

# Working Out the Body and Blood of Christ on the Eighth Day of Creation: Toward a Martyr-Ecclesiology

Craig Keen

When everything's made to be broken  
I just want you to know who I am<sup>1</sup>



In the mid-1980's<sup>2</sup> a rectangle of derelict property lay between East 41<sup>st</sup> Street on the south, East Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard on the north, South Alameda Street on the east, and Long Beach Avenue on the west—14 acres in South Central Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup> The businesses that once stood there were gone; pieces of foundation concrete littered the ground beside discarded appliances, furniture, and tires, piles of rags, broken glass, the other rubbish that is attracted to abandoned lots in crowded cities, and the vermin that hide and multiply there—especially in particularly neglected quarters.<sup>4</sup> The City needed a place to

---

<sup>1</sup> Johnny Rzeznik, "Iris," performed by The Goo Goo Dolls, *City of Angels: Music from the Motion Picture*, produced by Danny Bramson, Reprise Records, CD, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> "And he said to them, ' . . . for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'" . . . He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'" Mark 4:11 – 12, 26 – 29.

<sup>3</sup> Long Beach Avenue points north like an arrow at Los Angeles City Hall that stands tall at its near end.

<sup>4</sup> For the history of South Central Los Angeles Farm see Erika Hayasaki, "Seeds of Dissension Linger: Farmers in the South Central Community Decry the Loss of the Land to a Warehouse Project," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 2005; Daniel Hernandez and David Zahniser, "Seeds of Secrecy," *L.A. Weekly*, March 10, 2006; Daniel Hernandez, "Bushel of Complaints," *L.A. Weekly*, March 17, 2006; Jessica Hoffmann, "History of the South Central Farm How the Community Has Used the Land Since 1985," *The New Standard*, April 5, 2006, <http://newstandardnews.net/content/index.cfm/items/3028> (accessed June 12, 2007); Daniel Hernandez, "A Brown Day in L.A.: Mayor V. Faces Global Immigration Issues—and Angry Farmers," *L.A. Weekly*, May 25, 2006; Art Marroquin, "Deputies Evict Farmers, Supporters from South Central Farm," *City News Service*, June 13, 2006; Brent Hopkins, "The End for South Central Farm?" *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, June 14, 2006; Brenda Norrell, "Navajo Says Evictions of Farmers from Urban Farm Sends a Message," *Indian Country Today*, June 21, 2006; Mike Boehm, "Theater: Cornerstone Mobilizes the Troupe: The Normally Slow and Steady Theater Company Takes to the Streets Over the South Central Farm Eviction. A New Leaf?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2006; Brent Hopkins, "Last Gasp in Fight for Farm: 10 Arrested as Activists Attempt to Stop Bulldozer," *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, July 6, 2006; Bill Hetherman, "Attorney: City Sold South Central Farm at Major Loss for Taxpayers," *City News Service*, July 13, 2006; Connie Llanos, "Judge Rules on Urban Garden: Sale to Developer is Upheld," *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, July 27, 2006; Emanuel Parker, "Huntington housing ex-farm's trees," *Pasadena-Star News*, December 15, 2006.

build an incinerator and its leaders chose as the site this gray neighborhood of warehouses, factories, and the homes of poor, powerless people. And so, in 1986 this space was expropriated by eminent domain for a little under \$5 million from nine companies, the largest of which had owned just over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it.<sup>5</sup>

The people living nearby wanted anything but an incinerator in their back yard. After years of protests and the shock of the riots of 1992 the City changed its plans. By a complicated process those 14 acres were made available in 1994 to the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank, which was housed directly across Alameda from it. The Foodbank in turn offered the land to its neighbors. And they responded. Marginalized, largely propertyless people walked from the houses and apartments where they had slept too little after working too long, slowly and methodically cleared the land and blanketed it thickly with fertile soil they carted in and raked smooth. A decade later those 14 acres of earth stretched out as a well tended green and brown patchwork quilt garden: the seeds of ancestors bedded with forethought in rows as straight as the hoe handles strong arms and hands had held to draw these simplest of characters in now rich soil. Blessed by an endless growing season without frost or flood, nutritional and medicinal plants at any given moment quietly stirred, ripening—some not yet breaking through the soil to the abundant sunlight above, some standing taller than the children, women, and men who gave them time, sweat, and the compost and water they carried to them in buckets. Families gathered to work side by side, breathing air cleaned by the leaves of stalks rooted in new earth and rising redemptively toward the brownish gray city sky, children running down paths between garden plots, playing, dancing, making the mischief and art children make, their mothers, fathers, and

---

<sup>5</sup> See Jamey Hecht, "The Future at War with the Past: While South Central's Urban Farmers Face Eviction, Peak Oil Threatens Global Food Supply," *FromTheWilderness.com*, March 22, 2006. [http://www.Fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/032206\\_war\\_past.shtml](http://www.Fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/032206_war_past.shtml) (accessed June 12, 2007).

grandparents with dirty boots, knees, and hands working, sometimes laughing, sometimes angry, sometimes distraught, usually simply on task. Corn, potatoes, chiles, cilantro, cactus, onions, tomatoes, tomatillos, agave, yams, sugarcane, beans, alfalfa, mallow, chamomile, purslane, quintoniles, and more grew in rows or beside them. Plots were dotted with avocado, walnut, banana, guava, and other fruit and nut trees. There thrived in all 100 – 150 species of nutritional and medicinal plants.<sup>6</sup> Of course, there would be nothing particularly startling in all of this were these parcels situated in farm country, some place far from South Central L.A. But *in* South Central L.A. blighted property in a blighted neighborhood came to life. Off the beaten path of City development a parable of hope blossomed into a heavy fabric of work and stories.

Divided into garden plots, cared for by over 350 “documented” and “undocumented” families, largely of Mexican and Mesoamerican descent, the South Central Los Angeles Farm, as it came to be called, grew to be perhaps the largest urban garden in the nation. The discipline that gave rise to “the Farm” was also home-grown. The people who worked this land organized it into eight sections, each of which elected a council member, the council itself electing a president. The Farm council oversaw the land, kept plots tended, collected a little money for the water the Foodbank made available, and got out of the way of people who had long before learned from their parents and grandparents who learned from their parents and grandparents how to care for the earth and its bounty.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> See Devon G. Peña and Tezozomoc, “Preliminary List of Botanical Species Grown at South Central Community Garden: Prepared June 2005”; Devon G. Peña, “Farmers Feeding Families: Agroecology in South Central Los Angeles: Lecture presented to the Environmental Science, Policy, and Management Colloquium University of California, Berkeley, October 10, 2005”; Devon G. Peña, “Putting Knowledge in Its Place: Epistemologies of Place-Making in a Time of Globalization: Plenary Address prepared for the Place Matters Conference, Diversity Research Institute, University of Washington, Urban Horticulture Center, October 27, 2006: Prepared October 26 – 27, 2006.” All these texts are available at <http://www.acequiainstitute.org/researchreports.html> (accessed June 12, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Rufina Juarez, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, August 1, 2006.

In 2001 a partner of the company that had owned the largest portion of the property the City acquired in 1986 insisted that, when plans to build an incinerator were abandoned, he by law had had the right to buy back the land.<sup>8</sup> The City at first denied his claim, but in 2003, in a session closed to public scrutiny, it agreed to the sale. He once more acquired the land for c. \$250,000 more than the City had paid for it 17 years earlier.<sup>9</sup> Since that time advocates for South Central Farm have battled with its new owner, who at last agreed to sell it to the Farmers (minus c. 2 ½ acres) for over \$16 million, an outrageous and seemingly impossible sum, particularly for these people. When charitable non-profit organizations added millions to the dollars a grassroots fund raising effort had brought in and, beyond all expectations, met the asking price, the owner refused to accept it, claiming to have been the subject of public insults and character assassination.<sup>10</sup> On the morning following

---

<sup>8</sup> This was on the eve of the opening of “the Alameda Corridor,” i.e. just as property along Alameda Avenue was becoming once more very valuable. “The Alameda Corridor” runs immediately across the street from South Central Farm. It is hard to believe that anyone would have wanted to spend good “development” money for the Farm, when it fell into the hands of South Central L.A. residents just after the 1992 riots. See the Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority website, [http://www.acta.org/projects\\_completed\\_alameda.htm](http://www.acta.org/projects_completed_alameda.htm) (accessed June 12, 2007): “The Alameda Corridor is a 20-mile-long rail cargo expressway linking the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles to the transcontinental rail network near downtown Los Angeles. It is a series of bridges, underpasses, overpasses and street improvements that separate freight trains from street traffic and passenger trains, facilitating a more efficient transportation network. The project’s centerpiece is the Mid-Corridor Trench, which will carry freight trains in an open trench that is 10 miles long, 33 feet deep and 50 feet wide between State Route 91 in Carson and 25<sup>th</sup> Street in Los Angeles. Construction began in April 1997. Operations began in April 2002.”

<sup>9</sup> Adjusting for inflation, the 2003 purchase price was equivalent to over \$3,000,000 *less* than what the city paid for it in 1986, i.e. in 2003 dollars.

<sup>10</sup> The charge was specifically that Farm supporters had engaged in anti-Semitic rhetoric. Although it is true that hate-groups are found among all ethnic groups, there is no evidence of anti-Semitism at any official Farm website. Indeed, the following account makes the developer’s accusation seem to be a red herring: “We sat down in [the developer’s] comfortable office and introduced ourselves. Our all Jewish committee of six was clearly progressive, so [he] also quickly identified himself as a conservative. He spoke bitterly about the farmers, although when pressed he could not come up with who called him an anti-Semitic name. When we asked if he had accepted the farmers’ apology he nodded, I thought reluctantly, but then added he wouldn’t sell them the land if they gave him a hundred million dollars. His bitterness was palpable. And we couldn’t really figure out the root cause of it until he suddenly burst out: ‘These immigrants, they come over here, they think they own the place’ . . . . And behold, immigrant bashing filled the room and we spent an uneasy hour being regaled with it. In the end of our attempt to stem the tide of violence and anger in our community, we realized that our meeting with [him] had fallen on deaf ears. He proudly announced that he was a hero to his conservative friends. When we asked if he was concerned about the ripple effect of his accusations of anti-Semitism, he said ‘No.’ As long as he was true to himself, that’s what mattered.” Lila Garrett, email message to author, July 15, 2006.

Independence Day, 2006, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department cleared the way for a crew which over the next two days systematically bulldozed the fruit of over a decade of the sweat and pain and care of hundreds of the poor children of this land. A year later the acres lay untended. A perimeter fence locked the Farmers out, the seeds of their ravaged gardens stirring and sending out green shoots, which the City from time to time mowed down, leaving brown earth and stubble beneath the dust their tractors threw up.

Rufina Juarez and Tezozomoc are two of the elected representatives of the Farm. They are the children and grandchildren of Mexican farmers, but it was at South Central Farm that they came as adults to remember in their bones what it means to work the soil among people who work the soil. They came to see and smell and hear and feel and taste differently. They came to hope differently, the way family farmers hope before a field newly planted with seed as the rain clouds of early spring gather. They spoke of this particular 14 acres of earth less than a month after bulldozers raped it:<sup>11</sup>

Tezo: My father . . . was one of the original organizers [of South Central Farm] . . . so he spent a lot of years with the community here. . . . [He worked a plot at the Farm] for five or six years, [until] . . . he contracted leukemia and he became very ill. . . . After that he had a couple of strokes and . . . went to a convalescent [facility] where he needs 24/7 care. . . . One of his bedside requests was for somebody to take care of his plot. .

