RADICAL PROCESS ECCLESIOLOGY: AFFIRMING PLANETARY VALUE, PRACTICING DIFFERENTIATED SOLIDARITY, AND RESISTING EMPIRE

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Timothy Charles Murphy

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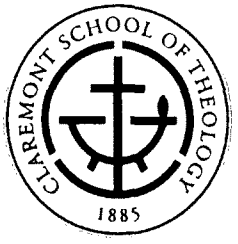

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ABSTRACT

A RADICAL PROCESS ECCLESIOLOGY:
AFFIRMING PLANETARY VALUE, PRACTICING DIFFERENTIATED SOLIDARITY, AND RESISTING EMPIRE

Timothy Charles Murphy

This dissertation calls into question the dominant way that American mainline Protestants have defined church institutionally, socially, and culturally. Neo-liberal globalization, with its idolatrous values, is the primary challenge to which this ecclesiology responds. This project also critiques church structures that are internally fixated as representing a cultural imperialism of internalized domination, the preservation of unjust privilege, and the inability to communicate constructively through conflict. It deconstructs self-enclosed church structures into the reconstruction of *churching* as a way of life using the Christian themes of *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*. The original contribution of this project is in its conception of church that exists for addressing the most urgent planetary problems but subsists within a situated knowledge and faith tradition: its Christian particularity serves a universal function. This project mimics process thought methodologically by weaving together many diverse voices into a dynamically intense contrast instead of relating them oppositionally. By applying process thought, this dissertation's proclamation is the affirmation of a cosmology of interrelationship and value-production. It understands ecclesial fellowship through a social ontology of mutual interest and encountering the other as a form of relational difference. It interprets service through a network of counter-imperial, justice-seeking, and capability-producing political practices. By reviewing missional, processual, and

indecent ecclesiologies, this project subverts the traditional orthodox marks of the church as normative and shows their mutual relationship with alternative counter-marks. Ultimately, churching becomes a decentralized yet organized, spiritual and activist, local and planetary, missional and solidarity-driven yet celebratory-of-diversity movement of social and interpersonal transformation: it is a radical process ecclesiology.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work functions as a concrescence or "growing together" of many different influences, both practical and academic, in my life. One might question whether this is an ecclesiology at all. As it dismantles orthodox constructions of church, one may wonder whether perhaps it is an anti-ecclesiology? It certainly does not conform to traditional debates on the nature and work of the church, and it rejects traditional approaches to *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia* for a much more radical trajectory. From the outset, a tension is apparent: I love the church, though I hate the phrase "the church." As you will see as you read this dissertation, I believe that it is impossible to write a universal ecclesiology. This is not a project about the nature and work of the church universal. This is a particular project, in a particular location, with particular problems that it seeks to address. That said, it is not a work of sectarianism or isolationism, either.

In another way, this project could very well be considered a radical missiology as it explores the mission and calling to which church-life responds. It thinks about the witness of Christians as a way of living, acting, and interacting with the world around us. A church that develops out of this paradigm could just as readily be called a mission center, and from a sociological perspective it might feel more like a social movement. But it would be a movement rooted in spirituality and a sense of the divine moving within and between us.

Even as we each come into the world from a specific frame of reference, we are accountable to each other in what we do, say, and affirm. While this project comes out of a very specific context, weaving together many different thinkers, experiences, and insights, it does not remain as an isolated monad. Rather, like the very process of

becoming that it seeks to ecclesially unfold, it is offered back into a world of infinitely diverse and singular perspectives. Because of this approach, it is entirely fitting and appropriate that the reader should know a bit more about the location from which I enter into this work.

My personal background has been shaped by church communities, and I have many clear memories of those experiences, from "Time for Children" lessons at the Presbyterian Church of my grandparents to Easter 1993 when I was baptized for a second time (that I was baptized as an infant was unbeknownst to me as my mom thought it should be my decision). I have been an ordained minister for over six years, have served as an associate pastor for three years, and have been a student ministry intern in three different congregational settings (not including my time as a chaplain at an HIV/AIDs housing center, chaplain at a homeless shelter, and summer intern for the Disciples Peace Fellowship and Disciples Home Missions in Yakama, WA and San Antonio, TX).

Surviving cancer in college clearly accentuated my radicalizing trajectory both politically and theologically. Questions of divine power and providence and an implicit process theology of divine persuasive power that works with the wreckage of life were born within me, as well as a commitment to using the one life I had to further respond to my calling to faith-based social justice ministries to the greatest extent possible. If my ecclesial project at times feels impatient about the state of church communities and their weak witness, it is doubly true for how I hold myself accountable.

My home congregation of First Christian Church of Paducah, KY was an early context for thinking about how our faith is public as well as how it is discussed (or avoided) internally. The Rev. Dann Masden was an early mentor who encouraged my

questions and never once told me to not raise them in church, even if larger church-wide discussions rarely materialized. Anecdotes, observations, and reflections come from this congregation, as well as from my time participating at Pilgrim United Church of Christ in Carlsbad, CA; All Peoples Christian Church in Los Angeles, CA; (a)Spire Ministry in Pasadena, CA; Webster Groves Christian Church in Webster Groves, MO; Compton Heights Christian Church in Saint Louis, MO; and visits to dozens of other Disciples, UCC, and mainline congregations over the past fifteen years.

There are many apparent tensions inherent within this project. It is skeptical of current institutional configurations of church but respects the need for institutional organizations. There are strong undercurrents of liberationist and postcolonial theology, but is often directed at relatively privileged persons within the United States. It is incredibly, even at times mind-numbingly theoretical, but is written with the express intent of making practical changes to the way of Christian faithfulness. Some might see it as a classic calling back to the original Jesus Movement (and in this way repeat its thoroughly Protestant roots), but it also does not seek to imitate the past as it attempts to push church into a radically different context of planetary globalization and interdependence. It is post-Christian in its use of philosophical and political sources and the trajectory of some of its conclusions, but it is written out of an intense love and commitment to the way of Jesus. At its best, it attempts to transform such tensions from oppositions into mutually enriching contrasts, increasing the potential for a more dynamic and just flourishing of life in our world.

This project is not a description of a church as it exists, but it hopefully functions as a "real potential" that can be actualized, particularly for those who like myself desire

to hold together as inseparable both spirituality and social commitments. They are not merely two things that are held in tension or as a paradox. Rather, they are inextricably bound together. Yet they are not identical. This basic premise, that things are interwoven without becoming the same thing or subsumed within an overarching superstructure, undergirds the way that this dissertation is written. One finds many voices in close proximity together in each chapter, sometimes of people who would not be interested in each other's projects. Yet somehow, there is the sense that these thinkers need each other, that what they are saying is connected so thoroughly and yet they are offering different insights. This project seeks the maximization of different experiences and perspectives for potential incorporation into an intense and harmonious whole, which is then offered for others to feel and respond to, either positively or negatively—this is my method of engagement with authors in these chapters.

The same could be said for the general contents of the chapters: one finds theology, political thought, and process philosophy as the threefold elements I attempt to hold together amidst my wrestling. Ever since the time that I was an undergraduate double major in Religion and Government, people have often commented how these are such a strange or contradictory set of fields to study together. Yet the relationship of religion and politics is deeply embedded within me, something that for years I have sought a way to weave together: this project is by far the most extensive weaving of the two.

Likewise, it is very easy to think about process thought without so much as a nod to what it means to exist as church, or what (if any) ecclesial or political implications are within process thinking. All three are held together, but this is not done in the abstract.

Every instance of interrelationship is always a specific, particular coming together. There is no universal interrelationship even if there is the transcendental condition of interrelating happening. It always happens from a location, from a perspective: this project comes out of my Christian background, as I demand my tradition to be held accountable to planetary problems.

It reflects my struggle with what it means to live as church, or as the dissertation describes, *churching*. Various readers beyond my committee will almost surely disagree with some of my conclusions, and this is to be expected. You have your own experiences and frames of knowledge that are different than my own. It could not be otherwise. I have sought to learn from as many people and perspectives as I can coherently hold within myself, but for anything to become concrete, there is always a principle of limitation that cuts off or ignores something. For some of you, these forsaken elements may be the key to the entire ecclesial puzzle.

I intend to be as clear as I can with my motivations and priorities, but I know that miscommunication so easily occurs. Nevertheless, we are never isolated monads, windowless and closed off from all but the world within! Communication *happens*, growth *happens*, and we learn and become so much more because of these encounters. This task is by no means a finished product, especially if ecclesiology is always in a process of becoming. May that process continue, as it seeks *to respond to its relevant environment*, whatever it may be!

I must thank my friends and colleagues of the Claremont community and the Center for Process Studies for the many conversations and (hopefully!) mutual support we have offered one another. Who cares if one can construct a relational system if one is

not eager to live relationally? Otherwise, it is so much straw! Special thanks must go out to Christopher Carter and our semi-weekly car rides during coursework, his humor, and our visits and discussions with each other as we have journeyed together in our programs; Rafael Reyes for his friendship and conversations on the relationship of process theology with liberation and postcolonial thought; Steve Hulbert and his patient listening and encouragement of me as I worked my way through the academic program and the many times I dropped by his office just to visit with him; and all the other Process Studies Ph.D. students, those coming before and after me, who are continuing on this journey through many potlucks and colloquia.

My dissertation committee has been a wonderful support and source of insightful questions. They have provided the perfect balance of affirmation of what was working well in my work, even with a pre-dissertation proposal draft that was long on ideals and short on sources, and where I needed to make improvements without handing me an emotionally overwhelming to-do list. I was left wrestling with some questions at times for months, but they were always the right questions for the moment. All students should be as fortunate to work with such mentors and scholars.

I am grateful to the two people who more than anyone drove me on the path towards an academic-activist-faithful study of religion: my professors Rick Axtell of Centre College and Michael Kinnamon formerly of Eden Theological Seminary. When I think of the kind of scholar I want to be, and the way I want to hold together the theoretical and the practical, I think of them. I hope to emulate them to the best of my ability.

