over meals in London, as fellow guest in country houses. In 1933 they cruised the Mediterranean together with a large party of mutual friends and acquaintances. It was on this cruise that Waugh, having been invited to the Italian villa of the Herbert family, first met Laura Herbert, who married Waugh in 1937. D'Arcy officiated at the ceremony.

Perhaps the greatest indication of D'Arcy's importance to Waugh involves the construction of the new home of Campion Hall, the Jesuit House at Oxford of which D'Arcy was Master in the 1930s. The new, far more spacious hall had been designed by Edward Luytens, but the project needed funds (Patey 124). Waugh, who had recently become interested in the Hall's namesake, the English Jesuit martyr St. Edmund Campion<sup>1</sup>, spent nine months researching and writing a biography of Campion after having quietly signed away his share of the profits to the Hall's construction (Patey 124-25). In his preface to the second edition Waugh's pays homage to his mentor:

In 1934, when Campion Hall, Oxford, was being rebuilt on a site and in a manner more worthy of its distinction than its old home in St. Giles, I wished to do something to mark my joy in the occasion and my gratitude to the then Master, to whom, under God, I owe my faith. A life of the Blessed Edmund Campion seemed the most suitable memorial. (13)

Fittingly, his study of Campion's life proved to be one of the milestones of Waugh's spiritual maturation. As Douglas Patey notes, "[Waugh's friend and critic] Christopher Hollis claimed that before 1935 Waugh's faith was not '*engagé*'; 'It was his study of Campion, his discovery of a man who thought that all must be sacrificed for religion, which was the great turning point in his life'" (qtd. in Patey 125). Patey believes that this process had begun in 1932 on Waugh's trip to South America, where he hoped to visit and write about South American missions, but he agrees with Hollis that *Edmund Campion* marked an important step in Waugh's spiritual journey (Patey 125, 106).

In later years, D'Arcy, who outlived Waugh, continued to pastor his protégé and helped transform Waugh's understanding of faith from intellectual acceptance of doctrinal propositions to participation in the fullness of divine and human reality. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Campion was canonized in 1970 by Pope Paul VI as one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

years prior to beginning the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, Waugh made his way “with difficulty” through D’Arcy’s “very important” *The Mind and Heart of Love*, which will be discussed in detail below (qtd. in Patey 276). In it, D’Arcy examines the nature of human persons and concludes that in the love that transpires between God and man, the human person comes into his own fullness even as he learns self-sacrifice. D’Arcy’s deeply personal approach to faith—in which the desires of the human person are met by the fullness of the Divine Person—resonates with Waugh’s late fiction, in which he moves beyond the initial conversion of his characters to the portrayal of them pursuing and fulfilling their vocations.

It is difficult to judge Waugh’s familiarity with D’Arcy’s other works. Waugh’s personal library, now residing at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas contains six of D’Arcy’s works,<sup>2</sup> most of which feature personal inscriptions from D’Arcy to Waugh. Waugh, a life-long bibliophile, made no marginal notes in these copies, leaving the books nearly pristine. Yet this does not necessarily suggest that Waugh did not read them, for even his copy of *The Mind and Heart of Love*, which we have no reason to doubt is the copy he read painstakingly, shows little or no sign of wear.

Though it is doubtful, that, even at the time of his conversion, Waugh conceived of faith quite as dryly as he portrayed it, not until *Brideshead Revisited*, a retrospective novel which revisits the process of the protagonist’s conversion, did Waugh explore at novel-length the creation of faith as something that includes, yet transcends reason. In practically all of his major fiction after *Brideshead*, Waugh explores faith as something integral to the very nature of personhood. In an unpublished letter of 1949, Waugh

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<sup>2</sup> *The Nature of Belief* (1931), *Pain and the Providence of God* (1935), *Death and Life* (1942), *The Mind and Heart of Love* (1945), *The Sense of History: Secular and Sacred* (1959), *Facing God* (1966)

contended, alongside Martin D'Arcy and the *Nouvelle* theologians, that nature is permeated by the supernatural order from the outset—that man “is born with a longing for God . . .”—with a natural desire for supernatural completion and fulfillment (qtd. in Patey 240).

The dynamic quality of Waugh's faith has not gone unnoted by his biographers. For instance, Douglas Patey identifies a shift of emphasis in Waugh's faith in his discussion of Waugh's 1950 hagiographic novel *Helena*:

*Helena's* contempt for theological speculation is a far cry from Waugh's youthful celebration of 'the science of simplification' in *Remote People*. Though Waugh never stopped arguing that philosophic argument and historical evidence could serve as a foundation for faith . . . *Helena*, with its stress on the cult of relics . . . and on the 'unreasonableness' of Christianity, captures the development in his faith over the years since his conversion. As Helena tells Lanctantius, 'It all makes sense up to a point, and again beyond that point. And yet one can't pass the point.' (294)

Though Patey is correct to identify in *Helena* theological exchange that moves beyond bare reason, Waugh's intent is not to promote a fideistic or superstitious kind of faith, nor is Helena's attitude anti-theological. Patey's analysis of *Helena* shoots wide of the novel's main theological target. Rather than promoting anti-rational or anti-theological faith, Waugh aims to portray a deep connection between the supernatural and the natural orders, one in which the operation of divine grace can be traced in history, its artifacts and its actors. In a word, he aims to portray a deeply sacramental created order. “It all makes sense up to a point, and then again beyond that point. And yet one can't pass the point” is Helena's acknowledgement that, in contradiction to neo-Scholastic teaching, something beyond assent, beyond nature's capacity, must intervene in conversion.

In claiming both that, “Man is born with a longing for God” and that “one can't pass the point [of conversion]”, Waugh echoes Henri de Lubac, who are argued against

the neo-Scholastic acceptance of Aristotelian connaturality, the principle that beings with a given *telos* necessarily possess the innate powers to achieve it (De Lubac, *Mystery* 147-49). In the neo-Scholastic view, therefore, man must have been created without natural longing for God. Otherwise, humanity would have possessed means to attain to the Beatific Vision, thereby obviating the role of divine grace. For De Lubac, the neo-Scholastic view created an unnecessary dichotomy between nature and grace. Instead, he contended that man had been created with the longing for the Vision of God, yet *from the outset* needed divine assistance to attain to it (De Lubac, *Mystery* 98). Thus, de Lubac conceived of creation itself as sacramental, a means through which, from the outset, we are meant to know God and to participate in his own life along a journey leading finally and fully to Himself.

#### *IV. Vocation and Sloth*

It is not difficult to discern the resonances between such a theology of grace and Waugh's understanding of vocation. For Waugh, the primary means by which man's "longing for God" is satisfied is through Vocation: the teaching that God calls believers to himself in and through their life's work, and that, thereby, the role they play on earth becomes a means of their sanctification. In his important 1946 essay "Fan-Fare,"<sup>3</sup> Waugh declared that for the rest of his writing life only two things would concern him: a preoccupation with style, and the attempt to represent the whole man, which for him "meant only one thing, man in his relation to God" ("Fan-Fare" 302). The two concerns seem unrelated: what does style have to do with man's relation to God? The answer lies

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<sup>3</sup> The essay was conceived in part as a tongue-in-cheek attempt to answer all at once the mountain of American fan letters Waugh received after the publication of *Brideshead Revisited*. Nonetheless, it contains some helpful and revealing remarks about Waugh's views of writing in general and his own goals as an artist.

in the unique understanding of vocation which he developed in the latter half of his writing life. Man's proper relation to God can be discerned, moreover, only within the Church, the Body of Christ, as believers find their places within the Church through the discernment of their vocations.

The Catholic Church understands vocation in its most general sense as the calling by God of all believers to Divine Beatitude, those characteristics listed by Jesus in Matthew 5 that lead to eternal fellowship with God (*Catechism* 427, 7). The Church acknowledges a range of more specific callings through which that ultimate vocation may be attained. The Catechism distinguishes among lay, consecrated, and priestly or hierarchical vocations (*Catechism* 237, 396, 241). The laity is called "to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (*Catechism* 237). Those called to the consecrated life usually live within one of the many religious orders recognized by the Church, professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience (*Catechism* 872). Finally, those called to the priestly vocation are meant to encourage, edify, and shepherd the body of Christ on earth, his Church (*Catechism* 895). Despite this range of callings, vocation is perhaps most often perceived by the laity as a call to clerical life, as if vocations were relatively seldom bestowed on the ordinary faithful. Certainly the *Nouvelle* theologians strived to enrich the ordinary believer's understanding of vocation. Their efforts bore fruit in Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium*. In art and in life, Waugh, too, championed a rich concept of vocation.

For Waugh, even the official understanding of vocation, including as it did the laity, seemed incomplete: certainly the clergy had fairly specific vocations, but for the

laity, vocation remained something of an abstraction. What about an individual person's relation to God as he lives in the everyday realm? How could a person find his right place within the Body? In answer to these questions, Waugh gradually developed his own understanding of vocation, firmly rooted in the Church's teaching yet reaching beyond it. According to Waugh, each individual person is appointed to a calling that only he can answer, and therein lies his sanctification. In 1950, the year of *Helena's* publication, he wittily confessed to John Betjeman: "each individual has his own peculiar form of sanctity which he must achieve or perish. It is no good my saying: 'I wish I were like Joan of Arc or St John of the Cross'. I can only be St Evelyn Waugh—after God knows what experiences in purgatory" (339). This call could be a special role, a craft, or even an individual act. Only in learning to hear the call peculiar to his own life, Waugh concluded, can a Christian find his proper relation to God.

Part of Waugh's drive to discover his relation to God may be explained by the vexations of his early adult life. As we have seen, he turned—or as he might have said returned—to the source and bastion of Western civilization: the Church. His conversion may have helped him stave off despair after his divorce, but it failed to alleviate his inveterate sense of aimlessness. In time, Waugh came to see his aimlessness as a symptom of a deeper malady: spiritual apathy, or sloth. As he learned more of the teachings of the Catholic faith, Waugh increasingly saw sloth not only as his own besetting sin, but also that of his entire milieu.

Waugh's concern with the subject culminated in a 1962 essay entitled "Sloth" and originally published in the volume *The Seven Deadly Sins*.<sup>4</sup> Because the theological sense of the word had become obsolete, Waugh begins the essay by dispelling sloth's

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<sup>4</sup> Mortimer, Raymond. Ed. *The Seven Deadly Sins*. London: Sunday Times Publications, 1962.



mild contemporary meaning. Sloth, or *acedia*, is no mere laziness or “indolence,” which “so far from being a deadly sin, is one of the most amiable of weaknesses” (“Sloth” 572). Rather, following St. Thomas Aquinas, Waugh defines sloth as “sadness in the face of spiritual good. Man is made for joy in the love of God, a love which it expresses in service. If he deliberately turns away from that joy, he is denying the purpose of his existence. The malice of sloth lies not merely in the neglect of duty (though that can be a symptom of it) but in the refusal of joy” (573). In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas states that spiritual joy is prompted by charity, that is, joy is the proper fruit of the love of God working within a person (II-II. q.28 a.1). When, instead, one responds to the love of God with sorrow, the resulting sin is sloth (II-II. q. 28 a. 3).

Mid-way through his career, about the time of the writing of *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh discovered his weapon against sloth: rather than being a Catholic who was also an increasingly skilled novelist, Waugh came to see himself as a writer summoned by God. A mere occupation no longer, writing became for him the means by which he served the Church, his right place within the Body. Waugh’s understanding of vocation not only gave concrete and particular form to what had previously seemed an abstraction, it also revealed a powerful paradox: the road to sanctity is at once universal and personal. The more clearly one understands one’s vocation, the more thoroughly one participates in Christ’s universal summons to mankind. Because Waugh believed that his vocation was to be a writer, this theological development became a literary development as well. Though part of “Fan-Fare” is devoted to teasing Waugh’s American readership, it also makes a serious attempt to explain his Catholic vision of imaginative writing. This understanding had developed slowly, but it was by 1946 more or less fully-fledged: “[I]n

my future books there will be two things to make them unpopular: a preoccupation with style and the attempt to represent man more fully, which, to me, means only one thing, man in his relation to God” (“Fan-Fare” 302).

Accordingly, in much of his later fiction, especially in *Helena* and *Sword of Honour*, Waugh sought to portray the gradual recognition of and response to a vocational summons amidst the world’s din. In these works, the apparently haphazard lives of the protagonists find focus, and Providence, which had been quietly preparing them to fulfill their vocations, asserts itself as the organizing principle of history, infinitely more powerful than strictly human attempts to shape the outcome of events. Tracing “man in his relation to God” by depicting divine grace working in and through what often seems human disorder becomes the primary theme of much of Waugh’s later work. Part of his literary aim thus becomes to achieve a multi-layered approach in which seeming disorder rests upon a subtly and painstakingly arranged work of art.

#### V. Style

Because Waugh saw writing as his vocation, he earnestly cultivated his craft in fidelity to his calling. Just as Waugh’s realization of his vocation was a gradual and natural growth, so his “preoccupation” with style arose from artistic concerns that had been with him since childhood. Even as a young boy, Waugh relished seeing a job performed skillfully, especially if the job involved manual dexterity. This early fascination grew into a general appreciation for craftsmanship and the well-wrought objects it produced. As a young man having left Oxford without taking a degree, Waugh wanted desperately to take up the life of an artist-craftsman. In one of several schemes to make this dream a reality, Waugh began in 1927 to take carpentry lessons, a plan which

was spoiled by his desire to earn money quickly so that he could marry. The delight Waugh felt watching the carpenter work presages that which, years later, Waugh would come to feel in writing:

Those were delightful days, under the tuition of a brilliant and completely speechless little cabinet-maker who could explain nothing and demonstrate everything. To see him cutting dovetails gave me a thrill which, I suppose, others get from seeing their favourite batsman at the wicket or bullfighter in the ring. (“General Conversation” 191)

Eventually, strained by penury and his inability to live up to his high artistic standards, Waugh abandoned all thought of becoming a visual artist or carpenter and took up a trade he initially despised: writing.

Yet the impulse to craft remained. In the mid-thirties, when Waugh finally accepted the label of “writer,” he began to conceive of writing in terms of craftsmanship, rather than those of creativity. In 1938, Waugh uses a review of Cyril Connolly’s *Enemies of Promise* to expound upon his view of writing:

‘Creative’ is an invidious term too often used at the expense of the critic. A better word, except that would always involve explanation, would be ‘architectural’. I believe that what makes a writer, as distinct from a clever man who can write, is an added energy and breadth of vision which enables him to conceive and complete a structure. (“Present Discontents” 238)

Waugh never abandoned this view of writing, and he lamented lapses in structural integrity wherever he found them in his own work.

Waugh’s 1945 use of the term “style” seems more focused upon the earnest study and mastery of the English language at the level of word and sentence, than upon larger structural concerns. Indeed, in his reviews and criticism, terms such as “style” and “language” gradually gain prominence. In 1962 interview Waugh said that he regarded writing primarily “as an exercise in the use of language” (“Interview”). Yet it is clear that

“language” and “style” include and further elaborate his structural view of writing: the task of the writer is to arrange language at all levels of composition, from large plot developments down to individual expressions. If every element of a piece of fiction works harmoniously, a writer succeeds in producing a well-made object. Waugh’s understanding of style as encompassing both grand structure and miniscule detail may best be described using an analogy from architecture. In an essay on Ronald Firbank, Waugh compares Oscar Wilde and Firbank using the analogy of Rococco and Baroque architecture. Whereas Rococo architecture indulges in mere “decoration” apart from concern for the larger structure, Baroque architects sought to “design” buildings which, from the largest shapes to the smallest, worked in harmony with each other:

[Firbank’s] raw material . . . is almost identical with Oscar Wilde’s—the lives of rich, slightly decadent people seen against a background of traditional culture, grand opera, the picture galleries and the court; but Wilde was at heart radically sentimental. His wit is ornamental; Firbank’s is structural. Wilde is rococo; Firbank is baroque. It is very rarely that Firbank ‘makes a joke.’ (“Ronald Firbank” 56-57)

Though Waugh here limits his discussion to humor, it is nonetheless clear that, even at the outset of his writing career he was beginning to think not merely in terms of the large-scale structure of a work, but also of the ways in which minor details and main structures should harmonize.

Waugh saw good reason for his obsession with style. His preoccupation with the mastery of the English language—combined with his earlier concern for narrative structure—is nothing less than his attempt to participate in the vocational life he sought to portray in his fiction. Waugh believed that to become “St. Evelyn Waugh,” he must pursue his vocation with the zeal of his characters. Thus, “style” and “man in his relation

to God,” far from being an arbitrary pairing, are inseparable—the two sides of Waugh’s mature literary craft.

### *VI. Waugh and Literary Modernism*

Waugh’s determination to “represent man more fully” may remind us of the aims of the literary Modernists who in the early twentieth century had permanently altered the history of the novel as an art form. Indeed, much can be said of Waugh’s complex relationship to the literary Modernists such as Lawrence, Joyce, and Woolf—who, through the development of new aesthetic principles, sought to represent human life more completely than had previously been accomplished. Waugh’s scathing opinions of these writers and their works are not difficult to glean, for he scattered them freely throughout his diary, letters, and essays. In Waugh’s view the Modernist project—representing man more fully—had, by locating the core of the human being in the psyche, discarded the true center of the human being. In “Fan-Fare,” Waugh describes what he views as the critical error of literary modernism:

The failure of modern novelists since and including James Joyce is one of presumption and exorbitance. They are not content with the artificial figures which hitherto passed so gracefully as men and women. They try to represent the whole human mind and soul and yet omit its determining character—that of being God’s creature with a defined purpose. (“Fan-Fare” 302).

For Waugh, the psyche should never be regarded as the core of the human being. The modernist mistake, at once anthropological and theological in nature, could, in Waugh’s view also produce aesthetic problems. For example, Waugh thought that Lawrence allowed his determination to represent the innumerable subtleties of human consciousness to overwhelm his prose (“Turning” 42); In Waugh’s view, Lawrence failed

in the task essential to any artist: the selection and arrangement of countless available raw materials into a shape. Waugh would always maintain, along with the New Critics, the view that the writer's task—like that of any other craftsman—was to create a beautiful, well-wrought object (“Present Discontents” 38). Joyce, too, in Waugh's view, ultimately failed as artist. Asked in a late interview whether Waugh experimented when he wrote, he replied, “Look at the results of experimentation in the case of a writer like Joyce. He started off writing very well, then you can watch him going mad with vanity” (qtd. in Stannard, *Early Years* 208). For Waugh, Joyce's failure was not one of craftsmanship, which was undoubtedly exquisite, but of misapprehension of his material: the literary craftsman could not forget that the fundamental purpose of his material (language) is to communicate.

Waugh felt confident making such an absolute statement about Joyce in 1962, looking back across the decades, yet Waugh's relation to literary Modernism was not only complex, it was dynamic. It would be a mistake and an oversimplification to represent Waugh as simply dismissive of or reactionary to modernist innovations. Like the Modernists, Waugh recognized that the Victorian novel—with its overly descriptive, moralistic, and intrusive narrator—was exhausted and that novelists needed to develop new forms of representation. In the mid-'20s, before his reception into the Catholic Church and before he had written any of his mature works, the young Evelyn Waugh had already experimenting with his own innovative literary techniques. As an inexperienced writer, he was not so resistant to overt experimentation as he later became. An early published story, “The Balance” (completed in August 1925), makes use of a relatively new art-form that fascinated Waugh: the cinema. Much the story is written as a

silent film, and, as the reader is privileged see both the captions and dialogue, the supposed movie-going audience is allowed to see only the captions and the action. At the end of the section, the film comes to an end, and the audience leaves quite unimpressed and somewhat perplexed (“The Balance” 5-33). As Martin Stannard notes, Waugh’s motivation for introducing this technique was probably consonant with the aims of literary modernism: the elimination of the intrusive narrator and the desire to show rather than tell (118).

Yet even here Waugh parts company with Modernism. Whereas Virginia Woolf, for instance, sought to show by entering the consciousness of her characters, Waugh, skeptical of verbal descriptions of interior experience sought new techniques to characterize without psychologizing. In a diary entry dated a month after completing “The Balance,” “Claude [Cockburn, his cousin] lent me a novel by Virginia Woolf which I refuse to believe is good”<sup>5</sup> (*Diaries* 225). Based on the date, the novel was likely *Mrs. Dalloway*. Still, Waugh’s first choice of publisher reveals his own view of his story’s vein: ten days before dismissing Virginia Woolf’s novel in his diary, he had sent the “The Balance” to the Hogarth press, where it was rejected by Leonard Woolf (Stannard 127).

However much Waugh disliked the techniques of the modernists, he continued to work to solve the problem plaguing the form of the novel: how to portray human beings so as to preserve their integrity. In 1930, Waugh, by then a celebrated young novelist, reviewing W.R. Burnett’s *Iron Man*, again lauded a minimalistic, telescopic, and cinematic method of writing:

There are practically no descriptive passages except purely technical ones. The character, narrative and atmosphere are built up and implicit in the

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<sup>5</sup> Waugh’s skepticism towards Woolf’s writing did not extend to *Orlando*, by which he was “transported” (“To Harold Acton” 29).

dialogue [. . .] Ronald Firbank began to discover this technique, but his eccentricity and a certain dead, ‘ninetyish’ fatuity frustrated him. I made some experiments in this direction in the telephone conversations in *Vile Bodies*. Mr Ernest Hemmingway used it brilliantly in the *Sun Also Rises*. It has not been perfected but I think it is going to develop into an important method. (qtd. in Patey 79)

In her review of *Vile Bodies* Rebecca West noted a similar method in Waugh’s work: “In the monosyllabic conversations [of Adam and Nina] Mr Waugh has done something as technically astonishing as the dialogues in Mr Ernest Hemmingway’s *Farewell to Arms*, so cunningly does he persuade the barest formula to carry a weight of intense emotion” (qtd. in Stannard, *Early* 196).

Though Waugh’s early work limits the reader’s vantage point largely to externals, I would argue that this is not done primarily with intent of producing superficiality or farce, as so many contemporary reviewers were convinced. Rather, he was seeking a subtle, aesthetically competent way to suggest character: by implication through dialogue and behavior. In contrast stands the Modernist approach as articulated in Virginia Woolf’s famous 1925 essay “Modern Fiction.” In it she argues that the earlier novelists had “tyrannically” forced their characters’ action to conform to a plot, rather than allowing them to think and act according to their true nature:

Life is not a series of gig-lamps, symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (160-61)

Already in 1930, Waugh’s view of the task and method of fiction differs sharply from Woolf’s, yet, again, we must not overlook the similarities of their views. Both Woolf and Waugh believed that the human person was more complex than established techniques



allowed writers to plumb. At the heart of their difference lies Woolf's use of the expression "uncircumscribed spirit." For Woolf, the spirit could be explored by freeing the novelist from the trappings of plot and dialogue—and by implication, of society and relationships—and making free of the vast territory of the psyche.

The young Waugh, on the other hand, saw in dialogue and situation the potential to provide glimpses into the spirit. For Waugh, the "uncircumscribed spirit" would be a double illusion. The spirit, for Waugh, is fundamentally circumscribed, first by the nature given to it by God, and second by the place—physical, cultural, historical—in which it finds itself. To our limited human understanding, we come to know a soul through its interactions with its fellow creatures and with creation. Therefore, Waugh paradoxically sought through externals to suggest the depths. From *Decline and Fall* through *Scoop* he worked by indirection, by portraying the absurdity of life while hinting at transcendent reality through its glaring absence. Nevertheless, even the early Waugh shared Woolf's disdain for Edwardian sociological novelists such as Galsworthy and Bennett. Neither Woolf nor Waugh had interest in portraying types, only particular people.

Despite the success of his early method, by 1937 Waugh felt he was approaching an artistic impasse. *Scoop* has been described as the most elaborately constructed of all his work: the comedy and even some of the characters grow naturally from the novel's largest structural elements (Stannard, *Early* 474). Yet Waugh felt he was rehashing old ground: he was a technical expert but he had nothing substantial to say. The minimalistic style and satirical mode had taken him as far as it could, and if he were to continue to develop as an artist and give real voice to the thing he held most dear—his faith—he would have to learn to portray new content and find a new style to fit it. Though Waugh

struggled with some success in this direction in the unfinished *Work Suspended* (1942), it was not until *Brideshead Revisited* that Waugh believed he had found his new artistic mode.<sup>6</sup>

Stylistically, *Brideshead* marks a radical departure from any of Waugh's earlier novels. Rich, elaborate descriptions aimed at evocativeness fill its pages. It was the first time in a completed novel that Waugh had employed a first person narrator, and the novel's lavish descriptions fit the narrative because Charles Ryder is a painter and therefore possesses the honed sight of the visual artist. Nevertheless, Ryder's florid narration extends beyond the visual descriptions, and some critics found the book overwrought and sentimental. When Waugh read the book years later, he was embarrassed by the extravagance of certain passages and accordingly revisions (1960).

In none of his later novels, even in the gruesomely satirical *The Loved One* (1949), would Waugh return to precisely to the minimalist style of his youth: his command of the English language had grown too versatile. In each work, he adopted a style designed to fit the content. For example, the elegant precision of the narration contrasted with the hilarious slang of the dialogue in *Helena* fit Waugh's goal of connecting a historical narrative to the present in a way that he would never repeat.

In the *Sword of Honour* trilogy—which I will contend most nearly accomplishes his goal of depicting “man in his relation to God”—Waugh's method becomes, in some regards, more traditional than in any of his previous novels. The pace is often leisurely, some of the dialogue becomes more fully fledged, and the third person narrator is allowed more prominence than in his early work. Nevertheless, Waugh remains true to

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<sup>6</sup> For this paragraph I am indebted to Martin Stannard's discussion of *Work Suspended* in *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years* pp. 488-504.

his early view that the narrator should not directly provide evidence of character, nor should dialogue artificially do so. Despite the great differences between Waugh's early and late work, a central paradox runs right through his canon: a hidden sacramental reality is contained in and imperfectly seen in an external reality. This paradox explains why Waugh, even in his most fully-fledged character, the trilogy's Guy Crouchback, only sparingly offers insight into Guy's emotional and psychological states. Throughout the trilogy we see Guy speak, act, and pray. Only on rare and then brief occasions are we allowed even into Guy's conscious thoughts. For the mature Waugh "[M]an in his relation to God" could be best portrayed by depicting man in relation to his fellow men and the Church.

#### *VII. The Transformative Character of Waugh's Faith*

Much has been made of Waugh's relation to his fellow man: decades after his death his public image as a reactionary snob and bully hangs as an apparition that refuses to be laid to rest. As with most things in Waugh's life and work, the image contains a mixture of truth and fiction. Waugh did cultivate a persona that increasingly dominated his public life and alienated him from many of acquaintances. But beyond his increasingly eccentric behavior and self-seclusion from the modern world, Waugh himself seriously held a low estimation of his own character throughout his adult life. Once, when charged by Nancy Mitford with extreme rudeness to a dinner guest, Waugh answered: "You have no idea how much nastier I would be if I was not a Catholic. Without supernatural aid I would hardly be a human being" (Sykes 334). His deeply felt humility found expression through public self-denigration. In his discussion of Waugh's donation of *Edmund Campion's* profits to Campion Hall, Oxford, Douglas Patey

observes: “To no one else did Waugh advertise his generosity, in this or his many future charities: like the *hypocrite renversé* Jonathan Swift, Waugh enjoyed flaunting his acerbities while keeping his generosity and kindnesses private” (125).

We must not minimize the flaws in Waugh’s character. Those wishing to castigate Waugh as a classist, a racist, or a misogynist have a pool of evidence to draw upon. Yet these labels may conceal a reality that is more complicated than they are suited for. My contention is that, despite his massive flaws of character, a distinct growth in charity may be seen in both his life and his art.

Accounts of the effect of Waugh’s faith on his character vary. Martin Stannard seems to cast Waugh’s life and faith as a gradual hardening into a rigid outlook, less and less able to see and appreciate others’ perspectives, an attitude which Stannard finds unappealing. Douglas Patey, who generally seems more sympathetic to Waugh’s Catholicism, views Waugh’s life rather as a spiritual pilgrimage upon which he gradually learned real charity. To me, the evidence supports Patey’s view. While it is true that Waugh’s sense of charity seems to have depended on his ability to view people through the lens of the Church, it was not for that reason narrow, as Stannard’s depiction of Waugh implies. Catholicism was indeed Waugh’s lens, but it was a universal lens: it enabled him to see in the light of love people for whom he would otherwise view with apathy or antipathy.

To understand Waugh’s view of the world two crucial points must be understood: first, his eye for criticism was never sharper than when it concerned himself and his own kind. If he ridicules the Africans in *Black Mischief* and *Scoop*, he reserves his most scathing criticism for the European diplomats and journalists. If he playfully mocks the

naïve southern Californians in *The Loved One*, he devastates the indolent Hollywood British expats. The second is that, as he aged, the eyes of love enabled him to view those he felt inclined to disdain with a sense of charity.

In later life, he deliberately sought out fellow Catholics with whom he would otherwise be unlikely to meet. In late 1948, Waugh travelled to the United States with a view to writing a piece on American Catholics. He particularly wished to “see the ministry at work among negroes & Mexicans [and] see how far national differences eg. between Poles, Irish, Spanish stocks created separate Catholic communities within the general body” (“To John Shaw” 283). In the resulting essay, “The American Epoch in the Catholic Church,” Waugh recounts Ash Wednesday Mass among a diverse congregation in New Orleans:

The Roosevelt Hotel overflowing with crapulous tourists planning their return journeys. How many of them knew anything about Lent? But across the way the Jesuit Church was teeming with life all day long; a continuous, dense crowd of all colours and conditions moving up to the altar rails and returning with their foreheads marked with ash. And the old grim message was being repeated over each penitent: ‘Dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return.’ One grows parched for that straight style of speech in the desert of modern euphemisms, where the halt and lame are dubbed ‘handicapped’; the hungry, ‘under-privileged’; the mad, ‘emotionally disturbed’. Here it was, plainly stated, quietly accepted, and all that day, all over that light-hearted city, one encountered the little black smudge on the forehead which sealed us members of a great brotherhood who can both rejoice and recognize the limits of rejoicing. (“American” 382).

It would be a mistake here to suppose that for Waugh this “brotherhood” of Catholics was another form of snobbery, for if the Church is a club, it is a peculiar one. Its membership is open to all of humanity, and only in it, does the human race directly encounter its true purpose: to find its redemption there.

Waugh's vision of the church became, in later life, truly global. In 1952 he travelled to Goa, India to observe the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Francis Xavier's death (Patey 252). While there he was so moved at the sight of Catholic piety thriving in an unfamiliar cultural context, he rejected Hillaire Belloc's famous judgment that "The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith" in favor of his own: "Belloc 'Europe and the Faith' my foot" (*Diaries* 708).

