Théologiques
Revue interdisciplinaire d'études religieuses

Théologiques

Gregory Baum on Nationalism and Ethics
The Case of Quebec

David Seljak

Volume 29, numéro 1, 2021

Hommage à Gregory Baum

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088159ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1088159ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Institut d'études religieuses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

1188-7109 (imprimé)
1492-1413 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Seljak, D. (2021). Gregory Baum on Nationalism and Ethics: The Case of Quebec. *Théologiques*, *29*(1), 164–189. https://doi.org/10.7202/1088159ar

Résumé de l'article

Suite à son arrivée au Québec en 1986, le théologien catholique Gregory Baum a articulé une éthique du nationalisme en examinant les oeuvres de penseurs religieux ayant épousé une appréciation critique des nations et du nationalisme. Baum a soutenu que, bien que le nationalisme puisse faire la promotion du chauvinisme et même de la violence, il pouvait aussi servir de mode de défense contre le colonialisme et l'impérialisme des systèmes universalisants de gouvernance. Ce sont les expériences de Baum en Allemagne, en Ontario et surtout au Québec qui, ensemble avec sa *théologie critique*, l'ont sensibilisé à l'ambigüité morale du nationalisme. Cet article décrit comment celles-ci ont influencé sa critique éthique du nationalisme en général et des projets nationalistes québécois en particulier. L'analyse de Baum a tenté d'établir des critères pour des formes acceptables de nationalisme; selon lui, l'idéologie dominante au Québec satisfaisait ces critères. Dans cet article, nous démontrons que la vie de Baum et son oeuvre théorique sont intimement liées, et qu'il est indispensable de comprendre son expérience du nationalisme, surtout au Québec, afin d'apprécier pleinement son analyse de projets nationalistes.

Théologiques 29/1 (2021) p. 164-189

Gregory Baum on Nationalism and Ethics

The Case of Quebec

David SELJAK*
St. Jerome's University
Waterloo, Ontario

In a development that would have astounded scholars only 30 years ago, nationalist and so-called "populist" revolts against globalization, many with strong connections to religion, have sprung up around the world. The Hindutva movement in India, Islamic groups committed to decolonization, Burmese nationalism promoted by Buddhist monks who demonize Muslims, the rise of Christian nationalism in the republics of the former Soviet Union, the influence of conservative religion in U.S. politics, as well as the role of religious revivalism in several Latin American states have demonstrated that religion and nationalism remain vital forces (Juergensmeyer 2010). How strange that would appear to those scholars, media pundits, and policy makers who, in the aftermath of the collapse of communism, assumed that both religion and nationalism were spent forces, replaced by secularism and the expansive cosmopolitanism promoted by globalization.

However, it was precisely at this time, that is, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when it appeared that both religion and nationalism were destined for the dustbin of history, that the Canadian Roman Catholic theologian Gregory Baum developed a faith-based ethics of

* David Seljak is Professor of Religious Studies at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, Ontario, and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Waterloo. Along with Paul Bramadat, he co-edited *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (2005) and *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (2008). From 2005 to 2018, he served as the editor of *The Ecumenist: A Journal of Theology, Culture and Society*, founded by Gregory Baum in 1962 and published by Novalis. From 2018-2020 he served as the Coordinating Editor of its successor, *Critical Theology*.

nationalism that took its inspiration from the response of the Catholic Church in Quebec to the rise of a secular nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Baum celebrated Quebec's formal ecclesiastical participation in the 1980 referendum on sovereignty-association, arguing that its theologians and bishops had developed the first substantial ethics of nationalism in the Catholic world. The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, to introduce readers to Baum's ethics of nationalism at a time when the relationship of religion to nationalism has become critically important; and second, to demonstrate that while Baum attributed the central insights of this ethics of nationalism to several religious thinkers along with the bishops of Quebec, his ethics of nationalism were, in fact, an original contribution generated by his critical reflection on his experience of nations and nationalism in Germany, Canada, and, especially, Quebec, from the perspective of his critical theology. Given that nationalism – and religious nationalism in particular – has re-emerged as a defense against the imperialism of universalizing systems of governance, especially neoliberalism (Juergensmeyer 2010), it is important to find a means of reconciling the claims of the local and the global, the particular and the universal.

Baum developed a sophisticated religious ethics of nationalism that attempted to reconcile the universalism to which he was exposed both by Catholicism and Enlightenment humanism with his appreciation of the particular, in this case, the nation or *ethnie*. While he appreciated the universalism both of Christianity and the Enlightenment, which he saw promoting international solidarity, he argued that every universalist project could become a tool of imperialism. In the face of this imperialism, Baum defended national self-determination, even if he understood that nationalism had the potential to promote chauvinism, isolationism, and self-interest. However, he believed it could also create a horizon of deep meaning for individuals and communities and foster a sense of community, history, and destiny which inspired solidarity. In this way nationalism protected society against both external pressures of imperialism and internal centrifugal forces of personal selfishness, sub-group loyalty, and regionalism. For example, Baum appreciated any nationalist project that promoted social solidarity based on a shared culture with deep historical roots as a means of resisting the inauthentic

universalism of the free-market system (or its now defunct competitor, international communism). However, his support for a nationalist project depended on whether it promoted democracy, social justice, and solidarity at home and abroad. Nationalism had to inspire people to universal encounter, dialogue, cooperation, justice, and solidarity both domestically and internationally. In other words, he argued that nationalism could be an ethically acceptable form of particular identity and solidarity if it opened itself to an authentic universalism. What was required was a set of ethical criteria by which one could justify any particular nationalist project.

While he claimed that he had found these criteria in the works of certain religious thinkers and the Quebec Church, Baum's yes-and-no approach to nationalism, with its attempt to reconcile particularism and universalism, was rooted in his critical theology and his experience of nationalism in Nazi Germany as well as in Canada and Quebec. The difficulty in pursuing such a hypothesis is that Baum left behind no archive of papers or letters[1]. He wrote no autobiography. Only in 2017, the last year of his life, did he publish an intellectual memoire (Baum 2017), in which he reflected upon his theological development in relation to his personal life. In one other article (Baum 2010), he discussed the influence that moving to Quebec had on his theology[2]. Hence, the only way to uncover the connection between his ethics of nationalism and experience (including his formulation of critical theology) is to draw connections between his writing on nationalism, his theological writing, and his life circumstances. This paper therefore focuses on Baum's writing on the ethics of nationalism, contextualizing it in his broader theological development and life experiences.

