At the Intersection of Religious Ritual and Automobility: Pastoral Care of the Road

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In spite of their mutual significance in late modern societies, automobiles and religion rarely figure together as a site of social inquiry. This paper attempts to open up their intersection. It does not address mobilities, or forms of socially meaningful movement, that are generally associated with religious activity, such as pilgrimages, flagellant processions or spiritual holidays. On the contrary, I will consider how religious practice relates with mundane acts of car-driving. Mundane car-driving, understood here, should not be taken to mean 'simple' or particularly lucid behaviour, and incorporates many more actors and associations than cars, roads and drivers. As a well-known author on the topic suggests, "automobility can be conceptualized as a self-organizing autopoetic, nonlinear system that spreads world-wide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs."[1] My argument claims that sacred ritual and mundane acts of automobility are deeply intertwined along particular pathways furnished by identifiable actors. The paper is organized into three parts. I first explore changing understandings of time and space, or the basic elements of physical mobility, and how they might suggest that religious ritual has become sequestered in relatively secular societies, or removed from everyday life. In the next section, after identifying two key problems with this characterization of ritual, I discuss two sources of complexity that nevertheless trouble its association with everyday automobility. Lastly, I apply my theoretical contentions to the case of the Vatican's Apostolate of the Road, which currently provides pastoral care to automobile-drivers in eleven European countries.[2]

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1. John Urry, "The "System" of Automobility," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 (2004): 25–39.
2. Following my focus on Catholicism, I use the language of 'church' and generic Christian terminology throughout the paper, but the argument is structured such that church can in many cases easily be substituted with institutions from other faiths.

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Defamiliarizing the Drive to Church

Religious ritual and everyday car-driving may seemingly refer to mutually exclusive phenomena. They serve different functions, generate different rhythms and invoke distinctive emotions, instruments, routines and discipline. Their environments may rub up against one another, but appear to 'end' before they mix; one occurs in an evidently special place, while the other affords a banal means to get to its parking lot. In order to begin to defamiliarize this intuitive separation, consider how religious ritual and car-driving relate to basic contexts of action. Since Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, religious ritual has stood as a source of shared, sacred meaning that might stabilize a sense of community, or a way of sustaining social bonds in time and across space. But we might instead, changing emphasis, conceive of sacred ritual as a way of reassembling time and space, in much the same way that mundane transportation networks, through specific combinations of passageways, construct and distribute these basic contexts.[3] Both ritual practices of religion and driving create a corporeal sense of time and space, or a bodily sense of being moving or dwelling in the world in particular, though revisable, ways; both consist in action routines. Doing religion or driving means performing choreographies shaped by reliable settings; churches and streets, for example, with their familiar furniture, codes, and unwritten etiquette. These settings structure our spatial and temporal habitus, or the embodied choreography of timing and spacing that Pierre Bourdieu likens to an intuitive 'feel for the game.'[4] Habitus, in turn, reciprocally structures such settings. Different churches and streets reflect an evolving range of choices that intentioned people make while, if sometimes unthinkingly, on the road and/or before the altar. Habitual knowledge, of the unspoken sort that allows diverse groups of people to, with surprising consistency, correctly proceed along the motorway or cue for communion, resides, therefore, in tension with spatiotemporal conditions of late modernity.

In the *Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre elaborates a pattern by which certain secular conditions of space arose. He outlines the decay of

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3. Peter Frank Peters, *Time, Innovation and Mobilities* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

4. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 27, 66, 82.

"absolute space," or the politico-religious space "made up of sacred or cursed locations: temples, palaces, commemorative or funerary monuments, places privileged or distinguished in one way or another, . . . always at the disposal of priestly castes."[5] Material boundaries and signs demarcate, circumscribe and physically perimeter absolute space, consecrating a location. But consecration also animates the symbolic existence of the politico-religious space, or "indeed a space, at once indistinguishably mental and social, which comprehends the entire existence of the group concerned."[6] In this sense, "absolute space is located nowhere. It has no place because it embodies *all* places."[7] By contrast, and to the detriment of absolute space, "abstract space," formal and quantitative, tends to erase sacred historical and bodily distinctions. Bound closely with the emergence of state capitalism and bureaucratic organization, Lefebvre describes it as "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived."[8] He argues that through layers of intellectual mediation developed in capitalist societies, abstract space dominates imaginative and more equitable ways of appropriating space. Space becomes a neutral container, or "nothing more than the passive locus of social relations;" it unifies into an absolute Object or *res extensa* containing (dominating) all senses and bodies.[9] The Euclidean dimensions of abstract space, by this account, overtake the symbolic depths and heights of religious space, the peaks and celestial summits of the heavens above the subterranean abysses and gaping holes of hell.