To my parents, Michael and Brenda, I thank you for giving me the space to explore my faith formation in ways that were compelling and enriching. Much of the praise (or blame, depending on the reader) for this work should go to them. They encouraged me to think for myself and be willing to ask faith questions that I had been afraid were out of bounds. As any of my Missouri-Synod Lutheran, Southern Baptist, Church of Christ, or Mormon childhood friends can see from the result, asking questions and challenging presumptions is indeed a slippery slope to what may look like for some people as little more than atheism alongside a garnish of theological language!

Just as the first will be last, I close with gratitude to my wife, Candace. It is only because of her that I have been able to devote the time and energy to write this dissertation. She has graciously read each chapter in their early draft forms and has humored me when I have needed to talk aloud about my project. She encouraged me when I questioned whether it was worth the effort to continue. We have made it to the other side, each of us different from how we were, yet more dynamically together. Thank you.

CHAPTER 1

The Mainline Church in its Planetary Context

> My challenge can be put very simply. I am proposing that the church take as its mission working with God for the salvation of the world.
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> —John B. Cobb, Jr., "A Challenge to the Church"

Globalizing Empire

The way you define a problem greatly affects the solution you propose. What may at first seem to be critical issues can actually be distractions from more pressing concerns. This is especially true when thinking ecclesiologically. The problems this ecclesiology attempts to address are not primarily doctrinal, nor are they solely focused on a church's own internal life. It is to this world, this planet and its innumerable relationships, both liberating as well as destructive, that an ecclesiology should respond. However, in this project, I do not pretend that the experience of this world come from no place, but rather it is rooted in the location of the United States of America and its complex relationships to the dynamics of globalizing Empire.

Empire's goal is the maximization of economic growth where all other values are subordinated to that objective, and in the process it applies market criteria to all aspects of life. In our world today, there are many religions, but above them all, one "religion" dominates: the worship of economism, with the use of military power to enforce the global propagation of this god. The process ecotheologian John Cobb notes that "economism . . . is the subordination of all other values to economic growth."[1] Today, notions of value are skewed in the direction of the economization of all value. In contrast

[1] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Democratizing the Economic Order," in *The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God: A Political, Economic, Religious Statement*, David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb Jr., Richard A Falk, and Catherine Keller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 97.

to this perspective, wealth should not be understood as the supreme value.[2] Lamentably, while people pursue many objects that are different from economic acquisition, these are rarely in direct conflict with it. As Jung Mo Sung recognizes, "The pursuit of wealth has become the most important objective for the lives of the majority of people, particularly those integrated in the market."[3] It acts as a source of transcendent value or an overarching framework for religious communities in the United States. Internal church life has too often become a place for individuals to consume and fulfill the desire to feel okay about themselves.

As the Roman Empire welcomed the many different gods of subjugated peoples into its system so long as they did not question Caesar as Lord and Savior, so American Empire welcomes many religious communities (Protestant churches, Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, Buddhist temples, etc.) so long as they do not challenge the hegemonic values of America's macroreligion. By Empire, I mean the interrelated patterns of racism, classism, neo-liberal capitalist globalization, military hegemony, (hetero)sexism, and ecological appropriation.[4] To the extent faith communities pledge allegiance to this higher power, they remain complicit in the domination and oppression of peoples occurring both locally and globally. It is not simply that we live in an imperial world, for it also affects the way we think about theological issues. As Catherine Keller has provocatively indicated, "Christian theology suffers from an imperial condition."[5]

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[2] Cobb, "Democratizing the Economic Order," 91.
[3] Jung Mo Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, Reclaiming Liberation Theology (London: SCM Press, 2007), 1.
[4] Obviously, much more needs to be said about Empire, and Chapter 4 will delve more deeply in interpreting this globalizing phenomenon.
[5] Catherine Keller, "The Love of Postcolonialism," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 221.

This is the relevant context, and I propose that churches need to resist this idol and reorganize themselves in order to more faithfully confront it. This may seem like a tall—if not impossible—order, but as Keller claims, "It is *because* the church is implicated in empire that we can decode and transcode the idolatries of empire."[6] Economic systems function as faiths, and so they need to be challenged on theological grounds. It is possible for church to become a counter-witness to the idolatries of neo-liberal economic theory and free-market capitalism. Churches should seek to enact and witness to an alternative conceptualization of how people can live and interact with each other in more healing and just ways. To the extent that existing faith communions will not or cannot address this situation adequately, then new faith communities need to emerge as radical witnesses.

The most basic question to consider, the one that is most relevant for today, is to ask whether churches are furthering Empire or subverting it? At a minimum, by ignoring this question you are conforming to the prevailing assumptions of your culture while mislabeling the broadest context you find yourself in. Tragically, sidestepping the key problems is not an uncommon practice for either churches or systematic theologians. Liberation theologies have made this critique abundantly clear in recent decades. Much of American liberal theology and liberal churches have acknowledged that there are problems that need to be resolved, but they see the church's calling as making changes in the aberrations of what is otherwise a relatively just society.[7] However, a growing number of people recognize that simple reform is not enough. The problems are worse than most liberal churches imagine. These churches do not have the power to impose

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[6] Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 21.
[7] For an example of this approach, see John B. Cobb, Jr., ed., *Progressive Christians Speak: A Different Voice on Faith and Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

changes, but this is when resistance is most needed.[8] For Cobb, there are several key problems where reform will no longer suffice and resistance becomes a clear task for progressive (and for me, radical) Christians: consumerism, poisonous inequality, American imperialism, scientism (and its dualisms), and global warming.[9]

Challenging Empire focuses on the political-economic side of oppression, but in no way should this lead us to conclude that we can dismiss ecological devastation. Since economics and ecological health are mutually implicated, by focusing on one, we are simultaneously addressing the other. Process theologians have constructed effective ecotheologies and spoken passionately about ecology, but they have failed to address what this means politically. As a way to correct their mistake, this ecclesiology will spend much more attention on political thought. Subjects some liberal Christians wish to keep separate are inextricably interconnected and often in ways they might not expect.

Mark Lewis Taylor incisively notes that the vast majority of Christian congregations in the United States have at least a *de facto* complicity or acquiescence to colonizing Empire, if not an outright celebration. Taylor laments that "any postcolonial theology will have a tough time finding an ecclesial or religious group as its social mediator in the U.S. today."[10] Cobb imagines a future where faith communities become this group by making visible the vision our world needs and convincing people that this vision is being implemented. If that might be the case, people would be more likely to dedicate their lives to this effort since "joining a congregation significantly involved in

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[8] As George Pixley indicates, "The clearest instances of resistance in distinction from reform occur when people are powerless to change the system." George Pixley, "The Bible's Call to Resist," in *Resistance: The New Role of Progressive Christians*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 25.

[9] Cobb, *Resistance*, 55-164.

[10] Mark Lewis Taylor, "Spirit and Liberation: Achieving Postcolonial Theology in the United States," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 40.

saving the world would seem important."[11] This project aspires to a way of practicing church that creates the condition where passive complicity to colonizing idols can be effectively resisted.

The mainline Protestant churches of the United States daily existence and self-understanding are only tangentially related to these problems, and few pay attention to those outside their country. It is not for a lack of intent in the denominations, such as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ's joint Global Ministries program, which sends missionaries to partner with others around the world via invitation and share those relationships with local congregations. However, in practice these function as top-down efforts at raising awareness; congregations may feel that this work is admirable but is not essential to who they are. Thus, American Christians too readily ignore planetary concerns beyond what the corporate media deem newsworthy, and they miss hearing the voices of Christians from other parts of the world who have a different perspective on what *matters*. Because of this lack of conscious interaction, "the picture of American liberal Protestantism that has emerged from viewing its role in relation to American imperialism and capitalist exploitation in Latin America is profoundly unfamiliar to the American liberal church."[12] Profound statements such as the Kairos Palestine 2009 document, which tell of the struggle of Christians in the Occupied Territories, are too easily dismissed. Could it not be that a serious engagement with these experiences provides the hinge on which to orient American faith life?[13] Process-liberationist George Pixley describes the situation aptly: "*The major divide among*

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[11] John B. Cobb, Jr., "A Challenge to the Church," *Creative Transformation* 18.4 (Fall 2009): 7.
[12] Pixley, "Bible's Call to Resist," 22.
[13] See Kairos Palestine 2009, "A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering," http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf (accessed July 27, 2013).

Christians today is . . . between those who oppose the profound injustice at the core of the contemporary world and those who ignore or support it."[14]

Although ignored by American Christians, the Accra Confession of 2004 by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches makes a strong theological critique of neo-liberal economics as an imperial project that destroys people and the planet.[15] Using the imagery of Romans 8:22, they "see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation."[16] Challenging the logics of Empire, sacrifice, value, free-market capitalism, and the power networks that maintain them through violence, they question what for many American Christians is simply unquestionable.[17] These are issues that Christians will inevitably address, either by ignoring or resisting, and this response constitutes what church is all about. According to the Accra Confession, "global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians."[18] This document clearly articulates the context and the problems for Christianity on this earth, yet they are so easily made invisible by merely residing in the United States for most mainline Protestants.[19] For too many American Christians, the problems they *do* see are all too parochial.

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[14] Pixley, "Bible's Call to Resist," 23. Unless otherwise noted, all italicized words or phrases found within quotations are original to the quote.

[15] See World Alliance of Reformed Churches, *Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth* (Accra, Ghana: 24th General Council, 2004). A copy of the confession can be found here: http://www.ucc.org/justice/globalization/pdfs/Accra-new-final.pdf.

[16] World Alliance of Reformed Churches, *Accra Confession*, pt. 5.

[17] Ibid., pts. 6-13.

[18] Ibid., pt. 16.

[19] It is also noteworthy that both the Accra Confession and the Kairos Palestine 2009 document were written by more hierarchical ecclesial structures than will be emphasized in this dissertation. I do not intend to present my project as universally normative for Christians throughout the planet. Readers can see clear differences between myself and the Accra Confession in my theological analysis, especially when it comes to God's sovereignty, the relationship of justice and unity, the analysis of empire, and the assurance of the victory of peace and justice.