In his ethics of nationalism, his critical theology, and his sense of personal identity, Baum was deeply concerned with integrating the particular and the universal – that is, the particular experiences and culture of a national group and humanity writ large, his particular vision of Roman Catholicism and global Catholic community as well as of the world's religions, his identification with Germany, Canada, and Quebec,

---

[1] Baum told me that when he retired, the Library and Archives Canada asked for his paper, and he had to tell them that he had kept nothing of his extensive correspondence or papers.

[2] In 1975, Baum published an edited volume, *Journeys: The impact of personal experience on religious thought.* However, his chapter contained little autobiographical reflection.

and his desire for connection to and solidarity with all humanity. In each of these, Baum attempted to reconcile the competing demands of the particular and the universal by adopting a kind of "rooted cosmopolitanism[3]", an identity committed to encounter, dialogue, cooperation, justice, and solidarity, and marked by attachment to one's own society and culture as well as openness to others.

Understanding these connections is important not just because they give insight into the nature and dynamics of Baum's critical theology and contextual, critical theology in general. More importantly, understanding these connections allows us to develop an ethics of nationalism that appreciates the moral ambiguity of nationalism, especially with regards to its emphasis on particularism and its relationship to globalism and other forms of universalism. Because the resurgence of religious nationalism today tends to polarize opinion into two camps, the nationalists and the globalists – both claiming the moral high ground (Hazony 2018, 1-13) – we need an ethics of nationalism that allows us to appreciate the local and the global. We also need religious reflection on nationalism. Baum argued that if religion and nationalism were going to continue to be important forces in the world, the Christian communities needed to develop ethical responses to them. Given that religion had too often been coopted into destructive nationalist projects, he was dismayed that so few religious institutions had developed a formal ethics of nationalism (Baum 2001a, 5-6). Besides allowing us to understand the importance of reconciling the particular and the universal in the ethics of nationalism, revisiting Baum's ethics of nationalism allows us to begin a revitalization of the Catholic ethics of nationalism that can contribute to broader debates on the role of religion and nationalism in protests we see today against globalizing forces. Such a review begins with Baum's experience of nationalism in three contexts: Germany, Ontario, and Quebec.

[3] I take the term from the debates in political philosophy around the relationship between nationalism and multiculturalism. See, for example, Kymlicka and Walker (2012).

1 Baum's experience of nationalism

Gerhard Albert Baum (Gregory was the name given to him when he became a priest) was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1923 to a nominally Protestant family that, unbeknownst to him until the Nazis passed the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, had Jewish roots. He recalls that his life in Germany was one of privilege, and he was educated into German culture, literature, and history, all of which he embraced (Baum 2017, 8). Of course this changed with the rise of Nazism, a particularly chauvinistic and violent form of nationalism that was to destroy his home life, send him and his sister fleeing to the United Kingdom as Jewish refugees in 1939, and lead to the death of his mother in 1942 (Baum 2017, 10). Even so, Baum, who fled Germany when he was 16 years old, never gave up his German identity. He writes, "I refused to allow Hitler to define my identity. I remained a German and treasured the German language" (Baum 2017, 222). As a young immigrant to Canada, he maintained his German language, read German Catholic theological and liturgical literature, and eventually entered the priesthood by joining the German province of the Augustinian Order. Near the end of his life, he applied for and received German citizenship and continued to see himself as a German (particularly as a Berliner) as well as a Canadian and Quebecer (Baum 2017, 222-223).

Baum's attachment to a German national identity was not merely sentimental or nostalgic. Throughout his career, but especially in the 1980s and 1990s, he maintained close contact with progressive German theologians and scholars, frequently lecturing in Berlin and environs where he often addressed German political and religious debates. In 1996, he published *The Church for Others: Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany*, a book that explored the radical theology of the Protestant churches under the German Democratic Republic. In this book, Baum praised the churches for embracing an implicit nationalism in that they formally recognized the GDR as a national state at a time when Western nations, including West Germany, refused to do so (Baum 2001a, 11). Baum recognized that the *Kirchenbund*, the main association of Protestant churches, had to make important compromises with the regime, but he praised it for developing an ethical critique of socialism and for serving as the umbrella for the pro-democracy movements that eventually led to the downfall of the communist regime in 1989 (1996, x). Baum argued that, in

doing so, the *Kirchenbund* had come to define itself as a "national" church, that is, as a "*Volkskirche*," representing the nation and responsible for the whole of society (1996, xvii). He compared the attitude of the *Kirchenbund* to the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec, "which also had been a *Volkskirche*, a church representing a nation, and which, despite the ongoing secularization and the drastic decline of membership, continues to feel responsible for the nation and addresses society and the government on issues of human well-being" (1996, xvii).

While his experience of Nazism made him "spontaneously suspicious of nationalist movements" (Baum 2010, 38), it did not lead him to reject nationalism altogether – partly because in Canada and Quebec he was to encounter more progressive forms of nationalistic thinking. Baum arrived in Canada just shy of his 17th birthday when he was transferred to an internment camp in Quebec as an "enemy alien." At age 36, Baum became a professor at Toronto's University of St. Michael's College, where he became an important Catholic intellectual from 1959 until his move to Quebec in 1986. In Toronto, he had gained national fame for his work on ecumenism and the Jewish-Christian dialogue (he was a *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and wrote the first draft of the section of *Nostra Aetate* that dealt with relations with the Jews) as well as for his outspoken opposition to the Vatican on issues of papal authority, especially in regard to the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. In Ontario, Baum became deeply attached to Canada and adopted a social-democratic nationalism that inspired Canadians to acts of national and international solidarity. It also protested the domination of American capital in Canada's economy as well as the surrender of culture and society to market forces. He joined the New Democratic Party and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and mingled in a circle of "left-wing intellectuals committed to social justice in Canada and the world" (Baum 2010, 34). Baum admired the progressive wing of the New Democratic Party, the Christian left in Toronto and on the prairies, the cooperative movement in Antigonish, and the Anglophone Christian socialists in Montreal, publishing articles on all of them as well as a book entitled *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*. Unlike many other socialist intellectuals – one thinks immediately of Eric Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm 1990; 2012) – Baum's socialist commitments did not lead him to adopt a left-wing

cosmopolitanism that condemned nationalism. For example, he was proud to be named to the Order of Canada in 1990 and told me that its motto "*Desiderantes meliorem patriam*" ("They desire a better country") was a fine socialist slogan.