Similarly, late modern time is thought to have 'flattened' out transcendental heights and depths into a uniformly metered, and thus taken for granted flow. The move to a standardized "secular time-understanding," Charles Taylor observes, "allows us to imagine society horizontally, unrelated to any 'high points,' where the ordinary sequence of events touches higher time, and therefore without recognizing any privileged persons or agencies, such as kings or priests, who stand and mediate at such

5. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 236–240.
6. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 240.
7. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 236.
8. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38.
9. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1–11.

alleged points."[10] Central in modern "social imaginaries," Taylor argues, or the shared normative expectations that people have about how they fit together with others,[11] is the notion that people simultaneously and 'directly access' society from a decentred, impersonal perspective. Such abstraction, for some, threatens to erase those qualitative breaks from noisy everyday life that provide ethical coherence and push people beyond utilitarian pursuits. For Robert Bellah, for example, "religious communities do not experience time in the way the mass media present it—as a continuous flow of qualitatively meaningless sensations. [Time is] punctuated by an alteration of the sacred and the profane. . . . Many of our religious traditions recognize the significance of silence as a way of breaking the incessant flow of sensations and opening our hearts to the wholeness of being."[12] Occupationally and ethically flexible relations of capitalism, in which profit becomes a primary ledger for time and aging, may fragment such "wholeness of being." Time's arrow is broken, as Richard Sennett puts it, meaning once coherent and cumulative biographies now lack "the quality of a narrative, in which one event leads to and conditions the next."[13]

Together these views should not be taken as either a story of linear secularization or death of traditional religious practice. But they suggest how late modern conditions may increasingly *sequester* sacred ritual within particular times and spaces.[14] Abstract space and time work to keep church (where ordinary events touch 'higher' time and space) in Sunday morning pews, so to speak. Sequestration clearly differs from the mingling of denominational and other identities. Flexible capitalism and global flows of all kinds may have spurred an unprecedented mixing and compounding of group identities. But they have also fragmented and distanciated linear biographies. To the extent that people without rigid social stations (e.g. in

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10. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 157.

11. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

12. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 282.

13. Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character* (New York: Norton, 1998), 83.

14. Anthony Giddens uses the term "sequestration" in *Modernity and Self-Identity*, in a loosely related but much more generalized sense than I develop here. He use the concept to describe the consequences for individual experience of the orientation of modernity towards control in the context of self-referential systems (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 149.

a Great Chain of Being) become comfortable with self-multiplicity, or "a pliant self, a collage of fragments unceasing in its becoming, ever open to new experience,"[15] we may need to coin a companion term as evocative as religion *à la carte* for religion *au milieu*. That is, in liberal democratic societies many otherwise 'secular' people continue to express coherent religious identities—in particular moments. Reginald Bibby shows, for example, that even as attendance and levels of social religiosity continue their decades-long decline, a strong majority of Canadians turn implacably to specific religious rites and ceremonies in times and spaces of birth, matrimony and death.[16] Religion 'according to the situation' extends, furthermore, from personal practices of life and death to political and cultural arenas. Sacred justifications and rites show up poignantly, for instance, in recurring debates over abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage, but rarely press into those over state sponsorship of failed auto industries and urban sprawl.

Although some evidence seems to support a sequestration thesis, we should arguably approach with some skepticism any strong interpretation that, in relatively secular countries, sacred ritual *stays* sequestered within particular familial or political moments. My argument does not address whether religious communities have unexplored capacities to reterritorialize secular institutions or proselytize nonreligious populations. Rather, I am insisting, with Lefebvre, that any space produced, in part, by social actors has a much harder time 'stopping' than we commonly assume; spaces sludge into each other; they superimpose and interpenetrate one another like ocean currents.[17] Spatial representations such as the celestial spheres may collapse, for example, but they persist in ambiguous imageries and mythic narratives such as the realm of the dead. Absolute space, indeed, informs contemporary *representational* space, or spaces of nonverbal signs and art, "redolent with symbolic and imaginary elements."[18] To Lefebvre's concept of produced space we could add Henri Bergson's temporal notion of duration. Challenging theories in classical physics wherein time occurs across discrete, separated instants, like a predetermined "cinematographic"