---

<sup>11</sup> Written of the eviction of weeks earlier, which damaged, but did not devastate, the Farm, the following account takes on special poignancy after its unrestrained razing in the shadow of "Independence Day": "The plants cry out. *Hay tristeza en las milpas y el campo*. The people or *gente* are unable to retrieve their seeds from all over Mesoamerica brought to L.A. by the diaspora of indigenous peoples forced to migrate. This includes Sara Haskie Mendoza's wedding corn—heirloom Navajo corn—struck down in a violent assault against a community's medicine. As a Diné elder once instructed us, taking care of the land is traditional medicine. Denise Andrade finds it hard to tell the story. Not because she can't. Quite the contrary. She finds it hard to look at the plants, the crops and the *yerbas*. Many are strewn about from the *tormenta* that has cut through the 14-acre urban farm here with the forced and violent eviction of 350 farmers from their plots. Here, Denise does not [initially] speak of the police violence against those that resisted. Instead she states: "The earth was raped." Her words are not hyperbole. Amid the largest urban community farm in the nation, the crops are yanked out. Others are stepped upon, thrashed, crushed and lifeless. If you pause, you can still hear the screams. Yet, not all the plants are down. [Note: as of July 7, 2006, nearly all of them they are.] They continue to plea. They stand here as witnesses. She asks Alberto Tlatoa to come along . . . to tell the story . . . and in short order, this 19-year-old speaks of dignity and sets the record straight: "We are farmers, not gardeners. We are *campesinos*." Patrisia Gonzales, "We are Farmers, Not Gardeners," *Column of the Americas*, July 3, 2006, <http://la.indymedia.org/news/2006/07/167399.php> (accessed June 12, 2007).

. . . Out of all things to concern him that was his greatest concern. . . . And so, [about eight years ago I started taking care of his plot and] I kept coming. . . .

This [pointing through the perimeter fence at the bulldozed wreckage of a section of the Farm] is the dividing line. It would go all the way up to the banana trees. . . . This was part of the legacy [my father] left. He taught a lot of people how to do things right [weeping], how to grow food correctly, how to plant. A lot of people respected him, because of his honesty. . . . We had . . . these agave plants, they were very important, and then I had a lot of sugar cane, [pointing] there's some of it . . . and the little banana tree. This is the first year it's given bananas. And it's pretty sad, you know. There was a pomegranate tree over there that he had left and there was a whole row of cactus that we used to eat from. On this side [pointing] . . . right there in the middle, right there, there was a guava tree. That was the last thing, the only real thing that I think my father left me [weeping]. The first day of bulldozing it survived, but the second day they came by and they tore it all down . . . .

[The Farm] was organized like the ejido system in Mexico, the kind of representational government we're used to . . . . [My dad was one of the elected leaders] and that was one of the reasons people kind of looked to me, when things came down. They looked at me as representing the same historical situation and that was one of the reasons they elected me to represent the community. And, you know, we fought hard, we fought pretty hard, and I'm so close to this that I cannot tell if it made a difference [laughs and weeps]. To me this represented a direct connection to my father [weeps more strongly]. . . .

For me the *land* has always been associated with my grandfather. When we were kids, my father had to come north to make a living, so we were basically left with my grandfather [weeping], who is still alive, who's still a farmer in an ejido, or communal land holding. To me [this plot] was still a connection back to that kind of a feeling of being, you know [his voice trails off]. For me the farm [in Mexico], it was a special place. It was rough and it was hard, but I had a lot of good times. I worked hard; when you're a kid you work hard. . . . The guava tree was really important for many reasons. When I grew up . . . [where] we lived . . . there was no road, they barely put a road in the last 15 years, but before then you had to pack mule all the way in there, which was like 8 hours. . . . And what we loved to do was . . . go down the river. . . . The River de San Juan . . . had created this very large ravine and you would just go down the ravines and they were full of guava trees and all day long you would take off and just go picking guavas just straight out of the wild. . . . And so to me [weeping] the bulldozing of the guava trees was [weeping strongly], was breaking the whole connection [his voice trails off] and [in its place is left] a feeling of numbness . . . .

And it's tough, you know, [weeping] because now you understand how much a little piece of dirt means to the people. It's kind of symbolic of a lot of things, like the struggle, of doing for yourselves [weeping]. I'm going to have to stop; this is way too hard for me. . . . I haven't been able to process it, I haven't been able to breathe, I've been busy fighting. So, you know, this stuff catches up with you. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Rufina: The last thing I planted was corn . . . [from my paternal] grandmother's side [of our family]. . . . My uncle still works [their] land [in Mexico]; . . . and my father, my

---

<sup>12</sup> Tezozomoc, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, July 28, 2006.

mother, and my sister, we planted that corn and it was growing real beautiful, but they killed it and that's just wrong. . . .

[There were] a lot of children [at the Farm], [children at] every parcel—except I think there was one couple that didn't have nobody and maybe the Russian gentleman that was with us and the Cambodian lady [but they probably didn't have family]—everybody else . . . , every single parcel, had children—maybe that their nieces would come, grandchildren would come, somebody would come . . . . You would get to know everybody's children after a while. They'd be running around down the walkways, the aisles [between plots] . . . .

This place was opened every day from sunrise to sunset . . . . When we started organizing more . . . we would ask people, “Well, okay, it's the Fourth of July, should we close down?” They were, like, “No! We have no other place to go to!” [We'd ask,] “You know, it's going to be Thanksgiving, do you guys . . . ?” “No!” “Well, what about New Years Eve?” And then they said, “No, let's open and close early!” Why? Because you have no other place to go! . . . This is their only place, this is the place. They didn't want to be stuck in their apartment, probably sharing rent with other families; they needed a space. . . .

We had the best meals, the best times, the best music . . . And underneath . . . the walnut tree we would have the services, the Christian service, the Catholic service. . . . [At] one of the [worship services] . . . we introduced two crosses, one for the north and one for the south. A farmer made them out of wood, real plain. And then we would rotate them, because there was mass once a month and then you would take care of that cross, take it to your house for prayer and worship and then you would bring it [to the next service] and then that person would bring some food, because that's the tradition: eat with everybody. And then another family would take it . . . . We would do a yearly feast [in June], the Abundance Feast . . . . We would have the dancers come in and we would have prayers all night. We would start up with a mass and feed people and then do the offerings . . . then take a rest and then have breakfast and then dance. And then in the evening [we would] invite everyone to come and eat. . . . In Mexico the Abundance [Feast] . . . [is] a real old tradition of giving thanks [at the end of the growing season] . . . for the abundance of what [the land] gave you . . . . People would do an altar and it was real pretty, decorated with . . . flowers, people would bring the most beautiful flowers they had. . . . That is, I think, what makes up a community: how you pray, how you play, where you live, where you eat . . . .

[At the Farm] faces were happy, because they were working the land and growing a plant and cleaning and weeding, like they were so much at peace with themselves. In the middle of all this bad violence, in the middle of this concrete and contamination there was this little, little peace . . . like they were really one with, well, the Creator, one with the Creator. And I think if you look at all the special moments, [they] were when the trees were moving because there was a light breeze, the birds were singing, the kids were running, the sun was up, you could smell if there had been watering of the land, and the people of the community . . . were just greeting everyone, like, . . . “Buenos días!”

And the other part is the sharing. You'd say, “Those are beautiful zucchinis!” And then [they would reply] “Have some!” And I said, “No, no, no!” And they'd say, “No, please!” And then you'd say, “Well, then, you have some [of my things].” . . . Or you would walk by and greet somebody and they'd say, “Come in, come into my little

parcel!” And they’d be heating up a tortilla and they would offer you whatever they had. . . .

I think [the one time I most felt] “well I’ve done something in life!” is when I saw some of the young children marching for the first time [protesting in support of the Farm] and that’s when I knew . . . I did something good . . . . And if nothing else happens, that was so important for those children and people who . . . have been real quiet, submissive, [who] worked all their lives, all because they needed to do that for their children—and to see them, the elders and more important the children, I knew that that’s it, that those children will never, ever be afraid to stand up!<sup>13</sup>



It takes a certain audacity to bring children into the world. The world is not an easy place, not even for those prosperous and well-adjusted families whom we come to know too rarely and for too short a time. Indeed, finding one’s way through this world can be quite an ordeal. The pain of childbirth is not the mother’s alone. Therefore, when the afternoon following the hour he first consciously witnesses a baptism a little boy turns to his mother and asks, “why did they pour water over that baby today?” she has been called upon to say more than her son can bear, more than she herself can say. She has been called upon to tell him the story of Jesus and his place in it. In her haltering reply to the child she loves more than her own life she will inevitably tell him how much *Jesus* loved children, she may even tell him that he was crucified for children as well as for adults; but saying much more than that will strike her as premature, as unsuitable for one so young, and may cause some disquiet in her own mind, when she later ponders how she might have answered him better. “Was I baptized?” he will ask. “Yes, you were baptized, too, when you were very small.”

How does a mother or father tell any child that we who have brought her into the world—we who have promised to love and shelter her, to feed and nurture her, to give her all that we have—have in fact given her away to be inscribed into the most shocking and disturbing of stories, a story which itself is an indictment against the whole world?

---

<sup>13</sup> Juarez, interview, August 1, 2006. Rufina is President of the South Central Farmers of Los Angeles.

But truly it must be a strange human being, or rather an inhuman brute, who would not involuntarily drop [her] gaze and stand almost like a poor sinner the moment [she] is going to tell a child this for the first time, a child who has never heard a word about this and of course has never suspected any such thing. At that moment, the adult stands there as an accuser who accuses [herself] and the whole human race.<sup>14</sup>

Not even the prosperous and well-adjusted have the resources to take in and mollify the story of Jesus, though they have often tried. Of course, it is no tragedy. At its open end is resurrection. And yet *this* resurrection is not the stuff of comedy, not even in the most formal sense of that term. Easter Sunday follows Good Friday. The Jesus who “stands up” on Easter Sunday has not gotten over being crucified. His story’s conclusion is by no means “prosperous, pleasant, and desirable,”<sup>15</sup> in any ordinary sense of those terms. He stands up on the far side of tragedy. What do we hope for as we tell a child, even in the most “age appropriate” manner, what she has been baptized into? Having told her, how do we then pray for her? How do we counsel her to approach the time that lies ahead of her? Do we dare pray that she will repeat, however differently, the passion of Jesus? Even without burdening her with *that*, her life no doubt would be hard. How could a mother, without a perverse, pathological abuse of a child’s unquestioning trust, pray for her to come to *Jesus’* end? How could she teach her little girl that her baptism means that she will suffer as Jesus suffered? Even the ghost of an image of such pedagogy would send a shudder through any but the most aberrant. And yet to baptize a child *is* to give her to be inscribed into the story of Jesus, a story that even in all of its heaviness is declared already in the words of the baptismal liturgy to be the only unqualifiedly good news.

It is indeed good news. The story of Jesus is the story of a light that shines to the far side of darkness. It is the story of a life that ceases to be threatened by death, because it has

---

<sup>14</sup> Søren Kierkegaard [Anti-Climacus], *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 175 – 176.

<sup>15</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “comedy.”

outbid it. It is the story of a life free to undo competition, a life whose abundance makes useless both the claim to “mine” and to “yours.” It is the story of an excessive love given freely both to friends and to enemies. It is the story of the forgiveness even of great debt, of the emptying of prisons, of the feeding of the hungry, of the renewal of the strength of atrophied legs and blind eyes, of the coming of peace, of the awakening of a righteousness that will not be defiled by contact even with what is most unclean. It is the story of a sanctity that comes to dwell among even the vilest of criminals, humbly and invitingly. And it is the story set inseparably in the context of the kind of grueling life that the great majority of the human race lives, has lived, and will live for as long as we can imagine. That is, it is good news only where news, more often than not, is bad.