Mainline Malaise

In the midst of this globalizing context, the institutional denominations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ are in a period of rapid transition and institutional decline. Obsession with these changes has become the inappropriate fulcrum of church renewal efforts. It certainly is true that their membership numbers have decreased every year over the past forty-five years. For example, in 1968, the year the Disciples of Christ were officially organized as a denomination, there were slightly over 1.6 million members.[20] As of 2011, that number had dropped to just over 625 *thousand*, a decrease of sixty-one percent.[21] As far as actual participating members of the Disciples of Christ, the numbers are fully one-third lower at 394 thousand, with an average weekly worship attendance of just 199 thousand.[22] The United Church of Christ (UCC) does not look much better, as it has averaged losses of over 30,000 members every year for the most recent decade in which statistics are available.[23] Paralleling the numerical decline of the Disciples of Christ, the UCC has lost over fifty percent of its membership since its founding in 1957. This data alone has resulted in great concern among denominational leaders and those who track such statistics.[24]

I address the Disciples of Christ (also referred to as Disciples or DOC) and the UCC because they are the two mainline Protestant traditions in which I have the most

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[20] *1968 Year Book and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, ed. Howard E. Dentler (Indianapolis: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1968), S-310.

[21] This is based on a comparison of the denominational annual yearbooks from 1968–2012. The most recent consulted edition is as follows: *Yearbook and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 2012*, ed. Howard E. Bowers (Indianapolis: Office of the General Minister and President, 2013), 550.

[22] *Yearbook and Directory, 2012*, 550.

[23] *2011 United Church of Christ Yearbook* (Cleveland, OH: United Church of Christ, 2011), 693. The calculated years are from 2000 through 2010. In 2000, membership was 1.377 million, and in 2010, it was 1.058 million. This amounts to a decline of 319 thousand in ten years, or 31,900 per year.

[24] In effect, the rate of decline of these denominations mimics the demographic reductions of the city of Detroit, MI, which has dropped from 1.8 million in the 1950s to 700,000 residents by 2013.

relevant experiences and relationships. By more adequately addressing their relevant context, they can perhaps transform themselves into more dynamic spiritual movements. However, this will be a secondary effect of their primary mission and not the locus of attention. As we will see, they make many assumptions that will fall under substantial critique. For example, both emphasize unity and being one in Christ as central to their identities. In their Statement of Identity, the Disciples claim, "We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us."[25] They mutually posit a macrotranscendent unity that inappropriately overwhelms their plurality: theologically, this is described as Christ as the church's head; politically, it means being a good American. As in liberal political theory, plurality becomes a problem that must be overcome. In its quest for unity, the Disciples all-too-easily follow a unity of the lowest common denominator, where conflict and controversy are avoided. This does not help them address planetary exploitation. When these middle-class churches say they are non-political, their rhetoric belies a politics that defends their privileges: they do not fear conflict itself but rather they fear conflicts that might take away privileges of class, race, sexual orientation, global position, and military dominance. This project offers them a better way to negotiate the relationship of the one and the many, unity and plurality.

Many mainline Protestants in the DOC and UCC have little practice constructively examining their own complicity in the oppression of others. One of two things frequently happens. We ignore other perspectives or see them as threatening with nothing positive to offer us. Even worse, these encounters sometimes act as earth-

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[25] *Yearbook and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 2011*, ed. Howard E. Bowers (Indianapolis: Office of the General Minister and President, 2012), 68.

shattering moments but are then simply reappropriated or consumed for our narrow benefit.[26] Without practice and discernment, the commodification of another's experiences can be just as devastating as open hostility or apathy. We visit simply to be entertained, to take in, or to consume the other. But we are *not* the other. We never can be. Likewise, privilege can blind one to inequities of power. Privilege misreads the loss of intensity that comes from the preservation of power as gain because it is the reassertion of identity. To stabilize one's identity above all change, to endure in the midst of chaos and be the norm that defines what is chaos, is the privilege of extracting oneself from the planetary eco-process.[27] It reads loss as gain and stagnation as security. This project attempts to help mainline churches move past such manipulating relationships and deluding self-understandings.

The loss of members in the Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ is not atypical of mainline Protestant denominations, though both denominations were numerically smaller than the more well-known Methodists, Presbyterians, or Episcopalians. However, this net loss of members does not take into account the substantial growth in immigrant churches over the past twenty years. It might be better to say that the *white* mainline church is dying, at least in the form in which it has existed in recent generations. These churches so often seek their own preservation, replicating the logic of maintenance over mission.[28]

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[26] Marcella Althaus-Reid describes how Westerns came to Argentina to gaze at basic ecclesiastical community gatherings. See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 26.

[27] Keller writes, "With its imperial success, the church . . . absorbed an *idolatry of identity*: a metaphysical Babel of unity, an identity that homogenized the multiplicities it absorbed, that either excluded or subordinated every creaturely other, alter, subaltern." Keller, *God and Power*, 115.

[28] See Craig L. Nessan, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

For many members, the decline in status, numbers, and influence are experienced pessimistically and with lament. Having visited many local congregations of both these denominations in my lifetime, I understand their pessimism. Many if not most of these congregations take a reactive stance to the challenges of their society. They look inward and worry about "trying to get more young families into the pews" or paying the bills. For those who take a more progressive stance, mainline Protestant Christianity critiques the way church is too exclusive, against open-minded values, and boring. Therefore, they try make church more welcoming and relevant for younger people.

For example, the meeting style of generations past no longer is as compelling for Generation X or Millennials such as myself. Long task-oriented agendas and reports do not match their spiritual longings for connection. Robert's Rules of Order is a great method for making decisions if the goal is to finish within an hour but is a poor method for relational discernment. Additionally, church does not need to be about passively listening to sermons, status, politeness, agreeableness, robes, and hymns.[29] This is good but insufficient to their context. Reforming these practices does not yet adequately address the critical planetary challenges mentioned above. They should not be the primary focus of an ecclesial project, but rather an important but secondary effect of shifting ecclesial priorities.

Certain social structures through which the church was previously expressed are falling away and new communities are emerging to take their place. Ironically, as the Disciples and UCC were formally organizing themselves, in 1968 and 1957 respectively,

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[29] Dorothee Sölle writes, "If church *de facto* consists in sitting still for an hour on Sunday without getting to know anyone else, the unity of kerygma, diakonia, and koinonia is destroyed." Dorothee Sölle, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," in *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1990), 144.

American religious institutions were entering a deinstitutionalizing phase. The way that the mainline church was institutionalized represents an institutional imperialism of internalized racism, the preservation of privilege, and the inability to communicate constructively through conflict. Today, these structures themselves create obstacles to practicing discipleship in our world. Churches cannot be faithful to the divine call upon them through the same methods that serve imperial globalization. Churches that keep traditional structures while engaging in radical actions and commitments must inevitably work against their structures' assumptions. A better alternative would be to replace these structures. There may be institutional manifestations of church worth saving, but it is because they help coordinate the tasks of church, not because they are institutional. Some have called this an opportunity to claim our deinstitutionalization in American culture: I would call it becoming a spiritual social movement. The loss of institutional stature is not a tragedy, for we should not have had it in the first place. John Howard Yoder has provocatively called the desire to direct one's dominant culture the Constantinianism of the church.[30]

The problems in the Disciples' tradition are frequently rooted in the context from which it emerged. Some of the assumptions of the early leaders have since been challenged, but others remain strongly present in Disciples' identity. These include the idea of a pure origin, our desire for unity, the practice of modern rationalism, and our proudly American ethos. In recent generations, Disciples have shied away from seeing the church as a pure origin that we need to renew, unlike our fundamentalist sister tradition, the Church of Christ. We have chosen to focus on ecumenism and unity, and it

[30] John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (1971; repr., Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 65.

has long been "our polar star." Unfortunately, readers will eventually discover how unity is a colonizing notion, and the desire for unity is part of the problem of "the logic of the One."[31] How we can hold the manyness of church together with a real relationship that does not ignore differences will be a major task of this project. Our modern rationalism misleads us into thinking that we are autonomous individuals and leads to a stale, intellectualized faith. Lastly, Disciples pride themselves on being the first denomination to be founded in the United States rather than being a transplant from England or Scotland.[32] Not surprisingly, we generally have a strong American ethos. We have uncritically taken this location for granted, but instead we need to take our planetary relationships into account so that they can subvert our national loyalties.

One will find in this project a dynamic between selectively affirming past actualizations while pressing on to novel configurations. This is certainly true for my relationship with mainline Protestantism. There are several elements of liberal Protestantism (and the Disciples and UCC) that I find important and want to affirm. For instance, I want to retain a commitment to a critical faith, where we are free to ask questions and reformulate what has come before. The past decisions and conclusions of previous communities are not boundaries to which we must stay within but are rather markers of where others have gone before. Past affirmations and confessions were important to a particular group in a particular time, but they may be transgressed; they are helpful guideposts but are not uncrossable boundary markers.

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[31] See Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008), Introduction and Part I.

[32] In fact, one can trace early 19th century migratory patterns of American settler-colonizers by simply looking at a map of where Disciples of Christ churches are located. Existing churches form a belt from Ohio to Kansas and down to Texas. From Washington D.C. up to Maine, there are less Disciples than in the state of Kentucky, and there are more in Indiana than in California. Refer to any DOC yearbook from 1968-2012 for substantiating figures.

Unlike those who find nothing valuable from the past, I affirm certain past successes. Holy Communion has rightfully been central to Disciples from the very beginning at the Cane Ridge revival until today, where it remains a weekly part of worship life, but how wide we set the table as well as its concrete practice will look different. Since 2001, the Disciples of Christ have affirmed that we seek to be an anti-racist/pro-reconciliation church.[33] This was a positive step, and dismantling racism should remain as a high priority.[34] For all their limitations, the DOC and the UCC have increasingly sought out partners across the planet using a cooperative style and mutual learning through their partnership called Global Ministries. They have encouraged experimentation for what makes for a thriving community and meaningful practices. Also, both communities have been at the forefront of ecumenical and interfaith relations for Christians. I will express these values in different ways, such as a less bureaucratic ecumenism, but I value these commitments and wish to retain them. In all these ways, I continue to be a part of the DOC and UCC while attempting to novelly change them.