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15. Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, 133.
16. Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 53.
17. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 87.
18. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 41.

sequence of images,[19] Bergson uses duration to depict time in terms of moments that irreversibly bleed into one another in ways that are often hard to predict. Time and space comprise the basic elements of motion, as the calculation of velocity denotes. Mobility, understood as otherwise abstract movement made socially meaningful in the context of unequal power relations,[20] could be interpreted as mediating our sense of social space and duration, of irreversible becoming. Automobility, by this interpretation, currently shapes a dominant sense of these most basic contexts of lived experience. After breakneck expansion for much of the 20th century, temporal and spatial forms related to car-driving now pervade most populated areas on earth.

Another problem arises from the idea that religious rites stay selectively relevant or 'sealed off' inside certain slices of timespace. It elides a multiplicity of nonhuman actors who associate consecrated moments with mundane moments, even as a difference of symbolic status conveys their separation. Most obviously, the same late modern conditions that have in some rich societies displaced religion as a primary concern or source of identity have assembled myriad other actors who help carry religious meaning further and faster than ever before. Mobiles, internets, webs of text messages and satellite technologies garner a lot of attention. But let us not exclude more banal actors: tables, chairs, buildings, roads, crosswalks, pipelines, parking lots, oil, gasoline, bridges, streetlights, cars, signage, etc. Do these objects have agency? Namely, do they not *mediate* the force they relay? As Bruno Latour puts it, "mediators transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or elements they are supposed to carry. . . . Their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time."[21] While frequently applied in science and technology studies, actor-network theory offers a way to open up the vast array of participants working to reproduce what we commonly think of as religious or spiritual experience. Including these actors in the context of the production of space and time challenges any final sequestration of religious

19. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Dover, 2007), 1–17.

20. Tim Cresswell, "The production of mobilities," *New Formations* 43 (2001): 11–25.

21. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

practice in secular societies. But we can go further and use this hybrid approach to show how two such seemingly disconnected phenomena as *sacred ritual and mundane automobility are, in fact, inextricably intertwined along particular pathways furnished by identifiable actors.*

Two Complexities

Before drawing out support for this thesis in the case of a unique Catholic intersection of ritual and automobility, I will describe two kinds of complexity that trouble such a relation. First, it runs counter to Durkheimian common sense whereby, even as pilgrimages and other processions emphasize flow and transit, religious ritual figures prominently within an operation of fixity, an operation in which the destination and the difference the destination makes carry more meaning than the commute. Ritual incorporates the choreography and materials by which people relocate ordinary zones and moments with sacred meaning, times and spaces that would otherwise float uncertainly in a sea of profane uses. When supporting actors such as tables and buildings are considered to have agency in accounts of ritual, they tend to appear rooted and segregated by virtue of their sacred location. For example, in her article "Building Traditions: Comparing Space, Ritual, and Community," Sally Gallagher critiques the religious markets paradigm and the religious subcultures approach for eliding sacred ritual as embodied in the buildings in which believers worship. She argues that "buildings reflect coherent, distinctive, and enduring streams of narrative or tradition," and "although denomination may be declining as a marker of religious identity, churches continue to be places in which individuals are offered opportunity to locate and experience a sense of [religious] identity and community."[22] Gallagher's spatial analysis of three American congregations broaches interesting neighbourhood effects, provocatively wondering how it matters if worshipers show up "in an array of well-kept, late-model minivans, SUVs, and mid-size family cars" or have to walk or take public transit to "the wrong side of the tracks."[23] But, generally focusing on what goes on once the faithful get 'inside,' it furthers the perception

22. Sally Gallagher, "Building Traditions: Comparing Space, Ritual, and Community in Three Congregations," Review of Religious Research 47 (2005): 70–71.
23. Gallagher, "Building Traditions," 74, 76.

that religious architecture works primarily as a means of enclosing sacred routines in social timespace.

Without deemphasizing the significance of fixity within the production of sacred timespace, we should take seriously the extent to which sites of sacred routine shape circulation patterns and co-implicate the banal means by which people physically reach them. Lefebvre takes up this notion of a fixed building.