Baum came to understand the moral ambiguity of this brand of Canadian nationalism. Later in life, he said that he regretted that Canadian nationalism had blinded him for so long to the suffering and dispossession of Indigenous peoples upon which the Canadian nation was built (Baum 2017, 225). Well before that, he realized that this nationalism – rooted in the English language and British political culture – disadvantaged and marginalized French Canadians and French Quebecers. Even as he taught in Toronto, Baum developed an affinity for Quebec society, spending a sabbatical semester at McGill University in 1977 and an entire year at the Université du Québec à Montréal in 1981 (Baum 2017, 117). During the 1980 referendum on sovereignty-association, he attempted to educate English-Canadians on Quebec nationalism, arguing that the English-Canadian vision of Quebec as one province among 10 equals and French Quebecers as one ethnic minority group among others failed to recognize the unique nature of the Quebecois nation and Quebec state. He recognized that Quebecers formed a nation, a people united by a sense of common heritage and shared destiny and was moved by the attempts of French Quebecers in the 1960s and 1970s to use the state to address historical injustices and inequalities and to protect their language and cultural heritage. Consequently, he found English Canadian arguments for "national unity" facile, arguing that they were, ironically, divisive (Baum 1978) and, when identified with God's will, idolatrous.

However, Baum's integration into and identification with Quebec society only really began after he moved there and was invited in 1986 by the *Centre justice et foi* (CJF) to join the editorial team of the Jesuit journal *Relations.* In his 2017 memoirs, he wrote,

> I considered my work at the editorial committee of *Relations* a great privilege. It allowed me to observe and participate in the political and cultural debates carried on in Quebec society. I was an outsider invited to become an insider. (2017, 118)

He joined the Catholic Left in Montreal, which he says had become his "spiritual home" and became a member of "Quebec's new-style socialist

party, Québec solidaire" (Baum 2010, 36-37). Baum praised Quebec society and the Catholic Church in Quebec when they embraced a "double orientation" that attempted to safeguard Quebec's language and culture while opening themselves to a wider ethnocultural pluralism (Baum 2002). He frequently criticized racism in Quebec (2002, 52-53), praised the Quebec model of *interculturalisme* (2010, 41-42), and celebrated the Bouchard-Taylor Commission's conceptualization of *laïcité ouverte* (2017, 126-127). After 2001, as Quebecers – and especially French Quebecers – became increasingly suspicious of Islam and Muslim immigrants, Baum defended the Muslim community, began attending meetings of *Présence musulmane* in Montreal (Baum 2004), and dedicated himself (for the first time at the age of 80) to the serious study of Islam (Baum 2010, 43; Baum 2017, 154-159). He wrote articles and co-edited a book on Fethullah Gulen, leader of the Hizmet movement in Turkey and wrote publicly defending him after he was accused of organizing a coup by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan[4]. He also wrote articles and published a book on the theology of the important European Muslim thinker Tariq Ramadan (who, after Baum passed away, was accused of sexual harassment and violence and eventually charged with multiple counts of rape)[5].

2 The ambiguity of nationalism

Baum's experiences in Germany, Canada, and Quebec helped to form his sensitivity to the ambiguity of nationalism. He experienced directly its dark side in Nazi Germany and in the post-World-War-II world. However, his experiences in Canada and Quebec convinced him that nationalism had a benevolent side. Nationalism could also lead to a deeper sense of self; that is, it attached individuals to a particular community, a long history, and a deep culture. It provided what Fernand Dumont would call a "*référence*", a horizon of meaning that gave the individual a sense of purpose, direction, and community (Dumont 1993). After his conversion to sociology in the late 1960s, Baum, following Durkheim, interpreted the individual as a social being whose identity was tied to one's community and culture. Since the nation was one such form of community, national identity and

[4] See Baum (2008) and Barnes et Baum (2015).

[5] See Baum (2009a, 2009b).

personal identity were intimately related. Nationalism was also tied to human dignity, since it invited participation in the self-definition of the society upon which one's identity was dependent. Consequently, nationalism allowed individuals to be subjects in the definition of their society and consequently in their definition of their own selves, which was in so many ways dependent on that society. It inspired people to move past self-interest and self-absorption and to make sacrifices for the benefit of the common good and the poor. As such, nationalism could even be reconciled to socialism. Finally, nationalism protected against imperialism. In the post-War era, the de-colonization movements around the world that Baum witnessed (and later wrote about) were often inspired by nationalism. Moreover, the Canadian nationalism Baum experienced in Ontario resisted American economic domination, and the form of Quebec nationalism he supported defended the French language against the cultural inroads of English and U.S. culture it carried as well as the economic domination of Quebec by global capital.