One of the aims of this study is to show how the transformative quality of Waugh's faith finds expression in his art. Not only does his depiction of the created order become increasingly sacramental, his treatment of his characters becomes more charitable. The case could be made that in the vast population of the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, all of the substantial characters, even the most sinister, encourage the reader's sympathy. Such an approach marks a huge shift for a writer who, in his early works, seemed at times to revel in the abuse of his characters. Though I will discuss this topic in more detail in the chapters treating *Sword of Honour*, one poignant example will suffice here. Virginia Troy, Guy's ex-wife may be the wickedest in the long succession of *femmes fatale* in Waugh's canon, the brilliant descendant of *A Handful of Dust*'s Brenda Last. Yet without minimizing the real evil of her betrayal of Guy, Waugh portrays Virginia in such a way that both Guy and the reader are able finally to sympathize with her, and even to a deeply hidden goodness in her. In one of the finest scenes in Waugh's canon, Virginia goes to dinner with Guy's aged Uncle Peregrine, "a bore of international repute," (*Men* 9) and brings about a kind of renewal in him simply by enjoying his company and taking an interest in his life. Unlike Waugh's many other *femmes fatale*—Julia Flyte excepted—Virginia herself also finds renewal and redemption in the Church.

Not long after their dinner together, Virginia and Peregrine are killed in the same V-2 explosion, and their destinies, so recently and tenuously connected in time, become joined eternally.

Throughout this dissertation I seek to show that in his art, as in his life, Waugh's faith was transformative and that through his art Waugh realized the *Nouvelle* theologians' hope of "supernaturalizing the natural" and thus reconnecting theology and life. I argue that Waugh's work demonstrates a gradual growth in a sacramental sensibility, an artistic vision in which the supernatural and natural orders ceaselessly commingle.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The *Nouvelle* Theologians, Martin D'Arcy and their Predecessors<sup>1</sup>

#### *I. Introduction*

This chapter seeks to accomplish several goals which will equip us to proceed to a close investigation Waugh's later fiction by viewing it through the lens of *Nouvelle Theologie*. First, it will describe the rise of neo-Scholasticism, the theological method that became the focal point of the *Nouvelle* theologians' critique. Then, it will outline the arguments of some of neo-Scholasticism's early critics, for these detractors were common influences on the *Nouvelle* theologians and Waugh's spiritual mentor Fr Martin D'Arcy. Next, it will offer an overview of the contributions of *Nouvelle* theology and highlight the continuities between the thought of its proponents and that of D'Arcy. We will then be equipped to proceed to the subsequent chapters, which offer more detailed accounts of pertinent works to arise out of *Nouvelle* theology and which analyze works by Evelyn Waugh in their light. For while these theologians did not directly influence Waugh, their work furnishes us with a vocabulary that enables us to perceive and to describe the sacramental outlook Waugh portrays in his fiction. Moreover, we will be able to perceive that, because of the deep affinity between the *Nouvelle* theologians and Waugh, this task does not constitute an imposition of an extraneous hermeneutic upon a literary text, but rather a bringing together of two consonant undertakings, one

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<sup>1</sup> In the sections of this chapter dealing with Blondel, Maréchal, and Rousselot, I am indebted to Hans Boersma's masterful discussion of the influence of these three figures upon the *Nouvelle* theologians in his *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*. Boersma's concise and persuasive explanation of this influence enabled me to realize that the *Nouvelle* theologians and Martin D'Arcy shared many of their most important influences.



theological and one literary, which will more fully illuminate the richness of Waugh's sacramental outlook.

Initially, the consonance between the Nouvelle theologians and Evelyn Waugh may seem more like dissonance. In fact, Waugh may at first seem more closely aligned with the neo-Scholastics than the Nouvelle Theologians. However, close consideration of each of these theological groups and the character of Waugh's mature faith and art will reveal the affinity. Waugh's faith—and his understanding of that faith—grew very slowly. He described his conversion as an intellectual assent to a philosophy he found rationally compelling. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Charles Ryder describes Catholicism as “a coherent philosophical system,” and it is clear from such essays as “Come Inside” that Catholicism's coherent and compelling doctrine was its initial appeal for Waugh. Fr Martin D'Arcy, Waugh's instructor, wrote that “talking with him [was] an interesting discussion based primarily on reason. I have never myself met a convert who so strongly based his assent on truth”<sup>2</sup> (qtd. in Patey 37).

From these descriptions it seems reasonable to conclude that Waugh's understanding of the faith would resonate with a theology—like that of the neo-Scholastics—that “assumed that theological discourse was able to capture adequately and comprehensively the revealed data in a system of thought by making use of syllogistic argumentation” (Boersma, “Analogy” 160). In other words, they assumed that the Catholic faith could be fully described by rational propositions derived from the historical evidence of the Gospels. Theirs was thus fundamentally “a rational apologetic. For neo-Thomism, the task of fundamental (or apologetic) theology was . . . a positive one: to

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<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps worth noting here that D'Arcy concludes with the word “truth” rather than “reason,” indicating that in D'Arcy's view Waugh's concern was for one of the transcendental even at such an early stage.

prove the fact of divine revelation by means of signs and miracles” (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 56). Though the neo-Scholastics claimed that their theology was built directly upon that of St. Thomas Aquinas—they considered themselves to be the *only* Thomists—other Thomists of no less a stature than Etienne Gilson believed that the neo-Scholastics, following such figures as Cajetan (1560-1650) and Suarez (1548-1617) rather than Thomas himself, had high-jacked Thomas’s dialectic method and applied it to an end he himself would never have sanctioned: the removal of Mystery from the faith, and the reduction of Christian doctrine to a logical system (Gilson 24-25). The consequence of this method was that, in the eyes of Henri de Lubac, the neo-Scholastics became “like museum curators, [who] can inventory, arrange and label everything, and who have answers for all objections—but who have, unfortunately, lost sight of the mystery of the Lord” (Schindler, xv).<sup>3</sup>

Chief among the casualties, in De Lubac’s view, was the paradoxical doctrine of *desiderium naturale*, the belief that from the beginning, man intrinsically possessed a desire for the Beatific Vision, despite his inability to attain it. While Thomas himself had affirmed this ancient Christian teaching, his commentators, in covertly introducing the concept of *pura natura*, had undermined Thomas’s insistence that the essence of the human person is bound up in God’s existence (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 94-95, Gilson 23-25). In Gilson’s view, such reductionist interpretations of Thomas had, by the nineteenth century, resulted in the victory of “a Thomism after the manner of the Schools, a sort of dull rationalism which panders to the kind of deism that most of them, deep down, really prefer to teach” (23). Yet, as we shall see, from the neo-Scholastic perspective, a

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<sup>3</sup> The quotation comes from David L. Schindler, who is recapitulating the main arguments of De Lubac’s 1942 article, “The Internal Causes of the Attenuation and Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred”.

systematized and controllable brand of Thomism was considered desirable for its supposed ability to safeguard the separation of the natural and supernatural, thus preserving the gratuity of grace. All of this resulted in the so-called Manualist tradition, in which theology was taught using pedagogical manuals of Thomistic theology, rather than Thomas's own writings (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 36-41, Mettepenningen, "Nouvelle" 174).

Though a strict rationalism that rejected a "unified vision" of the natural and supernatural orders had been gradually increasingly its hold over theology since the fifteenth century, (Schindler) doctrinaire neo-Scholasticism gained full sway within the Vatican only the late nineteenth century when Modernism—with its emphases upon the primacy of the subject, an immanentism that subsumed the supernatural into the natural order, and a historicist biblical exegesis—appeared to uproot the Church's core dogmas. The First Vatican Council's constitution *Dei Filius* aimed to dispel such tendencies in part by articulating a robust distinction between (natural) reason and (supernatural) faith:

By enduring agreement the Catholic Church has held and holds that there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only in principle but also in object: (1) in principle, indeed, because we know in one way by natural reason, in another by divine faith; (2) in object, however, because, in addition to things to which natural reason can attain, mysteries hidden in God are proposed to us for belief which, had they not been divinely revealed, could not become known. (Chapter 4)

Though the Council Fathers affirmed that faith and reason work in concert with each other, it is clear that their intent is to safeguard the separation of the two and thus forestall Modernism. Nine years later, the Church went a step further in the fight when Pope Leo XIII promulgated the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which endorsed neo-Scholasticism as the sole theological method of the Church (Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle* 19, 20). In it Leo lauds

Thomism for its perennial ability to dispel heresy and error (*Aeterni* 17, 18), and maintains that Thomism can once again rescue the Church (24). With its implacable realist epistemology, its insistence upon the objective reality of the supernatural order, and its literal reading of the New Testament—neo-Scholasticism seemed to be the only antidote to the increasingly relativist tendencies in contemporary theology (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 40).

The central issue at stake for the neo-Scholastics—and the Vatican in the late nineteenth century—was safeguarding the gratuity of Grace. In their view, any confusion or mingling of the supernatural and natural orders was tantamount to losing the gratuity grace: a gateway to a host of heresies (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 39). The enshrinement of neo-Scholasticism, though it filled an acute need at a critical moment in the Church’s history, proved to be, in the sight of the Nouvelle Theologians, merely a short-term response to a perennial problem within theology, namely the strict separation of the natural and the supernatural. The irony is that the weed of theological Modernism had grown out of soil impoverished by loss of the supernatural, soil which neo-Scholasticism, rather than replenishing, further depleted.

## *II. Precursors to Nouvelle Théologie and Martin D’Arcy*

In the midst of the battle against Modernism by the neo-Scholastics, theologians and philosophers such as Maurice Blondel, Pierre Rousselot, and Joseph Maréchal criticized both schools, recognizing that each represented the opposite side of the same devalued coin. One strictly separated the supernatural order from nature, the other internalized the supernatural, and each therefore lost Christian theology’s original sacramental vision. Henri De Lubac, a seminal figure of Nouvelle Théologie, claimed “a

particular debt” to Blondel, Rousselot, and Marechal (qtd. in Boersma, *Nouvelle* 53), while Martin D’Arcy counted the same three among those who had especially shaped his thinking (Sire 104-105).

Though a full conspectus of these three thinkers’ work would be beyond the scope of this dissertation, a survey of some of the most influential aspects of their thought will reveal the extent to which they influenced both the *Nouvelle* theologians and Martin D’Arcy.

Beginning with his 1893 dissertation *L’Action*, the French philosopher Maurice Blondel fought the neo-Scholastic establishment who “saw no reason to consider as part of their work showing that there was an intrinsic relationship between the order of creation and that of redemption” (Conway 70). While the neo-scholastics were content to build a rationalistic theology atop a notion of revelation that began and ended with historically verifiable miracles, “Blondel was the first of his generation to see clearly the radical insufficiency of this position and to understand that faith can be understood (and lived) in a salutary way only from within the movement of faith itself as a living and lived reality” (Conway 70). Thus, for Blondel, revelation had to be understood as a process continually and sacramentally imbedded within history. His “insistence on an organic relationship between nature and the supernatural,” in the face of the dominant neo-Scholastic extrinsicism served as touchstone for De Lubac and his contemporaries, who inherited the fight against the same unengaged theology and lamented the secularized culture they saw rising across Europe (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 53). In his dissertation, Blondel begins with the necessity of human action, and concludes that human action exposes a basic paradox of human nature:

In our knowledge, in our action, there subsists a constant disproportion between the object itself and thought, between the work and the will. Incessantly the conceived ideal is surpassed by the real operation, and incessantly the reality obtained is surpassed by an ever reviving ideal. One after the other, thought outstrips practice, and practice outstrips thought; the real and the ideal therefore must coincide, since this identity is given in fact; but it is given to us only to escape us no sooner than it is given. (Blondel, *L'Action* 319).

The disparity between what we desire, what Blondel terms our “willed-will” (*la volonté voulue*), and what we desire to desire, that is, our “willing will” (*la volonté voulante*), means that, unaided, the “immanent dynamism of human action was thus unable to find true satisfaction” (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 55).

Ultimately, Blondel contended, the failure of the “willed will” to correspond to the “willing will” represented the failure of philosophy to achieve a transcendence that human beings innately desire to attain. Thus, for Blondel analysis of human action exposed the point at which philosophy needed theology to complete it. Man was born with a desire which he is incapable of attaining on his own:

It is because I have the ambition of being infinitely that I feel my powerlessness: I did not make myself, I cannot do what I will, I am constrained to surpass myself ; and at the same time, I can recognize this fundamental infirmity only by having a sense already of the means to overcome it, by the acknowledgement of an Other within me, by the substitution of another will for mine. (Blondel , *L'Action* 327)

The paradox that Blondel identifies here—that man has an innate destiny he is nevertheless incapable of attaining—is precisely that which Henri de Lubac identified in his quest to rescue *desiderium natural* (the idea that man possesses an innate desire for the Beatific Vision) from its demise at the hands of the Aristotelian principle of connaturality, which held that man could not naturally possess a desire which he himself was not capable of reaching. For De Lubac, Blondel’s philosophy offered help in

recovering the Church Fathers' more paradoxical and sacramental understanding of man's situation within creation, and a more "organic" understanding of the natural and supernatural orders (De Lubac *Mystery* 147-150 Check)

Another context in which Blondel articulated this organic relationship was in his study of the relationship of history and dogma. *Histoire et dogme* (1904) targeted what he considered two mistaken schools of thought in this field, the Modernists and the neo-Scholastics, and offered the concept of Tradition as a corrective to both. For Blondel, both the neo-Scholastics (with their a-historical approach to dogma) and the Modernists (with their reduction of dogma to the product of historical forces, what Blondel termed "historicism") failed to understand the nature of the Church— an institution that both rests upon dogma and works from within history (Blondel, *History* 264). Some "synthetic force" that could make sense of both dogma and history was needed, and Blondel argued that Tradition was that force. For Blondel as for the Church Fathers, Tradition is no mere human institution "closed and complete in the past," but a "living reality" centered upon Christ and revealed by the Spirit in history (Conway 74).

For Blondel, the organic relationship of the natural to the supernatural has profound implications not only for properly understanding the Church, but also for a more thorough understanding of the people that comprise it. In this context, Blondel pictures this interaction as a love-relationship, and the influence of his language upon Henri De Lubac, other Nouvelle theologians, and Martin D'Arcy is readily apparent:

Does the supernatural consist, as the extrinsicist thesis implies, in a notional relationship determined by God, there being no link between the natural and the supernatural, but only an ideal juxtaposition of heterogeneous and even impenetrable elements which only the obedience of our minds can bring together? [. . .] Or can it be reduced, as the historicist thesis implies, to being no more than another name for the

divine or for a sort of concentration of it in nature itself, so that, if it is not entirely confused with nature, that is because after all one must have a word for the phase at present reached by our religious aristocracy? . . . . Or is it a love-relationship which insinuates a new order into the normal order—where man is and can only be *servus Dei* [servant of God]—one in which the slave can become the friend, the brother, and even *tanquam Deus Dei* [as it were, God of God]; so that, through this relationship, through grace, all men are made to feel, if not the spirit of adoption lost by the first fault, at least a profound sense of unrest, a mysterious hunger of the soul? (Blondel, *History* 283)<sup>4</sup>

The Nouvelle theologians and Martin D’Arcy received passages like this one as a clarion call to rethink theology and dislodge the extrinsicism dominant in the Church, for Blondel helped them to see that men naturally desired God, and that Europe’s secularization was being caused less by any loss of the sense of need for God than by the Church’s neglect of that need.

In a similar vein, Joseph Maréchal, the Jesuit biologist and philosopher, set about a critique of post-Kantian philosophy that, though it took Kant’s metaphysical critique rather than human action as its starting point, is analogous to the critique of philosophy offered by Blondel. Each saw that the ultimate success of philosophy was its ability to point beyond itself, to needs it could not in itself fulfill. Like the neo-Scholastics, Maréchal rejected the Modernists’ Kantian immanentism as a coherent and complete philosophy, but, recognizing the cogency and pervasive influence of Kant’s metaphysical critique, he saw a pointless obstinacy in the neo-Scholastic mere reassertion of Thomistic realism against it. If Kant arrived at an insufficient conclusion, being “afraid of going beyond a prudent agnosticism, of proceeding in the direction a finalistic metaphysics or

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<sup>4</sup> After this passage Blondel inserts this important clarifying footnote: “I do not wish to be saddled with a confusion between the *supernatural life*, as formed in us by baptism and habitual grace, and the antecedent *supernatural state* in which man is placed so as to be able to realize this life of grace. I do not overlook the conditions of personal access to salvation or the infinite difference which separates the spiritual life from spiritual death. But what is often been ignored is the fact that previously to habitual grace there is another grace, a first vocation, a state which results from the loss of the initial gift, but which contains a need and an aptitude for recovering it.” (284)



absolute idealism,” Maréchal believed he nonetheless made a beginning in that direction (Maréchal 57). Thus, Maréchal took it upon himself to carry Kantian philosophy to what he considered its natural end: Thomistic realism. For Maréchal, the mind “possessed an inherent drive to surmount the finality of being” (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 64). Human intellect refused to accept conceptual limits because the very awareness of a limit signaled the existence of possible intellectual activity beyond it: “As long as any condition whatsoever will look to us as ‘limiting’, we shall be certain that the absolutely last end of our intelligence lies beyond it, or, which amounts to the same, that the formal object of our intelligence extends beyond this limitation” (Maréchal 163-64). Ultimately, the intellect finds its end only in infinite Being:

We are positively aware that the movement of our intellections does not stop at the intelligible unity of . . . material objects . . . that, after having surveyed them, there remains in our intelligence a balance of unused power. Hence the adequate form of our intellectual activity . . . is wider and extends to a domain of being which exceeds our experience. . . . Let us continue to make hypotheses in the metempirical and we shall discover that the only insurmountable limitation which stops our thought is not this or that objective limit of being . . . but the “absolute limit,” non-being as such. But if we understand this well, to conceive non-being as the sole possible limit amounts to conceiving *the absence of a limit*. Hence, since the total objective capacity of our intelligence rejects every limit but non-being, it extends as far as being pure and simple. To such a formal capacity there can only correspond one absolutely last and saturating end: the *infinite* Being. (Maréchal 165)

Maréchal saw in Kant’s critique an artificial imposed barrier and a failure to extend to its true conclusion: the transcendence of the natural realm and the penetration of human intellect into the supernatural realm (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 63). Thus, like Blondel, Maréchal helped make straight the way for a fundamentally sacramental theology that would reaffirm the long neglected or denied doctrine of *desiderium naturale*, the belief that God created humankind with an innate or natural desire for the Beatific Vision.

A third key figure for *Nouvelle Théologie* and perhaps the most important influence upon Martin D'Arcy was the Jesuit theologian Pierre Rousselot. In several ways crucial both to D'Arcy and the *Nouvelle* theologians, he articulated a theology that sought to heal the theological rupture between the natural and supernatural orders.

First, in *L'Intellectualism de saint Thomas* he argued against the neo-Scholastic contention that Aquinas made intellect and rationality identical and regarded knowledge as purely conceptual (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 68). Instead, Thomas had been careful to distinguish between *ratio* and *intellectus*, rationality being one tool of the intellect in performing its highest purpose, union with the divine. Though, in Rousselot's view, the two were not opposed, "the relation between them was one of . . . incompleteness and completeness" (Sire 105). In Rousselot's reading of Thomas, rationality's natural tendency is toward distinction and an indirect arrival at the truth, whereas the intellect perceives truth in its unity and simplicity (Rousselot, *Intellectualism* 52-53). Knowledge, thus, was "not the result of isolating objects," but the union of the intellect to another (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 70). For, "Intelligence is the sense [sens] of the divine because it is capable of embracing God in this way; and if we are to have a correct idea of it we must understand that intelligence's role is not to fabricate concepts or put propositions together but to catch beings" (Rousselot 7). God, of course, cannot be "caught" except as he wills, but for Rousselot it is crucial that Christians recognize that the aim of the intellect is not the construction of concepts, but the fulfillment of a desire placed within in us by God: direct knowledge of Him in the Beatific Vision.

Second, in *Problème de l'Amore au Moyen Age*, his study of medieval views of love, Rousselot advocates a view of human love which harmonizes with his

understanding of Thomas Aquinas: self-love and love of God are not antagonistic, but rather complementary, since the Beatific Vision is both the consummation of love for God and our highest good (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 73-77). As H.J.A. Sire puts it, Rousselot maintains that “man is, metaphorically, a member of God; he is therefore only acting according to his proper nature when he is subserving the whole to which he belongs. In loving God selflessly he is acting by God’s own power within him . . .” (113). The height of human dignity and fulfillment is thus paradoxically achieved through the selfless love of God, where alone the integrity of man is preserved. As we shall see, this principle would prove key for D’Arcy as he developed his own articulation of human love.

Essential to Rousselot’s understanding of human and divine love is his contention that an innate drive toward the divine permeates humanity and the created order: all loves are sacramentally endowed with a supernatural *telos*. Rousselot thus contradicts the neo-Scholastic teaching that all created beings have only a natural *telos*, and that they take on a supernatural *telos* only through a *super-added* grace which does not belong to the created order. As Hans Boersma puts it, “[Rousselot’s] principle of a ‘universal appetite of all things for God’ ran directly counter to the neo-Scholastic separation between nature and the supernatural, which held that only the infusion of a supernatural principle (i.e. grace) could cause any kind of appetite for God” (*Nouvelle*, 77). In Rousselot’s understanding of love for God, therefore, no absolute division between the supernatural and the natural can exist.

Besides his views concerning intellect and love, Rousselot also influenced both the *Nouvelle* theologians and D’Arcy concerning the creation of faith. In a pair of articles entitled “Les Yeux de la Foi,” Rousselot criticized the neo-Scholastic position that faith

was created purely through reason—that the evidence of miracles was enough to convince a reasonable mind that the Christian revelation was true (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 79). This view afforded the supernatural no role in conversion itself. Recognizing this weakness, the neo-Scholastics found themselves in the odd position of arguing for a double faith, one natural and rational, the other supernatural and gratuitous (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 79). Against this dualistic thinking, Rousselot contended that rational evidence of Divine action was not in itself convincing. Instead, love for God, itself the gratuitous gift of God, gives the convert new eyes with which to look at Christ: reason and the love of God then work in harmony to reveal the truth of the Gospel. As with Rousselot's understanding of St. Thomas's intellectualism, love and knowledge are inseparable (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 78).

### *III. Martin D'Arcy's Sacramental Theology*

At the heart of the writings of Blondel, Maréchal, and Rousselot lay the recognition that the neo-Scholastic strict separation between the natural and the supernatural derived from modern positivism rather than from the Christian Tradition. Such dualistic thought, each of them saw, was creating havoc within theology and estranging the laity from the Church. Each therefore posited a sacramental view of nature and the supernatural order.

In the early twentieth century neo-Scholasticism became ensconced in the Vatican, and when, in the 1930's, a new generation of theologians, disturbed by the falsity and rigidity of official neo-Scholasticism, began the search for a more authentically Christian theology, it was partially to Blondel, Maréchal, and Rousselot that they turned. These same three thinkers also became seminal in the thought of Fr Martin

D'Arcy. According to H.J.A. Sire, D'Arcy's main biographer, it was D'Arcy who "introduced the English-speaking world to [Rousselot and Marechal's] dynamic and inspiring strand in neo-Thomist thought" (Sire 102). According to Sire,

What especially caught Fr D'Arcy's interest in the approach of the neo-Thomists was the effort to complement the abstractness and objectivity of St Thomas's thought with an exploration of the subjective basis of belief, in other words of the human psyche and the springs of its cognition . . . . Maréchal and especially Rousselot became Fr D'Arcy's particular guides (104).

D'Arcy's deep sympathy for Maréchal and Rousselot may seem surprising given his unwavering stance that the Christian faith is rational. Yet, it is important to point out that for D'Arcy as well as for Maréchal and Rousselot it was perfectly consistent, even essential, to affirm both that Christianity was rational and also that reason narrowly construed was not sufficient for genuine faith. One must bear in mind that all three opposed both the subjectivism of Modernism and the strict rationalism of the neo-Scholastics. In faith, one encounters a Divine Reality that both appeals to the mind's rationality and also to its innate desire to find complete satisfaction and direct knowledge of the object of its love.

One of D'Arcy's earlier works, *The Nature of Belief*, published just a year after he received Evelyn Waugh into the Church, reveals the extent Rousselot, Maréchal and Blondel's influence upon D'Arcy. Like each of these thinkers, D'Arcy emphasizes in this work that man does have a natural desire for an end he does not in himself have the power to attain. Reason, will, and love combine to move us to search for what we sense we lack. Thus, like de Lubac, D'Arcy affirms the doctrine of *desiderium natural*: "The soul has within it a love which can never be satisfied till it has found God . . ." (D'Arcy, *Nature* 236). The moment of the creation of faith signals the initiation of the journey

toward the fulfillment of the desire, but not, as in neo-scholastic thought, the creation of the desire itself.

Furthermore, D’Arcy’s view of reason resonates with that of these earlier thinkers. For D’Arcy Christian faith satisfies the mind’s desire for truth rather than offending it. Furthermore, our powers of reason can form within us a conviction of truth generally, and even of ultimate truth. In this D’Arcy may be said to hold an even higher and more sophisticated view of reason than the neo-Scholastics. Whereas they see chain-like syllogistic reason as adequate for persuasion, D’Arcy concludes rather that “belief of any kind is not the mere inspection of a chain of argument but an entry into a three-dimensional world in which facts converge, support each other and form a structure whose completeness and solidity provides a firm basis for conviction” (Sire 103). Nevertheless, this three-dimensional basis for conviction is not the same as faith itself. In order to result in faith, this “structure” of fact must be entered into by a receptive subject, one willing to receive, in Rousselot’s terms, “the eyes of faith”:

[W]e have to become like to God before we can judge with his judgment; that is to say . . . grace gives us the power to be the sons of God, and this power is not just an external help but an interior strengthening. Hence, when we are confronted by the word and work of One whose ways are mysterious and divine, we need an interior illumination and a taste for the divine beauty and goodness before we are able to seize their proper significance and to know the message as our way and our truth. (D’Arcy, *Nature* 211)

In case we are left with any doubt as to D’Arcy’s meaning, he supplies a footnote in which he introduces two scripture passages in order to reinforce the contradistinction between Rousselot’s “eyes of faith” and the neo-Scholastic sufficiency of reason: “Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven”<sup>5</sup> and: “the eyes

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<sup>5</sup> Matt. 16:17

of your heart be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”<sup>6</sup> In the lyrical concluding passage of the book, D’Arcy encapsulates his view of faith in an image that ties together the influence of all three thinkers. Present in it are *desiderium naturale*, reason, love, will, and supernatural grace, yet the image is not fractured but sacramental and unified:

And so it is that the pilgrim of eternity who wanders with heart uneasy—finding many roads but not *the* road, hearing many voices but not the one beloved voice he would fain hear despite his unworthiness—at a moment chosen by God sees stretching before him a way which he is sure is the only Way to a home beyond all his dreams, and hears unmistakably from without and from within the voice of the Truth summoning him to that Life eternal which is union with the Godhead. (*Nature* 236)

According to D’Arcy, this “union” cannot come about by natural means alone, for the divine must somehow be truly present to human living in the natural order. For D’Arcy as for Rousselot and Maréchal, the neo-Scholastic doctrine of “pure nature” must therefore be false. With the Nouvelle theologians, D’Arcy could say: “‘there is no such thing as nature unassisted’, nor is there any finite happiness that man can be satisfied with short of the vision of the divine” (qtd. in Sire 109).

Related to D’Arcy’s concern for the receptivity of the subject in the creation of faith was his emphasis upon the role of love in man’s search for goodness and truth. Renowned for his praise of love and friendship, D’Arcy was drawn to Rousselot and Maréchal because they argued that knowledge and love joined hands in man’s search for his highest good. Rousselot followed in the Augustinian tradition by “constructing a philosophy in which desire or love is the motive power driving us towards truth” (Sire 107). Likewise, for Maréchal, the seeker after truth discovers that love and truth are inseparable. As D’Arcy, speaking of Maréchal, wrote,

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<sup>6</sup> Eph. 1:18

Within the cold clarity of truth he discovers a buried warmth of desire. Truth and goodness are one finally, and judgment and love belong to the same movement towards them. P. Maréchal therefore gets, so to speak, inside thought and gives us a kind of metaphysical psychology. In doing so, if he be right, he has supplied modern Thomism with what it needed, namely, an analysis of love and desire and personality. (qtd. in Sire 107)

In the early 1940s, D'Arcy set out to make his own contribution to "metaphysical psychology," for he considered the nature of human love itself an unsolved problem. Several theologians before him, Rousselot among them, had examined the tension between Eros, self-regarding and acquisitive love, and Agape, selfless and sacrificial love. Though D'Arcy believed that Rousselot had come nearest to satisfactorily explaining the relation of these two tendencies of love, he nonetheless felt Rousselot's ideas needed further development and "[D'Arcy] might be said to have devoted his life to providing it" ( Sire 113).

He therefore undertook the task in what is widely considered his most important book, *The Mind and Heart of Love* (1945). Its argument is winding and complex, devoted largely to critiquing other authorities such as Anders Nygren and Dennis de Rougemont, yet at its heart, D'Arcy argues that the central paradoxes of Christianity reveal that Eros and Agape work as partners. Agape, in the form of God's creating and self-sacrificing love for us, demands that we respond in kind and precludes the tenability of an Eros that denies our basic dependence upon God. At the same time, human beings have been bestowed with dignity and worth as God's creatures, rendering illicit a desire for self-annihilating absorption into the beloved. D'Arcy concludes by envisioning the perfect operation of the two loves when we are in full communion with God in heaven: "God is all in all, and there is no trace of that kind of self-love which interferes with perfect love. But self is there, the self and the intellect, for it is God who loves them and gives them



both increase” (330). Thus, for D’Arcy as for Rousselot, the loving encounter of the human person and the Divine Person lies at the heart of faith. In conclusion, D’Arcy’s conception of faith depended upon a sacramental outlook in which the human person naturally perceived a supernatural destiny for himself, creating in him a receptivity to the love of God and to the supernatural gifts of faith. It was this same sacramental relation of the natural to the supernatural order that marked the thought and writing of the *Nouvelle* theologians.

#### IV. La Nouvelle Théologie

In 1946, a year after the appearance of *The Mind and Heart of Love*, the French Jesuit Jean Daniélou, a student of Henri de Lubac, published “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” a pointed essay criticizing neo-Scholasticism and calling for a re-thinking of the very task of theology itself. Because of the degree of controversy and official censure it provoked, Daniélou’s essay is often considered the public debut of the theological trend labeled “*la Nouvelle Théologie*” by its neo-Scholastic detractors. Though no formal school of *Nouvelle* theologians existed, each of the figures identified with the movement criticized neo-Scholasticism and sought to articulate correctives to its main tenets. Rejecting an understanding of faith as mere rational propositions to be defended with the tools of logic and rhetoric, the *Nouvelle* theologians looked both to the Church Fathers and to their nineteenth-century predecessors for what they saw as the central task of theology: entry into Divine Mystery (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 5). In their view, the neo-Scholastic method had created a gulf between theology and life, and was, in unwitting conjunction with other social forces, rapidly leading to loss of faith in Europe.

Rather than the “sawdust”<sup>7</sup> syllogisms of neo-scholasticism, the *Nouvelle* theologians desired a theology that could affirm both the objective truth of divine revelation and account for the fact that revelation reveals itself to human beings in history.