> Consider a house, and a street, for example. The house has six storeys and an air of stability about it. One might almost see it as the epitome of immovability, with its concrete and its stark, cold and rigid outlines. (Built around 1950: no metal or plate glass yet.) Now, a critical analysis would doubtless destroy the appearance of solidity of this house, stripping it, as it were, of its concrete slabs and its thin non-load-bearing walls, which are really just glorified screens, and uncovering a very different picture. In the light of this imaginary analysis, our house would emerge, as permeated from every direction by streams of energy which run in and out of it by every imaginable route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio and television signals, and so on. Its image of immobility would then be replaced by an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits.[24]

Falling attendance and rising property costs in wealthy urban nations such as Canada have seen churches more frequently close and consolidate than open additional venues. But during periods of new construction, we can view clearly in often acrimonious debates over church relocation how buildings betray a "complex" of physical and social mobilities. By the late 19th century in the United States, for example, rapid industrialization and population growth meant many congregations encountered a tough dilemma. They could remain in what suddenly became 'downtown' Chicago, Cleveland, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Denver or Seattle and reshape their ministries for a flood of working-class laborers, immigrants and their families. Or they could follow those congregants who wanted, and could afford, to escape modern industrial life into new suburbia. As observed by Jeanne Kilde, churches typically chose to uproot, retooling their mission to meet the spiritual needs of those whose private homes were defined in opposition to the hustle and noise, pollution and congestion of city life.

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24. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 93.

> No reason for church construction was more powerful than the desire to continue serving members moving to new residential areas. As middle- and upper-class families sought neighbourhoods safer, cleaner, and more fashionable than their former ones, urban congregations faced the loss of precisely those members who were most likely to participate in the life of the church community and to contribute substantially to its financial support. Consequently, in cities across the United States, church after church threw its lot in with the residential life of its members and followed its affluent constituents to new subdivisions.[25]

Kilde's analysis follows thoughtful Protestant church designers who struggled with relocating buildings—and the social missions these buildings embodied—away from the democratic experiments and structural inequalities seething through cities. She also shows how some evangelical churches did not follow but, in fact, led the charge to expanded neomedieval auditoriums built outside the city, prefiguring late 20th century 'mega-church' stadiums whose parking lots organize the tens of thousands of cars required for weekly attendance. Such "spiritual armories," as Kilde puts it aptly, reversed the longstanding practice of situating churches near the centre of a parish to make it relatively convenient for all possible members to access.[26]

Yet after many 19th century churches uproot and replant themselves again outside cities, they appear to, in Kilde's account, become sequestered there. The sacred buildings she examines embody cultural and geographical relations and particular ideas about the place of church in (or without) society. But once again located in place, subsequent *acts* of embodying these things seem to occur separately from their surroundings, or at least from how people negotiate these surroundings in order to get to their church buildings. The prosaic mobilities that affect how people reassemble mutually sacred times and spaces in buildings, therefore, become invisible. But the proliferation of the private automobile in the early 20th century, and its subsequent expansion in North America toward "hyper-equality,"[27] may provide more urgency in contemporary circumstances to make these

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25. Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 87.

26. Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 86.

27. Sudhir Chella Rajan, "Automobility and the liberal disposition," *The Sociological Review* 54 (2001): 118.

prosaic mobilities visible. In order to recast the process of 'locating church' with a greater sense of openendedness, perhaps

> it is helpful to think of architectures as 'archi-textures', to treat each monument or building, viewed in its surroundings and context, in the populated area and associated networks in which it is set down, as part of a particular production of space. . . . These networks are not closed, but open on all sides to the strange and the foreign, to the threatening and the propitious, to friend and foe. As matter a fact, the abstract distinction between open and closed does not really apply here.[28]

Viewing the modern suburban church building as part of a production of homogeneous-use, low density and fossil fuel-intensive space signals how it might structure, and be structured by, people's mobility. It helps account for the physical and social ease, for example, with which automobiles allow people to leave and arrive. In such a production of space, public transit generally proves impractical and few congregants live in walking or cycling distance. The practice of this church could not function without the circulation of cars along the necessary quasi-private passageways borne by easily forgotten, if expensively placed, public infrastructures. The tension between privatized mobility and its publicly resourced conduits nicely illustrates the contingencies of pathway and place. If urban-suburban arteries shape acts of *coming to be* in a sacred semi-private place, for instance, they also shape acts of *coming to be other* than in profane public space. The production of automobile-dependent suburban space, suffice it to say, alters both the physical grounds and social terrain on which congregations can either escape or reach out to a changing society. Just as church space and architecture embody social and political messages, the specific (im) mobilities which each mass or ceremony collects in a sacred destination likewise carry 'archi-textural' consequences. Namely, mobility systems modify people's bodies and minds differently. One significant difference that hegemonic automobility may make is the degree to which drivers of private vehicles can not only take vastly distanciated and uneven resource dependencies for granted, but also the extent to which they can make their *immediate* environs invisible. "Car-drivers," notes John Urry, "while moving

28. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 118.

at speed, lose the ability to perceive local detail beyond the car, let alone talk to strangers, to learn local ways of life, to sense each place."[29]

The second source of complexity in associating religious ritual with mundane automobility concerns their contrasting ontological status. The contrast relates to changes in ways in which people fit others within their social existence and normative expectations.[30] Peter Berger argues that "every society is engaged in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world . . . [R]eligion is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant." But "such a cosmos, as the ultimate ground and validation of human nomoi, need not necessarily be sacred . . . Particularly in modern times, there have been thoroughly secular attempts at cosmization."[31] *The Sacred Canopy* was first published in 1967, after which religious attendance and religiosity levels have steadily declined not only in Canada, but across many postindustrial societies with diverse religious institutions and cultures.[32] These trends do not support irreversible or uniform secularization, as Berger himself later argued, but they suggest a direction along which contemporary social imaginaries may be changing. If, as Berger writes, "originally all cosmization [or world construction] had a sacred character,"[33] sacred belief systems currently compete with many profane, nonreligious and irreligious ontologies; between people and groups, but also within the minds of individual subjects. Indeed, the checkered or selective ways in which many people now mobilize religious ritual in relatively secular polities reinforces the view that sacred rites remain sequestered in timespace.

In contrast, automobility forms a secular canopy with a force of verisimilitude to be reckoned with. Cars are proliferating, quickly. One billion automobiles were manufactured during the last century; one billion will be motoring around by around 2030, mainly in cities; global traffic volumes are expected to triple over the next several decades; and more drivable

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29. John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 129.

30. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 157.

31. Peter Berger, "The Sacred Canopy," in ed. S.C. Monahan, W.A. Mirola and M.O. Emerson, *Sociology of Religion. A Reader* (N.J: Upper Saddle River, 2001): 27–28.

32. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79, 85–86.

33. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 27.

cars inhabit the richest society in the world than people to drive them.[34] The timing and spacing of privately owned motor vehicles shape our most habitual knowledge and normal experience of mobility. As a quintessential product of mass production and consumption, notes Mike Featherstone, their cultural influence and "impact on spatial organization through roads, city layout, suburban housing and shopping malls, are undisputed. There is a powerful socio-economic and technological complex at work sustaining the car and although some are beginning to talk about the post-car, it is the end of the steel and petroleum car, not a world free from cars, they allude to."[35] Indeed, cars elaborate basic western understandings of freedom and autonomous enterprise. Automobility does not form merely one way of world-making among others: cars concretize liberalism and capitalism, or two formative contexts of late modernity (consider the significance theorists have attached since Gramsci to 'Fordism'). After consolidating common sense for a century, their construction of reality no longer confronts pressures of intergenerational change, or people who remember when city streets were otherwise, when they belonged to other activities, like children's play. By projecting the street-as-vehicular-thoroughfare back in time, however, we obscure the political economy and history of its emergence. We forget, for example, the tough-going labour required to re-educate walkers on their relegation to peripheral space alongside the streets *in* which they felt they belonged.[36]

We also obscure, however, how hegemonic automobility privileges a highly specific way of *being* moving, or showing up in the world, over others. Indeed, the distinction between sacred and secular canopies may not work very well here, once we grant movement the same level of metaphysical significance that philosophers accord time and space. Perhaps, instead, we should consider how automobility attaches prices to ways of moving that fail to reflect significant social, political and environmental costs, and how it constructs a sense of freedom and self-enterprise without a parallel

34. Urry, "The "System" of Automobility, 25; *Mobilities*, 115. Rajan, "Automobility and the Liberal Disposition," 118.

35. Mike Featherstone. "Automobilities: An Introduction," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 (2004): 1.