3 Critical theology and nationalism

Baum's analysis of nationalism was also guided by his theological journey. Early in his academic career, he had developed a liberal critique of the Catholic Church, its antidemocratic structure, rigid traditionalism, religious chauvinism, and clericalism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he underwent a profound intellectual conversion, receiving sociological training at the New School for Social Research in New York (Baum 2017, 65-76) and opening himself (largely inspired by his friend Rosemary Radford Reuther) to the theology of liberation (Baum 2017, 65-85). Moved by the classical humanist authors of sociology (Marx, Durkheim, and Weber among others) and his reading of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, the political theology of thinkers like Johan Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, the theology of liberation coming from the Global South, as well as various First World theologies of emancipation, such as feminist theology, Baum developed an original theological outlook, which he called Critical Theology. It amounted to a reading of theology in dialogue with the social sciences and the critical thought of the Late Enlightenment, resulting in the "application of various theories of alienation to the self-understanding in faith of the Christian Church"

(Baum 2006, 169). While his Critical Theology inspired him to embrace democracy, human rights, and other positive elements of the modern world, Baum developed an awareness of the "sinister side" of modernity. He developed a critical distance on modernity that had many parallels with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (Baum 2006, 227-231)[6]. Moreover, despite his radical conclusions, theologically Baum's work remained surprisingly traditional and relied on classical approaches to theology and faith as well as categories such as sin, redemption, and grace. Even so, his "theological reading of sociology" (the subtitle of his most important book *Religion and Alienation*) led him to radically rethink these traditional Christian concepts (Baum 2006, 170-185).

Inspiring him to adopt a yes-and-no attitude towards modernity, Baum's critical theology would have a major impact on his thinking about the ethics of nationalism, allowing him to acknowledge both its humanizing and death-dealing trends. First, it led him to embrace the humanizing and life-giving power of nationalism. Second, it made him sensitive to the importance of the "local" and suspicious of all claims to universal truth. Critical theology was consciously contextual and therefore did not present itself – as classical theology often does – as universally valid. It enters into dialogue with other theologies and strives for (rather than claims *a priori*) universalism. For Baum, the nation was a significant "context" for theology; so theology in Canada would differ from theology done in Latin America (Baum 2007, 239-268; 1987, 66-87). This served as his model for the ideal form of nationalism. He accepted the rights of peoples to define and promote their particular culture but then demanded that they open themselves to global society through encounter, dialogue, cooperation, solidarity, and the search for justice (Baum 2017, 165-166). Just as he valued contextual theology as a means of resisting the theological imperialism and false universalism coming out of Rome, he supported local culture as a means of resisting the hegemonic claims of both capitalism and communism (Baum 2001b).

[6] Raymond Morrow (1991) observes that Baum's critical theology closely paralleled contemporary critical theory, taking the form of a structural analysis of the Church and its surrounding society and an ideological critique of its teaching and practices.

4 Baum's ethics of nationalism

Baum explored his ethical reflection on nationalism most extensively in his book *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics*, which, he always delighted in telling me, was published in 1998 in French translation three years before the English-language original would see the light of day. In this book, he compared the ethical analyses of nationalism by four religious thinkers: the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, Mohandas Gandhi, the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, and the French Quebecois priest, activist, theologian, and sociologist Jacques Grand'Maison. Baum concluded that these thinkers, despite their different historical contexts and religious perspectives, came to a common approach to nationalism that, I would argue, Baum had already made his own.

4.1 Nationalism is a legitimate form of human identity

These authors all began with what Baum called the "Durkheimian argument" that individuals do not exist apart from society and hence enter into their humanity through community (Baum 2001a, 30). We are all products of a particular collectivity, and so our well-being is tied to the well-being of the groups to which we belong. Baum cites *The Socialist Decision*, in which Tillich defends nationalism as a form of the "myth of origins" that could "create solidarity, generate social power, and enable people to engage in joint political action" (Baum 2001a, 65). He also praises Tillich's observation that nationalism protected people against ideological systems, such as liberalism and capitalism, which claimed to represent abstract, universal reason. Such a system, he notes, "estranges people from their emotions, their imagination, their bodies, their communities, and the profound aspirations that transcend their material concerns" (Baum 2001a, 71). Despite its critique of bourgeois society, mainstream socialism also promotes the same universal reason that asks people to abandon "family, tribe, community, religion and nation" (Baum 2001a, 75). Nationalism, for Baum, was a legitimate, even necessary, form of social solidarity.

4.2 Nations are socially constructed

Buber, Gandhi, Tillich, and Grand'Maison agreed that nations were not "natural" but rather (paralleling Benedict Anderson) "imagined" communities (Baum 2001a, 114-117). Baum writes: "They are imagined insofar as they create a sense of comradeship among people who have never met, define boundaries that are not given by nature but by convention, and persuade people that they have the right to determine their future" (115). Hence nationalism was socially constructed, but that did not make it illegitimate. In contrast to authors such as Ernst Gellner (2006) and Eric Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm 1990; 2012), for whom nationalism was nothing more than an invented tradition hiding self-interested claims to power, wealth, and prestige, Baum argued that nationalism was not always a form of false consciousness or manipulation (Baum 2001a, 116). Baum argued that nationalism provided the potential for individuals to define their collective life and consequently the conditions of their own humanity.

5 Nationalism is inherently morally ambiguous

Buber, Gandhi, Tillich, and Grand'Maison all agreed that no form of nationalism escapes its dark side that allows nations to focus on their own self-interest, oppress minorities, and become imperialistic and violent. While nationalism could address imperialism, as Gandhi's nationalism did in India, it could also glorify a specific nation over others and justify imperialism (Baum 2001a, 108-111). It was the very structure of nationalist projects that opened them to this moral ambiguity. For example, Baum observed that by promoting strong in-group solidarity nationalist movements risked generating chauvinism and hostility to "outsiders" (Baum 2001a, 108-111).

5.1 Nationalism need not be a barrier to universalism

While nationalist in their own way, Buber, Gandhi, Tillich, and Grand'Maison all embraced a humanistic universalism. They affirmed the local particular identity as a means of moving towards a program of universal solidarity (Baum 2001a, 111-114). Baum recognized that

globalizing projects often represented a new form of imperialism and suggested that "undifferentiated universalism" always represented "an ideology of domination." He wrote, "To praise cosmopolitanism or universal humanism and assert that we are all citizens of the world is a political message that intends to cut people loose from their cultural roots and assimilate them to a certain Western-style self-understanding" (Baum 2001a, 112). He concludes, "Such forms of universalism are particularisms straining after universal power" (Baum 2001a, 113-114).