They found just such a theology in the Fathers of the Church. As such, their project of *ressourcement*, or return to the sources, was just as much about recovering an authentically Christian method of theology as it was about making the Fathers available to a modern readership. These tasks were “novel” only ironically, since they were intended to rediscover Tradition, that is, the whole narrative of the Spirit’s work in history. As Gabriel Flynn has put it, *Nouvelle Théologie* represented

a theology that is concerned to know the tradition, as opposed to a purely scholastic and repetitive theology. The view of tradition proposed by the *nouvelle théologie*, far from being traditionalist, in the sense of a repetition of the recent past, was concerned rather with the unity of the ever-living tradition. (“Introduction” 5)

To put it plainly the *Nouvelle* theologians recognized that if the Church wanted to speak to the contemporary world, it had to remember its own understanding of how God and history relate, it had to proclaim that history itself, rightly understood, revealed the mysterious work of the Spirit of God in and through it.

Though the *Nouvelle* theologians’ aims and areas of interest were wide and varied, Hans Boersma has persuasively argued that at the heart of their project was the recovery of a “sacramental ontology” that had been lost with the rise of modernity, for “created realities were sacraments (*sacramenta*) that pointed to and participated in spiritual mysteries or sacramental realities (*res*)” (Boersma, “Analogy” 160). Stemming from this central aim, several related goals characterize the spirit of their theology: the recovery of history as a theological category, a greater understanding of the role of the

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<sup>7</sup> The expression is Balthasar’s (qtd. in Ruddy 185).

layman in the life of the Church, a return to mystery in theology, and a healing of the rupture between nature and the supernatural widening in Western theology for centuries (Boersma, *Nouvelle* 31-34).

From the publication of Daniélou's essay through the 1950s, most of the *Nouvelle* theologians suffered severe censure—including removal from teaching posts and condemnation of their writings—by the authorities in Rome (Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle* 101-13). The source of the controversy was that the neo-Scholastics, including the powerful and irascible Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, considered this trend a new, disguised form of Modernism. In February 1947, Garrigou published his article “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle? [The New Theology: Where does it lead?] (in the process securing the movement's appellation), and in his conclusion supplied his now infamous answer:

Where does the new theology lead? It leads back to Modernism, because it has accepted the proposition that it has made: that of substituting for the traditional definition of truth—*adaequatio rei et intellectus* [the correspondence of things and intellect]—as though it were a chimera, the subjective definition: *adaequatio realis mentis et vitae* [the real correspondence of mind and life]. (143)<sup>8</sup>

The neo-Scholastic establishment regarded any method other than their own as tainted by relativistic tendencies. In 1950, the promulgation of *Humani Generis* by Pope Pius XII affirmed Garrigou's view, though it was to prove the last important defense of neo-Scholasticism (Mettepenningen, “Nouvelle” 179). Not until later would the Church accept that the *Nouvelle* theologians aimed not to relativize the Church's dogmas, but to recover the vital Tradition that had enabled their formulation.

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<sup>8</sup>“Où va la nouvelle theology? Elle revient au modernism. Parce qu'elle a accepté la proposition qui lui faite: celle de substituer à la definition traditionnelle de la vérité: *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, comme si elle était chimérique, la definition subjective: *adaequatio realis mentis et vitae*.”

Between *Humani Generis* and Vatican II, the censures were not only lifted, but the views of the Nouvelle theologians gained favor in Rome, and many Nouvelle theologians were given prominent roles in the Council.<sup>9</sup> As has often been noted, the Council itself seemed to result in two dissonant if not directly contradictory outcomes. One current endorsed a more liberal theology and accommodation to modernity, spurring reforms such as the vernacular mass and the centralized altar. This current was associated with the journal *Concilio* and its founders, including Karl Rahner, Hans Küng and Yves Congar. It was largely this current, with its focus on liturgical reform and modernization that so revolted Waugh and shaped his perception of the Council itself.

Simultaneously the Council produced another movement that, though its immediate effects were less obvious, profoundly shaped the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and brought to fruition many of the original hopes of the Nouvelle theologians, especially a recovery of the sacramental theology of the Church Fathers. Each of these currents saw problems with the Church's response to the modern world, yet the first sought to be more progressive and to accommodate itself to modernity, while the second emphasized the trans-historical character of the Church that had been most effectively articulated by the Church Fathers, and therefore advocated a *ressourcement*, or a return to the sources, which could inspire contemporary theology and furnish it with a theology that would allow the Church to serve as a witness of Christ to the modern world. This movement is associated with the journal *Communio* and its founders, including many Nouvelle theologians such as Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar,

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<sup>9</sup>The most thorough historically-oriented work on *Nouvelle Théologie* is Jurgen Mettepenningen's *Nouvelle théologie - New Theology : Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*. See also his article "Nouvelle Théologie: Four Historical Stages of Theological Reform Towards Ressourcement (1935-1965)" in Flynn and Murray 172-84.

and Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI). The theological currents both informing and issuing from this aspect of the Council share profound similarities with the theology of Martin D'Arcy and the artistic aims of Evelyn Waugh. Chapters Four, Five, and Six will examine this consonance by each reading one of Evelyn Waugh's later works using some of the central concerns of the *Nouvelle* theologians as a hermeneutic tool.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“[I]t was not all done by hand . . .”:  
Artistic Vocation and Beauty as Sacrament in *Brideshead Revisited*

### *I. Introduction*

*Brideshead Revisited*<sup>1</sup> clearly marks a watershed moment in Evelyn Waugh’s career. Even before its publication, he believed that in the depth of the novel’s themes, the richness of its prose, and the ambition of its scope, his art had grown beyond the satire of his youth. In letters written during and after the novel’s composition he refers to it only half-jokingly as his “M.O. (Magnum Opus) or . . . G.E.C. (Great English Classic)” (“To Laura Waugh” 198). Always modest regarding his own talent, Waugh recognized that *Brideshead* had qualities likely to make it an enduring classic. In February 1945, months before its publication, Waugh wrote to his mother:

I am beginning to get letters thanking for *Brideshead Revisited*. It seems to be a success and I think it should be. [ . . . ] I believe it will go on being read for many years. The general criticism is that it is religious propaganda. That shows how opinion has changed in 80 years. No one now thinks a book which totally excludes religion is atheist propaganda. 80 years ago every novel included religion as part of the normal life of the people. (“To Catherine Waugh” 200)

Indeed, perhaps the most basic distinction between Waugh’s earlier novels and *Brideshead* is that, for the first time, Waugh attempted to realize imaginatively not merely the dissolution he saw everywhere in modern life—an endeavor which, in his earlier work, had implicitly pointed to the need for God—but the positive portrayal of the workings of grace in a degraded society.

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<sup>1</sup> As this study is in part a diachronic look at Waugh’s artistic and theological growth, my quotations come from the 1945 edition, rather than Waugh’s revision of 1960, unless otherwise noted.

The question of how—and how successfully—Waugh portrays this grace has been a focal point of criticism of the novel since its publication. At the time of its publication in 1945, reviewers were divided in their reaction to this new turn in Waugh’s writing. While some critics lauded a new stage in Waugh’s artistic growth, others saw a work ruined by sentimentality, snobbery, religiosity<sup>2</sup>, and disunity. Laudatory critics then and now have struggled to answer these charges. As RoseMary Johnson has argued, early reviews established perceptions of the novel that have divided critics (and other readers) ever since (Johnson 162).

Recently, several sympathetic critics have emphasized Charles Ryder’s relation to beauty, its role in his conversion, and its unifying force within the novel. This angle of approach seems reasonable given that Charles becomes a painter and is keenly aware of beauty throughout the novel. While these critics have been successful in demonstrating that beauty plays a prominent role in Charles’s conversion, they have been hampered by the lack of an adequate theology of beauty and have not successfully articulated the sacramental nature of Charles’s encounter with beauty.

As I have shown, *Nouvelle Théologie* provides a rich and appropriate theological lens through which to read Waugh’s work. This chapter therefore examines *Brideshead Revisited* in light of one of the major works to come out of *Nouvelle Théologie*. In *Seeing the Form*, the first of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s seven-volume “theological aesthetics,” *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar argues that beauty, the most neglected by theologians of the philosophical transcendentals, is “the manner in which God’s goodness (*bonum*) gives

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<sup>2</sup> Some critics, as Waugh himself realized, would criticize the novel for including religion at all. By “religiosity” I mean rather the perception that the novel’s religious elements are super-added and inessential to its fabric.

itself and is expressed by God and understood by man as the truth (*verum*)” (12). The beauty we behold in earthly forms calls us out of ourselves and awakens us to the splendor of goodness, truth and Being. In Balthasar’s view then, beautiful forms are both sacramental and vocational- that is they both embody Being to us, and call us toward it.

My argument in this chapter consists of three movements. First I show that Charles indeed has an artistic vocation. Second, I contend that as a consequence of his vocation, beauty is destined to play a profound role in his growth as a human person. Third, I argue that the centrality of beauty, in its full theological sense, has profound implications for a proper reading of the novel. Essentially, I argue that as much as the novel is the account of the workings of grace among the Flyte family, it is also the record of the sacramental role that beauty plays in Charles’s Ryder’s conversion. Drawing on Balthasar’s understanding of beauty as sacramental vessel of Being, I show that Waugh demonstrates that Charles Ryder’s artistic vocation, as well as the consequent intensity with which Sebastian’s and Julia’s personal beauty affects him, initiates his journey through beauty, towards the truth and goodness of God. In this way, both the novel’s sharp division into Books I and II, and Charles’s apparently sudden conversion following Lord Marchmain’s equally sudden deathbed conversion must be reinterpreted in light of this single journey. Though Charles Ryder is convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith only after Julia and Lord Marchmain’s conversions, it is the presence of beauty that slowly converts him and makes him receptive to their Christian faith.

Ryder’s effort to understand the shape of his life through the exercise of his memory cannot be adequately understood apart from the paradox of sacrament. As Balthasar contends, beauty consists of both form and splendor: both beauty’s visible face



and the hidden depths that vivify it are necessary components of genuine beauty. Ryder's exercise of memory leads not to the rejection of earthly beauty, nor to its reduction as a mere signpost to the divine, but to his recognition of the divine splendor within God's created forms, and thus to his revised understanding of his own experiences. As the older Ryder comments early in the novel: "again and again a new truth is revealed . . . in whose light all our previous knowledge must be rearranged" (79). A central element of *Brideshead Revisited*, then, is Charles Ryder's re-visitation of a past whose real significance that, until his conversion, he had failed to understand.

## *II. Critical Reception of Brideshead Revisited*

Because of the influence of *Brideshead's* early reviews upon subsequent readings of the novel, it is worth taking note of a few of the more prominent and well developed early responses. Several reviewers echoed the complaints of Waugh's friends, for they too found troublesome his perceived "virulent snobbishness" as well as his sustained exploration of religion through fiction (Hastings 493). Perhaps the most prominent and vociferous detractor was Edmund Wilson, who labeled the book "a Catholic tract" and called it "a bitter blow to this reviewer" (246, 45). For Wilson, the conversions of Lord Marchmain and Charles Ryder were focal points of the novel's discordant intrusion of the miraculous and supernatural in the narrative. Wilson mocks this turn of the plot from a safe distance:

The worldly Lord Marchmain, when he left his wife, repudiated his Catholic faith, and on his deathbed he sends the priest packing, but when the old man has sunk lower, the priest is recalled. The family all kneel, and Charles, who is present, kneels too. Stoutly though he defended his

Protestantism<sup>3</sup>, his resistance breaks down today. He prays that this time the old man will not reject the final sacrament, and lo, Lord Marchmain makes the sign of the cross! (246)

Wilson's incredulity is plain, and his distaste for what he considers hocus pocus is rivaled only by his loathing of the novel's "snobbery" which, "hitherto held in check by [Waugh's] satirical point of view, has here emerged shameless and rampant" (246).

Wilson's incredulity over the novel's latter portions is offset by praise for the novel's early scenes, especially those at Oxford, which he finds

all quite brilliant, partly in the manner of the Waugh we know, partly with a new kind of glamour that is closer to Scott Fitzgerald and Compton Mackenzie. It is the period that these older writers celebrated, but seen now from the bleak, shrivelled forties, so that everything—the freedom, the fun, the varied intoxications of youth—has taken on a remoteness and pathos (245).

Though some reviewers found Book I—and the novel as whole—to be sentimental, there was widespread agreement that it was more evocative and more successful than Book II.<sup>4</sup>

Other reviews were more positive, seeing in the work the artistic growth Waugh himself recognized. For example, V.C. Clinton-Baddely saw the book a masterpiece of "character creation," in which the novel's complex plotline seems "not merely probable, but pre-ordained," its course being "created by the characters" (137-38). In contrast to Wilson, Baddely thought Julia, who comes to dominate the second half of the novel, to be

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<sup>3</sup> Wilson's assertion here makes one wonder whether his admitted secular bias against the novel's subject-matter permitted him to read the novel with care, as Ryder repeatedly describes himself as an agnostic who was raised nominally Anglican.

<sup>4</sup> It seems that Waugh anticipated simplistic readings of *Brideshead*—both those which find its portrayal of the pre-war world sentimental and those which find it overwhelmingly powerful—and sought to prevent them with a warning on the dust jacket of the first British edition: "The story will be uncongenial alike to those who see it as transitory, insignificant and, already, hopefully passed. Whom then can I hope to please? Perhaps those who . . . look to the future with black forebodings and need more solid comfort than rosy memories." Here, the key to understanding the book—that the world it portrays is neither insignificant nor an end in itself—is clearly laid out, yet it seems in many cases to have been lightly disregarded.

the most powerfully and convincingly developed character. The charges of snobbery and religious exclusivity, so prevalent in other reviews are absent, for, in Baddely's view, the agnostic Ryder's apparent adulation of an elite and exclusive circle of Catholics, is merely one stage in a journey upon which each reader is invited to undertake. Hence his laudatory conclusion: "Though the book has a powerful religious purpose it has no shadow of Catholic exclusiveness" (237).

For John K. Hutchins, *Brideshead* "has the depth and weight that are found in a writer working in his prime, in the full powers of an eager, good mind and a skilled hand, retaining the best of what he has already learned. It tells an absorbing story in imaginative terms" (242). In contrast to the tight wit of Waugh's early work, *Brideshead*'s prose exhibits "a leisure, a spaciousness of style and structure . . . . By comparison with [the early novels], this is a full-bodied play to a deft vaudeville sketch" (244). Moreover, Hutchins, like Baddely, sees honesty in the novel's treatment of an agnostic's first encounter with genuine faith that "could hardly be called propaganda, though he will surely be charged with propaganda" (244).

I dwell on these reviews because, though their views have been refined and expanded by more recent critics, they represent two basic attitudes toward *Brideshead* that persist today. Wilson's reading typifies one set of reactions to the novel which approves of the novel's "profane" portions and abhors the "sacred," and is therefore obliged to consider the novel a failure. For them, *Brideshead* is a fragmented work whose artistic sensibility has been overwhelmed by religious dogma. A second, that of Baddely and Hutchins, finds in *Brideshead* a coherent, masterful work of art, an honest and profound portrait of a troubled family of faith and one agnostic's relationship with them.

Johnson has suggested that though “negative criticism of *BR* has been rare since 1970, [] this is probably because those critics who were ‘dismayed by the book’s religious implications’ simply ceased to be concerned with it” (162). Yet, this silent criticism of *Brideshead* remains a powerful player in the effort of contemporary scholars to validate their sense that not only is the novel successful, but successful precisely because of its religious theme. Contemporary scholars’ habit of refuting Wilson’s “Catholic tract” “suggests that little progress has been made” (Johnson 162). Indeed, many positive reviews offered comparatively slight analysis of the novel, yet the objections of Wilson and his descendants constitute forceful critiques that, if they are to be corrected, need to be met with careful analysis and a suitable intellectual framework. The work of the *Nouvelle* theologians provides just that.

### *III. Beauty as a Sacrament of Being in Hans Urs Von Balthasar*

As I have shown, Waugh’s sacramental vision of reality bears a remarkable consonance to that of the *Nouvelle* theologians. Indeed, both Waugh and the *Nouvelle* theologians, particularly Hans Urs Von Balthasar, showed great concern for beauty, which both view as a manifestation of divine glory. Hans Urs Von Balthasar furnishes a richly sacramental understanding of beauty in *Seeing the Form*. Balthasar perceives that in modern life, beauty has become the most neglected of the transcendentals. While at least in some circles goodness and truth remain prized if elusive quarry, the chase for beauty has been given up. Balthasar places heavy emphasis upon the theological centrality of beauty, calling it the visible means through which goodness, truth, and finally Being come to be known (21). Beauty, understood aright, is nothing less than the apprehensible glory of the divine both illuminating and making itself seen within created

forms. This highly sacramental aesthetic sheds light upon the unifying function of beauty in *Brideshead Revisited*.

Rooting his thought in that of St. Thomas Aquinas, Balthasar distinguishes between form and splendor, such that, when we behold a beautiful form “[w]e are confronted simultaneously with both the form (or figure) and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a love-worthy thing” (20). Thus, according to Balthasar, beauty is by nature sacramental, for it presents both a natural, visible face, and an underlying supernatural reality which is glimpsed through the form. “Form” (*gestalt*) properly understood, therefore, includes and is inseparable from the spiritual reality dwelling within it.

For Balthasar, no “univocal transposition and application of [these] categories” to the “contents of Christian theology” is possible, for “God is neither an ‘existent’ (subordinate to Being) nor ‘Being’ itself, as it manifests itself essentially in everything that makes its appearance in form” (119). Nonetheless, the Incarnation constitutes “a genuine unfolding of himself in the worldly stuff” that both illuminates the eyes of our minds, enabling us to see visibly the form of Christ, and then, in the form of Christ, to perceive the Glory of God (120). Analogously, beautiful objects, through their glimmer of radiance, witness to Being, which, while not identifiable with God, itself witnesses to God. Human persons occupy for Balthasar a middle ground, for the incarnate Christ is the perfection of beautiful forms. Following in Christ’s wake, human persons are called to attain a form which radiates divine splendor: “As a totality of spirit and body, man must make himself into God’s mirror and seek to attain to that transcendence and radiance that must be found in the world’s substance if it is indeed God’s image and likeness—his

word and gesture, action and drama” (22). In other words, the calling given to every human being is nothing less than the conformation of his or her own form to the beautiful form *par excellence*, Christ himself, so that divine glory becomes ever more visible within each human form. At this point, Balthasar arrives at a crux: the adherence of human form to the form of Christ depends upon one’s ability to perceive splendor in other forms. Without that ability, the human person remains incapable of understanding the significance of form, and hence the true nature of beauty itself. Here a lengthy quotation from Balthasar will enable us to see how, for Balthasar as for Waugh, human individuality, vocation, beauty, and, ultimately, beatitude are all informed by a sacramental theology:

What is a person without the form that shapes him, the form that surrounds him inexorably like a coat of armour and which nonetheless is the very thing that bestows suppleness on him and which makes him free of all uncertainty and all paralyzing fears, free for himself and his highest possibilities? . . . For this is no extraneous form, but rather so intimate a one that it is greatly rewarding to identify oneself with it. Nor is it a forcibly imposed form, rather one which has been freely chosen. Nor, finally, is it an arbitrary form, rather that uniquely personal one which constitutes the very law of the individual. Whoever shatters this form by ignoring it is unworthy of the beauty of Being, and he will be banished from the splendor of solid reality as one who has not passed the test. . . . But if a man is to live in an original form, that form has first to be sighted. One must possess a spiritual eye capable of perceiving (*wahrnehmen*) the forms of existence with awe. (23-24)

Of central importance here is the fact that the perfection of our own given forms, which is simultaneously our salvation and our fulfillment, depends upon our ability to perceive the presence of splendor within other forms. This vocation, then, consists partially of a calling to perceive what is there (that is, the splendor within other forms) so that our own forms may be molded to display the divine radiance at the root of our beings.

Those who cannot perceive the splendor of beautiful forms are, at best, mere aesthetes, capable of perceiving external forms of beauty but not the splendor that enlivens them, for, “[w]hen beauty becomes a form which is no longer understood as being identical with Being, spirit, and freedom, we again entered into an age of aestheticism, and realists will then be right in objecting to this kind of beauty”<sup>5</sup> (22). A beauty devoid of the supernatural light meant to shine forth from it becomes a mere immanent, this-worldly beauty, and therefore not true beauty at all. According to Balthasar, the dire consequence for those unable to perceive beauty in its fullness is that they may eventually come to doubt the divine goodness underwriting Being itself.

Beauty must not lose its transcendent character; it must not be divorced from goodness or truth because “[t]he witness borne by Being becomes untrustworthy for the person who can no longer read the language of beauty” (19). Beauty, most especially the beautiful form of Christ, but to a lesser extent all beauty, is the medium by which human beings are assured of the goodness of Being. The loss of our ability to “read the language of beauty” is at the root of the systemic ailment of modernity because the pursuit of goodness (ethics) and truth (science) leads finally to monstrous practices and falsehoods when the triple strand of the transcendentals becomes unraveled and beauty disposed of, for beauty, when given its proper place, safeguards ethics and science from straying from their proper orientation: Being (18).

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<sup>5</sup> This description applies with poignant accuracy to the novel’s aesthete *par excellence*, Anthony Blanche. Though Blanche, in purely formal terms, commands an aesthetic sensibility superior to his contemporaries at Oxford, his inability to perceive splendor behind form inhibits his perception of beauty. Though Waugh occasionally uses Blanche in a prophetic role, as when he accurately pronounces Charles’s Latin American paintings “t-t-terrible t-t-tripe” (270), his inability to read the language of beauty leads him into such grievous errors as considering Sebastian merely charming rather than beautiful.

#### *IV. Artistic Vocation and the Role of Beauty in Charles Ryder's Conversion*

A natural consonance exists between Waugh's and Balthasar's treatment of beauty; for each, beauty is that which both expresses and contains Being, pointing both into and beyond itself. Thus, for each, beauty plays a central importance in the conversion of the human heart toward the Divine Being. As noted above, Balthasar saw beauty itself as a kind of vocation to the divine life, while Waugh made vocation the focal point of his literary aims for half his career. Though he does not dwell upon the point, Douglas Patey has correctly identified Charles as a called artist and that vocation as the "process by which Ryder is prepared to receive grace" (234). If Charles Ryder is indeed a called artist, then Waugh, too, articulates an intimate bond between beauty and vocation.

The splendor of forms—natural, architectural, and human— becomes the primary economy through which Charles's salvation is achieved, for the artist must be attuned to beauty in his attempt to fulfill his calling to portray it. In recognizing this fact we can perceive the central role that beauty plays in Charles's conversion, for, though Lord Marchmain's deathbed conversion and Julia's return to the church serve as catalysts for Charles's reception into the church, his conversion begins when he takes his first halting steps toward beauty. Although Charles' artistic vocation seems to languish in the latter portions of the novel, the epilogue reveals that his artistic vocation and his apprehension of the divine in beautiful forms have led him to accept the universal summons of God to mankind.

The remainder of this chapter will therefore read *Brideshead Revisited* through the theological lens of Balthasar's theology of beauty. Waugh signals the centrality of



beauty in his narrative by making his protagonist not merely an artist, but a one who believes he has a vocation to paint, for, as I will show, Charles has a vocation to paint. My contention that Waugh chose an artist to serve as the protagonist of a novel about beauty's power to convert the human heart may give one pause, for it may suggest that for Waugh, only artists need attend to beauty and its sacramental power, while Balthasar contends that beauty serves as a powerful motive of conversion for all with eyes to see it, not just for artists. Yet while Waugh magnifies the importance of beauty through Charles's painterly vocation, he does not limit the perception of beauty to artists but shows the importance of the true perception of beautiful forms for everyone.

Though by the beginning of Chapter One all we know of Charles's artistry is the bare fact that in civilian life he had been a painter, the opening paragraph's description of Charles's first visit to *Brideshead* exudes his enormous love of beauty and with the Psalmists ascribes to beauty a divine source:

I had been there before; first with Sebastian more than twenty years ago on a cloudless day in June, when the ditches were white with fool's-parsley and meadowsweet and the air heavy with all the scents of summer; it was a day of peculiar splendour, such as our climate affords once or twice a year, when leaf and flower and bird and sun-lit stone and shadow seem all to proclaim the glory of God . . . (21)

Though the reference to God may easily be passed over as a commonplace expression in praise of nature, the oblique allusion to a poem about the Spirit-infused source of nature's beauty emphasizes the idea of the beautiful forms revealing divine glory. Thus, Waugh uses language similar to Balthasar's to describe the relation of form to splendor, establishing from the outset a sacramental register within the novel.

This passage is narrated from more than twenty years' of Charles' hindsight, yet Waugh signals early on that, though Charles is still far from understanding or accepting

the radiance underlying beautiful forms, his ability to perceive beauty is nonetheless already developing in the novel's early chapters, as Waugh shows through his development of an "eyes to see" motif. Though Charles's academic friends had already convinced him of the falsity of modern aesthetics on an intellectual level, Sebastian's playful yet sincere critique affects Charles's more profoundly:

Collins had already exposed the fallacy of modern aesthetics to me . . . . but it was not until Sebastian, idly turning the page of Clive Bell's *Art* read: "Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?" Yes. *I* do," that my eyes were opened. (28)

Though this one instance is perhaps not enough to make a case for what Charles means by "open eyes," the motif continues when he relates his half-heartedly undertaken trip to Ravenna with Collins: "When, many years later, there appeared the first massive volume of his still unfinished work on Byzantine Art, I was touched to find . . . my own name: . . . *To Charles Ryder, with the aid of whose all-seeing eyes I first saw the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia and San Vitale. . . .*" (44, emphasis added). If there is any doubt about what Waugh intends by having Collins ascribe "all-seeing eyes" to Charles, Charles himself furnishes the novel's best description of beauty-perceiving eyes in his description of Julia as a debutante:

That night and the night after and the night after, wherever she went, always in her own little circle of intimates, she brought to all *whose eyes were open to it* a moment of joy, such as strikes deep into the heart on the river's bank when the kingfisher suddenly flames across the dappled water. (180, emphasis added)

Here, lest the profound significance of this passage be missed, Waugh includes a clear allusion to Hopkins's "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," a poem that plumbs the depths of a paradox that also lies at the heart of *Brideshead*—namely, that the more a thing of beauty

exclaims its own particular selfhood—in Hopkins’ terms, its “selving”—the more it sacramentally embodies and expresses Christ, the ultimately *specific* form of Beauty. Julia’s physical beauty, at the moment when she “comes into her own” radiates for Charles the beauty of Christ, whose beauty alone has the power to invoke true joy within the human heart. It is clear then that in Ryder’s use of the idea of “open eyes,” he means something akin to what Balthasar means by eyes capable of perceiving the splendor within beautiful forms.

Speaking thus of Julia, Ryder (and Waugh) extends the vision of beauty and its sacramental character beyond the purview of artists. The novel implies rather that artists are meant first to perceive beauty and then to produce works of beauty to aid others in perceiving the splendor of beautiful forms. This perspective undergirds several remarks in *Brideshead*, one of which is Sebastian’s linking the beauty of Cathedrals and butterflies. Sebastian, no artist, finds splendor both in art and nature, for Sebastian’s eyes, even before Charles’s, are open. This is why creatures and natural things both produce in Sebastian the same emotion as works of art, for he can perceive that within and behind all three is nothing else than the Glory of the Lord. Beauty, both natural and artistic, are aids to Sebastian’s faith. Here, I suggest, lies the substance of Sebastian’s apparently flippant remarks such as,

“I must go to the botanical gardens.”

“Why?”

“To see the ivy . . . there is a beautiful arch there and more kinds of ivy than I ever knew existed. I don’t know where I should be without the Botanical Gardens.” (33-34)

What on the surface seems mere whim and fancy is a sincere need to perceive beauty and so to know God. Waugh further emphasizes this quality within Sebastian when Charles asks him whether he actually believes in the details of the Nativity,

“the star and the three kings and the ox and ass.”

“Oh yes, I believe that. It’s a lovely idea.”

“But you can’t believe things because they’re a lovely idea.”

“But I *do*. That’s how I believe.” (87)

For Sebastian, the transcendentals of beauty and truth mutually reinforce one another: the beauty of the nativity story helps him believe in its historical truth. Here again, *Brideshead* illustrates a point similar to that made by Balthasar, that goodness, beauty, and truth are mutually coherent: they bear one another up, and when one is dispensed with, the others become unmoored.

As the novel comprises the recollection of a first-person narrator’s conversion, the sacramental, converting power of beauty is most powerfully seen in its effect upon Charles Ryder. By making Charles an artist summoned to his craft, Waugh is able to combine his enduring interest in individual vocation and its sacramental qualities, with an exploration of beauty and its own kind of sacramentality. Charles’s gradual discovery of his vocation both begins the process of his conversion and ensures that his eyes, in an especially cogent way, are opened to the depths of beauty. To fail in his apprehension of beauty would hinder the realization of his vocation, and, conversely, his failure to take up art would slow or prevent the opening of his eyes to beautiful forms. Sebastian says of Lady Marchmain’s brief, fruitless foray into painting: “Someone told her that you could only appreciate the beauty of the world by trying to paint it”<sup>6</sup> (82). While this statement seems trite when applied to Lady Marchmain, whose sanctity is thoroughly artless,

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that her artistic failure opens the way for Charles to make his first ever oil painting.

Charles's ability to apprehend beauty and his dedication to painting are inextricably entwined.

*V. Charles Ryder's Gradual Conversion to Beauty*

Though the young, agnostic Charles necessarily fails to identify his vocation as such, his art nonetheless provides him with the sense of purpose that will propel him toward new self-understanding and conversion. In Patey's words, "Charles's moments of artistic success closely track his spiritual development" (236). While making his first serious attempt at painting, Charles is given a glimpse beyond material reality: he finds himself unaccountably confronted by an "intensity and singleness and the belief that it was not all done by hand" (204). This initial glimpse of the transcendent is the deposit that eventually comes to fruition in his conversion.

By placing him among a family preoccupied with vocation, Waugh is able to highlight the latent reality of Ryder's vocation within these early artistic experiences. At dinner with Charles, after explaining that she would never have a debutante ball like Julia's, Cordelia, in a flight of logic apparent only to herself, suddenly remarks,

"I hope I've got a vocation."

"I don't know what that means."

"It means you can be a nun. If you haven't a vocation it's no good however much you want to be; and if you have a vocation, you can't get away from it, however much you hate it. Bridey thinks he has a vocation and hasn't. I used to think Sebastian had and hated it—but I don't know now." (221-22)

Here, Waugh introduces a splendid and subtle irony. As Cordelia hashes out a generically Catholic explanation of vocation, Charles's attention wanders, and he begins to contemplate the work he had accomplished that day. He longs to escape Cordelia's discourse, but it is nothing else but his own vocation that preoccupies him: ". . . I had no

patience for this convent chatter. I had felt the brush take life in my hand that afternoon; I had had my finger in the great succulent pie of creation” (201). Charles, unwittingly, is experiencing the satisfaction of doing what he is called to do.

Only three pages later, Charles’ recollection of those mystical first experiences with the brush remind him of the ten “dead years” following his self-imposed exile from the Flyte family during which that “intensity and singleness of purpose and the belief that it was not all done by hand” seem to have been lost. Immediately following this expression, Ryder offers a telling appositive: “—in a word, the inspiration” (204). Here is clear example of the older Ryder revisiting his earlier experiences, and identifying within them the work of the Spirit. Though his younger self could not have identified the feeling of guidance and of purpose as a vocation in the theological sense, he, like Augustine in the *Confessions*, only later discovers the divine source of his stirrings and longings.