36. Peter D. Norton, "Street Rivals: Jaywalking and the Invention of the Motor Age Street," *Technology and Culture*, 48 (2007).

sense of responsibility. As Sudhir Rajan notes, "what is significant about automobility is the 'liberalism theology' that is generated by its practices; the freedom to break loose can always be realized simply by getting into one's car and driving off in any direction one chooses."[37]

Pastoral Care of the Road

Thus far, I have argued that in order to draw out the associations of religious ritual and mundane automobility, in addition to expanding the number of nonhuman actors we should introduce two kinds of complexity. First, ritual should be viewed not primarily as an operation of fixing sacred times, spaces and actors against a profane background, but in terms of contingent relations of fixity and flow in which the production of mobilities implies the production of immobilities. Second, while religious ritual and mundane automobility may both reflect this relationality, they do not stand in relatively secular societies on the same kind of ontological footing. While elaborating their intersection, therefore, we need to consider their dissimilar purchase on existence. One way of mapping this intersection could build on the insights of Gallagher and Kilde, and proceed by exploring precisely how different ways of traveling to church shape clergy and laity within church, or how they negotiate their relationships to each other and with their God and where they position themselves toward and within public discourse. To emphasize the reciprocation of fixity and flow, of sacred and profane and of habitus and structures of late modern timespace, however, I will reverse this approach. Rather than follow congregants whose socially meaningful forms of movement lead them into church, I will follow the less explored case of a church whose world-making project leads out into socially meaningful forms of movement. Or more precisely, its religious project reaches out into mundane movement so as to help articulate its ethical and sociopolitical significance, if in the moral context of church doctrine. By examining the Vatican's Apostolate of the Road, this section attempts to show how, in a process of mobilizing novel forms of religious ritual, hegemonic automobility and church shape each other.

Charles Taylor correctly notes that fewer and fewer priests mediate access to modern "social imaginaries." But he fails to mention that to physically access any specific place in the "direct-access" society, trivial or

37. Rajan, "Automobility and the Liberal Disposition," 123.

profound, people usually require and think to use four wheels, gasoline and a herculean network of bituminous pathways. More and more priests, on the other hand, highlight the taken-for-granted effects of automobility. On June 19, 2007, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of the Migrants and Itinerant People released its first official "Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road." The Guidelines feature "The 10 commandments of driving," which highlight at #1 the conventionally fifth commandment in Catholicism, "You shall not kill." Its authors worry that because car-driving frequently lies on the "fringes of ethical regulation," its inexorable expansion will result in a "chaotic increase in road traffic."[38] Western media outlets such as the CBC were quick to report how they moralize car-driving as "an occasion for sin."[39] But the Guidelines just as frequently try to psychologize this form of travel. They emphasize how "cars tend to bring out the 'primitive' side of human beings;" while driving may be a "non-pathological phenomenon" coming "within the scope of psychological normality," they suggest it accentuates our "domination instinct" and can slide people easily into "psychological regression."[40] Furthermore, the Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road and supplementary Vatican documents feature sociological observations accumulated over 50 years of ministerial and apostolic engagement with car-drivers in Europe and South America.[41]

The "International Accident-Free Day," launched in Paris in 1951, struck a chord among pockets of the Catholic elite. Momentum grew with the identification by Pope Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council of traffic as a "grave moral problem," and in 1967 the Spanish Bishop's Conference created the "National Direction of the Apostolate of the Road."[42] The

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38. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, "Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road," *People On The Move* 104 (2007): 32.

39. The Associated Press, "Vatican driving commandments pave highway to heaven: Cars can be "an occasion for sin," Catholics warned," CBC News Online, June 19, 2007.

40. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," p. 25–29.

41. See Pope Paul VI, "Speech on the Moralisation of Road Use," Teachings of Pope Paul VI, vol. III (Vatican Library, 1965), 499. See also, Pope John XXIII, "The respect of life as the foundation of effective road discipline," *Speeches, Messages and Talks of Pope John XXIII, vol. III* (Vatican Library, 1961), 383.

42. Rev. Vicente Hernández García, Former National Director of the Apostolate of the Road of the Spanish Bishops' Conference, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the