In *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics*, Baum defends nationalism in terms of respect for individuals and the communities from which they come and in which they live out their lives. If these lives were not to be shallow and arbitrary, they would have to be rooted in history, community, and a sense of shared destiny. Moreover, he argued that the corollary of the Durkheimian argument is that the right to personal freedom is tied to the right of peoples to self-determination. In the face of imperialism (including neoliberal globalization), nationalism provided a legitimate defense (2001a, 117-120). However, he recognized that nationalism was inherently morally ambiguous, and thus what was needed was clear ethical guidance for supporting a particular nationalist movement.

6 Quebec and Baum's ethics of nationalism

Baum was puzzled that so little religious ethical reflection has centered on nations and nationalism – when his own experience in Quebec showed how important a faith-based ethics of nationalism was. In the Roman Catholic world, Baum observed that, despite a well-developed corpus of ethical reflection on broad social issues, the Church has been virtually silent on nationalism (Baum 2001a, 5). Baum asserted that the first extended, critical reflection on nationalism that provided Catholics with clear ethical guidelines was formulated by the Assemblée des évêques du Québec from 1960 to 1980. During this period, Quebec political parties adopted a more active political nationalism that sought to address the domination of the Quebec economy by large businesses operating in English, the socio-economic disadvantage of francophone Quebecers, and the sense that Quebecers were not "masters in their own house". This agenda, which cut across all of the major political parties, even united federalists and independentists in Quebec. The bishops consistently

affirmed the right of the people of Quebec to address the social injustices that disadvantaged French Quebecers, defend their particular culture, and exercise the right to political self-determination (Baum 1991, 169). Since a particular culture is always transmitted by a specific language, the bishops also defended legislation that protected the French language in a society surrounded by a sea of English-speakers (Baum 1991, 164-167). However, the bishops laid out their most detailed analysis of nationalism just before the 1980 referendum on sovereignty-association. In two public letters, they again affirmed the ethical principle of the right of peoples to self-determination[7] and encouraged citizens to participate in the public debates around Quebec's future. However, guided by Jacques Grand'Maison's 1970 two-volume work *Nationalisme et religion*, the bishops also recognized the moral ambiguity of nationalism as well as its constant temptation to make an idol of the nation (Baum 2010, 28-39). They warned citizens not to identify either option, federalism or independence, with the Gospel and to avoid demonizing their opponents.

Through these letters, Baum argues, the Assemblée des évêques du Québec established a "fourfold ethical proviso" for nationalism. For a nationalist project to be ethical, the bishops argued,

> […] first, it must aim to create a more just and more open society (what is rejected here are forms of nationalism that are non-democratic or that are driven by a national bourgeoisie indifferent to the concerns of workers and peasants); second it must protect the human rights of minorities (what is rejected here is ethnic discrimination); third, it must aim at maintaining peaceful relations with adjacent societies (what is rejected here is an aggressive nationalism guided by expansionist dreams); and fourth, the nation must never be allowed to become the highest good – this would be idolatry. (2017, 125; see also Baum 2010, 38)

Baum felt that the mainstream nationalist movement in Quebec had met the criteria for an ethical form of nationalism set out both in his *Religion, Nationalism, and Ethics* and in the pastoral letters of the Quebec bishops. He believed that Quebecers formed a nation united by a common

[7] Inspired by the post-World War II democratic decolonization movements (which many Quebec nationalists admired), this right was enshrined in the 1966 UN Covenant and was highlighted in Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum progressio* as well as the World Synod of Bishops 1971 document "Justice in the World".

heritage and shared destiny. He was moved by the attempts of French Quebecers to address historical injustices and inequalities and to protect their culture while striving to define a politics of inclusion and participation. He supported legislation to protect the French language since it promoted the unique Quebec culture and addressed a social justice issue in a province in which English had for decades been the language of upward social mobility (Baum 1991, 164-167). He also admired those elements in the nationalist movement that honoured and encouraged the participation of the historical Anglophone Quebec community, the many immigrant and refugee communities (the so-called Allophones), and, most importantly, Indigenous peoples. That being said, Baum refused to identify any particular political arrangement – independence, federalism, or sovereignty-association – with the Gospel message. Given his sincere affection for both Canada and Quebec, Baum hoped that Quebecers could exercise their right to self-determination inside a larger Canadian political framework, but he remained unconvinced by the dominant discourse of multiculturalism that saw Quebec as one province among ten and French Quebecers as one ethnic group among many. He saw this English-Canadian nationalism, and especially its neoliberal version, as an instance of inauthentic universalism. In the afterword of *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics*, he confessed that it was this form of English-Canadian multiculturalism that would force him to reluctantly support the Yes vote in a future referendum on sovereignty (2001a, 147, 150).

7 The personal, the political, and the academic

Baum's attempt to create an ethics of nationalism, rooted as it was in his own experience, highlights two important themes in his work: the connection between personal life and scholarship and the importance of critical theology as contextual theology. After his immersion in sociology and especially his exposure to Mannheim's sociology of knowledge (Baum 1977), Baum understood that intellectual analysis was intimately connected to the personal experiences and social location of the scholar (Baum 1980a, x-xi; Baum 1987, 227-228). So too were theology and ethics (Baum 2007, 245-246). Moreover, one's analysis also depended on one's commitments and that *a prior* commitment to justice affected one's sociological approach, theology, and ethics. One can see how Baum's

personal experience in Germany, Ontario, and Quebec along with his commitment to liberation awakened him to the ambiguity of nationalism and hence the need for a more robust ethical analysis.

That being said, it was Baum's experience in and identification with Quebec society that had the greatest impact on his ethics of nationalism. In an article aimed at an Anglophone Canadian audience, he wrote:

> The way an observer interprets a text or a social reality cannot but reflect his or her own history. This link between interpretation and the observer's historical context is obscured, it seems to me, when we try to understand Quebec society simply through universal concepts taken from philosophy or political science. How we read society is inevitably influenced by our concerns and desires. I cannot think about the Quebec nation without referring to my own experience. (Baum 2001b, 80)

Baum cites his work with *Relations* and Vivre Ensemble at the Centre justice et foi along with his admiration for l'Autre Parole, the Centre St-Pierre, l'Entraide missionaire, Développement et Paix, les Journées Sociales, the many women from religious orders and congregations, and other members of the Catholic left in Quebec as inspirational in terms of the last three decades of his theology and scholarship (Baum 2017, 118-119). Consequently, Baum's ethics of nationalism is – quite literally – unthinkable without his experience in Quebec.