Related to Charles’s latent vocation is the fact that, as Bridey recognizes, the young Charles has already adopted a proto-sacramental aesthetic theory. When Bridey asks Charles whether he considers the chapel at Brideshead as “Good Art,” Charles replies:

“Well, I don’t quite know what you mean. . . I think it’s a remarkable example of its period. Probably in eighty in years it will be greatly admired.”

“But surely it can’t be good twenty years ago and good in eighty years, and not good now?”

“Well, it may be *good* now. All I mean is that I don’t happen to like it much.” (92)

Though Charles’s words at first appear rather inconsequential, Bridey draws from them a surprising inference: that Charles, in being willing to admit that he does not like a piece of art that, by the critical standards conventionally applied to it is considered “good,” has

distanced himself from an “art for art’s sake” mentality and has adopted the position that art has a purpose that goes beyond itself: “‘Of course, you are right really,’ [Bridey] said. ‘You take art as a means not as an end. That is strict theology, but it’s unusual to find an agnostic believing it.’” (94) Charles, at a time when he possesses no conscious inclination toward God or Catholicism, feels not only a calling to produce beautiful art, but intuitively that art serves some purpose exterior to itself—namely, that art exists to participate in the beauty of creation and, hence, along with other kinds of beautiful forms, serves to point beyond itself toward Being.

Around the time of the composition of *Brideshead* Waugh himself was closely considering the role and value of art as well as the artist. His conclusion is modest and yet profound. As a Catholic, Waugh condemned equally the earlier Victorians’ elevation of literature as a substitute for religion and the later decadents’ “art for art’s sake” sentiment. His diary entry for Epiphany 1945 expounds upon the view that artists are meant to serve the church:

I had never realized how specially Epiphany is the feast of artists—twelve days late, after St Joseph and the angels and the shepherds and even the ox and the ass, the exotic caravan arrives with its black pages and ostrich plumes, brought there by book learning and speculation; they have had a long journey across the desert, the splendid gifts are travel-worn . . . they have made the most disastrous mistakes . . . but they get to Bethlehem in the end and their gifts are accepted, prophetic gifts that find a way into the language of the Church in a number of places.<sup>7</sup> (*Diaries* 606)

Though Waugh assigns artists to a humble place within the church, they nevertheless have a definite place: as prophets are charged with revealing truth, artists are likewise charged with revealing beauty to eyes unused to perceiving it. Ryder, the middle-aged Catholic narrator, uses the word “inspiration” in its theological sense. For Waugh, the

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<sup>7</sup> Waugh composed different iterations of this passage in several places: the letter to Laura quoted in Chapter One, in his article “St Helena Empress”, and in a prayer said by *Helena*’s hero.

Spirit of God works in and through the artist. Just as Ryder believes that the of the languor of youth has “some remote kinship” with the Beatific Vision (69), so does the craft of artists have some distant and humble kinship to that of priests sacrificing the Mass. The artifacts they produce, though infinitely inferior to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, are sacramental both because they are physical, human artifacts infused with grace by God’s participation in their production and because all true art radiates the splendor of Being.

To summarize this chapter so far, we have seen that beauty plays a central role in the novel, both for Charles and Sebastian, and that beauty is somehow important both for the growth of Charles’s art and his slowly germinating faith. Yet this line of reasoning does not adequately broach a salient topic: the relation of profane to the sacred within the novel.

#### *VI. Secular and Sacred Beauty*

Critics have long sought to articulate the relationship of the sacred and profane within the novel. Given the novel’s subtitle—*The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*—such a move is not unexpected, nor is it surprising that some critics have treated the “Sacred” and “Profane” elements as more or less distinct and counterpoised. Indeed, certain passages in the novel seem to create a sharp juxtaposition between the sacred and the profane, as when Ryder describes a Sunday morning in Oxford as Christians of all sects stream to their various churches: “So through a world of piety I made my way to Sebastian”<sup>8</sup> (60). As mentioned above, some early critics

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<sup>8</sup> While on a first reading Ryder may seem to set himself apart from the churchgoers, the arc of the novel suggests that Ryder is actually identifying with them and highlighting the nascent piety and devotion in his friendship with Sebastian.



discerned an artistic disunity in the novel because they saw the sacred and profane elements as not only distinct, but disjointed. Patey offers the beginning of a corrective to this view by pointing out that even the beauty of food and wine in the novel is “invested from the start with implicit eschatological significance, as a sign of (and call to) what in the sonnet ‘To what serves Mortal Beauty?’ Hopkins calls ‘God’s better beauty, grace’” (235). More recently, three scholars have used the distinction between the sacred and profane in *Brideshead* as a means of analyzing the novel’s treatment of beauty.

Laura White sees a close connection between the novel’s profane beauty and the divine beauty of God’s love. Yet, far from seeing a sacramental relationship in which the former leads to the latter, White believes that Charles must explicitly reject this-worldly beauty in order to clear the way for the love of God. She offers a fascinating insight into *Brideshead*’s rejection of various modern aesthetic theories, persuasively showing that Ryder alludes to and then critiques the aesthetic views of figures such as Pater, Bell, Huysmans, Fry, Eliot, and Yeats<sup>9</sup> (191). White correctly contends that Charles must learn to reject a strictly immanent understanding of earthly beauty and must learn not to ascribe ultimate value to his or other works of art. Ultimately, however, she extends her argument too far by claiming that Charles—and by implication *Brideshead*—not only rejects art-for-art’s-sake aesthetics, but rejects earthly and artistic beauty altogether. Only in so doing, she believes, can Charles come to embrace divine beauty. For White, it is not Charles’s artistic vocation that leads him to God, but his artistic failure (his paintings of ruins in Latin-America) that opens him to God’s love because “too great an adherence to

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most provocative example is her contention that Waugh has Lord Marchmain choose to die in the “Chinese drawing room” specifically to refute Yeat’s argument concerning art and mortality in “Lapis Luzuli” (10-11).

beauty is the very thing keeping him from God” (188). White concludes that prior to his conversion Charles arrives at a complete “rejection of beauty as a mode of ultimate being” (191). In claiming that Charles ultimately rejects beauty of all kinds, she fundamentally misreads the novel, which, is essentially Charles’s record of the divine Presence within earthly beauty.

Taking up the theme of Beauty in *Brideshead*, Marie Cabaud Meaney argues that beauty plays an important role in the novel’s conversions—particularly in that of Charles—and contends that beauty “can become a path to God,” though if it is loved for its own sake it can become a temptation and, ultimately, an idol ( 182). In one regard, Meaney is right. Indeed, Charles is drawn away from his agnosticism by the force of beauty, and he must learn not to see beauty merely as an end itself. In this way, Meaney’s work serves as a helpful signpost in my effort to identify the underlying artistic unity of *Brideshead*, for beauty remains a powerful force from the Prologue to the Epilogue. Yet, in another way Meaney’s reading of the book serves to reinforce the divorce of the sacred and profane almost as much as White’s reading.

Meaney holds that the young Charles is a mere aesthete, a devotee of beauty for whom the visible forms become adequate compensation for the God missing from his agnostic worldview. From there, Meaney continues, Charles eventually undergoes a conversion to divine beauty and must recant his earlier aestheticism. The younger Charles, in her view, has “seemingly no natural desire to seek God” (177). Yet attentive analysis of the novel’s early portions reveal that this statement is untrue. While the young Charles may have had no *conscious* longing for the divine, his story is clearly framed as a spiritual quest from the outset. Even as a freshman at Oxford, Charles is no aloof aesthete

in the manner of the spiritually vacuous cosmopolite Anthony Blanche. Rather, Charles is clumsily, even hungrily in search of a love he is incapable of describing or imagining. Charles describes this search for love in architectural terms: “that low door in the wall, which others, I knew, had found before me, which opened on an enclosed and enchanted garden, which was somewhere, not overlooked by any window, in the heart of that grey city” (31).

For the young Charles, Sebastian’s physical beauty becomes, for a time, the object of his spiritual longing, helping awaken Charles to the potent spell of the beautiful. Charles describes Sebastian as “magically beautiful” (31) and explains that he had been aware of Sebastian long before meeting him partly because of his “arresting” beauty (28). What is clear is that from the beginning of Charles’s record, his love of beauty and his drive to create art are bound up with his quest for love. The physical beauty of Sebastian and later Julia inspire love in him, and help lead him toward the divine source of love and beauty. Charles is, thus, far less susceptible to idolizing beauty for its own sake than Meaney suggests.

In the same vein, she mistakenly interprets the novel’s lavish descriptions of the beauty of Brideshead Castle and members of the Flyte family as the older, converted Ryder “giving the reader his pre-conversion perspective” (174). This assertion, however, also proves false. Whenever the older Ryder wishes to differentiate his current view from his earlier impressions or beliefs, he explicitly makes that distinction.<sup>10</sup> When he does not offer such commentary, we must assume that the rich descriptions reflect the perception

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<sup>10</sup> For example, narrating his departure from Brideshead for what he believes will be the last time Charles records his new-found commitment to materialism and then offers a correction from his post-conversion point of view: “‘I have left behind illusion,’ I said to myself. ‘Henceforth I shall live in a world of three dimensions—with the aid of my five senses.’

*I have since learned* that there is no such world . . .” (169)

and attitude of the older Ryder as much as the younger. Given that the novel is framed explicitly an exercise of memory, we should perhaps conclude that these impressions belong even more fully to the older Ryder than the younger. Clearly he does not wish to obscure or minimize the intensity or importance of the beauty that surrounded him in youth, a crucial point that I will explore in more detail below.

### *VII. Beauty's Sacramentality*

Not all critics have driven a wedge between the secular and sacred registers within *Brideshead*. Dominic Manganiello seeks to establish a fundamental connection between the two by arguing that Charles Ryder represents an anti-Stephen Dedalus. The adolescent Stephen, according to Manganiello, recognizes two kinds of beauty, one that saves and one that damns. The first functions sacramentally and opens onto transcendent reality while the second remains merely immanent and therefore ultimately leads to separation from God (155). Though Stephen seeks to direct his gaze toward “the stellar beauty of Mary [who] reorients the aspiration of the soul toward heaven,” he eventually comes to believe himself irredeemably caught in this world, and ceases to invoke Mary and thus to glimpse her heavenly beauty. Instead Stephen seeks a new kind of vision, one that, though it seems transcendent, is ultimately aesthetic and seated within the consciousness of the artist (Manganiello 156).

In contrast, Manganiello continues, Charles Ryder undergoes a different sort of aesthetic conversion. He, “like his Irish predecessor, initially sets out to create beauty for himself, but [his] ‘aesthetic education’ at Brideshead estate leads him to the first Author of beauty” (155). For Manganiello, Charles’s problem upon encountering the beauty of Brideshead and that of Sebastian and Julia is one of “restoring a right relation of means to

end” (160). The young, agnostic Ryder sees no reason to look beyond the present reality of natural beauty. Yet, in his life among the Flytes, Charles does gradually learn to see beyond appearances. Manganiello points out that what Charles learns is St. Augustine’s distinction in *On Christian Doctrine* between use and enjoyment, *uti* and *frui*:

[T]o enjoy a beautiful thing means to cling to it for its own sake and to love it as ultimate value, whereas to use a beautiful thing “with joy” means to employ it with reference to a proper object of love. So when people perceive “the works of the hands of men,” Augustine says, the inner eye of the soul should “lead them to the art and conception of the artist and thence to rise in admiration and praise of God, the Creator of all, and most fruitful end of love.” The same principle holds true in the case of a human being, who should be loved not for his or her own sake but for the image of the divine Person that creature bears. (160)

Even as Charles struggles to come to terms with the significance of his own art, he must also learn to see the divine source in the natural beauty of Brideshead Castle and in the personal beauty of Sebastian and Julia. It is Julia of course who by her own fidelity to God finally teaches Charles this lesson when she affirms that, “there was one thing . . . that I’m not quite bad enough to do; to set up a rival good to God’s” (340). Manganiello’s argument thus supplies a strong connection between the novel’s profane and sacred elements. Ultimately, however his argument assigns a surprisingly ambiguous value to beauty in the novel. For, while he shows that beauty is instrumental in bringing Charles to God, he concludes by first describing it as an impediment to Charles’s faith and then finally as a kind of Pauline dark glass, which nearly obscures divine beauty:

The visible beauty of the house he had imbibed as a young aesthete had for a time clouded his vision of the “Alice-in-Wonderland side” of religion. Now [in the novel’s epilogue] in the sacramental mirror, through a looking glass darkly, the eyes of faith can nevertheless see beyond mere shadows or appearances and recognize the tabernacle as a sign pointing to the soul’s heavenly home. (165-66)

Mangiello's conclusion does much to help us understand the role of beauty in *Brideshead*. He correctly argues that beauty leads Charles toward God and is instrumental in the creation of his faith, yet ultimately Mangiello's fails to discern that Charles is on his way to becoming an artist whose vision of beauty is not Platonic but thoroughly sacramental.

The older Ryder, in re-enacting in his memory the story of his vocation/salvation, makes no attempt to minimize the intensity of the sensual beauty that surrounded him in youth. Yet, at the same time, his recounting of the story is no mere sentimental longing for a fruitless past. These two facts must be held side by side if we are to perceive the Charles's purpose in recounting his life-story: namely, that *in* and *through* the beautiful forms he once believed to be merely immanent, the divine splendor was present to him all along. Thus, his conversion marks not the renunciation of his adherence to beauty, but the fulfillment of it.

#### *VIII. Goodness and Truth in Ryder's Conversion*

Thus far, this chapter has centered upon the central role of beauty in *Brideshead*: its sacramental character and its role in Charles's conversion. Yet I do not mean to suggest that beautiful forms alone lead Charles to God. Just as Balthasar has contended that goodness and truth are diminished when beauty is discarded, beauty itself is not sufficient to stand without her sisters. Indeed, Waugh does not make this mistake, for goodness and truth also play important roles in Charles's conversion.

First, just as Charles hungers for beauty in his Oxford days, he also hungers for goodness. Moreover, as his search for love becomes intertwined with beauty, so with goodness. Though this goodness does not manifest itself in a conventional sense, Charles

makes it clear that integral to his and Sebastian's relationship is the desire for an Adamic kind of goodness:

Now, that summer term with Sebastian, it seemed as though I was being given a brief spell of what I had never known, a happy childhood, and though its toys were silk shirts and liqueurs and cigars and its naughtiness high in the catalogue of grave sins, there was something of nursery freshness about us that fell little short of the joy of innocence. (45)

Even during his decadent days at Oxford he was driven partly by a desire for goodness, a desire which was nonetheless often disappointed. At the beginning of the long vacation after his first year at Oxford, Charles regrets the extravagant expenditure that has left him penniless and at the mercy of his father:

How ungenerously in later life we disclaim the virtuous moods of our youth, living in retrospect long, summer days of unreflecting dissipation. . . . There is no candour in a story of early manhood which leaves out of account the home-sickness for nursery morality, the regrets and resolutions of amendment, the black hours which, like zero on the roulette table, turn up with roughly calculable regularity. (62)

Charles's desire for goodness follows him into middle-age. Even with his failed marriage to Celia Mulcaster hanging over him, he embarks on his affair with Julia in a misguided attempt to reclaim the innocence of his first year with Sebastian. Waugh emphasizes this by his parallel uses of the word "love" at the outset of each relationship. Just as the older Ryder understands that he was "in search of love" at Oxford, Julia understands that, though he will not acknowledge it at the time, Charles is still searching for love when they are reunited on the passage to England:

[L]ater that night when she went to bed and I followed her to her door she stopped me.

"No, Charles, not yet. Perhaps never. I don't know. I don't know if I want love."

Then something, some surviving ghost from those dead ten years—for one cannot die, even for a little, without some loss—made me say, "Love? I'm not asking for love."

"Oh yes, Charles, you are," she said, and putting up her hand gently stroked my cheek; then shut her door. (256)

In his subsequent affair with Julia, Charles experiences for the first time a fully requited love, and on its foundation he seeks to establish the illusive sense of innocence he had briefly enjoyed with Sebastian. Charles does not yet realize that his and Julia's relationship is built, as he puts it, beside a mountain of unstable snow (310-11).

Ultimately, Charles must, if he truly loves Julia as he says, relinquish her willingly and seek goodness on yet deeper foundations. Though Julia would leave him in any case, the fact that he "understand[s]" and lets her go shows the extent to which, even when his life appears to be in ruins, Charles thirsts for goodness (341). It is his sacrificial love for Julia that leads him to remark, early in his narration, that "The love of one other human being is the root of all wisdom" (45). Furthermore, it is Charles's desire for Julia's good that leads him to pray for a sign from Lord Marchmain, the fulfillment of which leads to Julia's reconversion and the end of their affair. As the Epilogue reveals, Charles ultimately realizes that the good he has longed for since youth must be found in the goodness and mercy of God.

Truth, too, plays a role—albeit a more subtle one—in Charles's conversion. As Charles narrates his happy summer spent with Sebastian at Brideshead, he transitions from a conversation with Father Phipps to an aside about Sebastian's faith and his own understanding of Christianity at the time: "No one had ever suggested to me that these quaint observances expressed a coherent philosophic system and intransigent historical claims; nor, had they done so, would I have been much interested" (86). This statement implies that he has subsequently accepted Christianity on exactly these terms. Ironically, in the only place in the novel where Charles explicitly asks to have the logic of the



Catholic faith explained to him (when Lord Marchmain is dying, and the question at the fore is whether to admit a priest to his bedside), no one succeeds in doing so. Even Bridey, probably the only member of the family capable of explaining Catholic doctrine, makes “a pretty poor show” (330).

Two important points may be drawn from these passages. One is that, though his instruction in the faith is not narrated, Charles does become a Catholic partly under the conviction of the truth of its teachings. Like Waugh as a young convert, Charles would locate truth in Catholicism’s “intransigent historical claims” and “coherent philosophic system” (86). A second point is that these convictions are *not* what bring Charles to faith in the first place. Rather, as for Augustine and Anselm, the reasonability of faith follows upon his acceptance of it as truth. The older Ryder acknowledges that, had anyone “suggested” to him that Christianity did indeed constitute a coherent philosophy and lay claim to historical truth, even so he “would [not] have been much interested” (86). In contrast to his descriptions of his own conversion, Waugh portrays in Charles a convert led to the point of faith by the whole providential shape of his life, especially his aesthetic life, rather than merely by his reason.

The revised version of 1960 features a substantial reworking of this passage, reflecting Waugh’s own more holistic faith and his wish to emphasize that Ryder’s conversion depends upon much more than rationality. Instead of the “coherent philosophical system” expressed by Catholicism, Charles emphasizes the influence of his family upon his own spiritual growth as well as the reality of the supernatural order:

My father did not go to church except on family occasions and then with derision. My mother, I think, was devout. It once seemed odd to me that she should think it her duty to leave my father and me and go off with an ambulance, to Serbia, to die of exhaustion in the snow in Bosnia. But later

I recognized some such spirit in myself. Later, too, I have come to accept claims which then, in 1923, I never troubled to examine, and to accept the supernatural as the real.<sup>11</sup> I was aware of no such need that summer at Brideshead. (75)

In contrast with the earlier draft, we see another dimension of the historical circumstances—in this case the remote influence of his mother—that would lead him to faith, and also an emphasis upon faith as the acceptance of a supernatural mystery, not merely a set of doctrinal propositions. Waugh's portrayal of Charles' conversion, because it depends upon so much more than a mere logical demonstration of the truth of Christianity, then, contains much more similarity to the thinking of the *Nouvelle* theologians than the neo-Scholastics regarding conversion.

### *IX. Conclusion*

*Brideshead Revisited* is a multilayered text, in which the older Charles Ryder allows the reader to see partially through his own younger eyes and thereby join with him in his conversion narrative, so that, at the novel's conclusion, the reader too may revisit and reinterpret Charles's memories. In many passages the images and action become so engrossing that the reader easily forgets the span of time between event and narrator. In other passages, though, Ryder deliberately reminds the reader of this gap, and calls attention to the operation of memory, and the language and many of the impressions conveyed in the narrative are those of the older Ryder. These two registers create in the reader the uneasy feeling that all is not as it seems, mimicking perhaps the younger Charles's unconscious recognition that the forms present to him contained hidden realities: realities which he acknowledged only through his love of their forms.

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<sup>11</sup> In the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, Guy nearly echoes these words while in conversion with the chaplain of the Halberdiers. In neither case does the acceptance of the "supernatural as the real" constitute a denial of the significance of the natural order, but a repudiation of materialism.

The older Ryder's conscious recognition of the supernatural order present within the events of his past creates two paradoxes. The first is that Charles's lavishly joyful and evocative descriptions of the "half-heathen" revelry of Book I, arise partly *out of*, not in spite of, his conversion. The beauty of these early experiences, the older Ryder realizes, contain within them divine splendor, and are therefore worth depicting with his full rhetorical palette: conversion for the called artist constitutes no embrace of anti-worldly asceticism, but rather a call to take up an aesthetic that allows divine glory to vivify beautiful forms and transcend moribund sentimentality. Secondly, the novel's strain of melancholy, which, after sounding an initial note in the Prologue, gradually crescendos throughout Books I and II. And it is intensified, rather than ameliorated by Charles's conversion. If *Brideshead* is finally comedic in the Dantesque sense—with each of the main characters placed on the path to the Beatific Vision—such a divine comedy circumscribes a tragic portrayal of temporal beauty in its profound mutability. Ryder's conversion, while affording him, *sub specie aeternitas*, a vision that preserves him from despair in the Prologue and Epilogue, also enables him to see the extent of his loss of Sebastian and Julia, for, as his recognition of the fullness and radiance of Being grows, so does his appreciation for the loss of that Being as manifested in the forms he had loved so dearly. Reality, including his own past, becomes galvanized by a current of significance that was imperceptible to Charles the agnostic. This is why Ryder, the "middle-aged captain of infantry," dispassionate through most of the novel, "remember[s] with tears" his first visit to Brideshead (40). Though Charles has been called by God to the Vision of himself, the loss of the particular forms through which he first glimpsed that Vision fills him with longing and loss.<sup>12</sup> Sebastian and Julia, far from being mere signs pointing

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<sup>12</sup> A helpful analogue here is C.S. Lewis's description of "joy" in *Surprised by Joy*, which Lewis

toward God<sup>13</sup>, are truly creatures stamped with his Image, sacramental bearers of his Beauty, and Charles's loss of them is real and irrevocable, at least in this life.

By delaying full acknowledgement of his conversion until the Epilogue, Ryder (and Waugh) asks the reader to undertake the same demanding journey of experience and reinterpretation. If we view *Brideshead Revisited* in this way—as Ryder's attempt to build the reader's understanding (and his own) not through simple explanation but through manuduction along the same path, the underlying unity of the novel comes to light. In lovingly portraying his Oxford years, Ryder asks the reader both to live them first with his own eager, youthful eyes but also to re-envision them in light his of subsequent experience. If the reader succeeds in this, I would contend, the twin charges that Book I is sentimental or that it overwhelms Book II, give way to the recognition that Charles's early experiences take on their full significance only in light of the events of Book II. If Book I at first seems a sentimental recollection of a lost past, we eventually realize that, for Ryder, what gave those experiences their profound beauty was the sacramental presence of the divine within them, a presence which, at the time of narration, he explicitly realizes. Far from being merely an irrecoverable past, Charles's youth contains in nascent form his present acknowledgment of beauty's sacramental character and thus to his conversion to the Source and Sustainer of all Beauty.

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describes as a stabbing sense of loss and longing, an awareness of an absence of a perfect beauty that resides elsewhere: "And every day there were what we called "the Green Hills"; that is, the low line of the Castlereagh Hills which we saw from the nursery windows. They were not very far off but they were, to children, quite unattainable. They taught me longing—*Sehnsucht* . . . (7). While in Lewis's case, this sense of loss was often evoked by landscape, music, or poetry, for Ryder it is evoked most poignantly by memories of a lost past. In both cases, the sense of loss proves not futile, for it ultimately has the fullness of Beauty as its object.

<sup>13</sup> Near novel's the end but before his conversion, Charles entertains just such a neo-platonic notion: "Perhaps, I thought . . . perhaps all our loves are merely hints and symbols; a hill of many invisible crests . . ." (303). It is only after his conversion that he is able to understand the fully sacramental nature of his experience.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“That Unique Springtide”—or—“The Course of History is Indeed a Reality”  
History, *Nouvelle Théologie*, and *Helena*

### *I. Helena’s Obscurity*

Evelyn Waugh’s 1950 novel *Helena*, which fictionalizes the life of Constantine’s mother and discoverer of Christ’s Cross, is today relatively unknown even among devotees of Waugh’s more popular novels such as *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Loved One*. Despite a growing conviction among prevalent scholars such as Douglas Patey and George Weigel<sup>1</sup> that Waugh’s later works, especially *Helena* and the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, represent the pinnacle of Waugh’s literary achievement, *Helena* remains among the least read of his novels. Part of the novel’s obscurity may be a holdover from its initial unpopularity. Waugh’s reputation, particularly among non-Catholic readers, suffered in the years after *Brideshead Revisited*. Waugh became labeled a Catholic propagandist by once approving reviewers (Stannard, *Critical* 246). The complaint seems inevitable given the artistic path that Waugh chose. After *Brideshead Revisited* and Waugh’s 1946 announcement of his intention to portray “man in his relation to God,” it became fashionable to dismiss Waugh as a propagandist (“Fan-Fare” 302). It is true that polemical elements could—as in all fiction—be identified in Waugh’s work. But Waugh’s basic endeavor—to create works of art that reflect his understanding of reality—was no different than that of any other literary artist in that his artistic process was influenced by his vision of reality. Nevertheless, his later work was, in the eyes of critics for whom God had no legitimate place in art, often labeled religious propaganda.

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<sup>1</sup> See Weigel’s “St. Evelyn Waugh,” an incisive review of Stannard’s *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years* in *First Things*, May 1993, 31-36.

Yet bias against Catholic fiction fails to fully explain the anomalous place *Helena* has come to occupy within Waugh's canon. Generically it is unlike any of his other novels, being his only historical/hagiographical work of fiction. Stylistically it represents a peculiar blend of the slight, sharp narration and slangy dialogue of Waugh's early novels with the rich, sensual prose of *Brideshead Revisited*. Thematically the novel's concern for sanctity and its historical setting align it with Waugh's sole hagiography, *Edmund Campion* (1936), while its special emphasis upon vocation and the unusual roles to which certain believers are called would be further elaborated in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. This unusual blend makes for a novel which is difficult to place and subject to an especially wide variety of interpretations and responses, bewilderment and disappointment not least among them.

With one exception, *Helena's* reviews in the non-Catholic press ranged from "tepid to vitriolic" (Patey 290), and scholars since then have remained comparatively silent. Whereas a search in the *MLA International Bibliography for Brideshead Revisited* yields 147 results, a search for *Helena* yields only fifteen. Yet *Helena* appears to be undergoing small a critical renaissance. Since 2011, four full-length essays on the novel have been published. Of the twelve essays included in *A Handful of Mischief* (2011), a collection of new essays on Waugh edited by a group of leading Waugh scholars, three are devoted at least partially to *Helena*.

From Waugh's diaries we can glean that his novels were usually composed fairly efficiently, and, once undertaken, he tended to complete one before beginning other major projects. The protraction of *Helena's* composition—which took place intermittently from 1945 ("To Ronald Knox" 206) until March 1950 ("To Nancy

Mitford” 321), suggests both the difficulty of the task to which Waugh had set himself and his keenness to do his subject justice. Near its completion, Waugh declared in a letter of 9 November 1949 that the book would be a “MASTERPIECE. No one will like it at all” (“To Nancy Mitford” 312). Despite the playful tone of the letter, he believed the subject and his artistry had combined for a powerful novel and had high hopes for its reception. He was stung by the “peculiarly offensive” reviews (“To Graham Greene” 341), yet for years *Helena* remained Waugh’s favorite among his works (Patey 289).

The novel’s long period of gestation may also be explained another way. In the years following the completion of *Brideshead*, Waugh underwent a period of fruitful self-reflection. *Brideshead* represented Waugh’s first extended attempt to represent vocation, particularly artistic vocation, even as he began to consider his own vocation more closely. Waugh appears to have sought an appropriate role-model as an aid his self-understanding. As we have seen, he initially settled not on *Helena*, but on a group of men whose vocation he considered as idiosyncratic as his own: the Magi (*Diaries* 606). He would later reproduce these reflections as a poignant prayer from *Helena* to the Magi, in which she claims:

You are my especial patrons . . . and patrons of all late-comers, of all who have a tedious journey to make to the truth, of all who are confused with knowledge and speculation, of all who through politeness make themselves partners in guilt of all who stand in danger by reason of their talents . . . .

For his sake who did not reject your curious gifts, pray always for all the learned, the oblique, the delicate. Let them not quite be forgotten at the Throne of God when the simple come into their kingdom. (209-10)

The prayer that Waugh writes for *Helena* is very much his own. In time he perhaps came to see her, even more than the Magi, as the patron of artists, whose vocations, like her own, leads them to “a single peculiar act of service, something unattempted before and

unrepeatable” (“St Helena Empress” 409). What appears certain is that, just as Waugh furnishes Helena with childhood fables that inform her thinking and help her discern her vocation (*Diaries* 640), Helena herself became a kind of fable which informed his own vocational discernment. The intimacy and sense of personal investment with which Waugh approached the work and its heroine is shown in the fact that *Helena* is the only one of his own works he ever read aloud to his family (Patey 289).

## *II. Synopsis*

The novel opens with a young Helena, whom Waugh makes the daughter of the British king Coel, studying *The Iliad* with her tutor Marcias—as the omniscient narrator declares, in “the mood—at once resentful, abstracted, and yet very remotely tinged with awe—of British youth in contact with the classics” (7). From the outset, Helena pursues with zeal both remote ideals and the concrete present. For Helena, though she shows more interest in watching a fisherman from the tower window than in following Marcias’ lessons, is nonetheless captivated by the story of Helen, for whom she is named, and her distant ancestor Priam. In her imagination the city of Troy stands as an eternal reality, yet simultaneously, she feels an urge to go and discover its foundations as a physical reality. Her thought habitually moves on both a mythical plane and the plane of everyday experience.

After marrying Constantius, a young hopeful for the imperial throne on a clandestine mission in Britain, her ideal city shifts from Troy to Rome, which she endows with eternal and mythical qualities that Constantius mistakenly supposes to derive from Virgilian rhetoric of the early empire. When Helena tries to explain her vision, Constantius mistakenly understands her to be speaking politically. Yet she is attempting



to describe an Eternal City, something both concrete and transcendent. Helena's predisposition to contemplate both the immanent and transcendent prepares her for her final task of locating the Cross, the point of intersection between the temporal and the eternal.

After a few years of marriage to Constantius, during which Helena gives birth to the future emperor Constantine, Constantius informs her with heartless candor that he is divorcing her in order to form a more politically productive alignment. Helena accepts the news with grace and leads a life of quiet exile along the Dalmatian coast, where she throws herself fully into the management of her estate. There is a kind of pagan holiness in the disciplined life Helena leads during this period. Helena supposes she will spend the remainder of her life there, in private and dutiful service to her household. Yet it is not to be. After thirteen years of separation, Constantine arrives suddenly in unknown circumstances and announces that for their safety they must remove to the West where Constantius rules.