These denominations often say the right things. For example, the Disciples' vision statement is "To be a faithful, growing church, that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice."[35] As John Cobb describes the UCC, it is the one mainline denomination that has "completed the process of repentance with which

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[33] This commitment came along with the simultaneous goals of creating 1,000 new congregations, transforming 1,000 existing congregations, and developing leaders in the church by 2020. See Richard L. Hamm, *2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

[34] However, they decided in 2005 to switch the order and priority of the stance to pro-reconciliation/anti-racism. I believe at its core this was a marketing strategy to make its white congregations feel more comfortable and less confrontational with the project, as well as reflected our fetishization of unity and avoidance of conflict. Without the primary and more difficult work of rooting out racism in its systemic and institutional forms, reconciliation is premature, counterproductive, and is an expression of the underlying privilege that needs dismantling.

[35] *Yearbook and Directory 2011*, 3. This page also includes their mission, imperative, and covenant statements.

for fifty years our more progressive denominations have been preoccupied," such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, militarism, etc.[36] Since it has worked through its homophobia, Cobb believes the UCC can focus on the most critical issues facing the planet like ecological cataclysm. At its national levels, the UCC has promoted and approved numerous resolutions and statements concerning issues of social justice and solidarity. However, the majority of local congregations do not take these statements seriously and many if not most members downplay their own internal complicity. Inappropriately, Cobb questionably asserts that "the process of repentance is largely complete" for the UCC, even though he simultaneously admits that there remains a basic "failure to reject and oppose economism and all its consequences."[37] If this is the key idolatry confronting our planet along with American-centric loyalties, the process of repentance remains incomplete, to say the least.

Denominational statements, resolutions, and declarations will rarely move people's hearts or inspire repentance or *metanoia*. At best, they can act as witnesses for what has already happened for some people and be offered as an invitation for others as an evangelical testimony to do likewise. We will find that what matter far more are encounter and practice. See, judge, act, and you will be changed, or at least be more likely to change, especially when reflecting theologically about one's experience. The DOC and UCC do not have enough congregations offering real opportunities to have a different experience of those who are different, of claiming a good news that challenges their lives and the structures they participate in, and that prioritize resistance to cultural, social, and political evil as what church is and does. What we need are new faith

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[36] Cobb, "Challenge to the Church," 6.
[37] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Spiritual Bankruptcy: A Prophetic Call to Action* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 175-76.

communities that can have these tasks at the center of their life together. This project will describe how this reorientation is possible.

What we believe about ourselves, our relationships with others, what church is or should be, and its role in society can have dramatic influence on what we do and how we make meaning from what we are doing. This dissertation will take very seriously the variables of this equation. In some ways, much of my theoretical analysis can be understood as seeking to motivate and galvanize people to act first and then reflect theologically. With this, I seek to construct an ecclesiology that can incarnate those practices and worldview that best enable this process to be fruitful.

Case Studies

The following stories are based on the experiences of church members and myself in DOC and UCC congregations that describe a number of problems I find in existing Protestant communities. In some, people misidentify the key problems that church needs to answer in favor of some lesser parochial goal. Some examples reflect symptoms of an internal fixation, unhealthy relationships with others, fear of conflict, cultural racism, American exceptionalism, or describe additional problems. Reconstructing church will eventually help answer many of these challenges, and positive vignettes occur throughout the proceeding chapters.

In a sanctuary there are many things: stained glass windows, pews, a communion table, a pulpit, a lectern, a choir loft, a baptistery . . . and two flags—one of the Christian Church and the other of the United States of America. One day, I move the flags out of sight. Nothing is mentioned of their removal in worship; they simply vanish. Within a few days, complaints have reached the ears of the church secretary: "Why are they gone?

Don't you know we have veterans in our church? That flag is one of the ways we honor them and they feel connected with God." Its absence becomes a barrier to their worship.

It is another day for worship, and people call out the prayer concerns that are on their hearts. Someone has cancer, another is in the hospital, and someone else is looking for work. Then, a voice asks to pray for the troops and remember them for all their sacrifices and preserving our freedom as Americans. I add, "Prayers also for those in Iraq and Afghanistan fighting those they see as occupiers, for those so desperate they become suicide bombers, for members of Al-Qaeda, and for all families who grieve the death of loved ones. May all our weapons jam, for deserters and the disobedient, for the resisters and the court-martialed, for peace." Yet the last prayer is said only in my head . . . unspoken. Church is not the time or the place for such prayers. Someone might get offended.

A high school youth group goes off to a weeklong mission trip. It is summertime, and they have decided to go to a poor community and stay at the mission center there. None of them have been there before. The leaders found the option online and it looked to them like an eye-opening experience for their youth group. Asked what they hope to get out of the trip on their first night, some say, "We're here to work. Put us to work. We want to help out." At the end of the week, I ask them what they have learned. Several answer, "I just feel blessed and grateful for what I have. I realize how not everyone is as fortunate as I am." The adult leaders are asked whether they would consider coming back. "Perhaps, but we like to keep things varied up in order to keep people interested so that they will go on these trips. But this was a great trip: it was lots of fun."

The church members are committed. They have met and planned. They are organized to carry out the work before them. The time has come to put words into actions: the parking lot will be repaved. Many have complained about its wear and tear. Tree roots break through in places. There are never enough spots in the lot built many years ago. Now more people than ever commute in from across the area. People ask, "How can they be a welcoming church and invite new people into discipleship if there is no place for them to park?" They agree to not only repave but to expand the lot.

It has been another hard week, but a long-time church member looks forward to Sunday morning. Work is difficult, and she knows that worship gives her the strength to get up and go back to her job on Mondays. Worship refuels her; here she knows she is somebody, and that is a blessing. But she cannot remember ever hearing anything in worship that connects her work-life with the love of God for her. She wonders if there indeed is an unspoken relationship between them, other than to endure in her struggles. Is there more to church than recharging depleted batteries?

She is energized to have her first call as a pastor. It is in a small town in a rural area. She looks forward to bringing the gifts she's learned. Yet, after one year, she is worn out. She feels isolated. She misses seminary where she worked collaboratively with her colleagues. Here she does a little bit of everything. She loves preaching and worship, but finds Christian education and children's ministries a chore. Just because she is a young woman, why does everyone assume she has gifts for children's ministry? She wishes she could focus more on her primary passions and sense of call.

A middle-class white American mainline Protestant man is walking down the street. His family and friends consider him a decent and caring person. However, he is

not used to encountering members of another race in the neighborhood in which he dwells or the church he attends. He sees a group of dark-skinned teenagers walking down the street in his direction, and certain feelings crop up. There is a vague sense of discomfort and awkwardness. His defenses perk up. He feels a slight tinge of shame at getting defensive in the first place. He does not know these teens, and he has no conscious animosity to them. As far as he's intellectually concerned, there is nothing suspicious about them. Nevertheless, there is a response, a cultural scar inside him, in spite of himself. From his church community, he has learned the value of being nice to others. He has heard generic reminders on the importance of being welcoming, yet his local church is silent on structural racism. As the teenagers pass by without incident, I push my feelings aside and forget about them for the time being.

A suburban church sends money and volunteers to Haiti every other year. However, it does not work with the congregation of the same denomination five miles down the road, even though it is in a poor neighborhood. It's different—that is not a safe part of town.

These case studies represent just some of the many concrete ways that church communities live inadequately in their contexts. Positive examples of faithful practice, as well as additional challenges, will be interspersed throughout the dissertation. A discussion of concrete recommendations will round out Chapter 6. For instance, instead of a donor-recipient model that prevails in many international church relationships, we will need a model of shared power and access to financial resources. Mission trip tourism sees participants as benefactors to needy recipients, but we will need to practice mission models where churches mutually send mission groups to each other's communities to

serve, learn about another context, and be transformed through such long-term relationships. Church volunteers help at homeless shelters, but participants must hear stories of struggle and learn from them, thus becoming moved and committed to a better world. The pension funds of clergy come from international businesses exploiting workers and the environment, but we need divestment from such companies. Churches pay undocumented workers as janitors or landscapers or only hire people with proper documents, but we are called to commit to their enhanced capabilities. Churches engage in processes of assimilation for new immigrant groups into their norms, but we need to celebrate and learn from differences.

The Way Towards Churching

Conceptual and theoretical resources in certain bodies of literature point towards pathways of resolving many problems within church life, such as understanding what church is to be and do. We have an opportunity to resolve some of the problems that have been with mainline Protestants for centuries. This time of transition can be a tipping point in which church shifts into a more healing and liberating way of living. This is the perfect time to reconstruct church into something new, what I call *churching*, the activity or process of living out the way of Jesus with others.[38] Which resources should we use, and why are they better than other options?

One of the primary resources of this dissertation is the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and interpretations coming from that school of thought. Of all the philosophical options, why is process the right tool to address transforming church? After all, there are good reasons to be suspicious of its use. Some thinkers have been

[38] Norman Pittenger helpfully comments that one should not try to separate the Church from its activity, for the activity itself is the Church. This is very close to how I am using the term "churching." Norman Pittenger, *The Pilgrim Church and the Easter People* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 79.

tempted to objectify Whitehead's own thought as a new universal, but process thought should not become a foundation. They forget that he too came from a particular perspective and social location. He does not have all the right answers nor does he address every topic to which I am concerned. In some areas, his explicit answers clash with my commitments. No matter how profound his insights, Whitehead is still a Victorian British gentleman of the early 20th century, which shapes his social imagination in colonizing ways. His comments on cultures beyond Europe are often utterly cringe-worthy.[39] Furthermore, in his documented conversations where colonial activities come under discussion, he never once criticizes the imperial logic supporting these activities.[40] To the detriment of other process thinkers, most do not link Whitehead with his socio-political context.[41]

Whitehead's uncritical colonialist perspective cripples much of his sociological and political analysis. He is thoroughly Eurocentric and overly optimistic of the United States being the future source of progressive civilization. For this reason alone, it is clear that he cannot be the sole source of a politically radical, counter-imperial ecclesiology. Yet this fact does not mean that he is superfluous, only limited. Ironically, Whitehead himself gives insight to this paradox, saying, "There will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are

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[39] For a sample, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 12-13, 45, 55; and Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 11.

[40] For examples, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. Lucien Price (1954; repr., Boston: David R. Godine, 2001), 88, 124, 125, 144, 169.

[41] One notable exception is Randall C. Morris, *Process Philosophy and Political Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). While he connects Whitehead with British liberal socialism, Morris does not address imperialism.

assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them."[42] Put more straightforwardly, "Each generation criticizes the unconscious assumptions made by its parents."[43] Cognizant of how Whitehead's social location shaped his global perspective, we will use different sources in political thought but relate them to resonating aspects of his thought that have ongoing relevance.