Baum's experience of Quebec, along with the commitment to the poor and marginalized at the heart of critical theology (Baum 1987, 170-178), led him to side with Quebecers in the face of the historical injustices imposed by their more numerous and powerful Anglophone neighbours, both Canadian and American. His decision to write an ethics of nationalism is clearly linked to his decision to side with the striving of Quebecers to address past economic and political injustices and challenge the marginalization of their culture and language, a marginalization that Charles Taylor (1994, 25) reminds us inflicts real harm. While Baum sided with Quebecers, he never lost his critical distance on Quebec nationalism or society. He remained critical of Quebec society when it moved in a neoliberal direction, ignored its cultural heritage, discriminated against minorities, and promoted religious intolerance. Similarly, despite his positive experience in the Quebec church, he criticized it when it became

institutionally self-interested, ignored the poor, or discriminated against women.

8 The universal and the particular

However, just because Baum's articulation of an ethics of nationalism was tied to his particular experience and analysis of Quebec society, does not mean that his conclusions do not have universal significance. People everywhere, he argued, had the right to participate in the self-definition of their societies, to protect their language and culture, and to pursue social justice. Baum believed that the ethical analysis of nationalism developed in the Church of Quebec had something to contribute, not only to Catholic churches or societies, but globally. Baum's ethics involved a tension between the contextual or the particular and the universal, to which he was equally committed. In his book, *Amazing Church*, he writes:

> Because God's merciful self-donation is universal, the followers of Jesus Christ willingly commit themselves to universal solidarity: they want to embrace in love the entire human family, including members of other religions and people without religion. (Baum 2005, 136-137)

Baum was a cosmopolitan in this regard, deeply rooted in the Catholic world but open to the whole human family, which, he believed, shared a common destiny[8]. He celebrated the liberating elements of the Catholic faith as well as those of liberalism, socialism, feminism, environmentalism, and various other social justice movements. However, he recognized these universalist discourses could become the vehicle of imperialism and promote the destruction of a particular people's history and culture. He was suspicious of the "emphasis on cosmopolitanism, globalization, world citizenship, or any form of undifferentiated universalism" (Baum 2001a, 113). He writes: "Such forms of universalisms are particularisms straining after universal power. Successful classes have always tended to regard their own self-understanding as the definition of human nature" (Baum 2001a, 113-114). Baum interpreted the mainstream Canadian understanding of multiculturalism as a particularism masquerading as a universalism. This form of multiculturalism defined

[8] In this regard, Baum's position is defined by "rooted cosmopolitanism." See Kymlicka (2012).

attachment to the past and to a particular identity as backward and irrational (Baum 2001b, 82). He lamented that federalist Anglophone Canadians often adopted a superior tone rooted in ideological liberalism in the face of Quebec's attempts to protect its collective identity and language (Baum 2001a, 141-147; 2001b, 81-81).

While political liberalism represented one form of inauthentic universalization, a more pernicious form was found in economic liberalism. The supposed universalism of neoliberalism and the new global economy it sought to impose, Baum insisted, hid a new imperialism, a new example of a particular ideology straining after universal power. Baum wrote,

> What is the future of nations, and especially small nations, in the context of globalization? All forms of solidarity, secular and religious, are seen as obstacles to free competition and the production of wealth. Decisions about economic development are increasingly made by international financial institutions and transnational corporations, according to their own criteria. No thought is given to the human and social welfare of the nations concerned. It hardly matters if there is chronic large-scale unemployment, if young people have no future, if the health system deteriorates, if unions are under attack, if social inequality increases, or if children in poor families go to bed hungry. (Baum 2001b, 83)

During the 1980s, Baum argued, this allegedly universalist ideology legitimated the creation of a "capitalist empire" defined by a "new politico-economic orientation [...] that sought to enhance the material well-being of a privileged minority and assign to the margins the rest of the globe's populations" (Baum 2006, 224-225).

Baum praised resistance to neoliberal globalization, including efforts in Quebec and elsewhere to create a community-based, worker-controlled, ethical economy (sometimes called the "social economy"). He recognized that this resistance required a common culture of solidarity as well as the political protection and promotion of the national state, both of which represented a turn to the particular. However, the turn to the particular, in this case the national state, did not prohibit attempts to create international solidarity. For example, small-scale enterprises in the local, social economy were open to international cooperation and solidarity with other like-minded operations around the world. Baum writes:

> In the past, nationalism was often contrasted with universalism. However, now that globalization is transforming the relationship between the local and the global, nationalism can lead to global solidarity and create ties of international cooperation". (Baum 2001b, 86)

Authentic universalism, Baum felt, could only be achieved *through* a particular identity that was open to encounter, dialogue, cooperation, justice, and solidarity with others.

Like Buber, Gandhi, Tillich, and Grand'Maison, Baum attempts to balance the often competing demands of universalism and particularism in his ethics of nationalism. He argues that an authentic universalism is rooted in the "recognition of the pluri-national character of humanity" (114). This attempt to reconcile universalism and particularism in his ethics of nationalism is rooted in Baum's critical theology, which, while "striving[9]" for universal validity, recognizes the pluri-religious character of humanity. Baum believed that religious diversity was God's will and argued that Christians should proclaim the truth of the gospel while making room for the integrity of other religions (Baum 2007, 63-65). Consequently, he argued that Catholics have no mission to those deeply engaged in their own religious traditions; for these people, the proper Christian approach was an invitation to dialogue and mutual respect (2017, 162-163). Even within the Catholic community, Baum promoted pluralism by supporting "inculturation" as a means of articulating the meaning of the gospel in dialogue with the particular culture of each society (Baum 2017, 184).