As an exile at Tréves, Helena first encounters Christianity when she meets Lanctantius, a writer and Christian. Helena is intrigued that, in contrast to the Gnostics, the Christians worship a God whom they also identify as a historical man who died at a specific time and place. Though she does not pursue this interest, Lanctantius evidently sows a seed that slowly germinates.

In the latter portions of the novel, Helena's hopes for a private life become frustrated by the erratic and violent political scheming of Constantine. Even so, her increasingly public life does not take on the sordid character of the political figures surrounding her. Rather she remains devoted to her son's wellbeing, to common sense

and decency, discouraging him from becoming embroiled in politics and from wielding “power without grace” (174). When Constantine becomes Emperor Helena finds herself named one of the highest ranking women in the Empire, even though she has no aspirations to fame or influence. Though everyone else near Constantine becomes mired in his instability and his wife Fausta’s murderous scheming—encouraged by Fausta, Constantine has his son Crispus murdered in what seems a bout of temporary insanity—Helena retains her grace, patience, and equilibrium. As Christianity sweeps across the empire, Helena, with sincerity and devotion, submits to Baptism.

Waugh keeps Helena’s conversion to Christianity off-stage but allows her Christian devotion to crescendo unostentatiously until she realizes the startling fact that no one has tried to find True Cross. Such a holy artifact surely deserved to be venerated, and the Cross would serve as a witness to the dual nature of Christ at a time when heretical theologians everywhere threatened orthodoxy by seeking ways around the undignified and paradoxical teaching of the hypostatic union of Christ’s human and divine nature. The True Cross, she sees, represents the intersection of her longing for the ideal and eternal with her thirst for plain truth and concrete reality. After having discerned that she is called to seek the Cross, she sets out to find it with all the resources of the empire at hand, leaving a trail of new churches, charities, and acts of devotion in her wake. Having at last found the True Cross, she, old and exhausted, but fulfilled, quietly slips out of view, and the novel concludes.

### *III. Helena’s Presentation of History: A Recent View*

Central to the story are two analogous relationships. One is that between Helena’s vocation and the historical and social forces shaping her life. The second is that between

the natural and supernatural orders. In this chapter, I challenge Marcel DeCoste's reading of *Helena* as portraying a separation of vocation, the sacred, and the supernatural from history, the secular, and the natural. I focus closely on DeCoste's article because it is the most thorough and most recent examination of Waugh's treatment of history in *Helena*. Under close examination, De Coste's argument proves highly problematic both because it misinterprets textual evidence and because it fails to read the novel in light of Waugh's overall artistic development. These misinterpretations have profound implications for the theological tenor of Waugh's canon. If uncorrected, DeCoste's line of thought could lead failures to perceive the richly sacramental theology informing Waugh's later fiction.

Specifically, DeCoste argues that *Helena* presents a view of history that is static in its futility, yet punctuated by moments of transcendence in which the faithful are lifted out of the mire: "Waugh presents a view of history in terms of . . . parallels and repetitions, of a profound changelessness relieved only by brief glimpses in time of that which transcends the drearily monotonous temporal realm"<sup>2</sup> (161). These glimpses, for DeCoste, constitute a history of personal salvation cut off from a larger sense of history: he argues that the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection are both a rescue from history and the redemption of "certain historical facts" but not a salvaging of history itself (166). He goes so far as to say that, "For Waugh, as for Eliot . . . change happens for the individual believer in historical time, though not *for* historical time, whose watch keeps tragically ticking" (167). Thus, DeCoste conceives of Helena's vocation not as her

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<sup>2</sup> The excised portion of the quote indicates that DeCoste is critiquing not a view similar to my own, but the commonplace view that Waugh saw history primarily in terms of decline and decay, a view frequently articulated in his early writing. Waugh's early stance on history will be discussed in detail below.

calling to cooperate with Providence in order to shape history, but as her personal redemption *from* history.

To support this thesis, DeCoste points out that the novel's many anachronisms create strong parallels between the fourth and twentieth centuries. But these parallels represent not the changelessness or cyclicity of historical processes, but a unique and troubling reversal. Waugh's two great works of the 1950s, *Helena* and the *Sword of Honour* trilogy treat not simply similar periods, but mirrored portions of a great arc. For, while *Helena* treats a period of history where Providence seemed everywhere to endow the Church with assured victory and expansion, the Trilogy, particularly the third volume, deals with a period during which many areas of Catholic Europe were being dismantled by Communism. My contention that both works seek to show the providential movement of history toward redemption in Christ may therefore seem audacious. Yet, what I hope to show is that after having undertaken the relatively straightforward task of showing how *Helena's* fulfilled vocation contributes to the Church's growth and prosperity, Waugh intentionally wrestles with the difficult question of how history can be seen as providentially ordered when immediate events or even long-term historical trends seem to deny it. The conclusion implicit in Waugh's later fiction is that creation, the Church, and human beings are so fundamentally ordered toward Christ that history derives from and returns to the realm of the supernatural and the mysterious, so that empirical modes of historical analysis prove insufficient for understanding the essence and meaning of history. Ultimately, as thinkers like Blondel and De Lubac contend, history cannot be made intelligible apart from the Tradition of the Church.

DeCoste's reading overlooks some of the novel's major themes, most notably the huge historical ramifications of Helena's unique vocational act. Waugh in fact portrays Helena's vocation as a call to act *within* history, to participate in history's redemption (as well as her own) by helping to set its course toward Christ. Waugh thus presents not a bifurcated view of history, but a unified vision, in which personal salvation and the salvation of the world move seamlessly in graceful unity toward the common destiny of union with Christ. Waugh thus portrays the redemption of mankind in a way that echoes Henri de Lubac's powerful acclamation that "Christ the Redeemer does not offer salvation merely to each one; he effects it, he is himself the salvation of the whole, and for each one salvation consists in a personal ratification of his original 'belonging' to Christ, so that he not be cast out, cut off from this Whole" (*Catholicism* 39). Waugh surmounts the tension between vocation and history, supernatural and natural, through a sacramental vision of reality, in which the supernatural is seen in and through the natural order. In this chapter, then, I contend that in *Helena*, Waugh incorporates the supernatural into the very fabric of the narrative through a portrayal of history in which the Incarnation of Christ stands as its central event, setting a precedence for the providential operation of the supernatural within the natural order, a Providence which unites and integrates personal histories—or individual destinies—and history itself.

#### *IV. Waugh's View of History*

Waugh's preoccupation with historical processes appears throughout his fictions and in several of his essays. A diachronic look at Waugh's treatment of history shows that this treatment was dynamic and dispels some of the clichés surrounding Waugh. It is a commonplace view that Waugh saw history always in terms of loss and decay, and that,

concomitantly, Waugh's gaze into the past is necessarily imbued with nostalgia. Particularly after *Brideshead Revisited*, in which critics mistakenly supposed Waugh was lamenting a lost golden age, Waugh was seen as helplessly clinging to an idealized past. In fact, it is this perspective from which DeCoste seeks to rescue Waugh by arguing that Helena does *not* present history "in terms of cultural decline and forfeiture, but rather of parallels and repetitions. . ." (161).

DeCoste's argument marks a startling and counterintuitive movement in Waugh scholarship, for there is ample evidence that Waugh did in fact view history as a process of decay. Yet, as Douglas Patey points out, Waugh was no sentimentalist; even the young Waugh saw history not as moving from good to bad, but from bad to worse (59). Both his first novel, *Decline and Fall* (1928), and the essay "Converted to Rome" (1930), emphasize Waugh's belief that European civilization had been in decline at least since the Reformation and that even the glories of the eighteenth century in northern Europe were founded precariously upon a crumbling residual Christendom. For Waugh, each new historical movement represented a degradation of the previous movement, so that Modernism (both intellectual and cultural) marked not a rebellion against a glorious Victorian past, but a further degradation from an already moribund liberal Victorian humanism. This decay could be reversed, if at all, only by a return to the Catholic foundation upon which Western civilization rests:

It seems to me that in the present phase of European history the essential issue is no longer between Catholicism, on one side, and Protestantism, on the other, but between Christianity and Chaos. It is much the same situation that existed in the early middle ages.<sup>3</sup> In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the choice before any educated European was

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<sup>3</sup> Though this essay was written twenty years before *Helena* was published, Waugh seems to have maintained his belief that certain similarities existed between the twentieth century and the late ancient world/early middle ages.

between Christianity, in whatever form it was presented to him in the circumstances of his upbringing, and, on the other side, a polite and highly attractive scepticism. So great, indeed, was the inherited subconscious power of Christianity that it was nearly two centuries before the real nature of this loss became apparent.

Today we can see [this loss] on all sides as the active negation of all that western culture has stood for. Civilization . . . has not in itself the power of survival. It came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance. The loss of faith in Christianity and the consequential lack of confidence in moral and social standards have become embodied in the ideal of a materialistic, mechanized state, already existent in Russia and rapidly spreading south and west. It is no longer possible, as it was in the time of Gibbon, to accept the benefits of civilization and at the same time deny the supernatural basis upon which it rests. (“Converted” 103-04)

Implicit here is Waugh’s belief that faith should be adopted as an attempt—even if futile—to turn the tide of the cultural ebb. Part of the reason the young convert believed that the Catholic faith was essential for the nourishment of European civilization is that he viewed the faith itself as an entirely reasonable and logical system, a “science of simplification” (qtd. in Patey 294). This connection may sound counterintuitive to those accustomed to thinking of the Enlightenment as the dawn of the Age of Reason. Yet Waugh was convinced that the faith had given rise to Thomistic logic and reason, and that the Renaissance marked an abandonment of European intellectuals from the liberating logic of Thomism (“Felo de Se” 225). In his view it was faith’s reasonable character—as well as the supernatural basis of its ethical and moral codes—that enabled the cultural development of Christian Europe. The widespread abandonment of faith in the nineteenth century therefore signaled the final rejection of the light of logic in favor of the lower faculties of emotion and sensibility, presaging a further regression to mechanistic and materialistic barbarism in the twentieth.

Though Waugh never abandoned these views, his faith would mellow and deepen with the years; his focus moved from faith as the basis of civilization to the ecclesial life of faith itself. With the aid of his mentor Fr. Martin D’Arcy, friends such as Msgr. Ronald Knox, and the Catholic community at Mells, his emphasis upon faith’s rational character became tempered by a more vocational understanding of faith as a calling that employs but also transcends the rational. The personal relation of believers to God became the focal point of his thinking about faith (Patey 41). This more personal understanding of faith also forced him to reevaluate the relation of faith to history. His early emphasis upon faith being the wellspring of Western civilization—as if Western civilization and not the faith were the pearl without price—gave way to both a broader and deeper understanding of faith, one not bound to Western civilization, much less elevating civilization above faith itself. Waugh came to see that the Christian faith of a non-Westerner was infinitely more important than the civilization of a Western Christian. In his mature years, then, Waugh discovered that the faith and history were indeed related, but in a far more profound way than he had imagined when younger.

In “Come Inside,” a 1949 essay written for an edition of testimonies of prominent converts, Waugh confirmed his early understanding of European history:

England was Catholic for nine hundred years, then Protestant for three hundred, then agnostic for a century. The Catholic structure still lies lightly buried beneath every phase of English life; history, topography, law, archaeology, everywhere reveal Catholic origins. Foreign travel anywhere reveals the local temporary character of the heresies and schisms and the universal, eternal character of the Church. It was self-evident to me that no heresy or schism could be right and the Church wrong. (367)

Here Waugh confirms his earlier historical outlook, but his purpose here is to explain why he became a Catholic and not an Anglican; it is not an explanation of why he came



to Christian faith. His explanation for that comes first and is far more personal than the 1930 essay: simply, “life . . . was unintelligible and unendurable without God” (367).

Later in the essay he continues in this more personal vein,

My life since [my conversion] has been an endless delighted tour in the huge territory of which I was made free. . . . From time to time friends outside the Church consult me. They are attracted by certain features, repelled or puzzled by others. To them I can only say from my own experience, ‘Come inside. You cannot know what the Church is like from outside. However learned you are in theology, nothing you know amounts to anything in comparison with the knowledge of the simplest actual member of the Communion of Saints. (368)

Here is as elsewhere, Waugh maintains his distance, denying the reader a description of this “experience” and refusing to relate the nature of this “knowledge” attained by the saints, but gives them primacy over secondary considerations such as the preservation of civilization.

Nowhere, not even in his diary, does Waugh discuss the details of his interior religious life. In his fiction, too, Waugh largely denies the reader access to his characters’ inmost experience. Rarely, particularly in the Trilogy, Waugh narrates certain interior monologues pertaining to religious life, but, generally, he allows the force and depth of the religious life to show in his characters’ words and actions. Indeed, Waugh did not believe that such experience could be truthfully conveyed, nor that it was the job of the novelist to attempt it. As Waugh put it in a 1962 interviews with Julian Jebb: “I regard writing not as investigation of character, but as an exercise in the use of language, and with this I am obsessed. I have no technical psychological interest. It is drama, speech, and events that interest me” (“Interview”). As Waugh’s faith grew more personal, and as his understanding of history became simultaneously more personal and more theological, he made no attempt to treat topics such as faith and history in essays as he had done in his

youth. He nevertheless committed himself to exploring his understanding of personal faith, vocation, and history in his fiction, and this he did in both *Helena* and the Trilogy.

#### V. Nouvelle Théologie and History

Waugh's approach to depicting history in *Helena* aligns closely with the *Nouvelle* theologians' attempts to recover history as a theological category. Both Henri De Lubac's writing and *Helena* present an understanding of history that is at once intensely personal and broadly teleological. In his seminal work *Catholicism*, Henri De Lubac argues that one result of the loss of a sacramental vision of reality was the neglect of history as a valid subject for theological inquiry. The Church Fathers, De Lubac reminds us, saw history itself as having been graced with a supernatural destiny, as participating in a sacramental reality in which the natural realm is always supported by and infused with the supernatural. De Lubac joined the Church Fathers in affirming that history itself has been unified by and centered upon Christ, as Creator and as Redeemer, so that Christ both surrounds creation and penetrates its center through the Incarnation. History, then, is nothing less than the narrative of a world originating in and moving toward Christ. De Lubac begins his chapter on "Christianity and History" by contrasting this view with those of Eastern and early Western philosophies and religions, who formed a practically unanimous chorus in their affirmation that,

the world from which escape must be sought is meaningless, and the humanity that must be outstripped is without a history. The 'eternal return' from which nothing may be expected, each of its phases . . . the end of one being the beginning of another, with never a forward a movement, how overpoweringly monotonous it all is! (*Catholicism* 139-40)

In the words of Jean Guitton, De Lubac continues, early philosophies and religions believed that "nothing changes because everything changes" (qtd. in De Lubac,

*Catholicism* 141). The understanding of history De Lubac presents here is almost precisely that which Marcel DeCoste argues is portrayed in *Helena*: a lone saint finds redemption and escape from a world of stagnation and repetition. Against these cyclical, individualistic, and escapist views of History, De Lubac sets the belief of the Church Fathers:

For if the salvation offered by God is in fact the salvation of the human race, since this human race lives and develops in time, any account of this salvation will naturally take historical form—it will be the history of the penetration of humanity by Christ. For Christianity . . . the course of history is indeed a reality (141).

#### *VI. History and the Human Person*

For De Lubac, the historical character of the faith as well as the social character of the church—far from obscuring the human person—reinforce the deeply personal nature of faith and salvation by embedding them in history. Drawing upon Biblical images of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Pauline Body of Christ, and the Johanne Vine and Branches, De Lubac persuasively demonstrates that to speak of a Unity, as in the unity of history or the unity of the Church, necessitates the reality of diverse parts comprising that unity (329-30). In a passage that could have been penned as a preface to *Helena*, De Lubac sums up the relation between history and the church on one hand and the individual person on the other:

[D]oes not to be a *person*, if we take the old original meaning of the word in a spiritual sense, always mean to have a part to play? Is it not fundamentally to enter upon a relationship with others so as to converge upon a Whole? The summons to personal life is a *vocation*, that is, a summons to play an eternal role. Now perhaps it will be understood how the historical character that we have found in Christianity, as well as the social, emphasizes the reality of this role: since the flow of time is irreversible nothing occurs in it more than once, so that every action takes

on a special dignity and an awful gravity; and it is because the world is a history, a single history, that each individual life is a drama (331-32).

For De Lubac, then, the historical and personal nature of existence forms not a duality nor even a tension, but a mutual reinforcement. As we will see, this same paradox lies at the heart of *Helena*.

Jean Daniélou, one of Henri De Lubac's most prominent students, also contributed to *Nouvelle Théologie*'s emphasis on recovering history as a Christian category. In his *Lord of History*, Daniélou begins along similar lines to De Lubac by showing that Christianity broke with the cyclical, fated understanding of history dominant in the late ancient world and instead showed that history did develop so that things could be both novel and permanent. "Individual events" held "absolute significance" because they contributed to historical development (4). Like De Lubac, Daniélou simultaneously reinforces the ideas that individual actions held ultimate meaning and that history constituted a unified movement toward Christ.

For Daniélou, this unified movement meant emphasizing the inter-relatedness and, ultimately, the indivisibility of so-called "sacred" and "secular" history. Sacred history, rather than appearing within a larger secular history, is for Daniélou *simply history itself*, as perceived through the lens of the Gospel. Drawing up on the thought of St. Irenaeus, Daniélou avers: "The history of salvation embraces not only the history of mankind, but the whole of cosmic history" (28). Thus, those historical elements labeled secular history are really enveloped in sacred history. This schema draws upon *Nouvelle Théologie*'s entire thinking about the natural and supernatural realms. The supernatural order (if it is acknowledged at all), has in recent centuries been thought of as just that: super-nature, existing above the natural order and intruding into it only at odd,

miraculous moments. The *Nouvelle* theologians were keen to recover the more authentically Christian view of the Church Fathers, that the natural order was surrounded by and shot through with the supernatural order, so that scholastic idea of “pure nature” is purely a fiction. Similarly, because what is called secular history is actually surrounded by and penetrated by a sacred history that embraces the whole of reality, any notion of purely secular history is illusory.

Thus, for Daniélou the central facts of Christ’s life: his Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection, signal not an invasion of historical reality by a supernatural force, but a paradoxical appearance at the center of history of an already all-embracing reality. In discussing Christ’s resurrection, Daniélou joins together the principles of novelty, the significance of individual acts, and the circumscription and penetration of reality by Christ: “It is not only the beginning and end of our history that consist in actions on a cosmic scale. The central point is also a creative act, the resurrection of Christ, himself the Word of God, by whom all things were made, who is to come in the fullness of time to make all things new” (29).

As we have seen, Waugh’s tutor and baptismal sponsor Martin D’Arcy was allied with the same historically-minded thinkers that inspired the *Nouvelle* theologians. Not surprisingly, D’Arcy understood the importance of history to an authentically Christian theology, for the question of a Christian philosophy of history occupied him for more than twenty years (D’Arcy, *Meaning* 9). Like the *Nouvelle* theologians, D’Arcy drew upon the Fathers as well as nineteenth century thinkers such as Moehler in his writings about history. He also cited Daniélou himself, and D’Arcy’s conclusions strike a remarkably consonant note with those of Daniélou and De Lubac.

Like De Lubac and Daniélou, D'Arcy affirms the essentially historical character of Christianity, and points out that, at the time of Christ's Incarnation, contemporary philosophy had no place for permanent developments. If Christians were to fully appreciate the world-altering reality of the Incarnation, then contemporary understandings of history would have to be replaced. D'Arcy's *The Meaning and Matter of History* draws upon Daniélou's "The Conception of History in the Christian Tradition." Like Daniélou, D'Arcy emphasizes that Christianity is incarnate within history yet simultaneously encloses the temporal realm:

[A]s Père Daniélou has pointed out, Christianity had within it from the beginning the means and opportunity to free itself from the static conception of history. Its own novelty postulated a change from the past. . . . Père Daniélou has brought to light the struggle which the Christians had to make to vindicate the value of the singular and novel even, of new beginnings which could last perpetually (247-48).

The struggle came from the difficulty of explaining to the Hellenic world that these events, though new, were part of an eternal and divinely guided plan, not mere accidents. The Incarnation, to use the example *par excellence*, represented, paradoxically both a completely new historical fact, and the sacramental appearance within the temporal order of an eternal reality (D'Arcy, *Meaning* 248).

If the Incarnation and the continued work of Christ in his Church mean that history develops, then individual actors within history acquire "cosmic significance" because their actions may intersect with the divine (275). For example, Constantine's "victory, however assisted, was an event in history and in the development of Christianity. St. Louis and Fra Angelico were examples of Christian living. . . The works and actions of human beings are the meeting place of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man" (244). Here are expressed in different terms Waugh's contention that

vocation is essentially sacramental, a meeting place of nature and super-nature, creature and Creator in the unfolding of Providence.

Whatever the extent of D'Arcy's direct influence upon Waugh, it remains clear that the *Nouvelle* theologians, D'Arcy, and the author of *Helena* all understood Christianity as a fundamentally historical religion and, conversely, envisioned history itself as essentially Christian. For each, history is the narrative of creation's movement toward Christ, who both surrounds the universe as the eternal Word, and, in the Incarnation, orders its history from within.

### *VII. Providential Order*

At first glance, Waugh's portrayal of history in *Helena* might, as DeCoste has argued, seem divided between a static secular world and a dynamic story of personal salvation. On one hand we see a gluttonous menagerie of emperors, generals, and schemers plotting intrigues so numerous and destructive that the fabric of the empire threatens to unravel. On the other, we follow Helena, whose life gradually reveals more and more evidence of order and growth. Superficially, then, the novel appears to depict a sharp distinction between history and personal sanctity. The descriptively entitled Chapter V, "The Post of Honour is a Private Station" recounts the thirteen years during which Helena leads a quiet and forgotten life along the Illyrian coast. Here she dutifully and admirably minds her estate, while Constantius leads a violent and reckless life in the public sphere. After years of plotting and scheming, Constantius is finally made emperor of the West, while the forgotten and humble Helena leads an honorable life. The distinction is reinforced by Helena's hopes for Constantine while he is still young and in military service, "If only Constantine can keep clear of politics," Helena says upon

learning of Constantius' accession, "I sometimes hope that perhaps one day, when he's finished his service, he may want to come and settle down here with me . . . . If only he keeps clear of politics" (98).

When Constantine suddenly appears to whisk Helena away from danger, Helena seems oblivious to the rabid violence of contemporary politics. Constantine explains:

"You don't understand modern politics, Mamma. There are no private lives nowadays. You are my mother. That will be enough for Galerius."

"You are a tribune in Galerius's army [Helena replies]. You ought to be with your men, not careering across the Balkans laming a lot of good horses."

"I have no choice. When the historians write of me they will say that if I wish to live, I must determine to rule."

"Oh, *history*. I've read quite a lot sitting alone here year by year. Keep out of history, Constantine." (102)

Undoubtedly, Helena's advice is good in its immediate context, yet despite what appears to be a clear delineation between honor and politics, privacy and history, this is not the novel's final vision of their relation.

First, it is clear that "history" as Helena and Constantine understand it is synonymous with politics and public life, the history of the historians, not the teleological understanding of history that comes into view later in the novel. Second, while it is true that Helena's life at this stage is honorable, it remains a pagan honor, the honor of a pre-Christian as yet unable to hear her calling. Helena only reluctantly accepts her later role in public life. But her vocation is another matter. Had she ignored or fled from it, and so refused the role in history appointed to her, she would then have been leading a life of dishonor. Ultimately, Helena does not "keep out of history," as history turns out to be something quite other than she thought prior to her conversion. Simultaneously, in



remaining true to her calling, she, even in the midst of her fame, maintains a privacy and integrity unique among the novel's major characters.

Though Helena's vocation is the focal point of the novel, Waugh places it within a historical context, and, indeed, the fulfillment of her vocation is seen not as an escape or transcendence of history, but as a contribution to it. Providence in the novel governs human history as a whole, including both those ignorant of its designs as well as Helena herself, for Providence proves dexterous enough to allow human free will full play—even when that will proves contrary to the will of God—and yet achieve its purposes. By considering first the novel's depiction of Helena and her vocation and then examining Waugh's treatment of the larger historical movement of the period, we will be able to see how the shape of Helena's life and the habits of her mind fit the needs of her time, and thus how her vocation contributes to historical development and the designs of Providence.

### *VIII. Vocation*

In his perceptive 1953 review of *Helena*, Frederick J. Stopp first noted the “congruity . . . between the supernatural and the natural” in the novel, and the providential grace undergirding Helena's life (Stopp 325). As he explains, “Mr Waugh sees Helena's whole life as a preparation for, and prefiguration of this one supreme and historical act [that of discovering the True Cross]” (326)<sup>4</sup>. If the Cross is the ultimate of the God's Incarnation, it becomes the literal crux that unites the two paradoxical habits of Helena's mind—namely, the longing for an ideal abiding city on one hand, and a

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<sup>4</sup> Waugh, a strong skeptic regarding the value of scholarship concerning his own work, thought Stopp's review so perceptive that he encouraged him to expand it to book length, which Stopp did a few years later.

tenacious pursuit of straightforward and concrete on the other. From her girlhood, she cherishes an idealized vision of Troy—city of her ancestors—as an eternal City. When she meets her husband, Rome supplants Troy as the eternal city of her imagination. As the two journey along the imperial wall toward Constantius’s home in the Balkans, Helena asks, “Must there always be a wall, Chlorus?” Constantius replies

“I’m not a sentimental man, but I love the wall. Think of it, mile upon mile, from snow to desert, a single great girdle round the civilized world; inside, peace, decency, the law, the altars of the gods, industry, the arts, order; outside, wild beasts and savages, forest and swamp, bloody mumbo-jumbo, men like wolf packs; and all along the wall the armed might of the empire, sleepless, holding the line. Doesn’t it make you see what the City means?”

“Yes,” said Helena, “I suppose so.”

“What d’you mean, then; must there always be a wall?”

“Nothing; only sometimes I wonder won’t Rome ever go beyond the wall? into the wild lands? Beyond the Germans, beyond the Ethiopians, beyond the Picts, perhaps beyond the ocean there may be more people and still more, until, perhaps, you might travel through them all and find yourself back in the City again. Instead of the Barbarian breaking in, might the City one day break out?”

“You’ve been reading Virgil. That’s what people thought in the days of the Divine Augustus. But it came to nothing . . .” (47-48)

As the sheer grandeur of her vision suggests, Helena’s line of thinking here is not political, but transcendent; the vision is of a City that surpasses the limitations of human institutions. She is unwittingly envisioning a Rome capable of carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Helena’s long-cherished image of a divinely-instituted eternal city has prepared her not only to be received into the Church but also to find the Cross, for they are both the point of intersection between the earthly city and the heavenly city.

Her longing for an eternal city is complemented by her resolute realism. Her search for concrete confirmation of Christian historicity is shown poignantly in two successive scenes featuring parallel dialogues. In the first, she encounters her former

tutor, Marcias, now a famous Gnostic teacher. After he delivers a long and tedious lecture on Gnostic doctrine that befuddles his audience and gives Helena a case of the giggles, she asks, "When and where did all this happen? And how do you know?" Marcias replies,

"These things are beyond time and space. Their truth is integral to *their* proposition and by nature transcends material proof." Helena persists: "Then please how do you know?"

"By a lifetime of patient and humble study, your Majesty."

"But study of what?"

"That, I fear, would take a lifetime to particularize,"

Marcias concludes. Everyone in the audience except Helena is overawed by the sage (155). That evening Helena receives far more satisfying answers from the Christian writer Lanctantius:

"Tell me, Lanctantius, this god of yours. If I asked when and where he could be seen, what would you say?"

"I should say that as a man he died 278 years ago in the town now called Aelia Capitolina in Palestine."

"Well, that's a straightforward answer anyway. How do you know?"

"We have the accounts written by witnesses. Besides that there is the living memory of the church. We have knowledge handed down from father to son, invisible places marked by memory—the cave where he was born, the tomb where his body was laid, the grave of Peter. One day all these things will be made public. Now they are kept a secret." (117)

Later in the conversation, when Helena presses for more sacred and private information about the Christianity, Lanctantius replies that there are some things that must not be shared outside the household of faith. Aware of her own questing spirit, she answers: "I should not have asked. All my life I have caused offense to religious people by asking questions." It is Helena's thirst for truth, for straightforward explanations that leads her to the undiscovered Cross: where the mystery of the Incarnation meets plain beams of wood.

Helena's life is, then, a long preparation for the fulfillment of her vocation. But we must then ask precisely how her vocation meets a timely need and contributes to the story of human salvation. A closer look at the novel's depiction of broader historical movements, what DeCoste identifies as "secular history," will help us understand how Helena's vocation relates to these movements.

### *IX. Vocation and History*

In many ways, the seemingly anarchic depiction of history recognized by DeCoste is centered upon the person of Constantine. His career in the novel is comprised of a long series of acts of violence, reversal, incompetence, and insanity. Waugh wrote to Lady Mary Lygon: "I believe Constantine is a saint in your [Russian Orthodox] Church. He is a shit in my book so I expect you will be forbidden to read it" ("To Lady Mary Lygon" 223). As he seeks to advance his own career and ultimately elevate himself to semi-divine status, Waugh's Constantine both unwittingly aids Christianity and clumsily impedes it; he is certainly no hero of the faith. He displays such a startling combination of murderous cruelty, childish petulance, and sheer blundering naivety, that with equal aptitude he incites the reader's disgust, mockery, and sympathy.

Besides financing Helena's quest for the Cross, Constantine is mainly important in the novel for summoning the Council of Nicaea and issuing the Edict of Milan, which legalized Christianity in the Empire. These acts are, for Constantine, largely political expedients, the true worth of which he neither foresees nor understands. Thus, the emperor who is the very embodiment of instability and human folly becomes instrumental in both the rapid growth of the Church and the drafting of the Nicene Creed, which affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity and helped repel many heresies as the newly

legalized Christianity spread rapidly throughout the Empire. While the novel does not explicitly condemn the blend of Empire and Christianity that resulted from Constantine's reign, it also attaches no inherent value to a Church vested with great temporal power. Rather, the novel offers a balanced picture of both advantage and trouble for the Church in adapting to its new status. The pope and other clerical figures watch Constantine neutrally, waiting to see how his policies will affect their work, without confusing his aims for their own.

Waugh emphasizes Constantine's status as an outsider, an un-baptized opportunist whose demeanor clashes with that of the Catholic hierarchy and other authentic believers. In contrast to the quiet patience and sense of purpose displayed by the novel's clergy, Constantine's bombastic pretensions to spiritual authority are laughable. In one passage he offers a prayer before his court that becomes a litany of praises to God for all his own personal traits and for the course of his life right up to that very afternoon (154). In one way, the vainglorious Constantine serves as a foil for Helena, whose life has been a long and humbling training in Christianity. Yet, in a subtly ironic way there is a grain of truth in Constantine's prayer: though his self-understanding is loaded with ironies—he believes many of his vices to be virtues and his sins to be acts of sanctity—he does at times unwittingly act as an instrument of Providence, for he participates in the same historical order as Helena and aids her in fulfilling her vocation.