In light of his social location, how can Whitehead become useful for a counter-imperial theology? Fortunately, while one's location influences and constrains the possibilities of one's vision, it does not determine it. You can utilize a thinker in ways that may be the opposite of her own personal conclusions. A recent example is the reemergence of "the decision" from Carl Schmitt's political theology.[44] While Schmitt was an advocate of National Socialism in Germany and used his theory to support his political values, others have interpreted his thought towards forms of radical democratic participation. It is not difficult to misinterpret process thought's relationship to critiques of inequitable power relationships in part because they are not central to Whitehead's analysis. What was central for him was a metaphysics in light of science and in dialogue with past European philosophies. Almost in spite of himself, a critical analysis of power dynamics resides implicitly in Whitehead's cosmology: those of us who care about them must draw them out. While Whitehead was a British imperialist, I will attempt to construct a radically counter-imperial ethos from his thought.

While I am not developing a new ethics, I intend to apply Whitehead's thought to a new understanding of church that is thoroughly subversive and spiritual. Of course, he

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[42] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 48.
[43] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 24.
[44] Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5-6.

is not primarily a constructive thinker of ecclesiology nor political thought. Excluding historical analyses of either, his comments concerning both are infrequent. Nevertheless, I find that I am repeatedly drawn to his work, the depth of his insight, and the scope of his vision. I do not believe that this is merely an historical accident of temperament but indicates an ongoing validity and power to his work. That said, I am not particularly interested in simply explicating his work but in putting it to *use* to help churching address core problems.

The relationship of applied process thought and the church has been misconstrued in practice. Most churches have not engaged with process theology, but those that do often end up making it an attribute of church or just another available resource. An example of this comes from the organization "Process and Faith," whose main focus is to offer resources for pastors leading churches. It provides prayers, lectionary commentaries, or other materials that pastors can use to preserve the institution as it is. Is belief in God unreasonable or are you struggling to make sense of your faith in light of tragedies? The Center answers, "Process can help! It offers a plausible account to modern questions."

In this function, "Process and Faith" is institutionally conservative. It responds to the anxieties of those comfortable enough to sit back and ask these questions. Without critical insight, simply adding process thought to strengthen whatever project a congregation is already doing may undermine the gospel witness. If white South African churches added process elements in the 1980s without questioning apartheid, most process people would instinctively see this as not an improvement.[45] In a more generous

[45] Of course, a good argument can be made that such purely instrumental appropriation would be merely a superficial use of process thought that strikes against the heart of a process worldview.

reading, many of the questions people have about suffering and tragedy arise irrespective of social class. The problem is not that people are asking questions: the problem is that the questions are removed from actual life or contain within them socially decent assumptions that preclude more intense possibilities.[46]

This project is not the first attempt to create a process ecclesiology (though I believe it makes a number of key improvements!). Starting in the early 1970s, there have been multiple ecclesial works that diversely incorporate process thought. Some tend to what we could call a minimalist approach. Here there is very little in terms of process concepts beyond the idea of change and "divine creativity." Moreover, they does not really impact the life of church, which remains one in service to benevolent paternalistic mission, gradual progress, and social decency.[47] On the other end of the spectrum is a maximalist approach: what the church does may remain traditional but the tools of process thought thoroughly reinterpret church life. Early examples follow a systematic structure by beginning with God, then Christ, the Church, and finally ending with the sacraments and pastorate (and sometimes eschatology).

These early ecclesiologies tend to come from Christians from a high church background, namely the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions.[48] For example, Norman Pittenger sees the church as a social process throughout his career, with a strong eschatological element of moving to the future of God's Kingdom in line with Jürgen

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[46] As far back as 1925, Whitehead also noticed this phenomenon: "Religion is tending to degenerate into a decent formula wherewith to embellish a comfortable life." Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 188.

[47] See Lewis Smythe, "The Role of the Church in Changing Persons and Society," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (July 1971): 81-91.

[48] Examples include Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971); and Bernard Lee, *The Becoming Church: A Process Theology of the Structure of Christian Experience* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974). To my knowledge, Pittenger wrote the first book on process theology and the church.

Moltmann and where the four classic marks give "the meaning of the word 'Church' itself."[49] Marjorie Suchocki's ecclesiology largely follows this later model and will play a major interpretive role in Chapter 5. All of them fail to the extent that they make transforming church the telos of their project rather than seeing the transformation of the world as the center and secondarily explaining how church itself can be transformed in the process.

While I will be emphasizing the necessity of churching's public witness, K. Brynolf Lyon has insightfully suggested that congregations are ambiguous organizations that are filled with an "unconscious, intersubjective matrix of complex relational patterns."[50] Congregational life is more than faith's public side, for it is also how complex personal subjects internalize faith, for our personal expectations affect how we experience groups.[51] Mainline Protestants like to assume that they are rational agents controlling themselves, but this assumes a false sense of autonomous individualism. I will explore this anthropological challenge in Chapter 3, especially with regards to Catherine Keller, and institutional intersubjectivity will be highlighted as a major contribution of Suchocki in Chapter 5.

At issue is whether process thought should be used to prop up a faltering institutional church or to help motivate the creation of something new. The former makes process an instrumental tool that is evaluated positively to the extent that it is "useful" for existing churches. For example, the 2006 dissertation "The Church in Process" by Daniel Ott has an uncritically traditional feel of protecting the institution. Ott attempts to present

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[49] Pittenger, *Pilgrim Church and the Easter People*, 48.
[50] K. Brynolf Lyon, "Companions on the Way: Creating and Discovering the Congregational Subject," *Encounter* 63, no. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2002): 148.
[51] Lyon, "Companions on the Way," 149-57.

a universal ecclesial nature in light of issues of continuity, change, and pluralism.[52] Crippling his project, he abstracts the church from its planetary and political context, which makes much of his argument irrelevant for the problems we face. He affirms that part of the good news is that the church offers creative transformation to the world[53] and seeks to overthrow hierarchies in favor of love and justice,[54] but what are these contextual hierarchies? Ott is shockingly silent.

There have been other attempts to construct a process ecclesiology that are more sensitive to the concerns of this world. These have come primarily as summaries or syntheses of the work of other process theologians, particularly in the form of Master's theses. Kristine Culp offers one early example that resonates with this dissertation's telos. Namely, Beauty functions for her "as the maximization of value," so that "the church as a community of mutual participation aims at maximizing the value of its members, of the whole church, of all peoples, and of the entire world."[55] Chapter 2 will come to a similar conclusion through a complementary analysis of intensity and harmony. In tension with this project, Culp remains drawn to the four creedal ecclesial marks, where she interprets unity as Harmony, holiness as re-presenting and participating in the divine life, catholicity as the community of mutual participation, and apostolicity as the community in creative transformation.[56] Instead, Chapter 5 will challenge the unquestionability of the terms themselves and more clearly connect the traditional marks with their opposites through an interrelated contrast.

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[52] Daniel J. Ott, "The Church in Process: A Process Ecclesiology" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2006), ii.
[53] Ott, "Church in Process," 11.
[54] Ibid., 184.
[55] Kristine A. Culp, "Revisioning the Church: Toward a Process Ecclesiology" (Master's thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1982), 53.
[56] Culp, "Revisioning the Church," 70.

A thesis even closer in structure and logic to my own constructive project comes from Mark Y. Davies, who examines John Cobb's thought to build an ecological ecclesiology.[57] Davies begins by explaining the ecological crisis and its economic roots, attributing them to philosophical dualism and anthropocentrism. He provides an overview of process philosophy's concepts and event-orientation, as well as an overview of Cobb's major Christian doctrines. He proceeds to explain Cobb's theocentric ecological ethic in light of community life and policy implications in the USA and concludes with the ecclesiological implications and guidelines for the church.[58] More limited in his use of sources, Davies focuses almost exclusively on Cobb's thought. The result is primarily a summary of Cobb's ideas rather than a critical engagement with them, thus perpetuating what I believe are some of Cobb's main errors. Davies maintains that the Enlightenment is the original source of the today's problems, a conclusion that follows Cobb and Whitehead.[59] Even so, Davies does offer cultural recommendations similar to my own, especially when he writes, "Perhaps the church is actually called to be 'on the edge' of society and stand for what it believes in by living in solidarity with the outcasts and the voiceless," and in so doing, it lives out a "radical openness to creative transformation, even at the risk of losing mass support."[60] The result is that we offer similar recommendations, though the scope of his project is almost strictly limited to the thought

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[57] See Mark Y. Davies, "Towards an Ecologically Sensitive Ecclesiology: Ethical and Ecclesiological Implications of John Cobb's Process Theology" (M.Div. thesis, Candler School of Theology, 1992).
[58] Davies, "Towards an Ecologically Sensitive Ecclesiology," 1-2.
[59] Ibid., 11-14. Even up to today, Cobb still emphasizes that ideas (especially the influence of Descartes and Kant) change the world rather than looking at what are the material conditions that provide space or set the conditions for certain worldviews to become widespread. See Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, 52-58. This is not to say that I am affirming historical materialism as determinative of philosophical ideas, but rather that the relationship of material and ideas is thoroughly dipolar.
[60] Davies, "Towards an Ecologically Sensitive Ecclesiology," 108-09.

of Cobb. One additional structural difference is that he does not associate his chapters with the tasks of churching as I will proceed to do now.