Spanish Bishops perceived in automobiles a technology with ambivalent implications for humanity. They challenged countries that were quickly taking the car for granted as merely an instrument for getting around. By their definition, road traffic is physically and morally dangerous, but also "one of the most unavoidable forms of human cohabitation." In addition to organizing easy opportunities for violence and domination, "[d]riving a vehicle is [also] a way of relating with and getting closer to other people, and of integrating within a community of people."[43] The Apostolate of the Road subsequently spread out of Spain, and currently includes at least 11 European nations whose national directors first met in 2003 at Vatican City. Its ministerial activities include formulating and disseminating guidelines for ethical road use, and mounting periodic public awareness campaigns such as the National Day of Prayer for Traffic. It also runs a program for educating priests on "the theory and practice of road assistance [and] the sociological aspects of road traffic."[44] The practical edge of the Apostolate's programming involves specially trained priests (including traffic police chaplains) who strategically intervene in the changing network locations among actors at risk of "psychological regression." They circulate, for example, among chronic road users who operate especially deadly machines such as tractor trailers and truck trains, and they provide pastoral assistance at rest points, service stations and machine shops along high volume motorways. The Apostolate also encourages Catholic radio stations to take advantage of its "personal training potential," and erects chapels dedicated to St. Christopher, the patron saint of motorists.[45]

The Apostolate of the Road takes care as well to mythologize priests who are successful in these endeavors, such as the famed "Padre Gasolina," who is said to have given "more than five hundred seminars to just as many truck drivers by going from truck to truck and helping them" to discover

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Road," Document of Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, prepared for the First European Meeting of National Directors for the Apostleship of the Road, February 2003. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/ (accessed January 30, 2009).

43. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 30.

44. Garcia, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the Road," 8.

45. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 29, 81–82. Garcia, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the Road," 5, 8–10.

the Christian possibilities of driving.[46] 'Success,' of course, carries different meanings. Pastoral care of the road aims to reduce the human suffering wrought by the violence of individualistic driving behaviour while, at the same time, it provides spiritual first aid "in a field of new evangelisation, so dear to the heart of Pope John Paul II."[47] To help people cope with their "dangerous tools" of mobility, for example, the Apostolate encourages drivers to make the sign of the cross before setting out on a journey and to recite the rosary along the way for its "gentle rhythm."[48] The network of 'tools' and actors to which pastoral care contributes bodily and spiritual first aid extends, moreover, to motor vehicles themselves. The Apostolate's Guidelines emphasizes not only the protection of people, but also the prevention of potentially "enormous damage to material goods" and private property that traffic accidents pose[49]—especially to cars. This involves confronting the physical risk engendered "by not maintaining a vehicle or means of transport in safe mechanical order, by neglecting periodic technical check-ups." "Taking care of one's vehicles also means not expecting more from it than it is able to give." Spiritual care for cars surfaces in annual masses that incorporate the participation of automobiles, as well as in the practice of blessing vehicles.[50]

Overall, I would characterize the Vatican's program of pastoral care of the road as a cautious probematization of automobility. The Apostolate of the Road strives to save people's souls, and also to protect their physical bodies. It highlights traffic accidents as the most significant threat against cars that could act as a means of communion among people and their goods, accidents which kill 3000 people every day and which have killed more people since WWII than the war itself.[51] Reflected in its breadth of effort, the Apostolate does not simply transplant Catholic rituals outside rooted houses of worship onto the road into an open social vacuum. Rather, its mission programming engages in a process of making a taken for granted way of organizing movement socially and politically meaningful in the

46. Garcia, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the Road," 7.
47. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 78.
48. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 38, 59–60.
49. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 39.
50. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 34, 51, 82. Garcia, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the Road," 9.
51. Urry, *Mobilities*, 207.

context of its moral doctrine. This occurs prominently, for example, in the Vatican's provocative association of ordinary car-drivers with refugees, gypsies (Romani), circus and carnival people and 'people of the sea.' By housing operations for these vulnerable populations together under the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of the Migrants and Itinerant People, the Vatican associates everyday drivers who exploit the domination of automobility with dominated groups whose nomadic mobilities render them liable to repressive state policies.[52] To a limited extent, the Apostolate illuminates how people collectively fetishize automobility, in the Marxist sense of treating car-driving in isolation from the political economy and context of unequal power relations on which it depends, or conditions that systematically privilege particular ways of 'being moving' in the world over others.

Yet, even as the Apostolate incorporates a degree of social complexity into pastoral care of the road, it stresses individual neglect and personal moral failing as causing "the dreadful scourge of accidents that cause so much damage to persons and things."[53] The Guidelines maintain "that the vast majority of car accidents are the result of serious and unwarranted carelessness—if not downright stupid and arrogant behaviour by drivers or pedestrians."[54] By downplaying the systemic aspects of traffic accidents, the Vatican ironically denies a wholeness of being on the road. Instead, it arguably reinforces a 'liberalism theology' in which drivers can escape not only physical harm, but also social responsibilities to other people by merely driving away conscientiously and charitably with a full knowledge of the Highway Code. Left out of the Apostolate's cautious probematization of automobility are the collective social, political and environmental consequences of fixing the travel of people and commodities primarily within a system of automobile flows. Another irony attends this spotlight on traffic fatalities and their reduction to personal indiscretion. The Vatican office arguably extends an anthropocentric "culture of life"[55] that, as Taylor argues in his article "A Catholic Modernity," threatens to undermine a

52. James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 1.

53. Garcia, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the Road," 10.

54. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 63.