9 A contextual ethics of nationalism

The ethics of nationalism that Baum developed – and usually attributed to others – is certainly an important and original contribution at a time when nationalism and nations have reasserted their role on the global stage. Even so, it reflects the issues, debates, and values of its context and the experiences of its author. For example, it addresses nationalism in the context of a liberal democracy, a well-defined political movement, and a secular state marked by a separation of church and state and, as such, may

[9] Morrow (1991) insightfully identified Baum's theological method as "straining after universality".

not be applicable in other societies, especially those that experienced liberalism, nationalism, and secularism in the context of colonialism[10]. Baum presents us with a contextual ethics of nationalism, a contribution to, rather than the final word, on the topic. It would be a violation of Baum's whole orientation to imagine that he presented it as universally valid.

Indeed, it is limited in important ways and, I would argue, needs to be developed further. First, Baum failed to address the fact that, in settler societies like Canada and Quebec (not to mention the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and others), nationalist projects are always built on the dispossession and suppression of Indigenous peoples, who have their own projects of and claims to self-determination. Settler nationalism is inherently anti-democratic and imperialist in this regard (Moran 2002, 1015-1019). Late in his writings on nationalism, Baum realized this lacuna and lamented that he had not addressed the issue sufficiently. Secondly, Baum neglected an analysis of gender in his ethics of nationalism – mentioning it only in passing (for example, Baum 2001a, 67). Nationalist projects are often defined by the experiences, interests, and imaginations of men and promote ideals of masculinity and femininity that disadvantage women, not to mention individuals of diverse sexual orientations and identities. Joane Nagel argues that nationalism and the building blocks of the national-state system, including state power, citizenship, nationalism, militarism, revolution, political violence, dictatorship, and democracy "are all best understood as masculinist projects, involving masculine institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities" (1998, 243). Despite an emerging scholarship in this area (Banerjee 2005; Mulholland, Montagna *et al*. 2018) and Baum's continuing support for feminist theory, he does not look at the gendered nature of the nationalist imagination and nationalist movements.

Finally, Baum does not look at the issue of nationalism in the context of the environmental crisis. Nationalism and nation-states are

[10] For example, Talal Asad (2003, 7-9) argues that historically liberalism, nationalism, and secularism have served to justify the colonization in the Muslim world. Extending Baum's ethics of nationalism, which assume positive forms of liberal democracy, nationalism, and secularism, to Muslim post-colonial societies would have to address that history of imperialism.

inherently modern and modernizing projects, and, consequently, carry all of the moral ambiguities of modernization – ecological destruction included – that Baum analyzed and critiqued in his critical theology. Because nationalist projects claim absolute sovereignty over a territory, they impose human society, culture, values, and practices on the natural world contained therein and reimagine the land, flora, and fauna as "resources" for the nation to use according to its needs and desires. Moreover, claims to national sovereignty over a territory ignore the international repercussions of the use of resources. The destruction of the Amazon rainforest, for instance, affects all humans, and so an ethics of nationalism needs to address international obligations to safeguard an adequate environment (Batty and Gray, 153). Baum largely ignores the environmental issue in his ethics of nationalism, a serious lacuna, given that the recent resurgence of populist nationalism has presented real challenges to international agreements to address environmental issues (Dervis 2020). Expanding Baum's ethical analysis of nationalism to consider issues of settler colonialism, gender and sexual identity, and environmental issues would deepen its foundations and expand its horizon.

In response to globalization, nationalist movements – many of them deeply connected to religion – have arisen around the globe, dividing those who support a globalizing cosmopolitanism and those who defend national solidarity based on a shared history, culture, and project. Baum sought to reconcile these two positions through encounter, dialogue, cooperation, justice, and solidarity. This method of reconciling the particular and the universal is intimately connected to his personal experience. For example, in his theological memoirs he writes of forming deep bonds with faith-and-justice Christians around the world.

> Despite this experience of universal solidarity, I do not see myself as cosmopolitan or as a citizen of the world: I have been locally involved, socially engaged in the society in which I live, and related to it emotionally, happy to see its cultural achievements and its entry into greater justice, and saddened by its decline and increasing social inequalities. (Baum 2017, 217-218)

Baum was proud of his connections to Germany, Canada, and Quebec – even as he maintained the critical distance necessary for his trenchant ethical analysis of the failings of each. In the last third of his life,

he was loyal to Quebec but remained critical of it. He felt deeply rooted in this small nation but also open to global solidarity. Conversely, while committed to the globalization of solidarity promoted by the Catholic Church's social teaching, he celebrated his particular identities and loyalties. In his theological memoir, he wrote:

> As a Catholic remembering his Jewish and Protestant background, I have no conflict in being a Berliner, a German, a Canadian, and a Québécois. Because these identities are in constant dialogue with one another, they do not tear me apart but, rather, stimulate new thinking and enrich my life. (2017, 217-218)

Baum valued these poles of his particular identity even as he strained after universality through encounter, dialogue, justice, and solidarity. His ethics of nationalism and his sojourn in Quebec allowed him to be rooted in one place, among one people, but open to the world (Seljak 2018, 3).

References

ASAD, T. (2003), *Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003.

BANERJEE, S. (2005), *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*, Albany, State University of New York Press.

BARNES, P. et G. BAUM, (2015), dir., *Conversations on Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement: Dreaming for a Better World*, Lanham, Lexington Books.

BATTY, H. et T. GRAY (1996), « Environmental Rights and National Sovereignty », dans S. CANEY, D. GEORGE et P. JONES, dir., *National Rights, International Obligations*, New York / Waterloo (ON), Routlege / Wilfrid Laurier Press, p. 149-165.

BAUM, G. (1975), *Journeys. The Impact of Personal Experience on Religious Thought*, New York, Paulist Press.

_____ (1977), *Truth beyond Relativism. Karl Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge*, Milwaukee Marquette University Press.

_____ (1978), « Don't stress National Unity, says Gregory Baum. It's Divisive », *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, June 16.

_____ (1980a), *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*, Toronto, James Lorimer.

_____ (1980b), « Introduction », dans G. BAUM, dir., *Sociology and Human Destiny. Essays on Sociology, Religion and Society*, New York, Seabury Press, p. ix-xii.