If Constantine unintentionally protects Christian orthodoxy by calling the council that leads to the drafting of the Nicene Creed, Helena's "unique and unrepeatable act" further safeguards the young church from going astray at the very beginning of its exponential growth. In a climate of endless theological speculation, the Nicene Creed

helped protect Christianity from allegorizing efforts of the gnostics. Helena's act further contributed to that effort. While the Creed proclaims and protects the truth of the Gospel through theological formulations, the True Cross registers on the senses and the imagination, reminding believers of the concrete realities described in the Creed.

Thus, in the dynamic between the actions of Helena and those of Constantine, we can see that Waugh envisions consonance between acts of sanctity and the larger movement of human history. Yet this view presents its own set of problems, as Waugh, the *Nouvelle* theologians, and Martin D'Arcy recognized. The novel incorporates at least two difficulties inherent in Waugh's perspective, one that seems unique to him, and one that was engaged by *Nouvelle* theologians such as Jean Daniélou. The first concerns the historical impact of human actions when people act apart from their vocations. In both *Helena* and the Trilogy, Waugh implies that when Christians act outside of their vocation, even when those actions are intended for virtue and the advancement of God's Kingdom, the outcomes are often unpredictable, ambiguous, and even harmful.<sup>5</sup> Waugh, of course, despised any moral outlook smacking of utilitarianism, affirming the Church's stance that actions are virtuous or vicious regardless of their outcome. At the same time he was troubled by the reality that evil could result from good intentions. His provocative answer to this problem points back to his emphasis upon vocation: when Christians act—even virtuously—apart from their vocations, all manner of trouble and harm can result, not only for themselves but also for others. Yet, Waugh's implication seems to be, if a Christian pursues and fulfills his vocation, good fruit will result, even if that good, as in

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<sup>5</sup> As will be explored in depth in chapter six, Waugh delved into this problem most poignantly in *Unconditional Surrender*, when, in a revision of his short-story "Compassion," Guy attempts to help a Jewish couple in Yugoslavia, which ultimately leads to their execution.

the cases of suffering, persecution, or martyrdom, has to be understood *sub-specie aeternitas*.

We see this principle at work as Helena undertakes her voyage to the Holy Land in pursuit of the Cross. As she travels with Constantine's full backing, she pauses often, making charitable donations and commissioning churches and generally promoting the Church and her affairs. Yet this sequence, during which her aims and those of Constantine are most consonant, contains several episodes in which the worth of her actions seems dubious at best, as though in colluding with Constantine and the Empire, Helena's sanctity is endangered. Chapters X and XI make clear Waugh's unease with Imperial sponsorship of Christianity by the Empire. Chapter X, "The Innocence of Bishop Macarius" describes the radical transformation (in Macarius's view, the destruction) of the hill of Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre at the hands of Constantine's zeal and the architect Dracilianus's classical training. Macarius watches helplessly as these sites, which had been buried for two centuries beneath Roman architecture built by Hadrian, are not only exposed but completely transformed:

No sooner had Dracilianus surveyed the site, than he spoke of leveling and orienting it. He failed to hide his annoyance that the sepulchre did not lie dead west of Calvary and even hinted that perhaps this might be arranged . . . Months later Dracilianus's plan was revealed. Everything was transformed. Where Hadrian had leveled up, he had leveled down, Taking the floor of the sepulcher as his mean, Dracilianus had created a new, perfectly flat platform. The hill in which the sepulcher stood had been cut away, leaving only a thin geometrically regular mass of stone round the sepulchre itself so that what had been a cave was now a tiny house. The hill of Calvary had been trimmed to a cube; it lay outside the future basilica, which was strictly oriented on the axis of the tomb. . . . He rather fancied he had hit off just what the emperor had in mind. He had quite outdone the Lateran basilica.

But Macarius lacked vision of these future architectural glories. He had seen clearly enough the mourning women on the lonely hillside; he could not see eighty columns. He saw only a parade ground cluttered with

two incongruous protuberances, a sort of hut and an empty pedestal. He was lost, far from home in this wilderness of mensuration. What Hadrian had carelessly preserved, Constantine had zealously destroyed, it seemed to Macarius. (195-96)

The narrator clearly sympathizes with Macarius here. This simple Christian, native to the holy land, for whom these sites had served as touchstones of contemplation and prayer, finds them invaded by foreigners, who set to work with grandiose, standardized styles and techniques that cannot conform to the singularities of the place and the unique events that happened there.

By contrast, Helena has been sent not to obscure or destroy the rough and ragged beauty of the Gospel but to confirm it through the finding of the Cross. Therefore, her dealings in the Holy Land should look nothing like those of Constantine and Dracilianus, yet this is not the case, for Helena does not limit her activities there to the finding of the Cross. In fact, Chapter XI contains an episode that parallels Chapter X. On the day of her arrival, the majordomo of the government house where she is to stay tells her that the house was Pilate's Praetorium and its stairs those which Christ had descended on his way to the cross:

The effect was beyond his expectation. The aged empress knelt down, there and then in her traveling cloak, and painfully and prayerfully climbed the twenty-eight steps on her knees. More than this, she made the whole of her suite follow her example. Next day she ordered her private cohort of sappers to take the whole staircase to pieces, number them, crate them, and pack them on wagons. "I am sending them to Pope Sylvester," she said. "A thing like this ought to be in the Lateran. You clearly do not attach proper importance to it here."

. . . The holy stairs left for the coast in a train of wagons. Macarius and his chapter watched them go aghast. . . Were they to lose now, in the hour of liberation, what they had guarded so devotedly through all the years of persecution? (198-99)



Helena's reaction to the stairs is infused with a mature devotion unlike Constantine's childish zeal. Further, the episode coincides with the somewhat impetuous and absolute quality we find in Helena throughout, the quality that, in the case of her search for the cross leads to her sanctification. Yet here, where she strays from her vocation, her strong will combined with the almost magical resources of the empire lead to an act that verges on despoliation and, like Constantine's treatment of Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre, stuns the sensibilities of the simple and holy Macarius.

The second and more fundamental problem of conceiving of history as the penetration by Christ into the human story is the recurrent tendency of human free will toward evil. The fact that Waugh recognizes and grapples with this problem is the reason why, I believe, DeCoste was put off the scent and led to identify an incongruence between history and individual acts of sanctity. Indeed, no understanding of history could be correct without taking into account the horrific acts of human deviance found in every age. Yet, if history is the story of redemption in Christ, why, as Marcel DeCoste points out, do the same stale sins crop up generation after generation and in culture after culture? Why does Waugh in fact, through the novel's idiomatic language and through discussions of art and politics, draw parallels between fourth-century Rome and twentieth-century Europe? The passage from which DeCoste draws his title offers a poignant description of the historical redundancy he believes the novel fully endorses:

The oblivious Caesars fought on. They marched across the frontiers, made treaties and broke them, decreed marriages and divorces and legitimizations, murdered their prisoners, betrayed their allies, deserted their dead and dying armies, boasted and despaired, fell on their swords and sued for mercy. All the tiny mechanism of power regularly revolved, like a watch still ticking on the wrist of a dead man. (124)

The passage provide as succinct and compelling a picture of public life for the twentieth and twenty-first century as for the fourth. But it is important to remember that the passage is not describing a “tiny mechanism” that *will* continue indefinitely, but one that is winding down. For it is not private acts of sanctity to which the Caesars remain oblivious; it is the Edict of Milan, the Empire’s acquiescence to a blossoming church that will permanently alter the world. What is clear is that the change is historical in nature, not merely private: “[A]s the news [of the Edict] spread everywhere in Christendom, from every altar a great wind of prayer gathered and mounted, lifted the whole squat smoky dome of the ancient world, swept it off and up like the thatch of a stable, and threw open the calm and brilliant prospect of measureless space” (123-24). Clearly, the rising of prayers lifting and expelling the Pantheon signals the passing of one age and the dawning of a new age at once more human and more graced.

How can these two juxtaposed passages be reconciled? Does history develop according to Providence so that each moment is unique? Or is history a ticking watch, caught forever in its own gears? Waugh’s answer can be found in his choice of metaphor. The first passage, the replacement of a pagan temple’s smoke-filled dome with the dome of heaven imagines the emergence of new era, while the second, using the image of watch gears, refers only to the “tiny mechanism of power,” a mechanism which, as noted above, cannot continue by its own force indefinitely. For Waugh, history does not consist of the crass workings of secular machinery from which a few people and moments manage escape. That view is espoused by the priest of the cult of Mithras, and Marcias, the Gnostic. Rather, in *Helena*, history is the huge dome of Christ’s participation with man in his salvation, beneath which *merely* human action exposed as tiny and futile, and

in light of which divinely ordered human action is read can be seen to disclose the meaning and significance of history.

## CHAPTER SIX

### “Show Me What to Do and Help me to Do It”: Secular Sloth and Sacramental Vocation in the *Sword of Honour* Trilogy

#### *I. Introduction*

In 1951 Waugh began working the novel that he hoped would unfold into a *magnum opus*, a trilogy that would finish out his career (Patey 303). Having completed *Helena*, a fictionalized hagiography set in years of triumph for the Church, Waugh turned his creative energy toward a more recent, troubled, and intimately familiar theater in the Church’s history: that of the rise of totalitarianism in central and eastern Europe—the “dismemberment of Christendom” (*Unconditional Surrender* 180). *Men at Arms*, the first volume of what would become the *Sword of Honour* trilogy,<sup>1</sup> opens in 1939 and introduces thirty-five year-old Guy Crouchback, a despondent romantic living in Italy. Eight years previously Guy’s wife Virginia had abandoned him. Since then Guy’s various plans have been fruitless, and his life has stagnated on every front.

At its root, this stagnation is spiritual. A cradle Catholic, he has persisted in the central practices of the Catholic faith, yet he allows these practices to penetrate only slightly, keeping him within the fold but not on the path of sanctification. Bodily, he has fallen into a “habit of dry and negative chastity which even the priests felt to be unedifying” (*Men* 11). Lacking love, devotion, and all sense of purpose, Guy receives with elation the news that England will soon be at war with both Nazi Germany and

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<sup>1</sup>The Trilogy consists of *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1957), and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961, published as *The End of the Battle* in the U.S.A.). In 1965, Waugh released the three as a single volume entitled *Sword of Honour*. Unless otherwise noted, I have quoted from the original novels.

Soviet Russia. Finally, he believes, he has found a purpose—defending the Christian West against modern, atheistic totalitarianism: “The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome there was a place for him in that battle” (*Men* 5). Guy initially views the war as a kind of crusade through which he can restore his lost sense of honor. This belief is shaped—as the Trilogy gradually discloses—by both a misunderstanding of the true nature the Church and the desire to play a heroic role for which he is unsuited. Instead, Guy must confess his spiritual apathy, acknowledge the Christological source of his human dignity, and, finally, ask God for his true vocation.

This chapter treats the whole of the Trilogy by advancing a unified argument consisting of several stages. First, I examine Guy’s spiritual state at the Trilogy’s outset, arguing that Guy’s initial sloth derives from the loss of a sacramental sensibility. In his inability to see the eternal ramifications of his own actions, he largely ceases to act. Second, I will show that, though he begins his military life in a flurry of activity, his enthusiasm derives from the same source as his earlier indolence: his refusal to plumb the depths of his spiritual apathy and thus to make possible his renewal. Moreover, Guy’s inability to perceive divine transcendence tempts him, ironically, to ascribe transcendent qualities to a secular institution: his regiment. Because he has ceased looking to the church to offer him purpose, meaning, and identity, he foists all of these deep, long-stifled yearnings upon the Royal Corps of Halberdiers. As he eventually recognizes, his military quest constitutes a false vocation.

The latter half of *Men at Arms* and most of *Officers and Gentlemen* depict Guy’s prolonged and vacillating disentanglement from the web of his military life. As he

realizes the falseness of his military pose, he rediscovers that the Church, because of its divine origin and sustenance, is the only institution that comprehends the true purpose of human life. In order to discern his true vocation, Guy must stop following his wayward impulses and offer himself, even his wasted spiritual depths, to the service of God, even as he must also “ask” God for his true vocation (*Unconditional* 80). *Sword of Honour* is essentially the chronicle of a man’s lost and restored sacramental vision: a renewed ability to perceive the presence of the supernatural order in the events of his life.

Ultimately, Guy must act upon the conviction that he has been shaped to fulfill a unique role, and that therein lies his personal path to sanctification. Put simply, I argue that, in the trilogy, Waugh demonstrates that the cure for sloth, “the besetting sin of the age,” is the pursuit and fulfillment of one’s vocation (“Pioneer! O Pioneer!” 373). Vocation is nothing less than the pursuit of a supernatural *telos* through natural means—human participation in the providential unfolding of history—and therefore relates closely to the *Nouvelle* theologians’ attempt to restore a sacramental ontology to theology.

Despite the vastly different contexts of *Helena* and the Trilogy, Waugh undertook the two works with a closely related aim: to show how, in a destructive and seemingly chaotic world, human beings may find their unique vocations and, thus, their spiritual fulfillment and sanctification. As we have seen, Waugh’s highly personal vision of vocation extols both the worth of the person and the call to serve others in charity. In the face of totalitarianism, which depended always upon coercion and conformity, Waugh championed the virtues of “Liberty, Diversity, Privacy”—to him, the fundamentally Catholic values he saw as being eradicated everywhere, including post-war Britain (*Diaries* 661-62). Simultaneously, however, vocation circumvents the possibility of

complete indifference to the world: the final victory of individualism. For Waugh, as for the Church, vocation concerns how a person is called to love, and, thus, to act in service to both God and humankind. Where Helena is called to the spectacular and singular act of discovering the True Cross against the triumphal backdrop of Nicaea and the Edict of Milan, Guy is called, in the midst of “the dismemberment of Christendom,” to the unique but obscure role of remarrying his wife and adopting her illegitimate unborn child (*Unconditional* 180). These two acts, so different in character, are, at root, the same: both Helena and Guy discover their own paths to salvation and thus their proper roles within the Body of Christ.

Other distinctions exist between the two works. *Helena* remains crisp and elliptical, while the Trilogy eclipses even *Brideshead Revisited* in detail, complexity, and full-fledged realization, while portraying aspects of the spiritual life *Brideshead* did not approach. John Howard Wilson comments that at the time Waugh wrote *Brideshead* he had not yet developed “the range of concepts he needed to depict [salvation] convincingly” (Wilson, “Quantitative” 326). Distinct in theme as they are, *Helena* and *Brideshead* share in common the fact that they mainly depict their protagonists *prior to conversion*, emphasizing the ways in which providence has prepared them for faith. By the time of *Helena*, however, Waugh felt prepared to depict, if not conversion itself,<sup>2</sup> the fulfillment of vocational life, not merely its beginnings. While *Sword of Honour* shares with *Helena* and *Brideshead* the themes of vocation and sanctification, in the Trilogy Waugh forgoes the relatively facile drama of pre-conversion and begins with an unlikely candidate for the protagonist of a trilogy: a seemingly dull cradle Catholic in danger of losing his faith.

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<sup>2</sup> Like Charles’s conversion, Helena’s takes place “off-stage.”

## II. Sloth

At the beginning of *Men at Arms*, Guy Crouchback, childless heir of a once-wealthy recusant Catholic family, lives alone in a house restored by his prosperous grandparents above the coastal Italian village of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce. Known by the locals as the Castello Crouchback, it has become a place of spiritual desolation for Guy. Eight years earlier, he and his wife Virginia had been farming in Kenya when Virginia had suddenly left for England. Weeks later she had written to explain that she had fallen in love with another man and would not be returning. After their divorce Guy retreats to the Castello where he lives with a few servants, half-heartedly trying his hand at several crafts such as winemaking and writing, all of which “peter[] out” (*Men* 99). Guy also fails to win the hearts of the locals. After a hilarious catalogue of the meddlesome, offensive, and perverse neighborhood expatriates, all of whom the locals consider *simpatico*, we learn that

Guy alone, whom they had known from infancy, who spoke their language and conformed to their religion, who was open-handed in all his dealing and scrupulously respectful of all their ways, whose grandfather built their school, whose mother had given a set of vestments embroidered by the Royal School of Needlework for the annual procession of St Dulcina’s bones—Guy alone was a stranger among them. (10)

Though the narrator furnishes no clear reason why Guy fails to gain the sympathy of the villagers, the best explanation appears to be that Guy offers them nothing authentically human with which to sympathize. Outwardly, he is withdrawn; inwardly, he is vacuous.

These opening passages offer telling descriptions of Guy’s spiritual state, enabling us to understand his internal conflict apparent throughout the trilogy’s first two volumes. What we will find is that Guy’s spiritual condition amounts to a spiritual torpor closely akin to the sin of sloth. As we have seen, Waugh sought to articulate the Church’s



teaching about this misunderstood sin. With St. Thomas Aquinas, Waugh describes sloth as “sadness in the face of spiritual good. Man is made for joy in the love of God, a love which it expresses in service. If he deliberately turns away from that joy, he is denying the purpose of his existence. The malice of sloth lies not merely in the neglect of duty (though that can be a symptom of it) but in the refusal of joy” (573).

Guy Crouchback exhibits such sloth-like tendencies. Daniel McInerney rightly points out that Guy is not exactly guilty of sloth according to Thomas's and Waugh's definition: “it is . . . too much to say that the proper means of salvation fill him with *utter* tedium and disgust” (44). Guy prays, makes Confession, receives Absolution, and partakes of the Eucharist. Nevertheless, he does not respond to the Gospel with the joy that is proper to it. As McInerney delicately puts it, “Guy is not a man who has spurned the faith. Nonetheless, his soul does suffer from the wound of sloth” (44). He performs his religious duties perfunctorily, without the contemplation and willingness of spirit which would allow prayer and the sacraments to bring about spiritual renewal.

So, what precisely is the problem with Guy? His sloth manifests itself in several ways. He is physically retiring and isolated, and he feels “no brotherhood” even among fellow Catholics, but the root of the malady—which the narrator goes so far as to call “despair”—is internal and negative (11). After Virginia's departure, Guy suffered a spiritual wound that he himself does not fully understand. Its symptoms center on his unwillingness or inability to engage his faith with his whole being. For example, he confesses in Italian, a language he speaks “well but without nuances” because “there was no danger of going deeper than the denunciation of his few infractions, of his habitual weaknesses. Into that wasteland where his soul languished he need not, could not, enter”

(7). This seems to imply that if Guy would confess in English, he could enter into this “wasteland” and then identify and confess the sin that resides there. Yet the sentences that follow suggest that the situation is not so simple:

He had no words to describe it. There were no words in any language. There was nothing to describe, merely a void. His was not an ‘interesting case’, he thought. No cosmic struggle raged in his sad soul. It was as though eight years back he had suffered a tiny stroke of paralysis; all his spiritual faculties were just perceptibly impaired. He was ‘handicapped’ as Mrs Garry<sup>3</sup> of the Villa Datura would have put it. There was nothing to say about it (7-8).

These passages demand careful interpretation. Is Guy to blame or not? Is the description offered here that of an omniscient narrator, or is the narrator relating Guy’s own partial understanding of his situation? At several key points in the Trilogy, Waugh uses the refrain “he thought” or “Guy thought” both to indicate that the narrative vantage point has shifted near to Guy’s own, and to cast doubt upon Guy’s perceptions.<sup>4</sup> We are thus meant to take this passage with a grain of salt. Guy’s spiritual crisis is indeed an “interesting case”—it is the subject of three novels. Though Guy believes that “there were no words in any language” to describe his spiritual state, there must be “[some]thing to say about it.” He is obligated to find the right words, as he eventually does.

Concerning the question of culpability, both the difficulty and the brilliance of Waugh’s portrayal of Guy’s “paralysis” is that cause and effect are difficult to disentangle. He suffers from spiritual paralysis, but was it caused by Virginia’s abandonment, or was it a self-inflicted response to her actions? The answer seems to be a

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Garry is one of Guy’s *simpatica* neighbors who “distributed Protestant tracts, interfered with the fisherman’s methods of killing octopuses and filled her house with stray cats” (13).

<sup>4</sup> A poignant example of this is when, in *Officers and Gentlemen*, Guy believes the future deserter Ivor Claire to be the embodiment of quintessential Englishness that Hitler has forgotten: “Ivor Claire, Guy thought, was the fine flower of them all. He was quintessential England, the man Hitler had failed to take into account, Guy thought” (147). Claire’s desertion exposes to Guy his mistaken belief that a class of chivalric gentlemen distinct from common humanity existed in England.

blend of both, such that he is legitimately unable to distinguish between the victim and the perpetrator within himself. In this, Waugh succeeds in answering a question that is especially relevant to the *zeitgeist* of the twentieth century: *how* could someone who believes in the Gospel become averse to the economy of salvation? In the face of a suddenly and inexplicably ruined marriage, providence must have appeared to Guy either unreliable or unintelligible. Virginia's defection must have appeared to be not merely a great trial to be borne within the providential order, but the invalidation of a sacrament, an upheaval of the economy of divine grace that he had supposed was at work in his life.

At the heart of Guy's resulting spiritual malady is his loss of a sacramental vision of reality—one in which the natural order both points to and makes manifest the supernatural reality on which it rests. Since Virginia's departure, the bond between his actions and their supernatural significance has, for Guy, been broken. It is therefore fitting that in his practice of the other Sacraments he seems also to have lost sight of their mysterious depths. Given the stagnation of Guy's personal life and the lethargic way in which he practices his faith, it comes as no surprise that he receives the outbreak of the war as a welcome clarion call into action, an apparent rescue from his eight years of sloth. His desire to join the war effort creates in him a sense of devotion and urgency lacking in his Catholicism. Having relegated the sacramental and transcendent character of the Christian faith to a small corner of his consciousness, Guy looks to the war to furnish him with a purpose that can claim his whole allegiance.

Even in his new-found devotion, Guy's sense of worthlessness manifests itself in a telling incident. Having become a "facile professional beggar" after weeks of unsuccessful searching for a military post, Guy wonders why he has so far failed even in

joining the effort to which everyone is expected to contribute (20). While visiting his sister, brother-in-law, and teenage nephew, soon to depart for France, Guy wonders, “Why could he not go to France in Tony’s place [. . .]? But the next morning as he knelt at the altar rail beside Angela and Tony he seemed to hear the answer in the words of the canon: *Domine non sum dignus*” (32). These words of the centurion in Matthew’s gospel appear in the liturgy of the Eucharist just before Catholics receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. The full passage reads “*Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo et sanabitur anima mea.*”<sup>5</sup> As Waugh’s friend Msgr. Ronald Knox writes in his *The Mass in Slow Motion*, “Never talk about receiving communion worthily; it’s a misleading phrase. . . . Lord, you must force your way in, not take any notice of my soul’s untidiness; it’s not the least bit ready for you really” (136). “*Domine non sum dignus ut inters sub tectum meum*” is a simple yet supreme statement of humility, yet the clause that follows represents believers’ confidence in the restoration and worth conferred in the Sacrament. That Guy should hear them as he does is doubly disturbing. Most obviously, it shows the extent to which his military ardor threatens his faith. More importantly, perhaps, Guy isolates these words from the supplication that follows them so that they become for him a self-pitying expression of his worthlessness, not part of an affirmation of the worth conferred in the Sacrament. When Guy finally succeeds in joining a regiment—The Royal Corps of Halberdiers, it takes center stage in his life, as he vainly attempts to restore his sense of self-worth through military activity. Consequently, he is swept away in the military fervor inundating Britain and Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

### *III. Secularization and the Human Person*

As we have seen, Jean Daniélou was intent on articulating an authentically Christian understanding of history. Daniélou proves an especially illuminating guide in considering *Sword of Honour*. To a greater extent than De Lubac, Daniélou developed his view of history explicitly with the conditions of the twentieth century in mind. Like De Lubac, Daniélou undertook to show how the Church Fathers had overturned previously held notions of history—arguing that far from being cyclical or static—history was able to introduce not only beginnings, but beginnings that would endure (“Conception” 172). The Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Christ represented the emergence of a new beginning whose reality would never be negated (“Conception” 173). At the same time, the events of Christ’s life did not represent the end of sacred history, for “it is still going on: we are living in sacred history”<sup>6</sup> (*Lord* 10).

Daniélou contends that the period of history after Christ’s Ascension consists of “the working out of salvation in the course of historical time,” therefore chastens neo-Scholasticism for de-emphasizing the ongoing reality of sacred history (10). Undergirding the continuation of sacred history is Christ’s mandate to evangelize the nations: “The Christian mission is what gives substance and consistency to the history of our era. It is the intrinsic reality underlying the phenomena of secular history” (12). Furthermore, Daniélou affirms Blondel’s conception of Tradition as the elaboration of revealed truths through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within the particular circumstances of historical time:

. . . under the guidance of the Holy Spirit living in the church, certain aspects of the Revelation not explicitly [*sic*] expressed in the Scripture are

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<sup>6</sup> This quotation is taken from *The Lord of History* (1958), the introduction of which is a reworking and expansion of his 1950 article, “The Conception of History in the Christian Tradition”.

defined by the church. These definitions of dogma . . . are like historical events, for they do not proceed only from the reasoning of the theologians or even from the conscience of the church, but they correspond to historical conjectures; they mark the great articulations in the life of the church. (“Conception” 175)

Thus, Daniélou sees clearly that the Church Fathers’ emphasis upon sacred history as an ongoing reality with a *telos* oriented toward Christ himself would be key in helping the Church engage the crisis of secularism.

Having articulated this position, Daniélou also expounds upon the Church Fathers’ understanding of the relationship between secular and Sacred history—the “history of salvation” and “history, in the usual meaning of the word, the history of great cultural or political systems” (176). His treatment of this difficult subject is nuanced and paradoxical. He demonstrates the continuity between the two, but he also, in two ways, emphasizes their differences. Ultimately, he finds sacramental unity between the conceptions of history. On one hand, “The God of the creation and that of the redemption are one and the same God. Civilization cannot be considered as basically the work of the devil. In so far as political and cultural worlds take part in the creation, they enter into the work of God” (“Conception” 176). This inclusion of “secular” history within the Christian field of vision is to be understood paradoxically: “On one hand Christianity falls within . . . the sequence of historical eventualities. . . . But on the other hand, history falls within Christianity: all secular history is included in sacred history, as a part, a prolegomenon, a preparatory introduction” (24). Though human civilization partakes of the same historical order as sacred history, this continuity should be treated cautiously, for “[h]istory remains primarily the sacred history of the great works of God”

(“Conception” 177). Without God’s creative and salvific acts within history, secular historical achievements would, *sub specie aeternitas*, signify nothing.

Moreover, Daniélou insists on the obvious truth, recognized by the earliest Christians and elaborated by St. Augustine, that the secular order often appears directly opposed to the acts of sacred history, “the city of Satan over against the city of God” (*Lord* 31). Summarizing Augustine’s *De catechizandis rudibus*, Daniélou comments, “[T]he worship of idols consists in treating human productions as absolute realities. The wicked spirits of the gentile nations are still at work, and resume their power whenever a people or a class or a social group of any kind becomes an end in itself” (31-32). Such idolatry is precisely what Daniélou recognized in the various totalitarianisms of the twentieth century, especially Communism. In totalitarianism, Daniélou (and of course many other Christians, including his contemporary Evelyn Waugh) recognized a foe that must be engaged and defeated.

Finally, in view of the dire circumstances of twentieth-century Europe, Daniélou vigorously argued that the Church should engage and defeat secularism, particularly Communism, through the authentic practice of the Christian faith, not through accommodation or assimilation. For example, he warned that Christianity must not engage Marxism on its own terms, but must remain convinced “that Christianity is real maker of history”<sup>7</sup> for

as long as we are content with a social programme which is merely an alternative to communism, instead of following out into practice the essential principles of our religion, we cannot escape an inferiority

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<sup>7</sup> Daniélou means of course dynamic, lived, and confessing Christian faith, not a “more or less half-hearted form of Christian humanism,” (79) which in Daniélou’s view, cannot answer the strident claims of Marxist ideology. This view dovetails nicely with that expressed by Waugh in *Unconditional Surrender*, in which the common decency of culturally Christian Englishmen is overwhelmed when it encounters Communism.

complex. For us, social and economic policy is not the whole story: we have a deeper and more important concern, to further the work of Jesus Christ for the salvation of men. (*Lord* 80, 82)

In Daniélou's view, technological and social progress is relatively insignificant, for in such a time "the outstanding events are those of the sacramental life. . . . The greatness of these mighty works [of innovation] belongs to the intellectual and the physical world, but the mighty works of the spiritual world, in the order of charity, are the sacraments" (83). When the sacraments are enacted and honored, when the order of charity is manifested, then human beings should flourish. Though "[i]t is right to insist on the difference between the natural and supernatural orders . . . it is also true that nothing is outside the order of Providence" (92).

Here we see another articulation of a key principle among the *Nouvelle* theologians, one that sets them apart from the Modernists and neo-Scholastics alike, that the natural and supernatural orders must be understood as distinct, but never separate or autonomous. The relationship between sacred and secular history is to be found in the sacramental confluence of two orders. When the natural order is considered independent or autonomous, one result is an attribution of transcendent qualities to political and economic realities, a characteristic mistake of the twentieth century:

The fundamental mistake in communism is the belief that communism is good and capitalism is evil; and the capitalist's mistake lies in holding the contrary belief. Collectivism and capitalism are both half-truths. If people understood this, would not turn policies into ideologies; for there is no such thing as a mystique of politics. Mysticism belongs to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is the intrusion of mystical attitudes into political questions that leads to fanaticism, and to ideological wars, which are conflicts between false gods. (*Lord* 100-101)

Ultimately, it is the task of Christians to practice their faith and so make present the mysterious realities sought in vain among contemporary political systems. Daniélou



recognized that in forfeiting its claim over history, Christian theology at once helped to foster and yet left itself vulnerable to the secularism that, during the twentieth century, manifested itself in aggressive political forms.