55. Pontifical Council, "Guidelines," 37.

Christian tradition of transcendence, or the orientation that "what matters beyond life doesn't matter just because it sustains life."[56] Worry delegates to the recent European meeting: "We condemn abortion courageously, we proclaim ourselves real defenders of life . . . but we are accused of not applying the same emphasis and force to the deaths and injuries on our roads."[57]

Discussion

These ironies may express a deeper, ontological ambivalence on the part of the Vatican as it associates with everyday automobility. Recognizing the centrality of motor vehicles in late modern existence, pastoral care of the road combines parochial interests with a curiously selective sociopolitical mission into the world of automobiles. On one hand, as I have tried to show, the Apostolate of the Road strategically intervenes in networks outside of conventional church environments and creatively engages a wide array of human and nonhuman actors. It recognizes the agency of automobiles and autoscapes in their production of times and spaces in which people lose a moral and ethical sense of living together. Laudably, it makes strange the fact that hundreds of millions of violent casualties have resulted from our favoured and prodigiously funded way of moving around people and goods. In the context of Catholic doctrine, the Apostolate challenges a narrow individualism at least as ingrained in automobility as possibilities for solidarity. Finally, by relating normalized automobility with the nomadic movements of groups that states disproportionately police and exclude, the Apostolate forms the basis of a critique of the fetishization not only of cars but of mobility itself. On the other hand, the Apostolate of the Road stops short of a full social ontology of mobility. Pastoral care takes shape, in part, by eliding many social determinants of antisocial road behavior as well as racist and classist elements in western transportation policies. Its core Guidelines, which form the product of over five decades of advocacy, care and theological debate, remain remarkably mum on the effect of global environmental degradation, in which automobility is heavily implicated, on the moral standards of road use that were such a concern to Paul VI. In its

56. Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" ed. James Heft, *A Catholic Modernity?: Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13–37.
57. Garcia, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the Road," 10.

narrow focus on the "psychosomatic" (or psychophysiologic) factors that help make mobility either morally and socially desirable or destructive, the Apostolate also ignores the uneven influence of property relations and legal structures. Instead, it demurs to the "moral compulsoriness of the Highway Code," and focuses on improving the moral education of drivers.[58]

What may be most interesting about the Apostolate of the Road, however, is not that, as a papal organ and intervention, it fails to live up to a sharp sociological, historical or policy critique of automobility, but rather that it selects some significant aspects of a social ontology but not others. By some of its assumptions people appear as if individual atoms, crashing into each other because they lack appropriate training and personal rectitude; by others, people appear as if deeply ensconced within a social fabric that helps shape their mutual fate. Future research could build insight into the Vatican's automobility *à la carte* by, for instance, exploring why and how psychological variables receive such a high level of priority. In addition to how the Apostolate imagines the mobilities in which sacred fixtures are implicated, this paper has examined what it does on the basis of this imagination and what this work might mean for our understanding of religious ritual. The Apostolate's active engagement with networks of automobility, I have argued, betrays a set of novel sacred rituals and mundane acts of mobility that do not simply occupy space and time. They instead co-produce times and spaces around moving and dwelling bodies, times and spaces that reflect the agency of both the built environment and the mobile tools by which people and goods negotiate the built environment. This co-production, I have emphasized, illustrates the relationality of (im) mobility, and does not suggest a linear process of fixing or sequestering previously profane passageways with sacred meaning and purpose. The Vatican does not resemble, here, an institution looking to simply territorialize its profane surroundings so as to extend its moral jurisdiction. It could be viewed, rather, as helping to construct what Lefebvre has called an 'architexture.' That is, the Apostolate of the Road, recognizing how sites of sacred ritual continually work off the circulation of automobiles, has aimed to make mundane movement meaningful in terms of the social, cultural and political relations expressed in its evolving religious mission.

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58. Garcia, "The Past, Present and Future of the Apostolate of the Road," 10–11.