The mother and father who give their child to be baptized will hope and pray that the redemption of the resurrection will so saturate her that when times come that would tempt her to despair, she will face them with trust. But they would also pray—if they understood baptism a certain way—that her life would become redemptive, i.e. cruciform, that she would “suffer approximately as he suffered in this world.”<sup>16</sup>

To baptize a little girl is to send her down the path that leads to resurrection, but only through crucifixion. Although it is not possible to predict the way she might be described in a case study after she has spent years and other countable resources on this path, one might imagine a now young woman some difficult evening writing:

---

<sup>16</sup> “So what effect do you think this story would evoke in the child? . . . [Gradually], as the child went and thought about this story, [she] would become more and more passionate . . . —for the child would have firmly resolved that when [she] grew up [she] would slay all those ungodly people who had treated this loving person in that way; . . . childishly forgetting that it was [nearly 2000 years] since those people lived. . . . Then, when the child had become older and mature, [she] would not have forgotten [her] childhood impression, but [she] understood it differently. [She] no longer wished to strike, because, [she] said, then I am not like him, the abased one, who did not strike, not even when he was struck. No, now [she] wished only one thing, to suffer approximately as he suffered in this world, which philosophers have always called the best but which nevertheless . . . crucifies love and shouts, ‘Long live Barabbas.’” Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 177 – 178.

After a weary day of preparing the land for a [community] garden last April, I put down a shovel and lifted my gaze along the 2-story cement walls that enclosed our little open plot of land. My eyes eventually reached the sky, and I was met with an amazing sense of renewal. I felt as if God was saying, “I am inviting you to take part in an act of creation.”

My tired mind and plans for the garden were suddenly unimportant. Whether I was the one working on it, whether the beds were [bordered by] stone or wood, even whether we planted a Japanese Maple or a Dogwood—these things clearly did not matter. What I understood from God was: “I am doing something to redeem creation in this place. It is far more vast than you can imagine, yet you are invited to help as best you can.” . . .

As I turned from the sky, the abandoned factory across H Street loomed in my peripheral vision . . . From when I first came to Kensington, I’d felt the factory’s ominous presence over our neighborhood. It was all I could see from my room, the sun sank behind it hours before darkness fell . . . [At] the moment, it stood abandoned—a monument in opposition to new creation. . . .

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, early in the morning, our senses were overwhelmed first by the smell of smoke, and soon followed by an intense heat, crackling, and blaring light coming from within the H Street factory. . . . I started shaking. We grabbed what we could as we left the house, stopping to pray as hundreds of our friends and neighbors poured into the streets. By the end of the day, more than a city block and 9 homes had been consumed, including ours. The garden-to-be served as a gap between the row homes that day, stopping the flames from spreading around the corner to affect even more of our neighbors. . . . The building smoldered for days. My mind raced for nights, acknowledging miracles and mourning over what might have been spared or lost. Just a few feet from our home, the Dogwood tree we’d planted had somehow survived. I was personally spared more than I can fathom, and don’t know what to make of this. Nearly a month has passed, yet I am still numb and amazed that no one was hurt. . . . My role is still to trust and continue caring, and I dare to pray that God’s vast redemption of Creation will rise from the ashes. . . .

Recently, I have been reminded that we must empty ourselves so that God can fill us. If we fill our lives—there is no room for God to act. I have only the best intentions in what I do, and yet I consistently take on too much—or try to do things by myself—and somehow end up both drained and over-filled at the same time.

The solitude of which I speak is not for the purpose of remaining alone in nothingness. Rather, it is a space and time created for becoming still enough to enter into communion . . . [with] God. Without this space, we lose sight of how completely God loves us, and thus—we can’t know how to love each other as perfectly as we are loved.<sup>17</sup>

It is having been baptized into the extraordinary history of Jesus, having come to the strange thoughtfulness—the *metanoia*—that baptism entails, that we may begin to slip out of

---

<sup>17</sup> Jesce Walz, “Redeeming Creation,” in her “Newsletter,” an unpublished account of her time at The Simple Way, July, 2007. Jesce is a 25-year-old member of The Simple Way, a “new monastic” missional community in a particularly impoverished corner of Kensington, a neglected North Philadelphia neighborhood. Cf. <http://www.thesimpleway.org/> [accessed July 31, 2007].

the grasp of “natural consciousness” to see the task of life with a particularly uncanny difference, to see the whole world immersed in baptismal waters.<sup>18</sup> Surely it would take a *metanoia* to walk into a village of peasants bent and broken by the relentless demands of day labor and remember with some joy that it was to such peasants that Jesus said, “Come unto me . . .” (Matthew 11:28). A room full of comfortable people presuming to have put poverty behind them (perhaps by “redemption and lift”) is a body of false servants of the master who never got over being poor (cf. Philippians 2:6).



Human beings work. Their lungs open, they climb to their feet, not quite falling, they walk; sometimes they run. They thrust their rough hands into the earth that in rising to meet them tempts them to believe it gives them support. They cut a path through the world that in surrounding them tempts them to believe it gives them room. They walk furrowed fields, they carry what they’ve gathered in their skirts, and at the end of a good day they eat.<sup>19</sup> Human beings work and work is hard.<sup>20</sup> Though in weary moments we dream of a time when work was or will be effortless—like an overflowing spring—we touch that dream only fleetingly, say, when we give ourselves to tasks with exhilarating abandon.<sup>21</sup> Yet on any ordinary day, when with freshly washed hands we sit on our heels to eat, what we have

---

<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that baptism is an entry into Hegelian or Husserlian phenomenological consciousness or Heideggerian “thinking.”

<sup>19</sup> Those familiar with Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art” will recognize my borrowing his imagery. See Martin Heidegger, *Poetry Language Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 32 – 34. Of course, Heidegger’s position is not thereby being affirmed.

<sup>20</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* follows the etymology of the word “work” (s.v. “work, verb”) to an ancestor that signifies “to feel pain.” Cf. s.v. “labour, labor, noun”: “ad. L. *laborem* labour, toil, distress, trouble.”

<sup>21</sup> I imagine Tom Joad: “Tom hefted the pick. ‘Jumping Jesus! If she don’t feel good!’” John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking Press, 1967), 308. I also imagine the chain gang sitting on their shovels at the end of an extraordinary day of hard labor, shaken, bewildered, and elated: “Dragline: ‘Where’d the road go?’ Luke: ‘That’s it. That’s the end.’ Koko: ‘But there’s still daylight left.’ Dragline (checking the sun): ‘Bout two hours left.’ Loudmouth Steve: ‘What do we do now?’ Luke (smiling): ‘Nothin.’ Dragline [laughing]: ‘Oh, Luke, you wild beautiful thing! You crazy handful of nothin!’” *Cool Hand Luke*, directed by Stuart Rosenberg, Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc., 1967. But I imagine especially John 4:14, to which these parables awkwardly point.

known has been hard. Certainly, it is ambiguously so. Even on an especially painful day labor comes not only with distress, but also with joy—there are contraction and dilation, pushing and crowning, breathless silence and the death-defying, piercing cry of new life. And when new life comes warmly into her arms, she holds it close and it suckles at her breast.

It would be a strangely abstract fantasy were we seriously to imagine a future without work or food. Even while lying in her death-bed a worker dreams of a new day, perhaps before a feast table with the fruit of her labor bountifully spread for her children and grandchildren, for her brothers and sisters, for her mother and father, and for her, too, and the man to whom she has again and again turned in invitation. Life is a work and a feast that cease only under the cold weight of death. Feuerbach was right that we are what we eat.<sup>22</sup> Marx was right that we are what we do.<sup>23</sup>

Work constitutes no private property; its goods are not mine because my individual, sweaty intentionality is mixed with it. Certainly the stories of our falling prey to the temptation to covet the “product” of labor, what tumbles off a factory conveyor belt onto a half-off retail display table, stories of our fixation on belongings as the end of our human resources management, stories of our laying hold of goods and making them “mine,” are no less plentiful than dark. Nonetheless all that we do is a moment in the unendingly fluid, open, long march of work. It is only in the postponement of indolent, disengaged neutrality that privacy and propriety make any appeal to us. Work was there before your diaphragm tightened to receive your first gasp; work will be there long after it softens to release your

---

<sup>22</sup> For brief accounts of the context of Feuerbach’s famous words see Eugene Kamenka, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 30 and Harold Höffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. B. E. Meyer, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 281.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” trans. S. Ryazanskaya, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 156 – 158; and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One, With Selections from Parts Two and Three and Supplementary Texts*, trans. W. Lough, et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 42.

last sigh. It is no more yours than mine. Indeed it is not “ours,” some asset of a corporation desperate to operate in the black. It is a commission that comes to us, the way we together are sent to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, to cast our shadows on the earth’s seeds, green plants, and grazing wildlife; the way we are to move toward the interval of silence when the work week is full, the day we overtly and particularly wait upon that mystery we too casually call “God” (Genesis 1:28 – 2:3).<sup>24</sup>

We are textile workers, together weaving the fibers that rise uncompelled into the world from the earth. We are gleaners, filling fabric bags with grain left for us at the edges of fields, grain we will grind and mix and knead and bake. We are vine-dressers, tending rows of vines gnarled with age, collecting and gently crushing clusters of their fruit, and pouring new wine into fresh wineskins. We are poets, who ply our craft from memory, scratching out new songs of lament, petition, thanksgiving, praise, and intercession. We are dancers moving to the breath- and blood-rhythms of lungs and hearts. What we gather, bake, and pour, we eat and drink, gracefully singing and dancing our long, unfinished story. Work is food and food is work—each undulating into the other in an expenditure that holds out what it is doing, has done, and will have done, as a child might to an approaching parent—that is to say, righteously.




---

<sup>24</sup> Since we and the wildlife over which we are to have “dominion” are said in this passage to be given seeds and green plants to eat, whatever “dominion” might be taken here to signify, it doesn’t include the shedding of blood.

Work is charismatic.<sup>25</sup> *What* we are given to work upon precedes us, a gift sent our way the first five days of creation, the days when the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters, before our dust first stirred. *That* we are given to work is a gift of the sixth day of creation, the day the Spirit is breathed into our nostrils and we rise to our feet. The work that we are given to *do* is a gift released on the seventh day of creation, the day that belies our “productivity” and invites us to remember whose Spirit opens the way before us (Deuteronomy 5:14 – 15, 1 Corinthians 3:6; cf. Exodus 15 and 2 Samuel 22). In doing and waiting we are given to live for creation’s eighth day, the day the Spirit will have been poured upon all flesh and all work will have shone—and even now on occasion and in anticipation shines—with a liberative glory full of grace and truth (Barnabas 15:8 – 9, Acts 2:17, John 1:14). The “was,” “am,” “are,” and “will have been” of these days are the passion of giving.<sup>26</sup> Work is the way we give ourselves away, the way we are given to be stretched out, the way we are given to take time.

Time, however, cannot be held for long. As with all gifts that do not collapse into property, it comes newly into our hands only to get away again. Indeed we don’t so much

---

<sup>25</sup> It might be helpful to note explicitly here that I am particularly in this paragraph thinking of Heidegger’s phrase “*Sein zu*.” Heidegger uses this phrase, of course, in his significantly pagan non-substantialist ontology. It functions in part as a critique of the traditional Western notion that beings are relatively independent and circumscribable, items centered in themselves. For Heidegger there is no being that is not also a kind of entailment of the totality of beings, as an event of gathering, a happening-together. To think “a being” is thus to think of its relation to the larger happening of *being*. That is, “a being” is always a “being-to,” a movement out into what is both different from it and (from another point of view) precisely what it is (in the way, say, that words entail each other). This is seen perhaps most significantly in *Being and Time*, when Heidegger speaks of *Dasein* (which may for now be taken to be the way a human occurs) as “being toward death” (*Sein zu Tode*). Here, along the way of life, a human being is a relation to all that is happening, all that has happened, and all that will happen—and it is that as it struggles through life in anticipation of its own coming death, that moment when its particular instance of being will have ended and thus become all that it will ever be, i.e. a totality. See, e.g., Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 219 – 246. What I wish to suggest here is the *theological* point that a human life, though indeed living-*to*, is a living simultaneously to others and to God, who concurrently elude all totalizing. “Living to” here becomes the gift of love from and to the Father—and with the Father to the neighbor (Mark 12:28 – 31).