What do I mean by the tasks of churching? Dorothee Sölle notes that there is a three-fold task of church in the New Testament: "kerygma, diakonia and koinonia, i.e. proclamation, service and community."[61] This paradigm helps connect seemingly disparate chapters into a related work. It also shows how what may look to some as anti-ecclesial (through challenging traditional marks and structures of church) can just as readily be seen as an authentic ecclesiology. I will not closely follow Sölle in the content of these three tasks, though Chapter 6 will show similarities in our final constructions. For now, it is sufficient to say that this three-fold task of churching functions more in a liberationist line of ecclesiological thought. For instance, it closely parallels the model that early black liberation theology offered, where the task of the church is proclaiming divine liberation (*kerygma*), participating in the liberation struggle (*diakonia*), and being a manifestation of the reality of the good news (*koinonia*).[62]

Admittedly, I am not the first process thinker to frame church through these tasks. There are a few others who have done so, namely Clark Williamson, Ronald Allen, and Bernard Lee. In fact, Williamson and Allen are both members of the Disciples of Christ. They identify four critical tasks: they combine preaching and worship in kerygma, teaching and learning in *didache*, companionship as koinonia, and service to the needs of the least as diakonia.[63] Alternatively, I blend in didache with the other three tasks: I am

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[61] Sölle, "Kingdom of God and the Church," 141.
[62] See James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th anniv. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 129-32.
[63] Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *The Vital Church: Teaching, Worship, Community, Service* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998), 4.

certainly not against teaching![64] In fact, all churching has a teaching function. In his solo book, Williamson uses process theology and challenges cultural Christianity, wisely reminding that the church needs to be alternative to American culture. Otherwise, one should not be surprised when "so many 'good Americans' find no need for the 'middle man' between themselves and American culture."[65]

In a short article stressing the need for intentional communities and challenging the individualist ethos of the United States, Lee adds the task of *leitourgia* in ritual life through prayer, songs, scripture, and celebration to the core three of kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia.[66] There is no absolute reason to restrict the tasks of church to merely these three. For example, some even add in *martyria*,[67] so the list of ecclesial tasks could theoretically be expanded to at least six. One of the key differences between Williamson/Allen and myself is they focus more on what existing churches need to do differently than on forming new kinds of communities.[68] Likewise, we each have different understandings of diakonia, where they reflect a paternalistic colonialism by describing it as acts of service to the needy. Beyond these significant differences, there remain strong resonances with how they approach koinonia, especially in understanding the universe as a vast koinonia and prioritizing cross-cultural experiences.[69]

Unlike those tempted to essentialize ecclesiology, I am using these three tasks more as a helpful heuristic than as a rigid categorization. Compared to other process

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[64] Williamson and Allen consider it the most important yet ironically the most neglected task. Williamson and Allen, *Vital Church*, 4.
[65] Clark M. Williamson, "Companions on the Way: The Church," in *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 276.
[66] Bernard Lee, "Reconstructing Our American Story: Intentional Christian Communities." *Chicago Studies* 26, no. 1 (April 1987): 16.
[67] Sölle, "Kingdom of God and the Church," 147. She mentions testimony as bound up with kerygma; they are separated only when divorced from discipleship.
[68] Williamson and Allen, *Vital Church*, 45.
[69] Ibid., 107, 120-21.

thinkers, one of my unique contributions is in how I use these tasks to relate process philosophy, theology, and political thought together, and in my demand that the way these interact address the planetary context of domination and exploitation as its key frame of reference. My focus on the tasks of kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia roughly mirrors Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of the dissertation. This project unsettles traditional ecclesial thinking in potentially shocking ways, but it does so out of a commitment to follow the way of Jesus. As one may have noticed from the dissertation's subtitle, kerygma is affirming planetary value, koinonia is practicing differentiated solidarity, and diakonia is resisting Empire. When the kerygma-proclamation is for increasing the potential for value-production in the world and its inhabitants, it more clearly indicates that churching orients itself more for this life than in an afterlife. A koinonia-fellowship of interrelatedness and mutual interest helps explain how relationships we have traditionally defined as "external" to the church are often even more important than the ones that are "internal" to the institution. A diakonia-service of resisting Empire recognizes the power differentials at play in any attempt to construct a more just world and focuses on both enhancing quality of life and seeking liberation. Nevertheless, my chapters do not constitute a pure division of kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia, just as each of these components inevitably implicates one another. Thus, one can combine different tasks like kerygma and martyria, koinonia and leitourgia, or kerygma and didache because they are already connected as an internally related web.

John Cobb has spent much of his career lamenting the separation of theology and church life, hoping that they can be brought together through thinking theologically. While he affirms that liberation theologies are one appropriate method of resolution, he

believes some theologians may focus less on directly felt oppressions and more on guiding the church in renouncing its internalized mistakes.[70] In doing so, this will lead to drastic changes through transforming Christianity, the church and its received tradition, and Christian theology through the incorporation of others' insights.[71] In large part, this is what my dissertation seeks to do.

It is unproductive to refight the doctrinal debates the 16th, 18th, or 20th centuries. By this, I mean that these debates should not define our understanding of the church. Most have emphasized marking a clear boundary of who is in and who is out, whether through soteriological concerns or by saying the Church is where the Word is preached and the sacraments are rightly administered. What one believes, whether as a liberal, orthodox, or radical, should not be the starting point of what it means to be church, however conceived. Beliefs and worldviews matter but only insofar as they shape and are a reflection of our actions. Instead of first believing in order to belong to church and finally expressing one's faith through actions, we need to rearrange the order. As Philip Clayton has pithily said, the priority is "*belong, behave, believe*."[72] As liberation methodologies suggest, first comes the encounter with injustice and the "great revulsion"[73] against it, *then* reflecting theologically on the experience and where the divine is at work, and then being inspired to engage in new actions that promote wellbeing and/or resist evil. Theological reflection and doctrinal formation are a

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[70] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Lay Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1994), 19-25.
[71] Cobb, *Lay Theology*, 88-94.
[72] Philip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 40-42.
[73] Taylor, "Spirit and Liberation," 52.

secondary activity after living our faith.[74] Dialectically, "solidarity should feed reflection, and reflection should deepen and improve solidarity."[75]

This methodology begins to address the relationship of this counter-imperial ecclesiology with other liberation theologies and communities. There are many forms of liberation theologies, from black and womanist, queer and feminist, ecological and Latin American, to indigenous and Two-Thirds world theologies. Each speaks from its particular location, set of experiences, resonate images and revelatory encounters. At their best, they engage in mutual critique and are transformed through the insights of each other. Where does this leave predominantly white, middle-class Christians within the dominant American culture? As part of this common matrix, we only hurt ourselves when we cut ourselves off from the revelatory sacred experiences as well as the oppressive, demonic experiences of others. We will find that as part of the multitude, it is in our mutual interest to do so, even as we do not shirk from recognizing our particular unjust privileges and divesting ourselves (or engaging in the *kenosis*) of them.

Process thought needs political thought alongside it for its social critiques to find ground. At its most basic level, political thought is reflection and evaluation of how societies are to organize themselves and what relationships people do or should have with each other and their surroundings. Political thought can function, like process thought, at high levels of generalization and abstraction. The forms of political theory and applied process thought I will be using combine this groundedness and abstraction. Those even casually familiar with Whitehead's work have come across his famous image of the aeroplane that takes off from some specific location or body of knowledge, makes

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[74] George Pixley, "Latin American Liberation Theology," in *Resistance: The New Role of Progressive Christians*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 173.
[75] Pixley, "Latin American Liberation Theology," 182.

generalizations in the clouds, and then returns to land in a new location, examining and evaluating its conclusions in light of this new location.[76] Without a grounded perspectivalism, all that is left is drifting in elevated abstraction, taking some supposedly universal position and imposing it on others.

My resources in process thought and political theory overlap significantly with the ecotheology of Catherine Keller. I will be working out of a form of process thought that emphasizes its poststructuralist leanings, shaped by Keller among others. More than most, she effectively holds poststructuralist thought and materiality together.[77] While she has hinted at possible directions, even her introductory theology book does not include a chapter of ecclesiology.[78] One easily could read my project as an extension of Keller's poststructuralist, (trans)feminist, counter-imperial, process theology into ecclesiology. However, it is inappropriate to simply appropriate her thought as if it exists as a universally applicable form. Some of my sources overlap with those Keller uses and others are distinct, however complementary, in formulating this new ecclesiology. Though I will often not refer to Keller, I am convinced that my ecclesiological project extends much of her process sensibilities into this constructive ecclesiology.[79]

There are two sides to what church becomes that parallel a poststructuralist process method. With process, there is a double move of deconstruction and

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[76] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 5.

[77] See Catherine Keller, "Talking Dirty: Ground Is Not Foundation," in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 63-76.

[78] See Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

[79] There is at least one key difference between Keller and myself. Anyone familiar with her work will instantly recognize a large stylistic gap between us. I do not intend to write in poetic form, though beautiful writing may move us in ways that "functional" writing rarely will. Is there no middle ground between being moving and obscure versus accessible and stale? I am convinced there is, or else I would not be engaging in this project in the way that I do.

reconstruction. Actual entities are superjects beyond themselves and their own values: what they become is not all that can be. Any totalizing moves are undone in the becoming of novelty. At the same time, there are reconstructions through the prehension of completed entities into a new concrescence. Similarly, churching involves a persistent pattern of subversion and alternative making. In the Jesus Movement, this was presented through parables that inverted people's frames of reference and images of the *basileia tou theou* as a real possibility. Today, what this looks like ecclesially are indecent practices that subvert the normativity of Empire and seek a world with real potentialities i.e. enhanced capabilities of what the planet and its singularities and planetary bodies can become.

It should be noted that this project does not rely primarily on postcolonial theory, even though it engages with postcolonial theologians shaped by process thought. In particular, it interacts with those who demonstrate a deep-seated and complementary recognition of patterns of relationality, differentiation, and movement. Helpfully, many of them are clearer in their notions of inequitable power structures than are many process theologians. They will function as dialogue partners. Theologians shaped by a process-tinged postcolonialism who will make appearances in this project include Marcella Althaus-Reid, Marion Grau, Wonhee Anne Joh, Jea Sophia Oh, Kwok Pui-lan, Joerg Rieger, and Mayra Rivera.[80] I do not claim to be a postcolonial theologian, but I work with them as a counter-imperial theologian using a poststructuralist process worldview and taking materiality and global power imbalances seriously for our interrelated mutual benefit.

[80] It is worth noting that many of these persons either studied with Catherine Keller or have participated in Drew's Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia organized by her.

How can so many different voices be held together in this project without a resounding clash and subsequent thud? It would be so easy to place these thinkers and projects: process, politics, theology, church, postcolonialism, and liberation into oppositional terms. They do not even produce a binary, but more like a cacophony of voices arguing with each other, the reader, and the author. Yet, I am aspiring to hold these many perspectives in a creative contrast that adds some real value to the world and authentically responds to the challenges that its innumerable creatures face. By selectively prehending positively and negatively many different disciplines and voices, I hope to create something novel and timely. This dissertation does not attempt to paper over the differences among them but to *affirm the value* of their relationship as a diverse *solidarity* in the face of destructive *Empire*. In so doing, we come to what I hope is an original yet faithful way to practice churching.