_____ (1987), *Theology and Society*, New York, Paulist Press.

_____ (1991), *The Church in Quebec*, Ottawa, Novalis.

_____ (1996), *The Church for Others. Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany*, Grand Rapids, Eerdsman.

_____ (1998), *Le nationalisme. Perspectives éthiques et religieuses*, Montréal, Bellarmin.

_____ (2001a), *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's Press.

_____ (2001b), « Nationalism and Social Movements against Market Hegemony », dans L. BLAIR, M. VENNE et R. CHODOS, dir., *Vive Quebec! New Thinking and New Approaches to the Quebec Nation*, Toronto, James Lorimer, p. 80-86.

_____ (2002), « The Church and Pluralism in Quebec », dans P. AIRHART, M. J. LEGGE et G. L. REDCLIFFE, dir., *Doing Ethics in a Pluralist World. Essays in Honour of Roger C. Hutchinson*, Waterloo (ON), Wilfrid Laurier Press, p. 39-56.

_____ (2004), « Islam in Quebec », *The Ecumenist*, 41, p. 6-9.

_____ (2005), *Amazing Church. A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-Century of Change*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books.

_____ (2006), *Religion and Alienation. A Theological Reading of Sociology*, Ottawa, Novalis.

_____ (2007), *Signs of the Times*, Ottawa, Novalis.

_____ (2008), « Fethullah Gülen. Faith and Reason in Islam », *The Ecumenist*, 45, p. 10-13.

_____ (2009a), « Tariq Ramadan, Muslim Reformer », *The Ecumenist*, 46, p. 5-10.

_____ (2009b), *The Theology of Tariq Ramadan. A Catholic perspective*, Toronto, Novalis.

_____ (2010), « How moving to Quebec has affected my theology », *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 26, p. 33-46.

_____ (2017), *The Oil has not run Dry. The Story of my Theological Pathway*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press.

DERVIS, K. (2020), « When Climate Activism and Nationalism collide », *Brookings*, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/when-climate-activism-and-nationalism-collide/

DUMONT, F. (1993), *Genèse de la société québécoise*, Montréal, Boréal.

GELLNER, E. (2006), *Nations and Nationalism*, Malden, Blackwell.

HAZONY, Y. (2018), *The Virtue of Nationalism*, New York, Basic Books.

HOBSBAWM, E. (1990), *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

_____ (2012), « Introduction. Inventing Traditions », dans E. HOBSBAWM et T. RANGER, dir., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 1-14.

JUERGENSMEYER, M. (2010), « The Global Rise of Religious Nationalism », *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 64, p. 262-273.

KYMLICKA, W. et K. WALKER (2012), « Rooted Cosmopolitanism. Canada and the World », dans W. KYMLICKA and K. WALKER, dir., *Rooted Cosmopolitanism. Canada and the World*, Vancouver, UBC Press, p. 1-27.

MORAN, A. (2002), « As Australia decolonizes. Indigenizing Settler Nationalism and the Challenges of Settler/Indigenous Relations », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25/6, p. 1013-1042.

MORROW, Raymond (1991), Straining after Universality. Gregory Baum's Theological Method and Contemporary Social Criticism. *Society For Socialist Studies*. Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, p. 1–15.

MULHOLLAND, J., N. MONTAGNA *et al.* (2018), dir., *Gendering Nationalism. Intersections of Nation, Gender and Sexuality*, Palgrave Macmillan.

NAGEL, J. (1998), « Masculinity and Nationalism. Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21/2, p. 242-268.

SELJAK, D. (1995), *The Reaction of the Roman Catholic Church to the Secularization of Nationalism in Quebec, 1960-1980*, Montreal, McGill University.

_____ (2018), « Gregory of Montreal », *The Ecumenist*, 55, p. 1-3.

SWAN, M. (2017), « Controversial Canadian Theologian Gregory Baum dead at 94 », *Catholic Register*, Toronto, Archdiocese of Toronto, https://www.catholicregister.org/item/26209-controversial-canadian-theologian-gregory-baum-dead-at-94

TAYLOR, C. (1994), « The Politics of Recognition », dans A. GUTMAN, dir., *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 25-73.

Abstract

After moving to Quebec in 1986, Gregory Baum articulated an ethics of nationalism by examining the works of religious thinkers who adopted a critical appreciation of nations and nationalism. Baum argued that, while nationalism could promote chauvinism and even violence, it could also serve as a defense against colonialism and the imperialism of universalizing systems of governance. His sensitivity to the moral ambiguity of nationalism was inspired as much by his experience of nationalism in Germany, Ontario, and, especially, Quebec as by his Critical Theology. Baum's analysis attempted to provide criteria for acceptable forms of nationalism. He believed that mainstream Quebec nationalism met these criteria. This paper attempts to connect Baum's biography and social location with his theoretical work and argues that his ethics of nationalism is unthinkable without an understanding of his experience to Quebec.

Résumé

Suite à son arrivée au Québec en 1986, le théologien catholique Gregory Baum a articulé une éthique du nationalisme en examinant les œuvres de penseurs religieux ayant épousé une appréciation critique des nations et du nationalisme. Baum a soutenu que, bien que le nationalisme puisse faire la promotion du chauvinisme et même de la violence, il pouvait aussi servir de mode de défense contre le colonialisme et l'impérialisme des systèmes universalisants de gouvernance. Ce sont les expériences de Baum en Allemagne, en Ontario et surtout au Québec qui, ensemble avec sa *théologie critique*, l'ont sensibilisé à l'ambigüité morale du nationalisme. Cet article décrit comment celles-ci ont influencé sa critique éthique du nationalisme en général et des projets nationalistes québécois en particulier. L'analyse de Baum a tenté d'établir des critères pour des formes acceptables de nationalisme; selon lui, l'idéologie dominante au Québec satisfaisait ces critères. Dans cet article, nous démontrons que la vie de Baum et son œuvre théorique sont intimement liées, et qu'il est indispensable de comprendre son expérience du nationalisme, surtout au Québec, afin d'apprécier pleinement son analyse de projets nationalistes.