<sup>26</sup> Today, just before noon and just after finishing a meal of “tofu with vegetable,” chow mein, and steamed rice, I opened the fortune cookie I happened to receive. It read: “Time is precious, but truth is more precious than time.”

take it as surrender to it, as to a promise. Time is as it happens, the trace of a not-yet, a coming *new* time which unsettles constancy. Admittedly, it is not obviously so. Indeed the distilled wisdom of the great thinkers of record begs to differ. Every “principle of correct thinking” ascertains at most a restorative future which, held fast by the old, rests in changeless peace.<sup>27</sup> The image of a truly new day may well seem a fantasy. Even if *this* and *that* have gone, we recall, their matter/energy continues unabated.<sup>28</sup> (“Scoffers [come] . . . saying ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!’” [2 Peter 3:3 – 4].)<sup>29</sup>

The persistent widow imagines differently.<sup>30</sup> She imagines a time that is patient and kind even as it delivers its unsettlingly ambiguous pronouncement, “I am coming for *you!*” (2 Peter 3:8 – 9). Her time forecasts an “outside” that surprises and wounds our property, prying open our bolted doors and windows, breaking into our houses like a thief in the night. Already—as if in anticipation of an impending fire storm—in every day of hard labor, however partially and fragmentarily, it comes (2 Corinthians 5:17). Our stockpiles of goods open to a disaster, word of which not every ear hears as good news (Luke 12:16 – 23).<sup>31</sup> Or so she tells us. She looks us in the eye and without speaking asks, “Don’t you feel the ground shaking; don’t you feel the heat of the approaching new day?” Before her gaze it is a

---

<sup>27</sup> I take the phrase “principle of correct thinking” from my copy of Irving M. Copi’s and Carl Cohen’s *Introduction to Logic*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), xix. Could one even begin to think the ascendancy of anything but the fixed constancy of “sameness,” if all thought comes down to the venerated Principle of Identity,  $A = A$ ?

<sup>28</sup> “I mean, this is junior high school general science, for god sake!”

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Augustine, e.g. *City of God* 12.13 – 14.

<sup>30</sup> I think not only of the widow who is often given this title (Luke 18: 1 – 8), but even more of the other Lukan widows (Luke 2:36 – 37; 7:12 – 13; 21:2 – 3).

<sup>31</sup> Blanchot’ “disaster” is only a parable of what I am saying here. For example: “The disaster: break with the star, break with every form of totality, never denying, however, the dialectical necessity of a fulfillment; the disaster: prophecy which announces nothing but the refusal of the prophetic as simply an event to come, but which nonetheless opens, nonetheless discovers the patience of vigilant language. The disaster, touch of the powerless infinite: it does not come to pass under a sidereal sky, but here—a here in excess of all presence. Here: where, then? ‘*Voice of no one once more.*’” Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 75.

cold man even among unjust judges who does not swallow hard. In unguarded moments we wonder, contrary to our better nature (like children), could it be in *some* (horrifying?) sense that in our time “the heavens *will* pass away with a loud noise, and the elements *will* be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it *will* be [laid bare]” (2 Peter 3:10)? We ask, because her gaze *is* already an apocalyptic question, a question that points at you and me from an outside beyond our grasp (Luke 8:28).<sup>32</sup>

“Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?” Leibniz asks and Heidegger echoes.<sup>33</sup> Indeed anything *we* might ask of an impending time in one way or another repeats the question that has already arrived with the very breath out of which our words are shaped.<sup>34</sup> *Everything* depends on *how* we repeat it, how we lean into it.<sup>35</sup> How do we live, when we remember that whatever we hold in our hands (as well as our hands themselves) will crumble one day into the dust from which it has come? (“Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?” [2 Peter 3:11

---

<sup>32</sup> Note the third numbered item in this language family: “Entry: eghs. Definition: Out . . . Derivatives include *strange*, and *extreme*. 1. Variant *\*eks*. a. *ex*<sup>1</sup>, *ex-*, from Latin *ex*, *ex-*, out of, away from; b. *ecto-*, *ex-*, *exo-*, *exoteric*, *exotic*; *electuary*, *lekvar*, *synecdoche*, from Greek *ex*, *ek*, out of, from. 2. Suffixed (comparative) variant form *\*eks-tero-*. a. *estrangle*, *exterior*, *external*, *extra-*, *strange*, from Latin *exter*, outward (feminine ablative *exterā*, *extrā*, on the outside); b. further suffixed (superlative) form *\*eks-t(e)r-emo-*. *extreme*, from Latin *extremus*, outermost (*\*-mo-*, superlative suffix). 3. Suffixed form *\*eghs-ko-*. *eschatology* from Greek *eskhatos*, outermost, last. 4. Celtic *\*eks-*, out (of), in compound *\*eks-di-sedo-* (see *sed-*). 5. *samizdat*, from Russian *изъ*, from, out of, from Balto-Slavic *\*izъ*.” *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., “Appendix I: Indo-European Roots,” s.v. “eghs.”

<sup>33</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, “The Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason,” trans. Robert Latta, in *Leibniz: Selections*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 527 (paragraph 7); Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the notion that God is *die Fraglichkeit* of the world in Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 347 – 353; and *God and Word*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 31 – 32. Of course, Ebeling’s vision is quite different from the one I am voicing. Nonetheless in his own way Ebeling points the reader to the engaging and unsettling mystery of God.

<sup>35</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “obey,” “ob-”: “classical Latin *oboedire* (also *obedire*) to listen, pay attention, obey, submit to < *ob-* OB- + *audire* to hear. . . . In combination classical Latin *ob* has the following senses . . . : In the direction of, towards; facing, in front of; as classical Latin *obvertere* to turn towards, *oboedire* to listen to.”

– 12].) Do we dare to answer through the sweat of our labor: “in accordance with [God’s] promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness [dwells]” (13)?

Thus the time of waiting is to be no mere passivity. We are in no sense masters over time, but it does not happen without us. We make time. It is no less a gift that we do than a deed we receive. When all our work ceases, our time is up. Without work we are dead (cf. James 2:26). We work with the widow, however, not to acquire time, but to give it away—to the holy one who is “to come” and with the holy one to one another (cf. James 2:21 – 26, Mark 12:28 – 31, Luke 10:9, and Revelation 4:8). Each moment in this way arrives and in arriving gets away (Romans 14:6 – 15; cf. 1 Samuel 1:11).<sup>36</sup> Inspiration precedes expiration and may by God’s good charismatic pleasure follow it. That is how with the widow we dare to wait—even to the far, silent side of the cold metallic knell that in lingering tempts us even now to put an end to all waiting.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. (Romans 14:7 – 9)

Thus together we are given to live and move and unhand our being, i.e. we are given to pray. Led by an unlikely teacher, himself fresh from prayer, we turn our thinking bodies toward the mystery from which breath comes, acknowledging that we have no control over who or what this mystery comes to be. We remember all we have done, all that our ancestors have done and would have their children do, all that we yet plan to do, and we call upon the mystery to gather it all into a city of restless peace and righteousness.<sup>37</sup> We pray for this city to come freely—as freely as the cool dawn that breaks a long, hot summer—manifestly, out

---

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Appearance as the Arrival of the Future,” in *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), e.g. 136 – 141; Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 53 – 54.

<sup>37</sup> I might modify the opening of Augustine’s *Confessions* in this way: “You have made us for yourself and our hearts are at rest till they become restless in you.”

of hiding, here among these fists full of dust and ashes. And looking out into an open future we pray in the day when inertia drags us down and we ask that it nonetheless be a good day of food and work. We pray that our closure to the future, our self-exaltation or self-abasement, our possessive grasping after what is to come, and our clinging love for what was and is will be purged from our bodies precisely as we in good faith give up what we have a right to claim from others as ours (Luke 11:1 – 4). We pray that our day will trace a line down the path of righteousness (Psalm 5:8; Isaiah 40:3, Mark 1:3).

Wet from the waters of baptism in the Spirit who drove Jesus to the cross and raised him from the dead (Mark 1:8, 10:38 – 45; Romans 6:3 – 5; 1 Corinthians 12:13), we are little tempted by the notion that the path of righteousness could ever be hewn out of the forests and tangled brush of the wilderness or discovered amidst dangers and hardships by the intrepid pioneers of civilization. In that moment we know that it comes to us. We are led into it, graced by it—from the outside. The path of righteousness opens before us in the precarious moment that is neither simply present nor simply future. Admittedly, we step into it with some deliberation, *telos* in hand. Yet in coming this path unhinges teleology. Stepping into it calls for a postscriptive, non-teleological, eschatological “nevertheless” (Matthew 26:39).<sup>38</sup> The captains of industry who ride the raging bull of economic expansion, blinded by the whirlwind of dust their busyness stirs up, may presume to be masters of their own fate and the fate of the world, bringing history to its end, but the day of the giver of all gifts bears down on that property upon which the unrighteous stake their claims. The future comes to them as a crisis that will have hauled them as defendants before the bench upon

---

<sup>38</sup> Though there will be lonely days and nights for anyone, loneliness is a threat to the child of the coming reign of God. Cf. Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, trans. Grover Foley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 109 – 120.

which sit the poor evicted from South Central L.A. Farm (Luke 6:20 – 24, 12:16 – 22; 1 Corinthians 6:2; Romans 14:10).



The Gospels tell the story of the way Jesus' faithfulness to the coming of the reign of God took him into the darkness. It is because readers of the Gospels have been bold to think this "end" that without committing the fallacy of hasty generalization they sometimes hear themselves saying that among us all there is *none* righteous. It is not by inductive reasoning that they declare the whole human race to have his blood on its hands, to be "sinners." The doctrine of sin<sup>39</sup> has emerged rather by the simple fact that this Emmanuel is ultimately to be found among the lost, the damned, those consigned to hell.<sup>40</sup> He is a mission into that perditious field.<sup>41</sup> One might even go so far as to say that to meet him is always to meet him there.<sup>42</sup> Of course, no one simply believes such things. One must be nurtured into them, e.g. as one comes with the church to celebrate his broken body and shed blood. It is in that prolonged moment when the church professes that God is with us above all on the cross that it calls upon the Spirit to open our ears to a tradition of grace that does not shrink back from saying the most extreme things:

---

<sup>39</sup> The doctrine of sin is not to be confused with a doctrine of *guilt*. See Søren Kierkegaard [Johannes Climacus], *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. 1: *Text*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 525 – 531, 572, 583 – 586.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Luther's understanding of the work of the alien work of Spirit. For example: "It is by living -- no, rather it is by dying and being damned that a theologian is made, not by understanding, reading, or speculating." W.A. 5.163.28 (*Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519 – 1521), cited and translated by B. A. Gerrish, "To the Unknown God: Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God," *Journal of Religion* 53, no. 3 (July 1973): 269.

<sup>41</sup> This is not to say that the incarnation is to be located within a doctrine of sin, as if the former were nothing but a solution to the latter. What is to be said is that the incarnation is God's liberative solidarity with us, we who in making a pact with death, in throwing ourselves into a desperately competitive death-dealing, have blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

<sup>42</sup> "I the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me" and "the best thing of all is that God is with us" are phrases that meet each other provocatively in the decline and death of John Wesley. See Elizabeth Ritchie's account of Wesley's last words in Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 145 – 150; and to contextualize it Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 526 – 534. Of course, Wesley is one of history's most vigorous advocates of the doctrine of sanctification. He was quite troubled by Luther's doctrine that the justified is *simil iustus et peccator*, at once righteous and a sinner.

