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*Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context.* By Lieven Boeve. Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, Volume 30. English translation by Brian Doyle. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Press, 2003. ISBN: 90-429-1282-0. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans. ISBN: 0-8028-2667-9. Pp.183.

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Departing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Lieven Boeve offers a theological reflection upon the challenges faced by the Church amidst the contemporary chasm between faith and culture. In Western Europe, the Church's power and influence over society has been weakened. At the start of the twenty-first century, the Christian tradition in Europe confronts the modernizing forces of secularism, pluralism, and capitalism. Amidst these social conditions, Boeve argues that the Church must present the Christian faith's meaning and purpose in a more persuasive fashion. This book presents the latest results of Boeve's study as the coordinator of the research group 'Theology in a Postmodern Context' and as professor of fundamental theology at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium.

Similar to the Lutheran scholar George Lindbeck, Boeve approaches the Christian tradition as a kind of linguistic system. Boeve draws from discourse theory in order to describe how the Catholic Church linguistically constructs and negotiates its identity today. Boeve regards the Christian tradition as both historically situated and flexible amidst changing circumstances. He engages in an interdisciplinary dialogue with the results of cultural, sociological, and philosophical analysis. His essay contends that theology should be reflexive and dedicated to critically understanding social change in Europe. Thus, he cautions believers to avoid the extremes of fundamentalism and atheism as they confront modernity.

This book prompts readers to revisit the missiological question of what exactly constitutes the Gospel's inculturation in a particular society. In order to evangelize, pastoral initiatives need to be carried on from within the thought-patterns of a specific culture. As Boeve indicates, the Church's efforts to achieve such integration, in the years since the Second Vatican Council, have not been very productive in Europe. Much work needs to be done. He urges the Church to re-contextualize the Christian message and way of life so that it addresses the social conditions of contemporary Europe. For example, in the location of Flanders, as in many other places around the world, there has been an ongoing crisis of confidence in the Christian tradition, illustrated by the massive decline in Church attendance, the prevalence of 'New Age' spirituality, and a popular turn to other world religions. It seems that Christian culture is worn out.

In light of the Church's condition of diaspora, this book proposes a framework to renew the dialogue between faith and culture. For Boeve, the 'open-narrative' or interrupted-tradition is based upon three structural factors: (1) faith

in Jesus Christ, (2) the specificity of the Christian faith in God, and (3) the presence of non-Christian religious traditions in the Church's midst. He assumes that the grammar of the Christian tradition allows for pragmatic 're-invention' because its very own rules are based upon constancy and change. The ancient words, stories, and deeds inherited by Christians, and passed on through the Church's tradition, require ongoing re-contextualization as conditions in Western Europe change: "Only then can the living tradition we inherit be passed on to others and new Christians be integrated into the narrative" (178).

In his model, Boeve directs the reader's attention to the multicultural, post-Christian situation of Europe. Above all else, what he wants is for Christianity to be "able to recognize its own relativity" (178). The Catholic Church's renewal and inculturation into a given society, namely Western Europe, depends on its reflexive awareness of this relativity. For Boeve, the Christian tradition becomes more credible when it admits its own specificity and limited perspective. In terms of apologetics, the Church needs to become more sensitive to the boundaries of the Christian narrative. For the Church to sustain its own perspective on reality, it must promote in its catechesis a reflexive, self-scrutinizing familiarity with the grammar and praxis of faith.

Due to the position of Christianity in the modern world, the concept of 'faith' is taking on a specific profile: "The Church no longer enjoys a monopoly position into which one is simply born but has become a Church of volunteers" (179). Those who genuinely desire to familiarize themselves with the Christian tradition will need to make an explicit choice, and to develop a taste for its language and practices. At this moment, more attention could be given to studying the importance of conversion, discipleship, and church formation. In particular, Boeve has in mind the many European countries that have lost touch with the Christian tradition. Perhaps the challenges posed by modernity offer the Catholic Church an important opportunity to reconsider the meaning of sacramental presence in the world today.

From my perspective, this book is interesting primarily because of the author's ethno-methodological approach to the subject matter. Boeve avoids the functional reductionism that is sometimes found in religious studies. The reader might detect the influence of Anthony Giddens behind his concern with the 'consequences of modernity' upon tradition. Boeve reveals how the social variables of risk and trust construct modern religious identity. In sum, this book does a fine job at clarifying the Church's present situation in Europe. Here, the reader will find an insightful description and analysis of the historical and structural dynamics behind the recent transformation of the Christian religion into a religion of faith.