Like Daniélou, Martin D’Arcy developed his view of history with regard to the rapid secularization of the twentieth century and to political systems that evoked pseudo-religious adherence in their followers. In *The Mind and Heart of Love* (1945), a work devoted to providing a Christian synthesis of the relationship between *eros*—acquisitive, self-regarding love— and *agape*—sacrificial, self-denying love— D’Arcy claims that no system of belief besides Christianity can reconcile the apparent tension between these two tendencies. In a passage similar to Daniélou’s diagnosis of the illness inherent in secular political systems, D’Arcy makes the arresting observation that political despotism manipulates the human person’s innate sense of *agape* to that person’s destruction.<sup>8</sup> Though self-sacrifice is mandated by the Gospel, such sacrifice is circumscribed and transformed by God’s own self-sacrifice, safeguarding the dignity of the human person. Totalitarianism on the other hand, demands an un-qualified self-sacrifice to the demands of the state:

There is a constant threat against the rights and independence of man in modern society; he is with difficulty able to call his body and his soul his own. For that reason it is just that those who love man should recall to him his proper dignity and ceaselessly proclaim that a State exists to give fuller scope for personal life and not to subordinate personal life to itself. Personal life suffers both by the constant conditioning to which it is subject, and also, though this is less obvious, by an appeal to its so-called better nature to belong to some movement or to espouse some cause. This second danger is more insidious because it comes under the disguise of an

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<sup>8</sup> It is from this kind of coercion that Sebastian Flyte nearly succeeds in rescuing Kurt in *Brideshead Revisited*.

ideal, and may well be a genuine ideal. The interest of the anima<sup>9</sup> is enlisted just because the cause is altruistic. Now, as we all know, causes and ideals draw men together and often bring the best out of them; without them good fellowship is impossible and life is anarchic. But as modern movements have shown, if proof be needed, youth can be easily seduced and lose its reason and interior virtue. It loses its power of judgment and worships before an idol. (323)

As will become apparent, Waugh depicts this phenomenon throughout *Sword of Honour*, not only in characters wholly given over to the politico-military order, but also in Guy himself. Indeed, one of appeals of the military for Guy, who considers himself “ready for immediate consumption” (*Men at Arms* 12), is the opportunity to relinquish all claims on his own personhood, which he wrongly believes himself to have forfeited because of his many failures. This yearning for destruction, this “death wish,” as it is termed in *Unconditional Surrender*, lies at the root of Guy’s perceived military vocation. While Waugh thus echoes Daniélou’s and D’Arcy’s analysis of secularism, he contributes to it the idea that the sin of sloth is also partly to blame for the loss of faith in Europe.

#### IV. False Vocation

Despite his sloth, Guy’s decision to join the military is not wholly discreditable or based upon the “wish to die” (*Unconditional* 220). As with his spiritual state, so Guy’s decision to fight is a complex mixture of many motives. Some of these are honorable, presaging his nascent vocation, while others are misguided and even sinful. Guy’s eventual recognition that only God can charge him with his vocation is delayed by two volumes of wayward questing after he swears his military fealty upon the sword of Sir Roger of Waybroke. Sir Roger, a crusader unwittingly recruited into a local Italian

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<sup>9</sup> In the chapter from which this passage is drawn, D’Arcy is discussing the tension between *animus*, a self-regarding tendency within human persons, and *anima*, a self-disposing, unthinkingly self-sacrificial tendency akin to the Freudian “death drive”.

skirmish, had died in apparent futility, far from the Holy Land, 800 years before. Having been entombed in Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, the locals have adopted Sir Roger “despite all clerical remonstrance” as their unofficial patron, “il Santo Inglese” (*Men* 7). Santa Dulcina’s relics also reside in the town and are paraded once a year, but it is the English crusader who has captured the devotion of the village. His sword remains bright because of the touches of those seeking his blessing. Kneeling at his “old friend[’s]” side, Guy touches Sir Roger’s sword, saying “Sir Roger, pray for me . . . and for our endangered kingdom” (7). Sir Roger’s sword is one of the central images of the Trilogy, standing in contrast to the “Sword of Stalingrad,” which in *Unconditional Surrender* becomes an image of the sham secular holiness from which Guy must recoil.

His initial act of dedication has created something of an interpretive divide among critics. Because this act sets the Trilogy’s course, it is crucial that we understand why Guy performs it. John Howard Wilson writes that

[t]hese actions seem confused, to say the least. Sir Roger is not a saint, and both Guy and the people persist in their error, despite the teaching of the priests. Touching the sword is only a superstitious ritual, but Guy makes it into a priority. Instead of asking for Sir Roger’s prayers, Guy might petition St. Dulcina or the Virgin Mary, both more likely to intercede than Sir Roger is. By visiting the dead knight, Guy is committing himself to nationalism and war, instead of contemplating a saint and praying for peace (Wilson, “Quantitative” 328).

For Wilson, Guy’s prayer to Sir Roger is as misguided as his later identification of the Halberdiers as a false Church. In Wilson’s view, Guy’s later pursuit of his true vocation must be considered a complete repudiation of his dedication at the tomb of Sir Roger.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> After this passage, the question of chivalry, both its possibility and its true nature, becomes a motif running right through the trilogy, culminating in Kerstie Kilbannock’s condemnation of Guy when he agrees to marry Virginia and adopt little Trimmer: “Can’t you see how ridiculous you’ll look playing the knight errant?” (*Unconditional* 192-93). At least twice, Waugh inserted references to chivalry (*Men*. MS).

This reading has some merit, yet outright condemnation of Guy's act of dedication is overly simple because of the symbolic centrality of the Trilogy's two swords. Sir Roger's blade to some extent represents Christian devotion, however misguided, while the other represents the idolatrous worship of the State. If this "State Sword" and its hordes of worshipers depict the spiritual vacuity of secular modernity, then Guy's oath uttered upon the sword of the Christian crusader cannot be entirely wrong.

Both Douglas Patey and Daniel McInerny see a more complicated picture than Wilson. For Patey, Guy's close identification with Sir Roger is important, because Guy's path is destined to parallel Sir Roger's failure followed by unlikely redemption: "Waugh planned Guy's crusade, like Sir Roger's, as a failure, but a fortunate failure that would breed private spiritual regeneration" (305). Indeed, Guy's first quest is not wasted. Instead, through his protracted military frustrations, Guy gains self-knowledge, learns to distinguish between false and genuine objects of devotion, and disentangles virtue from vice within himself. McInerny, too, discerns, through the novel's symbolic structure, that Guy's identification with Sir Roger is not wholly misguided:

The title of the trilogy indicates that the image of the sword is one of the key images in the trilogy, and the sword of Sir Roger of Waybrooke [*sic*] is the first sword that we encounter in the story. Sir Roger's sword is the sword of traditional heroism in defense of Christendom; it is the sword, at least in the eyes of the people of Santa Dulcina, of sanctity [. . .] so he begins his own journey through the war seeing himself in the image of Sir Roger: a crusader in defense of Christian Europe. (45)

As McInerny's analysis makes clear, Guy visits Sir Roger not because of superstition but in the conviction that there are similarities between himself and Sir Roger. In the Catholic

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Ch. 1 p.13, Ch. 2 p. 13) presumably to provide continuity to the motif and to encourage the reader to consider whether chivalrous and honorable behavior remains possible.

practice of seeking intercessory prayer from the saints, believers seek out the appropriate saint for their individual plight. Sir Roger, though not a canonical saint, would seem then an appropriate patron for Guy's crisis.

Guy's prayer to Sir Roger initiates the first of the two major movements of the Trilogy, when Guy first mistakenly identifies himself too closely with his regiment and the cause of war, and then gradually sinks into disillusionment with military life. Crucially, the second movement, in which Guy asks for, discerns, and fulfills his vocation, is also initiated by a prayer to a non-canonical saint: his recently deceased father. Following that prayer is another in which he asks God for his vocation. The second prayer serves as both a counterpoint and complement to the first.

As Wilson would emphasize, and as the Trilogy in due time makes clear, Guy is in fact deceived: he is no crusader, and his salvation depends upon realizing this mistake so that he can take up his true vocation. Nevertheless, his willingness to leave his sloth behind and to engage in a cause that he believes to be just is not inherently sinful.

Though the manner of Sir Roger's death seems futile, he symbolizes admirable self-sacrifice throughout the Trilogy. Waugh imbues the scene of Guy's dedication at Sir Roger's tomb with slight melodrama, yet there can be no doubt that the narrator, like Guy and the people of Santa Dulcina, reveres Sir Roger. In time, his death produces a powerful and moving irony: while his death may initially have appeared an utter waste, his willingness to be led away from home and the comforts of the world in service to the Church makes Sir Roger the most *simpatico* of all the Englishmen in Santa Dulcina. Rather than the people's love of Sir Roger being mere superstition, the devotion he inspires is a demonstration of how misguided decisions and frustrated outcomes can, by

strange roads, lead to one's proper place in the life of the Church. The villagers, "to whom the supernatural order in all its ramifications was ever present and ever more lively than the humdrum world about them," perceive this truth (6-7). Sir Roger, like the Magi and also like Helena, is a "latecomer," one of Waugh's unlikely holy people whose offering, though late and imperfect, is still accepted and used. Thus, Sir Roger serves as an antitype to Guy, who, only by a long and often frustrated path, will arrive at the place where he can truly be of service to God.

Yet, whereas the villagers can perceive the supernatural welling up through and transforming daily life, Guy is practically insensible to it. Its absence has left a void that he is eager to fill, explaining the swiftness with which he endangers his soul in the machinations of secular life. Henri de Lubac makes the shrewd observation that "the more you separate [the natural and the supernatural] the less do you really *distinguish* [between the two]" (313). If the natural and supernatural orders are conceived of as entirely separated, two outcomes will result: either faith becomes spiritualized and privatized, or the natural order comes to appear self-sufficient (313). The former result had come to the fore within the Church, while the latter had produced secular Western thought. We see something analogous in *Sword of Honour*. At the Trilogy's beginning, Guy's faith is spiritualized and privatized to the point that it has little bearing on the rest of his life. When military fervor envelops him, he takes the opposite tack, attributing a kind of transcendence to his regiment. Later, Guy's slowly reawakening sacramental sensibility reveals to him his idolatrous veneration of the Halberdiers, enabling him to discern true transcendence within the life of the Church. After the death of his father—

who in life had encouraged and instructed Guy in the faith—Guy, remembering his father’s words, asks God to reveal his vocation.

Guy’s eventual commission in the Royal Corps of Halberdiers, an old regiment distinguished for its pride and tradition, initiates Guy’s confusion of the secular and sacred. Ironically, it is on a visit to his father at his lodgings in a small hotel in the seaside town of Matchet, that Guy is introduced by his father to Major Tickeridge, an enviably cheerful man and pleasant dinner companion, who promises Guy a place in the Corps. During the period of Guy’s secularization, his father becomes his strongest tie to the Church. The elder Crouchback’s own life is thoroughly bound up with the Church’s life: he attends daily Mass, prays often, makes allowances to numerous beneficiaries, and lets his ancestral home to a convent. Moreover, Mr Crouchback maintains the sacramental vision Guy has lost, as becomes evident when he relates the story of how Guy’s older brother, who was killed in World War I, was preserved from sin by a religious medal, a sacramental:

“It didn’t protect Gervase much, did it?”

“Oh, yes,” said Mr Crouchback, “much more than you might think. . . . Once in London, when he was in training, he got rather drunk with some of his regiment and in the end he found himself left alone with a girl they’d picked up somewhere. She began to fool about and pulled off his tie and then she found the medal and all of a sudden they both sobered down and she began talking about the convent where she’d been at school and so they parted friends and no harm done. I call that being protected.”  
(*Men* 33)

The difference here between an overt miracle and thoroughgoing sacramentality is clear. Gervase’s and the girl’s life histories converge upon that moment, where the potential for sin is transformed into the virtue of friendship by the manifestation of Providence in a

mere stamped piece of metal. This parable of fluent communication between the supernatural and the natural exemplifies Mr. Crouchback's outlook.

Nevertheless, Guy's own sloth and his ensuing enthusiasm for the Halberdiers stymie his father's benevolent influence. This "august and ancient regiment" has the dignity and custom of a church, and Guy quickly becomes infatuated. Whereas Guy feels himself profoundly isolated from his fellow Catholics, the warmth of affection and brotherhood swiftly kindles toward the Halberdiers. After mere weeks among them, the splendor of the barracks, the amiable companions, and the pleasant order of training produce in a Guy an effusion of love such as he has not known for years: "Guy loved Major Tickeridge and Captain Bosanquet. He loved Apthorpe. He loved the oil-painting over the fireplace of the unbroken square of Halberdiers in the desert. He loved the whole Corps deeply and tenderly" (49).

Guy's love of the Halberdiers soon becomes a kind of alternative spiritual life, and in several passages the Corps is likened to the Church, as when Guy surveys his fellow probationary non-commissioned officers,:

He wondered, sometimes, what system of selection had produced so nondescript a squad. Later he realized that they typified the peculiar pride of the Corps, which did not expect distinguished raw materials but confided instead in its age-old methods of transformation. The discipline of the square, the traditions of the mess, would work like magic and the *esprit de corps* would fall like blessed unction from above. (40)

Here Guy's familiarity with biblical language concerning the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the sanctification of believers clearly informs his conception of the Corps's training methods. While such language might be mere considered a facetious rhetorical device, these processes prove transformative to Guy. He, too, is one of those nondescript



converts who, like the St. Paul's Corinthians, lacked worldly notoriety and influence.<sup>11</sup>

He, too, undergoes a transformation that influences both his behavior and his interior life in a way that, for years, his Catholic faith had not.

One example of this influence is the way his conscience becomes honed by the behavioral codes of the Corps. Still early in training, after mildly rebuffing an elderly guest in barracks, Guy finds his conscience prickling before sleep. Yet it is not so much as a Catholic, or even as a man, but as a Halberdier that he feels he has failed: "He had snubbed that decent, melancholy old man . . . Was that the real 'Halberdier welcome' expected of him? There was much to repent and repair" (63). Here again, the use of the language of scripture and the Church indicates the extent to which Guy's regiment threatens to become his surrogate faith.

At the height of his dedication to the Halberdiers, Guy even undergoes a grotesque physical transformation. After weeks of listless growth, his mustache suddenly takes shape, and he simultaneously purchases a monocle in hopes of correcting his dismal performances on the shooting range. He is favorably impressed by his "transmogri[fication]" into a Victorian soldier. Yet Virginia, who even as an estranged ex-wife knows Guy better than he knows himself, exposes his new personal effects and his "perfectly awful" mustache as phony (151). Virginia's rejection of Guy's transformation strikes home, causing a moment of true reflection that nearly unmasks his self-constructed life in the military: "he had . . . seen them [moustaches and monocles] in the Halberdier mess, but on faces innocent of all guile, quite beyond suspicion. After all, he reflected, his whole uniform was a disguise, his whole new calling a masquerade" (152). In adopting the monocle, the symbolic and literal lens through which a good

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. I Cor. 1:26

Halberdier sees the world, Guy has nearly been lured into trading his dormant Catholic vision of reality for that of the Halberdiers. But, as Guy discovers, that vision is only a picturesque and outmoded version of the secular modernity that Guy had vowed to fight. By the mid-point of *Men at Arms*, Guy has begun to suspect that the Halberdiers are not so glorious as they at first seemed.

The illusory fulfillment offered by the Halberdiers is embodied in one of Guy's fellow NCO's, Apthorpe, who becomes his main companion. Distinguished by their relative old-age, the two become inseparable—not to say indistinguishable—and are called “Uncle” by the younger officers. While they become companions, Apthorpe never takes on the fully-fledged humanity required for friendship. His life remains shrouded in mystery, and most of what little Guy learns is eventually exposed as false. Though each section of *Men at Arms* is named for Apthorpe, we never even learn his first name. Instead, he remains an outsized embodiment of the Halberdier ideal. Among their batch of officers in training, “Apthorpe alone looked like a soldier. He was burly, tanned, moustached, primed with a rich vocabulary of military terms and abbreviations. Until recently he had served in Africa in an unspecified capacity. His boots had covered miles of bush trail” (46-47). Apthorpe appears to be the genuine military article.<sup>12</sup>

That Apthorpe is an embodiment of Guy's love of the Halberdiers' camaraderie becomes evident as *Men At Arms* progresses. First, Apthorpe encourages Guy's identification with the Corps. After Guy has his mustache shaved, Apthorpe, in a rare show of concern for Guy, asks what has become of it. To Guy's answer that he has had it shaved, Apthorpe seems disturbed by what appears to him a slight regression in Guy's

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<sup>12</sup> It is not until after his death that Guy learns that Apthorpe had had a desk job in Africa as the representative of a coffee concern.

status as a Halberdier: “Did you? What a pity. It suited you, Crouchback. Suited you very well” (165). Moreover, Apthorpe’s vitality waxes and wanes with Guy’s own love of the regiment. After Guy fails to seduce Virginia while on leave, he finds solace in the thought that “the spell of Apthorpe would bind him, and gently bear him away to the far gardens of fantasy” (166). Soon after, Apthorpe’s “spell” reaches its zenith in the surreal saga in which he and Guy devote weeks to keeping Apthorpe’s antique field latrine—his “thunder-box”—from the clutches of Brigadier Ritchie-Hook. Discussing the matter while sequestered at Pelicci’s restaurant, “their relationship came nearest to love and trust” (188). After the thunder-box—and, with it, Apthorpe’s sense of dignity—is destroyed by Ritchie-Hook’s booby-trap, the brigade removes from Southsand-upon-Sea to a far less comfortable camp in Scotland. In these conditions, Guy’s love for the Corps flags, and so does Apthorpe’s strength. He is repeatedly described as “rum” in their new surroundings, and he never really recovers from the loss of his thunder-box:

“Crouchback . . . there’s something I have to say to you. I never want to hear another word about that happening at Southsand. Never. Do you understand? Otherwise I shall be forced to take action.”

“What sort of action, Apthorpe?”

“*Drastic* action.”

Rum. Very rum indeed. (213)

This decline continues for Apthorpe as Guy’s regimental affections dwindle. After Guy is unjustly disgraced by Ritchie-Hook’s illicit reconnaissance mission in West Africa, Apthorpe falls ill deep in the bush and is gravely weakened by fever before he can be moved to hospital. When Guy visits him, he follows the advice of the brigade major, bringing Apthorpe a bottle of whiskey that proves fatal.

The basic illusion of the Victorian-esque Halberdiers as a vital alternative to the modern age, echoes Waugh’s complex feelings toward Victorian England. As has been

discussed above, Waugh rejected Victorianism not in the iconoclastic spirit of the literary and cultural Modernists characteristic of Bloomsbury, but as a degraded version of a culture long in decline. For Guy too, Victorianism exerts a strong charm in the guise of the Halberdiers. Guy finds the regiment's formalities, such as the baffling rules governing the use of the snuff box and the impossibly elaborate pile-arms detail, delightfully civilized and antithetical to the horrendous "Modern Age in arms." Even the tradition of Anglican churchmanship adds to the allure of the Halberdiers for Guy:

One of the characteristics of the Halberdiers was a tradition of firm churchmanship. Papistry and dissent were almost unknown among the regulars. Long-service recruits were prepared for Confirmation by the chaplain as part of their elementary training. . . . Nowhere in England could there be found a survival of a Late-Victorian Sunday so complete and so unselfconscious as at the Halberdier barracks. (68)

Though Guy continues to attend Mass and is put charge of marching the dozen Catholic servicemen to a "tin church in a side-street," the staunch Anglicanism of the Halberdiers exerts a powerful pull on his imagination. Simultaneously, a slight contempt tinges Guy's attitude toward the local Catholic priest, whose anti-war sermon clashes with Guy's vision of the Halberdiers: "His sermon that morning was not positively offensive . . . but when he spoke of 'this terrible time of doubt, danger and suffering . . .', Guy stiffened. It was a time of glory and dedication" (69). After Mass, when the simple Irish missionary priest offers Guy company and a glass of whiskey, he refuses in a tone suggesting that it would be in unfitting for a Halberdier associate with someone who questions the "glor[ious]" mission of the Halberdiers. Again, the spurious brotherhood of the Halberdiers trumps the true brotherhood of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, the Halberdiers' Anglicanism derives not from Victoria, but from Elizabeth. The regiment, as the new officers learn in their history lessons, "was raised by the Earl of Essex, for service in the low countries during the reign of Queen Elizabeth" (44).

What Guy initially fails to perceive is that the Halberdiers are no vital antidote to the world he loathes, but a mere husk of the kernel that gave rise to it. What seems to be their rich tradition is merely empty traditionalism. The Halberdiers, ultimately, are but a picturesque ruin in the landscape of the Modern Age.

In order to gain this insight, Guy must first undergo “series of regressions” (Patey 307). Much like Charles Ryder’s brief, happy childhood with Sebastian, it seems to Guy that in the jovial atmosphere of the Halberdier barracks “he had been experiencing something he had missed in boyhood, a happy adolescence” (43). Later, after his unit is transferred from the Barracks to Kut-al-Imara House,<sup>14</sup> a requisitioned prep school, Guy and his fellow probationary officers seem to further regress to childhood. In their new setting, they take up the half-forgotten rhythms of school life, complete with petty crises and triumphs, as in the episode of Apthorpe’s thunder-box. This extended trope of regression, while providing much of the comic tone of *Men at Arms*, serves a more serious purpose. Guy’s illusions about himself, the Halberdiers, and his vocation must be removed before he can begin to rebuild, and Waugh accomplishes this removal through Guy’s symbolic reversion to childhood.

Even in the period of Guy’s deepest involvement with the Halberdiers, he never entirely gives up Catholicism. His most deeply held convictions, even if they become almost totally obscured, remain Catholic. Yet, simultaneously, the thrill born of deep personal investment belongs to the Halberdiers. Even after the disgraceful climax of *Men at Arms*, in which Guy takes part in an illicit mission and then inadvertently kills Apthorpe, damages his illusions about the military and his place in it, he remains unaware

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<sup>14</sup> The school’s rooms, like the school itself, are each named after humiliating World War I defeats, highlighting both Waugh’s disdain for what he considered the sadism and incompetence rife in many British schools as well as the absurdity of Guy’s military vocation.

of his latent true vocation. Instead, he awaits an opportunity for his military passion to be rekindled.

At the heart of the conflict that runs through *Men at Arms*—Guy’s struggle to find his place in the war—lies his original problem: the lack of a truly sacramental sensibility—one grounded in the doctrines of the Church but also richly and vitally personal, ever present and compelling. What the failures and frustrations of *Men at Arms* achieve is to turn Guy toward a sacramental and transcendent vision. Though the military spell is not entirely broken—for there are moments in *Officers and Gentlemen* when he is clearly in its grasp—its power is waning.

#### V. Guy Crouchback’s Recovered Sacramental Vision

In the opening pages of *Officers and Gentlemen*, Guy joins an upper-class Commando unit led by Tommy Blackhouse, the man for whom Virginia deserted Guy. His initial admiration for his fellow Commandos is based upon a false assumption that they are inherently admirable: for the most part they are lazy, snobbish, and selfish. Douglas Patey observes that Guy must learn that he has been “most wrong in making the equation of the novel’s title” (Patey 328). Indeed, Waugh’s portrayal of the swank and fashionable officers of *Officers and Gentlemen* forms a powerful argument against the snobbery so often attributed to Waugh. Norman Shrapnel goes so far as to say that, because of Waugh’s lambasting of the elitist officers of the commandos, “Waugh’s severest critics will have ceased to call him a snob . . .” (Shrapnel 365). The novel culminates in the cowardly desertion of Ivor Claire, whom Guy had earlier identified as the “fine flower of them all. . . quintessential England, the man Hitler had not taken into account . . .” (*Officers* 147).

Guy's increasingly aimless military endeavors are implicitly criticized at telling moments by scenes featuring his father's quiet holiness and sense of purpose despite his straitened circumstances. The first comes as Guy undertakes an absurd quest to find the illusive and ape-like Chatty Corner, the beneficiary of Apthorpe's tons of gear, the second as Guy confesses to and then reports a possible spy-priest on Holy Saturday in Alexandria. In both cases, the elder Crouchback's gentle but stalwart holiness contrasts sharply with the disarray besetting Guy.<sup>15</sup>

Though he has little contact with his father in *Officers and Gentlemen*, Guy begins once more to share in his sacramental vision of reality. The life of the Church, its sacraments and liturgical calendar, begin to occupy a more prominent place in Guy's consciousness. In calling attention to both Guy's and his father's reflections on the liturgy, the narrator stresses their subtle similarity. In *Men at Arms*, by contrast, the narrator uses the liturgical calendar mainly as a means of emphasizing Guy's distance from the life of the Church. For example, throughout the Lenten season of 1940, Guy is occupied by the saga of Apthorpe's thunder-box. The attention that Guy should devote to soul-searching and repentance is given instead to helping Apthorpe hide his antiquated field latrine from Brigadier Ritchie-Hook. Holy Week "climax[es]" not in Guy's remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, but in the explosion that destroys Apthorpe's beloved thunder-box (193). Though later in Holy Week Guy visits his father and briefly takes a place at the Altar of Repose on Good Friday (*Men* 198), there is no

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<sup>15</sup> A third appearance by Mr. Crouchback counterpoints his simplicity and charity with the duplicity of Britain's war-machine. In the midst of a series of brief scenes concerning Trimmer's phony heroics, Mr. Crouchback, unfamiliar with the machinations that have transformed a disgraceful coward into a national hero, naively yet charitably deems that Trimmer's picture "deserves a frame" (*Officers* 202).

evidence that the experience has any profound effect on Guy, and no mention is made of his experience of Easter.

From the opening scene of *Officers and Gentlemen* onward, the liturgical year functions differently. The narrator pairs scenes of secular life with those of important moments within the liturgical rhythms of the church. These pairings highlight both the distinction between the secular and the sacred, and yet also the connection between them. The novel opens in London in the autumn of 1940, after Guy's return from his ignominious exploits in West Africa. As London is shattered by the Blitz, Guy and the unscrupulous journalist Ian Kilbannock look out over the city from the top of St James's Street, watching the destruction of a club that neighbors their own:

Half-way down Turtle's Club was burning briskly. From Piccadilly to the Palace the whole jumble of incongruous facades was caricatured by the blaze . . . . On the pavement opposite Turtle's a group of progressive novelists in firemen's uniform were squirting a little jet of water into the morning-room.

Guy was momentarily reminded of Holy Saturday at Downside; early gusty March mornings of boyhood; the doors wide open in the unfinished butt of the Abbey; half the school coughing; fluttering linen; the glowing brazier and the priest with his hyssop, paradoxically blessing fire with water.

"It was never much of a club," said Ian. "My father belonged."

He relit his cigar and immediately a voice near their knees exclaimed: "Put that light out." (1-2)

After a close-call with a bomb, Guy and Ian return to Bellamy's, where the drunken porter is spreading rumors that, "[t]he gutters outside are running with [Turtle's] whisky and brandy" (3).

Guy's connection of the destruction of Turtle's to the Easter fire is mischievous—quintessentially Waugh—yet it is also subtly poignant. In the first volume, Guy remains so rapt by the Halberdiers that there is no room in his consciousness for the images of his



faith. He had falsely ascribed a kind of sacredness to the Halberdiers, an illusion that serves to displace truly sacred images in his imagination. The reference to the Easter fire is not present in the early manuscripts, but was inserted at a later stage, implying that Waugh wished to furnish an indication early on that Guy is beginning to turn toward his faith. Though Guy has not yet recovered a sacramental unity between the natural and supernatural, his imagination is free to move between the secular and the properly sacred. Guy makes no such association with the liturgical year in the entirety of *Men at Arms*, and that Waugh should have Guy do so on the first page of *Officers and Gentlemen* signals that his ignominy in West Africa was truly a watershed moment: he is now on the far slope of his military life.

However, the full weight of this episode as reviving Guy's Catholic sensibilities is not revealed until much later in the novel, when Waugh brilliantly parallels it in another scene featuring Guy's father. The following Easter—just after we learn that, “Guy had begun to dissociate himself from the army in matters of real concern” (161)—the scene shifts from Guy to Mr. Crouchback's Holy Saturday reflections:

Holy Saturday in Matchet; Mr Crouchback broke his Lenten fast. He had given up, as he always did, wine and tobacco. During the preceding weeks two parcels had come from his wine merchant, badly pilfered on the railway, but still with a few bottles intact. At luncheon Mr Crouchback drank a pint of burgundy. . . . After luncheon he filled his pipe. Now that he had no sitting-room he was obliged to smoke downstairs. That afternoon seemed warm enough for sitting out. In a sheltered seat above the beaches, he lit the first pipe of Easter, thinking of that morning's new fire. (175)

Through the images of burning tobacco, of broken or pilfered bottles, and of the Easter fire, this radically different scene echoes the opening scene of the novel. For Mr. Crouchback, the smoking pipe tobacco (and the burgundy with its Eucharistic suggestion)

speaks in its small way to the same sacramental reality represented by the Easter fire. As for Bridey Marchmain, who “never left [the subject of religion],” and the villagers of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, the ordinary and the spiritual worlds are inseparable for Guy’s father (*Brideshead* 164). The mental movement from ordinary flame to Easter fire is a clue that Guy, though lagging far behind, is on the same path as his father.

A third reference to the Easter fire further emphasizes Guy’s emerging sacramental sensibility. On that same Holy Saturday, 1941, Major-General Whale, ironically known as Sprat, is summoned to the War Office. His various Special Forces schemes are failing, and his career is at stake:

Outside, in the cathedral, whose tower could be seen from the War Office windows; far beyond in the lands of enemy and ally, the Easter fire was freshly burning. Here for Sprat all was cold and dark. The gangmen of the departments closed in for the kill. The representative of the DPS drew a series of little gallows on his agenda. [. . .] Sprat returned to his own office. All over the world, unheard by Sprat, the *Exultet* had been sung that morning. It found no echo in Sprat’s hollow heart. (153-54)

General Whale, hopelessly enmeshed in the military machine, is insensible to the sacred world in which Mr Crouchback lives and moves. Yet crucially, General Whale also occupies the same reality, for sacred history is at least potentially just as present to him as it is to Mr Crouchback.

#### *VI. Vocation as a Weapon against Sloth*

Following his return from the British rout at Crete at the conclusion of *Officers and Gentlemen*, Guy spends about two years attached once more to Halberdiers but sees little activity. The prologue of *Unconditional Surrender* covers these two years in just a few paragraphs. The present moment begins with the surrender of Italy in 1943. Guy is

on leave visiting his father when news of the Italian capitulation arrives. The conversation that ensues proves to be the turning point in Guy's life.

Seeing in Italy's surrender the final destruction of the revolutionary governments that had persecuted the Catholic Church for over half a century, Guy denounces the Lateran Treaty—the 1929 agreement by which the Church formally acknowledged for the first time the loss of the former Papal territories and withdrew to the newly-created Vatican City State—as a short-sighted and disastrous concession:

“What a mistake the Lateran Treaty was. It seemed masterly at the time—how long? Fifteen years ago? What are fifteen years in the history of Rome? How much better it would have been if the Popes had sat it out and then emerged saying: ‘What was all that? Risorgimento? Garibaldi? Cavour? The House of Savoy? Mussolini? Just some hooligans from out of town causing a disturbance. Come to think of it wasn't there once a poor little boy whom they called King of Rome?’<sup>16</sup> That's what the Pope ought to be saying today.”

Mr Crouchback regarded his son sadly. “My dear boy, you're really talking the most terrible nonsense, you know. That isn't at all what the Church is like. It isn't what she's for.” (*Unconditional* 7-8)

Though Guy's father—who elsewhere says of himself that he's “not much of a dab at explaining things” (*Officers* 29)—says nothing more on this occasion, he soon after writes to Guy to explain what the church *is* for:

*Of course in the 1870s and 80s every decent Roman disliked the Piedmontese, just as the decent French now hate the Germans. They had been invaded. And, of course, most of the Romans we know kept it up, sulking. But that isn't the church. The Mystical Body doesn't strike attitudes and stand on its dignity. It accepts suffering and injustice. It is ready to forgive at the first hint of compunction.*

*When you spoke of the Lateran Treaty did you consider how many souls may have been reconciled and have died at peace as the result of it? How many children may have been brought up in the faith who might have lived in ignorance? Quantitative judgements don't apply. If only one soul*

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<sup>16</sup> Napoléon François Charles Joseph Bonaparte (1811-1832), was from birth given the title King of Rome by his father. After Napoleon I's abdication in 1814, he declared his son Napoleon II, Emperor of the French, a reign that lasted a week.