All . . . are under the power of sin, as it is written: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.” “Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of vipers is under their lips.” “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their paths, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3: 9 – 18)<sup>43</sup>

There is no shortage of narratives in the traditions that are gathered in this passage that approve of its claim. Within a certain confessional imagination it is more than understandable that the “they” of those stories quickly becomes “we.” Here *we* are the ones who close our hearts and throats and hands to the Spirit’s future, to the coming of the holy God (Genesis 3:4 – 7), building to shake our fists at the sky (Genesis 11:4). Before the merciful God who elects the poor, the slave, the orphan, those who labor and are heavy laden—*we* murder (Genesis 4:8); *we* close our doors to wayfarers (Genesis 19); *we* sell our sisters and brothers into slavery (Genesis 37:28); *we* multiply the pain of those already broken by hard labor (Exodus 1:8 – 11); *we* pursue our own good, perched above the poor while life is drained out of them (Job 24; James 2:6); *we* ignore the motherless and fatherless, the friendless, the strange (Malachi 3:5); *we* survive, thrive, compete, and amass by trampling others underfoot (Isaiah 59:7). The face of the destitute fades from view, because we have turned our backs to it or because we look through it to a greater good or because the glitter

---

<sup>43</sup> It is sometimes suggested that the universality of sin is empirically obvious. Certainly, as far as anybody can tell there has not ever been a time when we were not inflicting misery on one another. However, the sweeping extent of Paul’s words cannot ever be “verified.” Not only will even the most careful scrutiny never be able to set aside the possibility that among all the perpetrators of injustice there is some relatively small number who do “good” and that continually—but even more so sin is not just any destructive act; it is an act performed precisely *coram Deo* as a “strong” or “weak” despair in the face of the future coming of the God who is love. God is the “third term” without which there is neither righteousness nor sin. Søren Kierkegaard [Anti-Climacus], *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13 – 14, 79 – 82; Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 38, 40 – 43, 58, 107, 130, 252 – 256. How one is related to God may be known by one’s “fruits” (Matthew 7:15 – 16, a passage actually about “false prophets”), but human fruits are even more ambiguous than apples and peaches, that may be deceptively clear-skinned or spotted. Believing the exhaustive concreteness of sin as Paul lays it out takes entry into the sociality of discourse and practices he exemplifies—the sociality that is always on the way from and to the crucified/resurrected Jesus.

of something we more desire distracts us from it. Time and time again we anxiously meet an alien body of people, shrink back from its unpredictability, rise only to intern it, and with violence and delusion “secure” *our* homeland.<sup>44</sup> In the fantasy of good and evil, food and work inscribe a closed circle. And so, we feed workers just enough to keep them on schedule. Without the prospect of a new day, the pain of their labor soon eclipses delivery, new life threatens to be stillborn, and a barren yesterday increasingly holds sway over tomorrow (Exodus 1:8 – 13).

But, of course, it is also to be said that “they” do oppress “us.” “We” are also the betrayed—the poor: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.<sup>45</sup> In fact “we” are the poor in greater numbers, not uncommonly poor because we have been faithful to the call of the God of Jesus Christ (Psalm 44:22, but especially as it appears in Romans 8:36).<sup>46</sup> In this sense, the suffering bear witness to their Lord; they are “martyrs” (Revelation 12:11). And though there is a certain “blessedness” to that mode of life and death, it is no less an appalling injustice. Even if one with good reason says that persecution for the sake of righteousness is in the tradition of persecuted prophets and that the path of righteousness will lead one into the jaws of the lion (Matthew 5:12, cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:15), it is only because death not only will have been, but already has been swallowed up in victory that the

---

<sup>44</sup> I think of the Japanese-American Internment Camps of World War II. The precedent for these “camps” is the “Indian Reservation.” Their descendent in the current “immigration crisis” with its border enforcement and INS agents is the spatially ambiguous field of the “undocumented” who have been systematically “disappeared.” Certainly the most obvious and extreme example in the living memory of the rise of European civilization is the Nazi Concentration Camp. However, the internment of Hebrew slaves in Egypt provides a paradigm by which these and other phenomena become particularly theologically relevant.

<sup>45</sup> The word “poor” is the bigger term, signifying the one whose life is being drained away. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Option for the Poor,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Robert R. Barr, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 241 – 242.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Hauerwas makes this point well in his *After Christendom: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 46 – 47. When the prosperous have kept the poor hidden, it is easy to seduce the shielded into thinking that faithfulness to God yields a measurable “blessing.” Most of the world knows better. In some parts of the world it is even pretty clear to all that the servants of the crucified do not receive in this world a rosier fate than their master (Matthew 10:22 – 25). In no case, however, are “the poor” to be romanticized. Dreadfully, but not uncommonly, a single woman or (more often) a single man is both oppressed and oppressor at once (as “civil wars” bear witness).

murder of “the least of these” is not completely unholy (Matthew 25:31 – 46, 1 Corinthians 15:54 – 58). The blood of Abel still cries to God from the earth (Genesis 4:10).

In the end, however, “*we*” oppress “*us*.” We betray and deny—we are betrayed and denied by—our sisters and brothers, our friends, the ones with whom we journey through this wilderness. The whirlwind of righteous crisis bears down on us—not abstractly, but with the concreteness of a face-to-face encounter. “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7). Before the crisis of the coming of the holy one, even the upright fail to stand.<sup>47</sup>

As if blatant treachery were not enough, there is another, more insidious betrayal, faceless and all but nameless. We stutter and say “the Satan” (Job 1 – 2) or “principalities and powers” (Ephesians 6:12). Without warning and from out of nowhere anyone might be thrown down by drought, fire, flood, earthquake, famine, disease—afflicted, broken, disinherited, forsaken, no less prey to despair than anyone (Job 2:9). Even if from all appearances some one of us had lived in righteousness receiving to give, when she is by some disaster left alone to rot, she is tempted to imagine that some retributive justice were getting even with her for what she had unwittingly done. When a day is lived under the weight of a heavy, invisible hand, it might seem that it is a vengeful God who wears the torturer’s mask.

It is among the greatest of mysteries that smothered by the dark shadow of great loss the throat of the sufferer does not simply and inevitably close. In fact, improbable as it is, it may open not only to receive again one last wisp of a breath, but to fill lungs painfully near to bursting in order to release a cry, a cry that tears through earth, heaven, and the “God” of

---

<sup>47</sup> “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’” (Isaiah 6:1 – 5; cf. John 20:26 – 29, Mark 4:11 – 12, and Jeremiah 4)

retribution—to the holy one free to save (Job 19:23 – 27).<sup>48</sup> “I cry out ‘Violence!’” (Job 19:7).<sup>49</sup> And whether it is the apparently blind violence of storm or shifting land mass; or the designer violence of an economics of competitive profit, there is a word to be heard: “Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields . . . cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the [Sovereign] of hosts” (James 5:4, cf. verse 11 and Exodus 3:9). It seems so unwarranted, when a body—disintegrating to the dust and ashes out of which it was shaped—rises into the firestorm and lets the words spill from her lips: “I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25).<sup>50</sup>

The Jesus Christ of the Gospels is *this* Word, too. He is the Word that above all stands out of an open and parched throat—as death, sin, and hell sink in their claws—and says, “Father, into your hand I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). He is the one in solidarity with all those under the cold, crushing weight of despair. Even when they cannot speak, he speaks for them. Even when they cannot move, he calls them to himself, lifted up as he is, and in calling them breathes the breath of life into their lungs. Further and above all, he calls them to make his journey theirs. He calls them to be liberated, not only for their own good, but to move—givingly, lovingly—into solidarity with other sufferers: the hungry to feed the hungry, the imprisoned to visit the imprisoned, the naked to clothe the naked; but also the

---

<sup>48</sup> See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 63 – 66.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Lola before the roulette table in *Run Lola Run*, directed by Tom Tykwer, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1998.

<sup>50</sup> It is the testimony of the fellowship of the cross that the outcry of hope from one under the shadow of despair is uttered already with the breath of the Spirit that raised the crucified Jesus from the hell into which his body was dumped. In saying this, a “universal truth” is not represented. It is not that only a fool would deny this. These words are spoken because the light of the eighth day of his holy week shines back upon their speakers from what was then only a hope for which there was no good reason. He who breaks bread at the wayside along the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) breaks bread with them, too. He calls to them, too. And though he brings peace to them, it is the peace of a life of love that moves to stand in solidarity with all those whose backs break on every lonely mountain of injustice. He says to them, too, “feed my lambs” (John 21:15). And when those words strike home, a body is gathered that is sent with him into the pit of hell where “we” oppress “us.”

full to become hungry with the hungry, the free to become imprisoned with the imprisoned, the clothed to become naked with the naked.<sup>51</sup>



In the stories that arise among the people whose memories of him are still warm Jesus is no disembodied spirit hovering in sweet bliss above the birth pangs and sweat of our days and nights.<sup>52</sup> He, too, pounds out his life as a worker. He, too, labors and eats, one of us. He works wood; he attends to his mother, brothers, and sisters; he stands with friends vis-à-vis their enemies; he obeys the law of his people; he pays taxes to the foreign military power that holds his people captive; he washes feet as a common servant; he teaches and preaches; he attends to the sick; he rejoices and weeps; he fights the temptation to despair; he is arrested and dragged away at night; he does time on death row; he is publicly shamed and tortured; and he agonizes alone through a brutal execution as an abject failure, his body as cut, broken, and humiliated as South Central L.A. Farm on July 5, 2006. He acts and is acted upon. Yet he performs it all in a peculiar way—playing fast and loose with the institutions to which he so freely and inexplicably subordinates himself.<sup>53</sup> That there were terrorists in his inner circle is a reminder that we'd best not too quickly align him with an

---

<sup>51</sup> This has nothing to do with the abstractions, “the beauty of a tragic life” and “salvation through suffering.” There is nothing beautiful about tragedy. Suffering does not save. Not in the abstract. To “love your neighbor as yourself” is to love your flesh and blood neighbor with your flesh and blood. Even though that means that you will bear your neighbor’s suffering with her; that is not all that will come your way. Further, even in bearing your neighbor’s suffering your task is to perform the coming of a certain peace, joy, feast, and laughter, i.e. which take promising shape precisely in the giving of a the concrete love celebrated here and there, say, on any given Sunday morning.

<sup>52</sup> That is, even early Gnostics have calcified memories of Jesus; a sad irony.

<sup>53</sup> “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’” (Mark 3:33 – 35). “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43 – 44). “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). Of his wood working, one need only think of the instrument of execution upon which he breathes his last breath.

order against which he did not rise up in arms.<sup>54</sup> Indeed he was hunted down as an enemy of the state and put to death according to the logic of national and international security. And for good reason; he embodied way more than “the transvaluation of all the ancient values”<sup>55</sup> that sent him to the gallows.

What is most striking about his worker’s life, however, is that his hard days and nights have about them such an unprecedented prayerfulness. Prayer is not a part of his work day, say, a “quiet time” at its dawning. *All* his work is performed as a prayer (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17).<sup>56</sup> He hungers and thirsts and eats and drinks and cuts and planes with us, but what enlivens him is the work he has been sent above all to do, the work of his Father that, as the Father’s Son, he is to “complete” (John 4:34; cf. 5:19). He attends to this work with abandon, throwing his life out into his Father’s imminent reign. Prayer is all over him. Indeed his life is consumed by prayer—and consummated. His life is a journey of prayer that more and more lets loose of the good that he has done and would do. As he approaches his last week, what he “is” becomes in the gospel stories more and more translucent to the light of the Father. When finally he sets his face on Jerusalem, he sets out to be utterly effaced.<sup>57</sup> His journey throws open his body—like a hinged triptych—and, though a dispassionate observer could hardly have expected it, from that space the face of the hope and mystery of the world shines. To see him baptized in his own blood is in the Spirit to see his Father (John 14:9, 26; 16:13 – 14; 20:28).

---

<sup>54</sup> On this matter of “terrorists,” admittedly a hyperbole, see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 39, 56 – 58.

<sup>55</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols; or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, in *Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*, trans. Thomas Common (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004), 32.

<sup>56</sup> Of course, this is not to deny that he prayed in a more obvious ways, as when he slipped off to pray alone (e.g. Matthew 26:36).

<sup>57</sup> It is this that later gives rise to the doctrine of the enhypostaton, that the human, all too human, Jesus is a person only *in* the person of the eternal Son of God. That is, that he has *in himself* no personhood.

The technical theological term for Jesus' work is "atonement." All theological textbooks tell us that the holy God and we are reconciled in the work of Jesus. In doing so they follow Paul (e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 19). "Atonement" is a familiar, all too familiar, term. Familiarity breeds thoughtlessness. Here in particular everything depends on how and among whom this atonement is understood. Indeed the fellowship of the cross is precisely a way—a bodily way—of understanding the atonement (Acts 9:2).