The suffering of the planet, of people trying to be free, of assassinations and police brutality—these injustices crucify the planetary sacred over and over again, reducing possibilities for the world and its creative transformation. These events are *theological* issues, not merely sociopolitical ones. Being church, or churching as following the way of Jesus, compels responses to what is most significant to this context. If, like Cobb, we want to save the world from ecological devastation, we must challenge the economic systems of Empire that result. Even more importantly, we have to challenge the values that justify such devastation, particularly the logic of sacrifice for some ideal. As resistance for resistance sake is not enough, churching will offer an alternative vision to aim towards and proclaim a different value-system through applied process thought that undergirds resistance even as it does not become another dogmatic foundation. By

living out and proclaiming an alternative value system for the world, a radical ecclesiology addresses the real crises we face together.

Chapter-by-Chapter Outline

Each subsequent chapter addresses one or more of the problems raised in this opening chapter. We face a misguided ideology that believes the world is only a series of isolated and autonomous units, but Chapter 2 will show that everything is interrelated in a moving and mutually immanent process of becoming. Following the Enlightenment, liberal Protestantism tends to bifurcate facts and values. Facts are for the realm of the secular disciplines and are objectively measurable, while values are the subjective, often religious, experiences of people. This is the sad legacy of the Enlightenment's anthropocentrism and dualism.[81] In contrast to the dominant instrumentalization of all value in terms of economic productivity in the idolatry of Empire, process thought provides a distinct axiology where everything that exists is a value process for itself, the other, and the whole world in terms of intensity and harmony.[82] A radical process ecclesiology will kerygmatically proclaim this in its witness, teaching, and invitation for people to live out an alternative to the dominant (de)valuing systems.

Chapter 3 will argue that humans exist as a social ontology that is both complexly and mysteriously a part of the larger cosmos. When thinking about humanity, there is the tendency towards emphasizing either separable or soluble selves: the former is referred to economically as *Homo economicus*.[83] Catherine Keller brilliantly articulates these

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[81] Cobb, *Resistance*, vii.

[82] As Cobb correctly realizes, "Those who are successful in the American empire think in terms of what supports the status quo. If the world is to be saved, we must develop policies on entirely different principles." Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, 181.

[83] Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, 110. He accurately notes, "*Homo economicus* is imaged as a self-enclosed individual who relates to others in the market by making agreements that are considered by all participants to be individually beneficial."

dynamics in her inaugural book, *From a Broken Web*, which are examined from the lens of sexism. Her analysis will be explored in the first half of Chapter 3. Where interest is generally thought of either as self-regard or benevolent other-regard, the second half of Chapter 3 articulates the critically important notion of mutual interest and compares my notion of *differentiated solidarity* with Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan's *deep solidarity*. The final section looks at the implications for the spiritual practice of encounter and draws out the connections with postcolonial and liberationist missiologies.

While offering many insights to politics, Western political liberalism ignores the most important questions of its own material violence and economic and ecological exploitation. In contrast to these limitations, Chapter 4 will explore a deeper understanding of Empire and resistance to it, the role of capabilities in pursuing quality of life issues besides any final liberation, an alternative understanding of justice as a social process, and the necessary place of political theology. These ideas and power analysis can help us better understand what churching must resist. Concerns about capabilities, marginality, solidarity, and agonistic politics will help reinterpret the practice and service of churching. There can be no neutral position concerning politics and church. Claims of neutrality are themselves a political perspective and have political implications. This construction will replace political notions of unity, privateness, univocity, and neutrality. Specifically, it will deconstruct the way political liberalism functions in much of liberal mainline Protestant churches. Church practices and values that mimic Rawlsian moves will also be implicated as I construct a radical diakonia.

By articulating several political theories, Chapter 4 shows the limitations of liberal thought for a counter-imperial ecclesiology. We need to accurately analyze the

problems that churching struggles against, and I will examine theorists who further the analysis begun in this chapter. Second, we need to know what we will be struggling for politically. This will involve liberation but not to the exclusion of quality of life concerns. It will have a planetary dimension, but it will dynamically hold together local considerations as ways to manifest that struggle. Third, we need to be clear to what extent political theory can helpfully express a way of organizing church either as a completely deinstitutionalized a way of life, or with some institutional structures of representation necessary. Chapter 5 will more directly address this matter.

Mainline Protestantism as a decent and respectable discourse often focuses away from the world or to its internal life, but Chapter 5 will highlight the missional, process-relational, and subversive elements of the recent ecclesiologies of Jürgen Moltmann, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, and Marcella Althaus-Reid. Instead of the church existing for its own perpetuation, it will be oriented towards a novel future in light of the activity of Jesus. Instead of seeking to repeat past traditions and successes, it needs to anticipate the potentials for itself and the world for creative transformation. While it seeks to preserve institutional structures, it needs to dissolve past exemplifications and move towards new structuring patterns of coordination. Instead of being heteronormative in sexuality and global politics, it needs to become queer in the eyes of the dominant world system and immanent in planetary struggles. Instead of fitting uncritically into the Constantinian creedal marks of one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, it will affirm how these traditional marks are interrelated to the counter-marks of many, secular, particular, and novel.

Chapter 6 is the final constructive chapter that will synthesize the previous chapters' claims. Rather than submitting to Nicaea, or the magisterial Reformation in

determining what constitutes the practice of churching, it looks towards a New Testament model: kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia. It develops the analysis of the preceding chapters and offers concrete recommendations for how churching can appropriately respond to its planetary context through its proclamation, fellowship, and service. Among other suggestions, Chapter 6 will recommend a decentralization of clerical roles with a reaffirmation of the priesthood of all "practioners." This will also include the practice of deep listening and reflecting on our shared stories. Intentional communities will be lifted up, while still defending a role for novel institutional structures. It will seek a way of practicing one's faith with others that is infused by a passion to maximize the possibilities of the planet's polycentric actualizations. There are many alternative yet complementary ways to configure this project. It is an ecclesiology of the multitude; it is counter-imperial churching; it is living as subversive church; it is indecent churching; it is a radical process ecclesiology.

CHAPTER 2

A Process Cosmology and Theory of Value

> Have a care, here is something that matters!
>
> —Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*

Everyone inevitably has a working metaphysics. It may be implicit, but it is there. My affirmation of process philosophy is a way to be honest with the metaphysical assumptions that profoundly shape my ecclesiology. Even so, process philosophy has certain problematic tendencies. In its most scholastically rigorous forms, its debates can appear similar to asking, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" For example, do eternal objects ingress solely through hybrid physical feelings or are actual occasions the partial self-creators of atemporal objects?[1] Occasionally, process thought has the preponderance of trying to prove that it is the "right" metaphysics.[2] At its worst, it can remain an esoteric high-order word game of dogmatic fidelity to Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. As Catherine Keller has said, participating in such arguments can exhaust what lured some people to process in the first place.[3] Nevertheless, at its best, process thought is doggedly empirical, returning again and again to *this* world—*this* matter—*these* experiences.

To be an applied process thinker, one does not need the bulk of one's work to be fixated on Whitehead's words. As John Cobb has said, being a Whiteheadian does not

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[1] John B. Cobb, Jr. and Lewis Ford represent these two options with the former remaining closer to Whitehead's original position and the latter revising them. See John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 8, 21; and Lewis S. Ford, *Transforming Process Theism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 213, 367.

[2] David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 3-4.

[3] Catherine Keller, "Introduction: The Process of Difference, the Difference of Process," in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, ed. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 12.

mean that you are primarily focused on metaphysics. One's primary field may be law, psychology, environmental ethics, or cultural studies, to name but a few. Yet on the issues that divide philosophies, one finds oneself aligning with Whitehead, just as someone else might side with Immanuel Kant or G. W. F. Hegel.[4] In this way, I am a Whiteheadian even though I engage with a variety of thinkers, many of whom do not themselves interact with him, and I am primarily concerned with the challenges the world faces and how a radical ecclesiology can most appropriately respond. Additionally, I sometimes side with Whitehead's late thought on one theme while being drawn to his earlier work on another. Thus, to be Whiteheadian is not to simply follow Whitehead or even assume a univocity within his thought but rather to emphasize certain themes or directions in his work as well as particular readings of him, even if some process scholars would view them as "counter-readings" to a Whiteheadian orthodoxy.

This chapter begins by presenting the basics of a process cosmology, emphasizing the process of concrescence and the category of mutual immanence.[5] In so doing, I will also address notions of potential, creativity, aims, intensity and harmony, and God, setting the stage for much that comes later in this dissertation. The second half of the chapter describes how this metaphysic issues forth a novel theory of value. While I discuss process philosophy's implications for all of planetary life, my dominant emphasis in subsequent chapters will be on the roles and responsibilities of humans practicing church. Unlike those who proclaim a once-and-for-all unique revelation of God through

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[4] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Who Is a Whiteheadian?" Process and Faith, entry posted March 2007, http://processandfaith.org/writings/ask-dr-cobb/2007-03/who-whiteheadian (accessed April 30, 2013).
[5] While I use the terms cosmology and metaphysics fairly interchangeably, they are technically distinct, with the former being the conditions of the existing world, while the latter are the conditions for any conceivable world. See Philip Rose, *On Whitehead*, Wadsworth Philosophers Series (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002), 3.

Jesus Christ, this dissertation's *kerygma* or proclamation is the notion that all entities are related value-intensities; this constitutes the good news. To understand how this can be good news, we need to first review the contours of a process cosmology.