*was saved that is full compensation for any amount of loss of "face".*  
(*Unconditional* 10)

Mr. Crouchback goes on to say that he may not have long to live and that he worries for Guy. The father sees deeply into his son's character. He sees that what Guy has done for last twelve years is "strike [an attitude]." Guy has not been prepared to forgive the adulterous Virginia, preferring instead to "sulk," first alone in Italy, then in the army. Most importantly he perceives how little thought Guy has given to the eternal welfare of others.

Through the astuteness of his rebuke, Mr Crouchback prepares Guy to recognize and lay hold of his true vocation. The letter resonates in Guy's mind, for he is haunted by its truth. "Quantitative judgements don't apply," becomes for Guy a refrain in the novel's latter portions. Soon after, Guy receives news of his father's death via telegram. At the funeral, Guy contemplates the letter and considers why his father was worried about him. He realizes that for years in his prayers, "He reported for duty to God: 'I don't ask anything from you. I am here if you want me. I don't suppose I can be any use, but if there is anything I can do, let me know,' and left it at that" (*Unconditional* 80). In thinking about his father—"the only entirely good man he had ever known" (78)—and seeing the hundreds of mourners, many of them beneficiaries of his charity, who have traveled at great inconvenience to pray for him, Guy realizes the fundamental slothfulness in his own faith:

"I don't ask anything from you"; that was the deadly core of his apathy; his father had tried to tell him, was now telling him. That emptiness had been with him for years now even in the days of enthusiasm and activity in the Halberdiers. Enthusiasm and activity were not enough. God required more than that. He had commanded all men to *ask*. (80)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Murray Davis has noted Waugh's substantial rewriting of Mr Crouchback's funeral scene. This entire paragraph is a manuscript insert (Murray 315).

Epiphany follows epiphany for Guy in this crucial scene. Soon after realizing that he must ask God to show him his purpose, he compares himself to one of late-hired men in the parable of the vineyard workers. He too would receive full recompense for taking “the chance to do some small service which only he could perform, for which he had been created. Even he must have his function in the divine plan” (81).<sup>18</sup> Evidently, his father’s letter has opened the way for Guy to ask God for his vocation, for he immediately recalls that “Quantitative judgements did not apply. All that mattered was to recognize the chance when it offered. Perhaps his father was at that moment clearing the way for him. ‘Show me what to do and help me to do it,’ he prayed” (81). This moment of dedication is both the fulfillment and the redemption of his original oath at Sir Roger’s tomb. As on that occasion, Guy correctly believes that he can be of use and serve a purpose. This time, however, Guy attaches himself to no secular cause and suffers from no self-delusion. Rather than envisioning a glorious role for himself meant to atone for his previous inactivity, he realizes that he must rely upon God to reveal to him his true vocation.

When Guy recognizes the mission that only he can accomplish—legally remarrying Virginia and raising her son fathered by Trimmer—it becomes apparent how much his father might be said to have prophesied Guy’s vocation. Because of Guy, one child “will be brought up in the faith who otherwise might have lived in ignorance.” Moreover, in remarrying his ex-wife who—initially at least—makes unwelcome sexual advances on him out of desperation, Guy can’t help but “[lose] ‘face’” among

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<sup>18</sup> This final sentence, also a manuscript insert, highlights Guy’s modest appraisal of his own character, but, more than that, it emphasizes Waugh’s individual understanding of vocation (MS. Book II p. 7). Cf. the bold Helena’s realization of her vocation: “But how do you [Pope Sylvester] know he [God] doesn’t want us to have it—the cross, I mean? I bet he’s just waiting for one of us to go and find it—just at his moment when it it’s most needed. [. . .] I’m going off to find it. . .” (183).

acquaintances—even sympathetic ones such as Kerstie Kilbannock—whose worldly values prevent them from comprehending his divinely inspired acts. When Kerstie undertakes to rescue Guy from what she believes to be Virginia’s ruse by announcing to Guy her pregnancy, Guy’s correction stings her sense of justice:

“But, dear Kerstie, do you suppose I didn’t know?”

“Virginia told you?”

“Of course.”

“And you’re marrying her in spite of—?”

“Because of.”

....

“My dear Guy, the world is full of unwanted children. Half the population of Europe are homeless—refugees and prisoners. What is one child more or less in all that misery?”

“I can’t do anything about all those others. This is just the one case where I can help. And only I, really. I was Virginia’s last resort. So I couldn’t do anything else. Don’t you *see*?”

“Of course I don’t. Ian is quite right. You’re insane.”

And Kerstie left more angry than she had come. (192-93)

After Kerstie’s departure, Guy turns once more to his father’s letter, re-reading the lines:

*“Quantitative judgements don’t apply. If only one soul was saved, that is full compensation for any amount of loss of face”* (194). Guy is well aware that his act will be “something they’ll laugh about at Bellamy’s” (193). Yet, he is happy to be the butt of a joke, as well as the object of Kerstie’s derision for the sake of his wife and her child. Virginia’s subsequent death in a V-2 explosion only reassures Guy that his true vocation is to ensure the well-being of her child.

## VII. “The Death Wish”

Guy’s conversation with Kerstie Kilbannock marks the end of Book II of *Unconditional Surrender*. It could be argued that, with a little expansion, Book II might well have served as a suitable ending for the Trilogy: Guy’s faith has been renewed, his

sacramental vision of reality has been restored by the acceptance of his true vocation, and he is determined to carry it out. Nevertheless, a third book, “The Death Wish,” both challenges and affirms Guy’s renewal by placing it within a broader context: one in which the sloth that has long affected Guy seems suddenly to become epidemic.<sup>19</sup> Book Three portrays the fall of many former stars of the Trilogy’s vast military constellation—including General Whale, Ritchie-Hook, and Ludovic—into sloth-like despair, even as the communists (both British and Yugoslavian) teem with vitality. Simultaneously, Guy’s new calling is overshadowed by the plight of a group of Jewish refugees. Though his honorable and charitable efforts to rescue them prove disastrous for two of these refugees, Book Three nonetheless explores the possibility of living an authentically Christian life, and thus bringing about a wider renewal, in the midst of a secular age.

When Guy is sent on a goodwill mission to communist forces in the Balkans only weeks after remarrying Virginia, he soon realizes that the mission seems populated by British communists more concerned for the welfare of their fellow partisans than that of Britain. Guy spends the ensuing months at a small establishment in Croatia, attempting somewhat ineffectually to coordinate British efforts with those of the hostile local partisans. His main concern, however, becomes a group of roughly one hundred freezing and hungry Jewish refugees stranded in their attempt to reach Italy.

Meanwhile, the slothful quality of Guy’s old military life finds fresh expression in the once seemingly inexhaustible Ben Ritchie-Hook, who resurfaces in Yugoslavia. The despair that has always seethed beneath Ritchie-Hook’s incessant “biffing” surfaces when

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<sup>19</sup> As Frank Kermode points out, “The Death Wish” “reflects a self-diagnosis as well as the anomie of the world in general as the author saw it, not only in 1945, but at the time of writing” (Kermode xxviii). Indeed at the time of Waugh’s death, “Laura and the children agreed that he had long prayed for death” (Patey 364). Cf. Waugh’s “Sloth.”

he realizes that his career in the active services has come to an end. When a demonstration attack by the partisans upon a small garrison is planned for the observation of American and British commanders, Ritchie-Hook reckons it will be the last chance he has “to hear a shot fired in anger,” and in accord with his genius for subterfuge, he infiltrates the fight (283). The attack is botched and then postponed in light of news that German troops are *en route*. Yet at the last moment “[t]wo figures,” Ritchie-Hook and the opportunistic and invulnerable photographer Sneiffel advance upon the walls of the base. Though Ritchie-Hook gestures to the partisans obscured in the scrub, none follows. Ritchie-Hook manages to reach the base of the wall before he is “flung down dead” by snipers’ bullets. Sneiffel meanwhile emerges with career-making close-ups of Ritchie-Hook’s final moments. When Guy tells his former Brigadier’s long-time batman of Ritchie-Hook’s demise, the man replies tellingly: “He was fair asking to cop one. As you’ll remember, sir, he always spoke very straight and more than once he’s said to me right out: ‘Dawkins, I wish those bastards would shoot better. I don’t want to go home’” (289). Ritchie-Hook, a god of Guy’s halcyon days in the Halberdiers, is exposed as a man consumed by sloth-like despair, who ultimately succumbs to the Death Wish.

Back in England, Ludovic, who once saved Guy’s life in a feat of super-human strength and stamina, has sunk into deep torpor. He is now an inert, isolated, and half-crazed commandant of a paratrooper training center. Having established himself as a something of a literary figure for a collection of spare and sharp-witted *pensées*, his torpor presents now itself in a flurry of mindless literary activity—much as Guy had



masked his own torpor in the activities of the Halberdiers—that results in a massive, melancholic novel entitled “*The Death Wish*” (244).<sup>20</sup>

Ludovic, a nuanced and somewhat perplexing character, has drawn much critical speculation. What is clear is that in *Unconditional Surrender*, Ludovic serves as Guy’s double (Patey 354). Much as Apthorpe shadowed Guy through the relatively straightforward and innocent world of *Men at Arms*, Ludovic’s and Guy’s fates are inversely related in the complex, disintegrating world of *Unconditional Surrender*. Waugh painstakingly draws parallels between the two characters. As Guy had dedicated himself by swearing on the sword of Sir Roger, Ludovic visits the Sword of Stalingrad in an act of quasi-veneration (Patey 354). Waugh even has Ludovic recall, as Guy had done to Apthorpe in *Men at Arms*, the Chestertonian dictum: “The best place to hide a leaf is in a tree” (*Men* 187, *Unconditional* 115). Throughout *Unconditional Surrender*, as Guy becomes spiritually renewed, Ludovic, haunted by the murders he committed in Crete and helpless to expiate his guilt, “spiritually dies” (Patey 354). As we discover in the Epilogue of *Unconditional Surrender*, Guy later sells the Castello Crouchback, the original site of his own spiritual desolation, to none other than Ludovic, who presumably immures himself in the permanent despair that might well have been Guy’s own (310).

Ritchie-Hook and Ludovic, along with many other characters, such as Trimmer and General Whale, are both the victims and perpetrators of a dying and cheaply pragmatic secular humanism. The assumption among most of Trilogy’s characters is that the mere possibility of victory renders the war desirable. The short-sightedness of this view ironically becomes a source of despair for characters such as General Whale and

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<sup>20</sup> For excellent discussions of how Waugh uses this and other episodes in the Trilogy to parody himself and his earlier work, especially *Brideshead Revisited*, see Patey 355 and O’Hare.

Ben Ritchie-Hook, who, in spite of victory, lose the battle for hope. From the earliest pages of *Men at Arms* onward, Waugh reminds us that most of his cast has little concern for why Britain is fighting. While Guy naively believes in the justice of the British cause, he correctly sees from the start that Britain's abandonment of Poland is a betrayal and a partial forfeiture of justice:

Russia invaded Poland. Guy found no sympathy among these other old soldiers [at his club Bellamy's] for his own hot indignation.

"My dear fellow, we've got quite enough on our hands as it is. We can't go to war with the whole world."

"Then why go to war to at all? If all we want is prosperity, the hardest bargain Hitler made would be preferable to victory. If we are concerned with justice the Russians are as guilty as the Germans."

"Justice?" said the old soldiers. "Justice?" (*Men* 21)

Throughout the trilogy, Guy finds himself almost completely alone in his concern for the justice of Britain's cause. The point is reinforced later in *Men at Arms*, where a newly-issued Army Training Memorandum begins:

*"What are we fighting for?"* The Training Memorandum mentioned with shame that many private soldiers had been found to entertain hazy ideas on the subject. Could [Guy's brother-in-law and MP] Box-Bender have given a clear answer? Guy wondered. Could Ritchie-Hook? Had he any idea what all this biffing was for? Had General Ironside himself? (219)<sup>21</sup>

Though, as we learn later in this passage, Guy is still persuaded that Britain's situation satisfies the requirements for a just war, he also understands that his contemporaries care nothing for justice and cannot or will not search for any real *telos* to justify the fight.

Against this exhausted humanism, Waugh sets the communists, whose staunch ideology and vigor prompt Waugh to portray them, as he had done the Halberdiers in *Men at Arms*, as a kind of false Church. Whereas the Halberdiers had been described as a high church, rich with ceremony and custom, the communists more closely resemble the

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, just after Guy's dispute over the question of justice, Box-Bender had side-stepped Guy's question, "What are we fighting for?" (22).

early Church in the era of Roman persecution.<sup>22</sup> Joe Cattermole, a former Cambridge professor of philosophy who has campaigned with the Yugoslavs, has been won over by the partisans: “‘The partisans are a revelation—literally.’ . . . when he spoke of his comrades in arms it was with something keener than loyalty . . . a counterfeit almost of mystical love” (213). Cattermole then recounts to Guy the selflessness and ardor of the partisan forces:

“Officers and men,” he proclaimed exuberantly, “share the same rations and quarters. And women too. . . . Lying together, sometimes for warmth, under the same blanket, but in absolute celibacy. Patriotic passion has entirely extruded sex. The girl partisans are something you will never have seen before. . . . I have seen spectacles of courage of which I should have been sceptical in the best authenticated classical text. Even when we have anaesthetics the girls refuse to take them. I have seen them endure excruciating operations without flinching, sometimes breaking into song as the surgeon probed, in order to prove their manhood. Well, you will see for yourself. It is a transforming experience” (213)

Holiness and devotion have been replaced by “Manhood,” but like the Christian martyrs, whose embrace of suffering fostered faith in others, the fervor of the partisans has indeed “transformed” Cattermole. The nameless major who appears throughout the Trilogy tells Guy: “Joe’s a queer fellow . . . works like the devil. Takes everything off my shoulders—and [Brigadier] Cape’s. . . . Joe likes everyone—even the Jugs. Awfully good-natured fellow, Joe; always ready to stand in and take extra duty” (200). The nameless major—whose haphazard career, like Guy’s own, serves an apt symbol of military inefficiency—is pleasantly confounded by Cattermole’s zeal.

Waugh saw in communism the prime opponent of the Church in the battle for the hearts and minds of Europeans. Here, as elsewhere, Waugh makes his case that

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<sup>22</sup> Ironically, one of the main undercurrents of *Unconditional Surrender* is the theme of the return of persecution of Christianity to Europe.

humanism not grounded in Christianity stands little chance against totalitarian fanaticism.

In both the Yugoslavs and Cattermole, Waugh finds what D'Arcy describes as

“[p]ersonal life suffering . . . by an appeal to its so-called better nature to belong to some movement or to espouse some cause. . . . [and] worship[] before an idol” (*Mind* 323).

Against secular humanism and communism, Waugh offers in *Guy* a Catholic view of history in which a historical *telos* and an individual purpose work in consonance. And yet *Guy* is afforded no facile sense of joy or fulfillment after accepting his vocational life as father and husband. Soon after arriving in Bari, one of *Guy*'s new acquaintances says,

“Crouchback has the death wish.”  
“Have you?” asked the Brigadier with a show of disapproval.  
“Have I?” said *Guy*.  
“I recognized it the moment we met . . .” (219).

*Guy* recognizes the truth of the observation. The next day he confesses:

“Father I wish to die.”  
. . . .  
“Yes. You have attempted suicide?”  
“No.”  
“Of what then, are you accusing yourself? To wish to die is quite usual today. It may even be a very good disposition. You do not accuse yourself of despair?”  
“No, father; presumption. I am not fit to die.” (220)

Though the priest considers *Guy*'s self-accusation a “mere scruple,” it nonetheless may surprise the reader that *Guy* should still wish to die. Has or has he not left behind his old “despair”? Is he in fact on the same path as Ritchie-Hook and Ludovic? The answer lies in the confession.

The sin of presumption occurs when, in the words of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, a “soul [], because of a badly regulated reliance on God's mercy and power, hopes for salvation without doing anything to deserve it, or for pardon of his sins without repenting

of them” (“Presumption”). What Guy is accusing himself of is clear. Knowing now his unique path to sanctification, a part of him wishes not to undertake it. If he shirks his vocation, he presumes upon his salvation. Thus, though Guy is still tempted toward sloth, he is now able to confess it. Together with his intention to repent and pursue his vocation, this sets him apart from his one-time fellows.

Yet Guy’s troubles do not end even there. Vocation teaches charity, but in his attempt to help a group of Jewish refugees, Guy learns in an especially painful way the Thomistic principle of double-effect. In a fallen world, even charitable acts can have dire consequences. At first Guy correctly though uncharitably avoids helping this group because they are “simply not [his] business” (230). A few weeks later, when the UNRRA<sup>23</sup> signals Guy to make a report on “*displaced persons*,” they become his business (231). But it soon becomes a personal matter, for Guy’s rarely robust charity awakens toward these refugees, especially a young couple named the Kanyis, and he toils diligently for their safety and comfort.

Ironically, Guy’s determination to act with charity toward the Kanyis leads to their execution. Months later, when Guy learns that the Jews have finally escaped, he is surprised to learn that the Kanyis are not among them. The British communist Gilpin explains: “They were a thoroughly shady couple. . . . A whole heap of American counter-revolutionary propaganda [Guy’s gift of magazines] was found in their room. . . . They were tried by a People’s Court. You may be sure justice was done” (305). In “Compassion,” the 1949 short story from which the episode is adapted, the agnostic Major Gordon, Guy’s analogue, laments the death of the Kanyis to a chaplain and the story concludes:

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<sup>23</sup> United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

“You musn’t judge actions by their apparent success. Everything you did was good in itself.”

“A fat lot of good it did the Kanyis.”

“No. But don’t you think it just possible that *they* did *you* good? No suffering need ever be wasted. It is just as much a part of Charity to receive cheerfully as to give” . . . .

“I’d like you to tell me a bit more about that”, said Major Gordon.  
(468)

In adapting the story to the Trilogy, Waugh omits this conversation. Presumably, as a Catholic, Guy would already be aware of the truth expressed by the chaplain. However, the omission still represents a denial of consolation and sympathy, and Guy returns to England in burdened by a sense of defeat.

However, it is Mme. Kanyi who provides Guy with a final moment of self-understanding by incisively explaining the relation of the death wish to the war itself:

“Is there any place that is free from evil? It is too simple to say that only the Nazis wanted war. These communists wanted it too. It was the only way in which they could come to power. Many of my people wanted it, to be revenged on the Germans, to hasten the creation of the national state. It seems to me there was a will to war, a death wish, everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war. They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. They would accept hardships in recompense for having been selfish and lazy. Danger justified privilege. I knew Italians—not very many perhaps—who felt this. Were there none in England?”

“God forgive me,” said Guy. “I was one of them.” (300)

Through Mme. Kanyi’s words, Guy once again sees with clarity his old flaws, and his new understanding that honor lies in the pursuit of his vocation is reinforced.

Book Three of *Unconditional Surrender* thus serves as a nuanced and compelling dénouement for the Trilogy. As Guy’s confession of presumption indicates, the pursuit and fulfillment of his vocation does not mean that he is henceforth immune to sloth. As a faithful and newly reinvigorated Catholic who now sees his purpose in life, his persistent “wish to die” can be nothing else than a sense of tedium toward that purpose. However,

his vocation enables him to recognize sloth, even as it furnishes him with a weapon against it. Nor does his vocation allow Guy an easy sense of fulfillment and joy. On the contrary, after accepting his vocation he feels more keenly the force of evil acts that war with mercy and charity. Because of the charity that Guy's vocation awakens within him, the plight of the Jewish refugees affects him more profoundly than almost any other episode in the Trilogy.<sup>24</sup> The claim he allows the Kanyis to make on his heart means that he will have to live with the painful knowledge that he had unwittingly brought about their deaths.

Nevertheless, Guy's sacramental vision has been restored. Though this does not mean that the battle is over and that his life's course is settled and secure, it does mean that Guy can once more grasp the means of salvation that once seemed destroyed by Virginia's abandonment. In the fight against sloth, he need look no further than his adopted son, for, in his vocation to raise this child to maturity, he can now see the sacramental operation of grace within the human order.

Even then Waugh refuses to bid farewell to Guy without one final touch of irony. In the Epilogue of *Unconditional Surrender*, set during the Festival of Britain in 1951, we learn that Guy has married Domenica Plessington, a distant relation, and fathered children, including two sons. Yet it is little Trimmer, not Guy's biological son, who will take his place as the head of the Crouchback family. In *Sword of Honour* (1965), Waugh

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<sup>24</sup> When an airplane scheduled to rescue the refugees is unable to land, Guy offers a prayer more heart-felt than any besides that in which he asks for his vocation: "Please God make it alright. You've done things like this before. Just send a wind. Please God send a wind" (294). His concern for them stands in marked contrast to others in need throughout the *Trilogy*. When in *Officers and Gentlemen* at Crete an air attack leaves troops seriously wounded in the road, others go to their aid while Guy remains in the shade, refusing to involve himself (256).

omitted these children<sup>25</sup> because many concluded along with Box-Bender that, “things have turned out very conveniently for Guy” (710). Waugh had intended the appearance of natural children to strike an ironic note, for Guy could not disinherit Trimmer’s child without forfeiting his vocation.

Waugh’s own reading of this scene appears unnecessarily harsh, as though little Trimmer would be incapable of bringing joy into Guy’s life, or as though the disinheritance of his biological children would outweigh the joy of being given them. In any case, the original ending is superior: Guy has ample natural grounds for joy, yet the poignancy of raising Trimmer’s child will always recall him to the supernatural *telos* of his vocation.

#### *VIII: Conclusion*

As in *Helena*, what Waugh aims ultimately to show in *Sword of Honour* is that vocation, while being perfectly personal and unique, also participates in the providential unfolding of history. For Waugh, as for the *Nouvelle* theologians, history is a theological category. Without a serious belief in the action of Providence within the historical order, faith easily slips into the domain of the merely private. One aspect of Guy’s spiritual growth is emergence of his faith into (to use Daniélou’s phrase) the order of charity. In the opening pages of *Men at Arms*, as a cab driver conducts him along the first leg of his journey to England, we learn that, “Sometimes he imagined himself serving the last mass for the last Pope in a catacomb at the end of the world” (11). The image is no mere idle

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<sup>25</sup> Waugh wrote to Anthony Powell, “I am disconcerted to find I have given the general impression of a ‘happy ending’. This was far from my intention. The mistake was allowing Guy legitimate offspring. They shall be deleted in any subsequent edition. I thought it more ironical that there should be real heirs of the Blessed Gervase Crouchback dispossessed by Trimmer but I plainly failed to make that clear. So no nippers for Guy & Domenica in Penguin” (“To Anthony Powell” 579).



daydream or morbid fascination for Guy, but rather a cherished image, for he does in fact keep his faith as private as he can: “He never went to communion on Sundays, slipping into the church when few others were about” (11). As though in protest against Guy’s thoughts, the fascist cab driver interrupts: “History is a living force” (11). Behind his mimicry of official rhetoric, an ironically truthful retort to Guy’s solipsistic faith emerges. Because history is, finally, guided by Providence, it is indeed a living force, and Guy must find his proper place in it or lose his faith.

In this light, another dimension of the trilogy’s many references to the liturgical year becomes evident. Douglas Patey has remarked that the narrator’s habit of dating of events by the liturgical calendar serves the purpose of showing the “ironic distance” between “the human world of frustration and corruption, and the transcendent, orderly reality of God” (355). While this is partially true, it does not express the entire purpose of the liturgical references. Henri de Lubac contends that the Church constantly serves as a witness to the world that the created order has a sacramental character, for “. . . it is neither the natural cycle nor some extra-cosmic deliverance that is portrayed by her liturgical year: it is the vast history of our redemption” (*Catholicism* 153). What else is the liturgical calendar than the remembrance of divine action within the “human world of frustration,” a reminder that the two realms, while distinct, are never independent of each other.

These liturgical references bear witness in Waugh’s fictitious world, as the liturgical practices of the Church are intended always to do, to the transcendent significance of history. The regular turn of the liturgical year demonstrate the Church’s *kairotic* understanding of history. However disordered or disastrous history may seem,

the Church must persistently acclaim that history is underwritten by a deeper and broader reality, that of Sacred history properly speaking. Sacred history consists not only of the events commemorated by the liturgical year itself, but also of God's ongoing presence within human civilization. As Daniélou explains,

the history of civilization . . . is to be regarded as series of *καίροι*, moments of decision, crisis, each representing at once the condemnation of a society that has committed the sin of *ὑβρις* [hubris] in the pride of life—each consisting also in a parallel renewal of the church through purgation. These decisive moments, times and seasons, each reflect the supreme *καίρος* of the passion and resurrection of Jesus, as they also anticipate the ultimate *καίρος* of the Last Judgement (*Lord* 32-33).

These reflections prove helpful when considering the grim context of *Sword of Honour*: the trilogy does not serve as an epitaph for the Church any more than *Helena* constitutes a triumphal paean to the Constantinian age, but rather follows the Church through a dark hour that, as it does for Guy, shall finally prevail against the gates of Hell.

Guy's vocation dispels his defeatist fantasy of serving the world's final Mass, and sends him instead back into the providential stream of history. Waugh seasons the novels chronological events with allusions to the liturgical year, so that we are primed to follow Guy when he recognizes the presence of the supernatural within the natural—especially in the form of his vocation—as his weapon against sloth and as the unique path by which he will work out his salvation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI used his Christmas address to the Roman Curia partly to speak to the legacy of the Second Vatican Council, 40 years after its close. First, Benedict acknowledged that the implementation of the Council's teachings began slowly and is still ongoing. The Council's legacy, he continues, is contested by "two contrary hermeneutics [that] came face to face and quarrelled [*sic*] with each other. One caused confusion, the other, silently but more and more visibly, bore and is bearing fruit." These two hermeneutics he names "a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture" and a "hermeneutic of reform," of "renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us." The latter of the two has brought about "new life" and "new fruit ripened." The former is to be identified not with reactionaries who lament the reforms of the council but by those who claim that "the texts of the Council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the Council" because "they are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless."

He holds that the task of the Council was to "determine in a new way the relationship between the Church and the modern era," not to orient the Church unreservedly toward it. Those who thought that unbridled accommodation to modernity "would transform everything into pure harmony, had underestimated the inner tensions as well as the contradictions inherent in the modern epoch." Moreover, "[the] Gospel

parables [of the talents] express the dynamic of fidelity required in the Lord's service; and through them it becomes clear that, as in a Council, the dynamic and fidelity must converge.” In other words, the task of the Council was not merely to define the Church’s relationship to the modern age, but do so by drawing upon and remaining faithful to its unique resource: Tradition:

[t]he Church, both before and after the Council, was and is the same Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, journeying on through time; she continues “her pilgrimage amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God”, proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes.

Here Benedict picks up on the paradoxical note struck in *Lumen Gentium*, one of the central documents produced by the Council: the Church must be at once old and new. It must be prepared to speak to new manifestations of humankind’s needs, but it must always do so by bringing forth and making present its permanent mysteries.

In *Lumen Gentium* the Council Fathers assert that this mysterious quality of the Church is “by no weak analogy . . . compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body” (*Lumen Gentium* section 8). The Council, then, affirmed a deeply sacramental ecclesiology, describing the Church as belonging at once in both the natural and supernatural orders, especially as it creates supernatural mysteries in its sacraments.

Moreover, the Council Fathers extend this sacramental sensibility to the realm of vocation, taking care to address the situation of the laity. Like the church itself, individual believers find themselves in two distinct realities that must be delineated: “Because of the very economy of salvation the faithful should learn how to distinguish carefully between

those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society” (*Lumen Gentium* 36). Simultaneously, believers must “strive to reconcile the two” (36). The laity in particular “by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (31). They live within a complex of everyday, worldly realities “from which the very web of their existence is woven” (31). The effect of this undertaking is twofold. First, they participate in the providential unfolding of history by “work[ing] for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity” (31). Simultaneously, in pursuing their unique vocations, they participate in their own sanctification:

The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. . . . Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith . . . (41)

According to the Council Fathers, vocation is at once unique and universal. Moreover, vocation makes present the love of Christ to others, and accomplishes the sanctifying work of the Spirit in those who pursue it.

These are the themes of Waugh’s later work. For Waugh, vocation became a primary means by which we might recover a sacramental ontology, by which the supernatural might, even if not “ever more lively than the humdrum world about [us],” still be made manifest in and through it. Likewise, the *Nouvelle* theologians sought to heal the rift between theology and life. In “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” the article that brought *Nouvelle Théologie* into the crucible of controversy,

Daniélou makes the bold claim: “What men of today, who live in the world, ask of theology is that it explain to them the meaning of their lives. It is no longer possible, as it once was, to separate theology and spirituality”<sup>1</sup> (17). In several ways—including a return to the sources, a recovery of history as a theological category, and the restoration of sacramental mystery to the heart of the faith—these theologians sought not only to restore more authentically Christian practice of theology, but, in so doing, to help Christians see how fully their lives are united to Christ.

As I have tried to demonstrate, Waugh also grappled with this same basic concern. I have contended that Waugh’s special contribution to this sacramental way of thinking and living is vocation, understood as the participation of Christians both in their own sanctification and the providential unfolding of history. This is a primary means by which the rift between theology and life—and the sloth that often results from this rift—may be overcome.

What I hope has become clear is that Waugh’s longstanding reputation as a reactionary Catholic is simply unjust. Rather, his art resonates with one of the predominant theological movements of the century, one whose misunderstood conservatism, like Waugh’s own, rejected change for change’s sake and frivolous novelty, and yet saw that theology of its day needed profound correction. The paradoxical conclusion reached by this movement was that the Church, in order to address the needs of the day, must look to its own Tradition, its own Sacraments, and, ultimately, its very Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> “Ce que des homes d’aujourd’hui, vivant dans le monde, demanderont donc à la théologie, c’est de leur expliquer le sens of leur vie. Il n’est plus possible de dissocier, comme on l’a trop fait autrefois, théologie et spiritualité.”

Vatican II produced an ecclesiology and a lay spirituality consonant with those advocated by the *Nouvelle* theologians and, perhaps surprisingly, also embodied in the mature fiction of Evelyn Waugh. As Benedict XVI has pointed out, these aspects of the Council continue to be realized well into the twenty-first century. Waugh's impressions of the Second Vatican Council were not wholly false. Nor, had he seen the complete picture, would he have supported the Council wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, a more thorough exploration of Waugh's relation to twentieth-century Catholic theology, and therefore a reappraisal of Waugh's relation to the Council, was considerably overdue. As the Church moves further into the twenty-first century, Waugh's canon can be an instructive companion on the journey.

Waugh's accomplishment as a literary craftsman is beyond question, but his Catholicism has too often been regarded as either accidental or positively harmful to his artistry. I have tried to demonstrate how Waugh's craft *depends* upon his theology, and, by illuminating his profoundly sacramental depiction of reality, how it reveals his importance for contemporary readers who have taken up the perennial quest to find meaning and purpose in their lives. In answer to Maurice Blondel's ever-pressing question, "Yes or no, does human life make sense and does man have a destiny?" Waugh's canon answers, finally, "Yes."

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