Atonement in the fellowship of the cross is in fact a tensive term. It does not collapse difference into "sameness." To bear witness to it is to acknowledge that we were and are and will forever have been radically different from the reconciling God.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, through the history of Jesus, we and God are "at-one."<sup>59</sup> Through him the holy one is here, where we are. That is the doctrine. Jesus bridges nothing, but he does so give away whatever might obstruct the coming of his Father that the whole fullness of that holy one is pleased to dwell in him (Colossians 2:9). Indeed he gives away to such an extent that he "is" a give-away, a sacrifice, an audacious emptiness. The "kenosis hymn" is a worker's tale that stands in contrast to the story of the idle Adam and Eve who, though they were in the image of God, regarded equality with God as their property right:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
 who, though he was in the [image] of God,  
   did not regard equality with God  
   as something to be [seized],  
 but emptied himself,  
   taking the form of a slave,  
   being born in human likeness.  
 And being found in human form,  
   he humbled himself

---

<sup>58</sup> Of course, in the light of the sanctification worked by the coming of the Son, that radical difference shifts in significance from the past to the present to the open-ended future perfect tense.

<sup>59</sup> This seems like a bad pun, but the word actually does come precisely from that etymology. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "atonement."

and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5 – 8)<sup>60</sup>

His emptiness is nonetheless filled, the Definition of Chalcedon tells us, but by the holy one, the one apart—by the “divine nature” that as such is other than his “human nature.” Jesus is thus filled by the one who is free not only to be without us, but also to be with us and is with us in Jesus’ unobstructed surrender, in Jesus’ work that, as sacrifice, “makes holy.”<sup>61</sup> What he does and what is done to him—his whole life history—is in this way the manifestation of holiness. That is, the long path his 33 years cut through earth and world is the glorification of God.<sup>62</sup> And yet it is precisely where his openness to the coming of his Father takes him that makes this a most unexpected glorification.

The work of Jesus is particularly among the unclean, those who could not be contacted with impunity, those whose bodies by definition would defile anyone contacting them, including anyone otherwise holy. Jesus is always among them: the sick, the maimed, the diseased; Gentiles; the poor; questionable women and men; the demon possessed; and sinners. Leaving behind the stable equilibrium of one after another “here and now,” Jesus crosses over to them. He touches them and is touched by them. He eats and works with them—and is undefiled. He loves them and he takes them in—and is uninfected. Rather they are infected by him. Without falling prey to profanation, his embrace hallows them.<sup>63</sup> He is the event of the coming of that holiness which crosses the great divide, the one who rises up in invitation to those who labor and are heavy laden. To come to him is to come to

---

<sup>60</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 114 – 119.

<sup>61</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “sacrifice, a”: “ad. L. *sacrificus*, f. *sacri-*, *sacer* sacred . . . + *-ficus*”; “-fic, suffix”: “repr. L. *-ficus* ‘-making, -doing.’” It is not that his union with God is the effect of his sacrificial life as its cause. Rather he is as the perfect sacrifice the place where the whole fullness of deity freely dwells. The concurrence of these events constitutes the significance of two-nature Christology. (Does it need to be said as well that the use of the word “surrender” above has nothing to do with Appomattox Court House?)

<sup>62</sup> John G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, 54, 98, 176, 197).

<sup>63</sup> James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus and Holiness: The Challenge of Purity,” in *Holiness Past & Present*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 190.

a body that is anything but intact. In touching them he throws his integrity aside. As if Good Friday were a knife that already cut him as he walked the long roads of Palestine, he opens.<sup>64</sup> “Eat my flesh and drink my blood!” he says (John 6:53). His body—nourished with the doing of the will of the Father who sent him—his body—a worker’s body that does the work of justifying justice—his body—lifted up in a spectacle of shame for all to see—his body—broken, cut, dying, dead, and damned—his body is *food*. It draws all people to itself. Taking him in is in his work to be consumed—and consummated. Taking him in is with him to be sent to those who hunger and thirst. Taking him in is with him to present ourselves a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), to give ourselves with him to be food, the food without which there is no life at all. Taking him in is with him to pray.

In this way, among these people, the atoning work of Jesus comes to carry on its shoulders the significance of all work. His work will not yield to the allure of a disembodied universality, say, in order to determine *in general* what makes for a good day’s work. *His work*, when it is finished (John 19:30), comes in all its particularity and concreteness to determine what makes for a good day’s work—and an evil one. But he unhands “good” and “evil” in his work. He lets them come and go, as the Father wills. His only concern is that he faithfully walk the path of righteousness—a path the Spirit drives him into the wilderness of temptation to blaze and finally in the bright evacuative light of glory to become.

It is the glory of his particular, debased and exalted body that shines like a searchlight in the eyes of the investors of this unrighteous world as they squint to turn a profit by grinding the faces of those whom the march of progress is destined to forget. His is the work of justice that *coram Deo* refuses to yield to pain, but bends and breaks outward into an improbable future, a future precisely for those whom pain has bent and broken and left in a

---

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 24.

past without promise. He is the one who comes as judge and advocate at the dark end of a long day. Despite their mastery of the mechanics of cause and effect, the sacred and secular cities that pursued him to death—that beat and cut him, bled and smothered him, and threw his cold and lifeless body into the ditch—came at last to have shattered against his tender flesh. The testimony of the saints is that they shatter still. To follow him is with him to work his unlikely righteousness. To follow him is forever to be entangled in the social fabric of labor, never abstracting from the calloused hands, straining backs, and dirty faces especially of the least of his sisters and brothers, not even to rise into the ether of a “truth” that is by its own definition greater than both they and his crucified/resurrected body. In him in particular the evicted poor of South Central L.A. are first.



Work and workers are as concrete as are muscles and bones. As much as Augustine found the opening of the Gospel of John in the books of the Platonists,<sup>65</sup> it is there perhaps only if some Aramean wandering through the streets of fourth century Tagaste, Carthage, and Milan happened to drop it there.<sup>66</sup> The Word becomes flesh for all, but with a hard particularity that somebody could trip over (John 1:14, Hebrews 10:19 – 22, Acts 17:31, 1 Corinthians 1:23).<sup>67</sup> Of course, the Word *becomes* flesh. Incarnation happens as contingently as any grace and joy. The fleshy Word is not a pale reflection of a “higher reality,” an exemplar of some metaphysical *ratio*. No doubt the Word is the liberative site of the in-breaking of what is unrestrictedly other, and so, free, say, in relation to space and time.

---

<sup>65</sup> Augustine *Confessions* 7.9

<sup>66</sup> Augustine *Confessions* 5.13 – 6.4, cf. 1.11 – 12, 3.1 – 12.

<sup>67</sup> By the way, the beginning of the Gospel of John reads rather differently, when it is juxtaposed with its ending, an ending that confronts the reader with the singularity of the human being, Jesus. For example, first: “Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:27 – 28). Then: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son,\* full of grace and truth” (John 1:1 – 2, 14).

However, the Word is free above all to *be* spacious and timely, to give room precisely by coming close enough to hold close and be held close by those whom propriety decrees are not to be touched.

*This* Word engages the concrete “You!”—the flesh and blood sister, daughter, lover, mother, and friend: the woman with a face. And even if it takes an apocalyptic storyteller to say it, that broken body who breathed his last on one particular Friday and, though dead and damned, came to be bathed in the new life of resurrection on one particular Sunday—this body has come to address even those who long before gave their days and nights to the fresh coming of God (John 8:56 – 58; Matthew 17:3). Though what this Word evokes has an eerily similar vocabulary and syntax to the punch line of Descartes’ second meditation, it even more strongly says the humane “I am.”<sup>68</sup> The worker, the point of intersection of line after line of work, is named and turned loose by the Word, i.e. no less than is the dead brother of Mary and Martha: “Lazarus, come forth!” (John 11:43).<sup>69</sup> Were ontology not so loaded with overweight baggage, one might say that the Word gives one to “be.” And yet what one is particularly given to “be” is a martyr, a bodily witness to the crucifixion/

---

<sup>68</sup> There is an “unsaying” here, too. “[God] said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ [God] said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you’” (Genesis 22:1 – 2; cf. 12:4). “Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. . . . [And God] called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am’” (Genesis 22:10 – 11). “God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am’” (Exodus 3:4). “Then I heard the voice of [God] saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’” (Isaiah 6:8). “The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. . . . For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the [Sovereign]; let it be with me according to your word’” (Luke 1:35 – 38). It may seem not only logically, but also literarily unforgivable to say that Jesus confronts his mother with the announcement of his own birth, as if suddenly we had shifted genres to blatantly cosmic or acosmic mythology. Of course, this is not quite what is being said here. It is God who confronts Mary. However, God confronts her with the coming of the Word (to transport into Luke, of course, the language of John and the dynamics of Nicea). Indeed, it is possible to say that God confronts Abraham through Jesus only from within the context of the church’s acknowledgement that the ancient Hebrew stories of Abraham are in its Old Testament. For the phrase “I am,” See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1979), 17; and Emmanuel Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 68 – 69, 75.

<sup>69</sup> See Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 7 – 9.

resurrection of Jesus Christ. The work of the martyr who testifies to *him* is kenotic, a work of emptying.

It is because the call of this Word is the call to perform the work of kenosis that the pattern of life that it gives cannot without radical qualification be called “virtuous.”<sup>70</sup> The Greeks are the ones who first taught us of virtue. Already in their early paradigmatic texts the word figures large. There one who is virtuous is one who has become whole, who is well-adjusted, above all a man of integrity.<sup>71</sup> Odysseus is among the most powerful early images of virtue. He is wealthy, noble, handsome, strong, cunning, skillful, resilient, the lover of beautiful and elegant women, a decorated war hero, and the last man standing in a triumphant bloodbath of revenge, prevailing against all odds, even in the face of the wrath of the gods; in short, virile. He stands on his own two feet and no one can throw him down.<sup>72</sup>

When a modified paradigm of virtue appears in the fourth century with Socrates, Odyssean virility is sublimated, but not significantly altered. There are obvious differences. Socrates is ugly, a pug-nosed old man with a pelican-body; the husband of an odd and forgettable woman; content to be short on cash; seldom found outside the thick walls of Athens; and an apparently idle conversationalist. Yet he is, if anything, an even more impermeable man of integrity and authenticity. To his loving student, Plato, it is not his body or his social standing or his observable actions that make him that. His virtue, his wholeness, resides in his soul. And there nobody can touch him. All the way to his placid

---

<sup>70</sup> “To understand the few passages where *areté* is used in the NT it is important that . . . the LXX use [of the word] is purely tentative and that there is no real place for *areté* = virtue in the translation of the OT. For a world in which [the human being] constantly saw [herself] morally responsible before a holy God the Greek concept of virtue could not finally fulfill its apparent promise. Though not irreligious, it was far too anthropocentric and this-worldly in orientation. What both the OT and NT attest is not human achievements or merits but the acts of God.” Otto Bauernfeind, “*areté*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 460.

<sup>71</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “virtue, noun”: “ad. L. *virtūt-*, *virtus* manliness, valour, worth, etc., f. *vir* man.” Cf. Bauernfeind, “*areté*,” 457 – 460.

<sup>72</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens*, vol. 1 of *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 20 – 26.

end, he shows his self-sufficiency, his wisdom, his courage, and his aloofness, all of which serve especially his extended Athenian family by example.<sup>73</sup>

When the Word that is the crucified/resurrected Jesus calls one of us by name and sets her free, it is among other things from integrity and authenticity that she is liberated.

What strikes the Greeks as the end of all human life is in Christ so much *skubalon*.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the [excesses] of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as [*skubala*, excrement], in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through [the faithfulness of] Christ, the righteousness from God [which travels down that faithfulness]. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. (Philippians 3:7 – 10)<sup>74</sup>

Paul lets go of everything that might distinguish him, every medal of valor, every mark of a noble ancestry, every achievement, every quality of soul. His eyes are set on a criminal's despicable execution, a deed he gives himself to imitate, seeing in that execution the personal irruption of the future of the invisible holy God (cf. Hebrews 11:1). Since it is in the

---

<sup>73</sup> “It was Socrates’ summons to men to ‘care for their souls’ that really turned the mind of Greece towards a new way of life. From this time onwards, a dominant part of philosophy and ethics was played by the concept of life . . . as a clear and comprehensible unity, a deliberately shaped life-pattern. This innovation was caused by the way Socrates lived; he played the part of a model for the new *bios*, the life based on spiritual values. And his pupils realized that the greatest strength of his *paideia* came from the change he had introduced into the old educational concept of the heroic Example which is a pattern for other lives to follow. He made himself the embodiment of the ideal of life which he preached.” Werner Jaeger, *In Search of the Divine Center*, vol. 2 of *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), 46. See Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 201 – 202. Virtue is applied by the Greeks not only to the individual. A city-state is also to be virtuous. Its justice is its wholeness, its balance, its harmony, and its power—encircled by a thick and strong city wall. Just as an authentic, virtuous soul has its power in itself, so also does a virtuous *polis*. It stands on its own feet, a strong rational animal, beautiful, good, and swift in enforcing the justice that keeps its scales balanced. The wisdom, courage, and temperance of its classes attune it to an unchanging standard of order, to the energy that feeds resolve, and to the self-control that keeps the passions in check. It is self-sustaining, rich in native resources; its center of gravity fixed; its doors locked on the inside; its army standing in readiness. No foreign army can touch it. No insurrection could arise from within. It is a city with integrity and authenticity—two words that could make one shudder.

<sup>74</sup> Verse 11 is quite important to this passage (“if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead”). I have left it off only to moderate a triumphalism that leads one to ignore every sacrifice that precedes mention of the coming resurrection—a move that may already have been made by the reader of verse 10. It is important to remember both that resurrection is not the effect of the cause of an admirable life, and that the resurrected body of Christ—in which all resurrection is to occur—has not gotten “well.” It is forevermore scarred by the crucifixion.

crucifixion of Jesus that God is glorified, Paul works to be crucified with him. This view of life could only strike the Greeks as absurd (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Nonetheless the language of virtue comes already in the childhood of the church to be taken up in its prayers. Perhaps that move is forgivable, even inevitable, and quite possibly helpful. However much we have come to enter into the glory of God's coming reign, we still live among a people of unclean lips—and their language is ours. And yet, servants of the master who hallowed the unclean might yet by the Spirit of resurrection work a miracle, even with the most deadly term. And though the shift was more often than not rather awkward, as this word has been lifted up, it has undergone a *metanoia*. In the prayers of the church thanks is given not so much that *I* or *we* have been made whole, but that *between* our way of life and the way of God's life into the world there is now an alignment, our works have been set right, woven together, opened Godward, and in that sense cured of their mortal sickness.<sup>75</sup> Indeed an “authentic,” i.e. self-sufficient,<sup>76</sup> individual would be thought in this new discourse to be anything but virtuous. Rather the language of “virtue” is in these prayers unsettled, de-centered, outworked, by the irruption of an other without whom no prayer may happen at all. And so, unlike the Greeks who think of virtue as an immanent, internal balance that is ex-pressed (still immanently) as temperance, courage, and wisdom, the church prays for the *gift* of the virtue of faith, hope, love, humility, hospitality—and of prayer itself.<sup>77</sup> The language of virtue is the language of “sanctification,” i.e. a free,

---

<sup>75</sup> For the multivalency of the etymology of “*therapeia*,” see Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, Roderick McKenzie, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9<sup>th</sup> revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 792 – 793.

<sup>76</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “authentic, a. (and n.)”: “a. OF. *authentique* (13th c.), ad. L. *authentic-us*, a. Gr. *authentikos* ‘of first-hand authority, original,’ f. *authetia* ‘original authority,’ and *authentes* ‘one who does a thing himself, a principal, a master, an autocrat,’ f. *auto-* self + *-entes* (cf. *sunentes* = *sunergos* fellow-worker).”

<sup>77</sup> “For, though it would be correct to say that the practice of virtue encourages likeness to God and prepares the way for the believer’s union with [God], it is mistaken and dangerous to aver . . . that prayer actualizes this union. . . . [A human’s] union with God and [her] deification are not the result of human activity but a gift of divine grace. Divine grace secretly performs [a human’s] deification, while virtue simply renders [her] capable

open, vital movement into the coming of God. To be virtuous is to be named and liberated by the Word made flesh.<sup>78</sup>

As hard as the earliest pioneers of Western civilization pushed for authenticity, we, their modern children, far outstrip them. Even when we try with all of our might to think our way to the sociality of bodily life, we remain stuck in the vision of a purely formal erotic lure to fulfillment, one that breaks into some purported “solitariness.”<sup>79</sup> In prayer everything comes differently. The Word that names and liberates is as tangibly particular as any worker, and, as a worker, is no in-dividual, but a body of social entanglements. The Word lays into, receives, and releases the stuff of this world quite differently than the relative novelty of romantic “creativity.” The one who names me and sets me free is my brother and yours, the

---

of receiving deification. Prayer as a human activity is classed as a virtue, and is not sufficient by itself to bring about [a human’s] union with God or [her] deification.” Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 88; cf. 91. (Perhaps the capacity virtue renders is also a gift.) That prayer could be thought to be a virtue is bewildering only until it is remembered that here a virtue is not so much what is *in us* as *that in which* we are given to live. Further, even when the language of the Greeks is used (e.g. when a saint is said to be “wise”), everything has become different. Here wisdom is a gift that never ceases to be a gift, one for which God alone is to be praised. Similarly, to pray for prayer is already to acknowledge that every prayer is a gift that arrives before we could ever collect ourselves to pursue it. The technical term for this fore-giveness is “prevenient grace.” “[The] one who calls upon God is one to whom God in turn speaks, thereby situating the unidentified worshipping ‘I’ with which the rite opens, not only within a shifting place, but also within a relational place, in an I-Thou relationship with the ultimate Thou. In the case of apostrophic address to God, the calling ‘I’ does not occupy a prior or more primitive subject-position, because God alone makes the cry both possible and audible, such that to call upon God is always already to have entered into [God].” Pickstock, *After Writing*, 196 – 197. “Christians . . . stood out from the rest of their culture by their unusual love for each other in their communities. This love . . . was a way of being together, a way of prayer, and a way of living in the world, rooted in their experience and understanding of the God who had come to them in the resurrected Jesus. . . . Indeed Christian love, Christian prayer, and Christian virtue were so interwoven that the individual elements are hard for us to separate in their early writings. . . . There is no ‘holy’ life that calls us to renounce parts of ourselves as unworthy. If we are to pray, we are to love, and for both love and prayer all of ourselves with nothing left out is needed.” Roberta Bondi, *To Pray & to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 16, 27. For some of the ways Wisdom literature informs the New Testament account of Jesus see Marinus de Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 194 – 199.

<sup>78</sup> Although there is no question that the work of Alasdair MacIntyre shifts the weight of the theory of virtue off of the individual or collective subject and makes it quite helpfully a social, historical, lived, and open tradition (and thus the evocatively ambiguous phrase “after virtue”), it yet lacks a certain decentering ecstasy. MacIntyre’s virtuous traditional community does indeed step out into *future* possibilities, yet it pushes off *from* the past. See, e.g., *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 218 – 223.

<sup>79</sup> I am, of course, thinking of Alfred North Whitehead and in particular his *Religion in the Making* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1954), 16.

one who cuts, plains, drills, and hammers at your side, the one locked with me in the box, the one who cannot be held fast for long. This Word is an event of hope, a body that opens to and out of the space and time of every day of hard labor. And he is contingent, might have been otherwise, might not have been at all, as vulnerable as a newborn infant.

When one considers how easy it is to kill a child, it is quite a lot to declare in the strong sense that a “virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel” (Matthew 1:23). And in quiet moments of honesty we know that the precariousness of the child remains in the adult. “God with us” is God’s solidarity with us, taking on the pain of sinful flesh, of injustice, torture, humiliation, death, and damnation—and being overcome by none of it (John 1:5). It is God become flesh, living among us, whose glory we see, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

There is a particularly striking mystery at work in the affirmation that it is God’s *glory* that we see in this transient Jesus. It is not finally simply for us that the Redeemer comes, as if our plight forced God’s hand. The God who cannot but fight for us is a false redeemer, a company doctor in a company town, a function of our world, to be explained in and by its structures.<sup>80</sup> The Redeemer “whose glory we see” is a stranger in our house—and that by definition.<sup>81</sup> “Glory” is precisely the manifestation of holiness. It is the strangeness of the absolutely other dwelling *here*, among us. To be befriended by this one is to be touched by that strangeness. Indeed his coming is liberative precisely because he and what is manifested

---

<sup>80</sup> “In the philosophy of organism [the] ultimate is termed ‘creativity’; and God is its primordial, non-temporal accident.” Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology: Corrected Edition*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 7. Admittedly, Whitehead’s statement needs to be understood in its philosophical context. Nonetheless, that context makes God secondary to “creativity,” Whitehead’s term for “nature.”

<sup>81</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 314 – 316.

in him are other than we and ours are.<sup>82</sup> That he is at once one of us *and* other means that in him the doors and windows of human life already open to what it is not. In him human life breathes. The work he does is worked out into what this world must always perceive as an abyss, that is, not perceive at all. And yet he is the redeemer of this world. The future he embodies is the future of this world. Just as he—body, soul, and spirit—is glorified, so also all those with whom he stands in solidarity are touched by glory and have glorification as their future. The future of this world is this world made new.

This worker's story pairs *two* commandments, however. That God was pleased to dwell in him, that his whole history was raised from the dead and exalted at the right hand of the Father, is not a private adventure, one which perhaps we can admire and imitate from afar. It already touches my history and yours, for the heart, soul, mind, and strength of this one not only open Godward, but open also to his brothers and sisters, to you and me (Mark 12:28 – 31). Indeed, we are indistinguishable from his “self.” For God to be glorified in him is for the radical difference of God to enter not only into him, but concurrently into those into whose lives his has worked, even those whose last breath is “no” to God's mercy.



The church, let us say, is a body of workers whose paths meet in the breaking of that bread they are invited to call the body of Christ. The degree to which a random sampling of these workers has been aroused by his call to remember him may not be perceptible even by them; but it is because in a certain broken way he is remembered among them that we may quietly say that they come together to be grafted into his work. Their coming together,

---

<sup>82</sup> “This creature . . . exists in this movement from another to itself and itself to this other—a movement which, since God the Creator is this Other, it is quite impossible to describe as a movement within itself. . . . To be summoned is to be called out of oneself and beyond oneself. Because it is God who speaks here, what is said has the right and power to enable the creature to transcend itself.” Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Harold Knight, et al., vol. 3/2 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 159, 166.

whether they perceive it or not, thus signifies (signified even before they thought to leave their homes) that they have come in order to “present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice,” one which even by the miracle of God’s sacramental grace would at best repeat his (Romans 12:1). As unwise as it might be to expect to be able to measure it on any given Sunday, they are the ones who, insofar as they have in a certain broken way abandoned the demand for reciprocity, have come to be precarious friends, come by the gift of the Spirit to “love one another with mutual affection” (10).<sup>83</sup> Perhaps we may be forgiven the audacity of imagining that on some days they actually are the ones who in *giving* to one another—in a certain way deferring to one another without the profit logic of economic investment—are delightfully surprised that they have come to *receive* from one another as well. As circumstantial as no doubt the evidence is that it has taken recognizable shape in some local neighborhood, perhaps these *are* the ones who, as “*many*, [have come to be] *one body* in Christ, and individually . . . members one of another” (5 – 7). Before a whole world of those who shake their heads in disbelief, perhaps they have come this one week by the miracle of sacramental grace to “bless those who persecute [them], bless and . . . not curse them” (14). Perhaps already they have come not to “repay anyone evil with evil” (17), no longer to avenge themselves, but to leave the determination of good and evil in the hands of the inscrutable mystery of the Father of the crucified Jesus (19). They are told unambiguously by the terms of their passports: “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink” (20).<sup>84</sup> Perhaps they have come today to bear witness that to their surprise they have this week traveled in this very manner. In other words, this church is that

---

<sup>83</sup> The King James Version translates this phrase: “be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.”

<sup>84</sup> Of course, Paul exhorts the Roman congregation to do these things. Thus it cannot be assumed that they are already doing them. He exhorts them almost certainly, because they are not doing them—at least not consistently. Nonetheless, Paul is declaring that this mode of life is precisely the one to which the church is called, without which the church is not faithful to its calling. It is for such work, whether they acknowledge it or not, that they assemble, that “they come.”

body of workers—in themselves no more altruistic than anyone—who again and again assemble to enter into the body of the Christ who with abandon, they have heard, gave himself to his neighbors, whomever they were, as he gave himself with abandon to the coming of his holy Father. It is the Spirit he breathed in the upper room upon his by no means altruistic followers (John 20:22), they have heard, who may yet make it so, as these people, caring for and yielding to be disciplined by one another, rub shoulders as they move in and out of huts, shops, rice paddies, coffee plantations, and more solemnly dedicated sanctuaries.

The technical term for the work these people gather to do is “the liturgy of the eucharist.” “Liturgy” literally means “the work of the people.”<sup>85</sup> The eucharist is that text in which their work is inscribed.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23 – 26)

The liturgy of the eucharist is the way holy week in this church is particularly to be remembered. That is, the end and new beginning of the history of Jesus is remembered by *performing* Jesus’ crucifixion/resurrection. Doing the work of Jesus entails a by no means ordinary vision of the world and our place in it.<sup>86</sup> The liturgy of the eucharist signifies that in Christ each chop of a hoe, each turn of a bolt, each ten-finger run across a keyboard, and

---

<sup>85</sup> “[Originally the Greek word *leitourgia*] meant an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals—a whole greater than the sum of its parts. It meant also a function or ‘ministry’ of a [human being] or of a group on behalf of and in the interest of the whole community. Thus the *leitourgia* of ancient Israel was the corporate work of a chosen few to prepare the world for the coming of the messiah. And in this very act of preparation they became what they were called to be, the Israel of God, the chosen instrument of [God’s] purpose.” Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 25.

<sup>86</sup> See William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 8 – 18, 31, 57, 65 – 71, 206 – 207, 222 – 252, 267 – 268, 271 – 281.

each molding of a cool compress to the forehead of the dying, i.e. all the gestures by which the peace is passed, together make an imitation of the work of the Lamb whose food was doing the will of his Father (John 4:34).

The liturgy of the eucharist, however, need not be the esoteric ritual of a secret society walled off from the rest of the world.<sup>87</sup> It need not be the organizing center of institutional self-identity. It need not be a religious sleight of hand fixated on arcane items nestled in plates and cups out of which no one will ever have had a meal. It may rather be as fluid as the hard work of people together in a certain broken manner imitating the passion of their master.<sup>88</sup> Nor need it be a one day affair. Particular days almost certainly will figure importantly here. It is unlikely that even revisions of this liturgy will ever for long simply level the days of the week. Yet the day of greatest importance for this work, even when it is most institutionally canned, is the day that remembers and repeats the work of the day of holy week that the words of institution acknowledge has gathered and renewed every day.

The time working people have lived is in a certain broken manner gathered together in this work. All week they move—lunch under their arms, tools in their hands—from and to the celebration that does not get over Easter Sunday. Christ is raised on *that* day, not on the sabbath, not on the last day of the week, but on a new day that exceeds the old order of a seven day cycle. One might say that resurrection joy irrupts as the dawning of an unprecedented first day, a first day that will not stand in competition with the old order, but penetrates it, saturates it, and folds it into the new, the way a baker might fold flour into what will have been batter. Thus this *new* first day in its relation to the old is also the eighth

---

<sup>87</sup> It seems to me that the Wesleyan tradition has been wise to invite all to an “open table,” even if it has sometimes confused hospitality with careless “tolerance” or claustrophobic “inclusion.”

<sup>88</sup> See Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 51.

day.<sup>89</sup> And this is the day of the celebration of the eucharist, the day in which a particular working class enters into the apocalyptic coming of God.

God's future reign is here the redemption of time. It is the gathering of all the hard days and nights of work in the glorification of the holy God. Therefore, as we enter that coming apocalyptic event in a certain broken manner in the celebration of the eucharist, the works of days and hands enter into it, too. This need not be an ethereal shadow play. It may be as actual as the crop that is threatened in every growing season by drought, flood, disease, pestilence, and fire; but also as actual as "the *hypostasis* of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1). In the eucharist our praxis enters God's peace and is sent back into the world, alive with the freedom of God's coming glory.<sup>90</sup>

It is in the liturgy of the eucharist, let us say, that we come to what we are created for: to gather the fruit of the earth and to offer it in adoration to its creator.<sup>91</sup> The church need not have a sacred function standing in opposition to the profane. That line of separation in fact is transgressed in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. The eucharistic liturgy is an assembly of people who carry the "world" with them wherever they go.<sup>92</sup> Admittedly, in one sense they may be said to assemble on Sunday in order to *ascend* in prayer with their goods to the God who *transcends* all of creation. Yet even then in a certain broken manner they pray for the coming of a fullness of time in which all that will have

---

<sup>89</sup> "The eighth day is the day beyond the cycle outlined by the week and punctuated by the Sabbath—this is the first day of the New Aeon, the figure of the time of the Messiah. . . . This eighth day (coming after and standing outside the week) is also, therefore, the first day, the beginning of the world which has been saved and restored." Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh Moorehouse (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1966), 77 – 78; cf. the larger context of this statement, 75 – 80.

<sup>90</sup> "We can therefore say that the symbol [of the eucharist] reveals the world, [human being], and all creation as the 'matter' of a single, all-embracing sacrament." Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 40.

<sup>91</sup> See Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 3, 11.

<sup>92</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship As Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 25 – 31.

occurred will have come to be glorified in God's embrace.<sup>93</sup> The world as it stands is in such a prayer taken to the world as it is redeemed. The two meet in the glorified crucified Son of God—the deified destroyed human temple of God—the pivot upon which the whole liturgical procession turns.<sup>94</sup>

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,  
 “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered  
 to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
 and honor and glory and blessing!”  
 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,  
 “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb  
 be blessing and honor and glory and might  
 for ever and ever!”  
 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshipped.  
 (Revelation 5:11 – 14)

Such a eucharistic liturgy begins when those who will gather get out of bed in their homes.<sup>95</sup> It continues as they trace out a line of movement in their journey to the place of assembly. Their journey eddies as the assembly enters together into the site of the scarred Christ's exaltation in heaven at the right hand of the Father. There is no fixation here on what is laid out on a plate or contained in a cup, nor is this food disregarded as a mere “representation.”<sup>96</sup> By the Spirit it is the whole liturgy, embracing as it does the works of every day, that is the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ: food, life.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> “The liturgy is served on earth, and this means in the time and space of ‘this world.’ But if it is served on earth, it is accomplished in heaven, in the new time of the new creation, in the time of the Holy Spirit.” Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 218; see 213, 222, and 225. See Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 42; cf. 16 and the Lord's Prayer.

<sup>94</sup> If Christ is the pivot, the Spirit (to put it overly simply) is the turning. Thus every liturgical move already leans toward the coming of the Spirit to whom the prayer of epiclesis cries out in appeal. There is indeed no epiclesis without the prevenience of the Spirit.

<sup>95</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 27.

<sup>96</sup> The bread and wine, the words of the liturgy declare, are the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

<sup>97</sup> “The purpose of the eucharist lies not in the change of the bread and wine, but in our partaking of Christ, who has become our food, our life, the manifestation of the church as the body of Christ.” Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 226; cf. 11, 49 – 50.

It is because such a liturgy is the work of the redemption of the whole of time, of every week and day, that departure from the assembly does not bring the eucharist to an end. One leaves the coming new creation precisely to get to work in the world as it is.<sup>98</sup> Those who gathered are sent into the days to come to carry both the wounds and the liberative glory of Christ in their bodies. They do so not by marketing a solution to some speculative question. They offer rather a gift, a gift that can never become someone's private property.<sup>99</sup> That is, what such a church is sent to offer is Christ, the food of the world. It offers that food as a mode of life into which to enter. It is in this sense that the church's mission occurs within the pure gift of the living God—a gift that in coming brings joy, not satiety.<sup>100</sup> It is because the church is the body of Christ that it is sent where life is threatened, taken, and undone, to offer itself as food, as the bread of heaven, i.e. in the way the Christ of the passion narratives is offered. The church is sent to work, not as a Gnostic physician tending to non-material souls, but as a tangible body that provides to be metabolized what it might have kept as its own.

On a given Sunday, when with freshly washed hands the people of the church sit on their heels to eat, what they have known has been hard. Certainly, it is ambiguously so. Even on an especially painful day labor comes not only with distress, but also with joy—

---

<sup>98</sup> “We are always *between* morning and evening, *between* Sunday and Sunday, *between* Easter and Easter, *between* the two comings of Christ. . . . God revealed and offers us eternal Life and not eternal rest. And God revealed this eternal Life in the midst of time—and of its *rush*—as its secret meaning and goal. And thus [God] made time, and our work in it, into the *sacrament of the world to come*, the liturgy of fulfillment and ascension. It is when we have reached the very end of the world's self-sufficiency that it *begins* again for us as the material of the sacrament that we are to fulfill in Christ. ‘There is no new thing under the sun.’ Yet every day, every minute resounds now with the victorious affirmation: ‘Behold, I make all things new. I am the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end . . .’ (Rev. 21:5 – 6).” Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 64 – 65; see Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 244 – 245.

<sup>99</sup> See Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 47.

<sup>100</sup> “O eternal Trinity! / Eternal Trinity! / O fire and deep well of charity! . . . / Just as you gave us yourself, / wholly God and wholly [human], / so you left us all of yourself as food / so that while we are pilgrims in this life / we might not collapse in our weariness / but be strengthened by you, heavenly food. . . . / What drove you? / Nothing but your charity, / mad with love as you are!” Catherine of Siena, Prayer 10, in *The Prayers of Catherine of Siena*, ed. and trans. Suzanne Noffke (Ramsey, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 78 – 79.

there are contraction and dilation, pushing and crowning, breathless silence and the death-defying, piercing cry of new life. And when new life comes warmly into her arms, she holds it close and it suckles at her breast.

Of course, the church does not float above this world's brutality. Its people are threatened and undone no less often than people anywhere. People who have been starved, beaten, run out of their villages, and robbed even of the fruit of their wombs have every right simply to roll over and die or to lash out in explosive rage or by heroic effort simply to get on with their lives. It is a sacramental miracle, when they turn instead in a new manner to give themselves away—not out of weakness or submission or cowardice, but by an uncanny and shocking audacity that may yet elude that tempest that would throw us all into the sea. And with the one who feeds the hungry and will not be their hero-king there might be a little body of people who bear witness with their bodies to the coming of a new and just city. That kind of freedom, the freedom to give your very breast milk, when all you have, when the little one who would have been your baby, has been ripped out of your hands, cannot be forced, not even when without her gift the stranger stretched out on the dirty floor, with breath enough only to whisper, would perish.

Suddenly the boy cried, "He's dyin', I tell you! He's starvin' to death, I tell you." "Hush," said Ma. She looked at Pa and Uncle John standing helplessly gazing at the sick man. She looked at Rose of Sharon huddled in the comfort. Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharon's eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other. The girl's breath came short and gasping. She said, "Yes." . . . Ma leaned forward and with her palm she brushed the tousled hair back from her daughter's forehead, and she kissed her on the forehead. Ma got up quickly. "Come on, you fellas," she called. "You come out to the tool shed." . . . She herded them through the door, drew the boy with her; and she closed the squeaking door. For a minute Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comfort about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she lay down beside him. He shook his head slowly from side to side. Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. "You got to," she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. "There!" she said. "There." Her hand

moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 472 – 473.