The Process of Concrescence

Unlike earlier substantialist philosophies from thinkers like René Descartes and Immanuel Kant, which posit a fundamental division between subjects and objects, essences and attributes, Alfred North Whitehead offers an innovative nondualistic philosophy. Actual occasions, or events, do not have relationships in the way that a subject has a predicate; rather, events are their relationships to other events, which are themselves relationships. Thus, everything is a relationship of relationships. As such, all entities are complex as they internalize aspects of each other. Moreover, this dynamic is not a static reality, but is cumulatively and temporally unidirectional. This process of relating and differencing is a movement of novelty. Actual occasions are the real actual entities that constitute the world. Rather than dualistic essences, each actual occasion is a concrescence with a dipolar structure of a physical and a mental pole. Concrescence is a Whiteheadian neologism that means "growing together" or "many things acquiring complete complex unity."[6]

All actual occasions are a process of unification and differentiation. This is necessary, because if occasions were only a gathering of many different elements, then the trajectory of the world would be towards a totalizing unification of oneness. To prevent this, occasions also have a multiplying side. An occasion ends its self-constituting private subjectivity in actualization, but in doing so, it becomes a public object for other future occasions to prehend or feel. Whitehead describes this dynamic

[6] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 236.

through the pithy statement: "The many become one and are increased by one."[7] An entity becomes one concrete fact, but there is an ongoing pluralization of becoming facts, which prevents any final unity in the temporal world.

The philosopher Philip Rose has noted that there are actually two processes, a macroscopic process and a microscopic process. Another way to name this distinction is public becoming and private becoming, the external process and the internal process.[8] The former focuses on the relationship between multiple occasions, while the later focuses on the self-creativity of individual actual occasions. Neither takes precedence over the other, for "both processes are mutually supporting . . . as distinguishable elements within the totality of process."[9] Following Rose, I will first describe the macroscopic process of efficient causation, followed by the microscopic process of self-construction.

The macroscopic process describes the efficient causation between actual occasions. The relation is a direct one that shares "the content or information between one Occasion and the next."[10] In effect, the first and last stages of concrescence are the same but from different perspectives. The decision acts as a determinative quality for future becoming occasions, which they receive as a datum. As Whitehead explains, "The 'datum' is the 'decision received,' and the 'decision' is the 'decision transmitted.'"[11] The end of one occasion is identical to the beginning of the next occasion. This efficient

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[7] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 21.
[8] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 20.
[9] Ibid., 35.
[10] Ibid., 28.
[11] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 150.

relationship acts to set limits as an objective constraint or "brute fact" to which subsequent occasions must respond.[12]

In this macroscopic process of antecedents, contemporaries, and consequents, the future does not have the same relationship with the present as it does with the past. Causal efficacy is unidirectional, such that "an Actual Occasion will . . . be internally related to its antecedents and externally related to its consequents, with no Occasion ever efficaciously determining its Past or being efficaciously determined by its Future."[13] The degree of internal relations for contemporary events is in the appetition of one for another, but this is an indirect relationship. To avoid their mutual determinism, the relationship between two "presents" means they are not fully immanent in each other. As Whitehead explains, "The vast causal independence of contemporary occasions is the preservative of the elbow-room within the Universe."[14] Contemporary events are only indirectly related insofar as they prehend a common past and they anticipate a common future.[15] Beyond that, however, they are casually independent. The past is active as an efficient cause for the present as it is "an efficient activity (or cause) of objective determination."[16] Subjectively, it is complete as a satisfied process of self-enjoyment, but for the future it is objectively incomplete, awaiting how it will be felt by future becoming entities.[17]

Unlike the macroscopic process, the microscopic process of becoming looks at the internal development of an occasion. Internally, an occasion is its own final cause.

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[12] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 30.
[13] Ibid., 37.
[14] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 195.
[15] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 79-80.
[16] Ibid., 53.
[17] Ibid., 54.

Whitehead describes this process in a variety of ways throughout his career. Most simply, he calls it the cycle of "data, process, issue."[18] Another way to say this is the influences, self-creation, and being an influence for others. Occasions physically feel their past world, conceptually choose from ways to integrate these feelings into a novel whole as an intense and harmonious pattern, and then satisfy and become objects for others. In their internal process, they have a three-fold cycle in their becoming. This cycle has a logical order but does not happen sequentially. From the "inside" of an occasion, one can imagine a sequence, but from the "outside" of an occasion, the cycle happens all at once. Prehension itself is broken into two broad categories of physical and mental prehensions. With these subcategories, the result is data, physical prehension, mental prehension, and satisfaction.

According to Rose, the first phase is a response to a past occasion's satisfaction as internally the initial datum.[19] In so doing, this first phase is the prehension of the actual world within the occasion. This is one of Whitehead's most original ideas, for it is a key way in which he avoids falling into an essentializing dualism. According to Whitehead, prehension is an "*apprehension* which may or may not be cognitive [emphasis in original]."[20] While prehensions may also be called feelings, it is inappropriate to say that actual entities *have* feelings. Rather, actual entities do not have feelings as if the subject has some external agency beyond feelings; they are constituted by their feelings and the way they feel them.[21]

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[18] Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (1938; repr., New York: Free Press, 1968), 93.
[19] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 39.
[20] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 69.
[21] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 222.

There are three aspects to a prehension: the subject prehending, the datum prehended, and the subjective form or way (the how) the subject prehends the datum.[22] In addition to positive prehensions, there are negative prehensions, where data are excluded from the becoming occasion. An occasion physically prehends the entire actual world that has gone before it, though most actual entities have a trivial relationship to it. However, these negative prehensions nevertheless contribute their subjective form, or the way in which they are excluded.[23] As Whitehead says, "A feeling bears on itself the scars of its birth."[24] The way an occasion feels its inherited data is its subjective form, which is the second stage of the microscopic process.[25] Though it is out of logical order, it is useful to delay the discussion of mental prehension until after discussing satisfaction. This is defensible because the internal process does not happen in time. It is perfectly possible, as others have done, to describe the sequence in alternative arrangements.[26]

The third and final stage of an occasion is its completion as a satisfaction. This is where it "becomes fully self-constituted or synthesized."[27] It is fully just what it will be for itself and others as a subject-superject. This is also referred to as the perishing of the occasion where it "attains a final, determinate unity."[28] Once it has actualized, it becomes an active object for others demanding a response, either positively or negatively, as a superject. Judith Jones offers this ecstatic interpretation when she says that occasions as

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[22] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.
[23] Ibid., 26.
[24] Ibid., 226.
[25] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 40.
[26] For example, one can start with extension and move back through concrescence, prehension, and ingression. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 77-80.
[27] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 42.
[28] Ibid., 42.

subject-superjects really affect their environments such that "to be this present subject will be to be that future superjective influence in the world."[29]

We now return to the second half of prehension: the mental side. This delay was necessary because the mental side draws us into a discussion of potentials, the divine, and aims. If the whole actual world is felt in the act of physical prehension, what remains to be mentally prehended? Whitehead's answer leads us to one of the most misunderstood terms in all of his philosophy, often resulting in the charge that he is nothing more than a Platonist in disguise: eternal objects. However, unlike Platonic ideals, eternal objects are not the most real things but are abstracted from the world process, which allow for macroscopic continuity. Eternal objects or potentials are indeterminate, for only with actual entities can such determinacy be established.[30] Whitehead eventually stops using the term "eternal objects" and replaces it for what is frankly a more intuitive term: "potentials." Even when discussing eternal objects, he offers this substitution, suggesting, "If the term 'eternal objects' is disliked, the term 'potentials' would be suitable. The eternal objects are the pure potentials of the universe."[31]

Pure potentials are not actual, but according to the Ontological Principle, all real things are grounded in actual entities. How then can becoming actual occasions prehend these potentials? Whitehead answers with the notion of God as the actual entity that holds these potentials. In addition to pure potentials, there are real potentials that are available for actualization. These real potentials have been shaped by the entities that have actualized them. For example, a proposition is a real potential for becoming, which may

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[29] Judith Jones, "Intensity and Subjectivity," in *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought*, ed. Michel Weber and Will Desmond, vol. 1 (Frankfurt, Germany: Ontos Verlag, 2008), 286-87.
[30] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 51.
[31] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 149.

or may not be actual yet; it functions as a lure.[32] Real potentials generally but not always come from the relevant past of a concrescing occasion. There are many other subcategories within Whitehead's philosophy that lie beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The one exception to the structure of actual occasions is God, who is not an actual occasion but rather an actual entity. Whitehead asserts that God should not be an exception in his philosophy but the chief exemplification, but how can he consistently make this claim? Implicit in his answer is the notion that God should not be compared to an actual occasion but rather to the World.[33] God and the World interact dynamically through a "reversal of poles" in a symmetrical fashion. While actual occasions begin with the physical pole and are followed by their mental pole, the actual entity of God begins with the mental pole and is followed by the physical pole, which are also called the primordial and consequent natures, respectively.

More recent models of the divine in process theism have suggested, not unlike the theologians of the future such as Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, that God (as the collection of all possibilities) comes to the world as its eschatological future, drawing the world to become itself.[34] "In Whitehead the potentials that are actualized in an occasion may never have been actualized before," writes Cobb, and "to think of them as belonging to the future or as coming to the occasion as from the future is not much of a stretch."[35] In this way they are pure potentials, rather than real (or as Whitehead

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[32] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 258.
[33] Ibid., 348.
[34] Roland Faber, "De-Ontologizing God: Levinas, Deleuze, and Whitehead," in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, ed. Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 222.
[35] John B. Cobb, Jr., "God as the Power of the Future," Process and Faith, entry posted January 2012, http://processandfaith.org/writings/ask-dr-cobb/2012-01/god-power-future (accessed March 9, 2013).

sometimes calls them, impure) potentials. Through them, radical novelty becomes possible.

Whitehead reaffirms the importance of the divine microscopic process, while also implying that the divine's retention of all potentials is a dynamic event. In his analysis, "Too much attention has been directed to the mere datum and the mere issue. The essence of existence lies in the transition from datum to issue. This is the process of self-determination. We must not conceive of a dead datum with passive form. The datum is impressing itself upon this process, conditioning its forms."[36] This makes sense if the divine has its own internal process as an actual entity. Whitehead describes it as such: "The grading of the ideal forms arises from the grading of the actual facts."[37] As the forms are conditioned, there is a transition from pure potentials to real potentials in the divine primordial nature or Divine Eros.[38] What the world does affects the divine, including the new potentials that will be offered to the world.

Every occasion has a subjective aim, which is how it decides how it will create itself. The subjective aim is the "subject itself determining its own self-creation as one creature."[39] Additionally, there is the initial aim that sets the limits to how the past can be creatively incorporated into a novel fact. Without this limitation it would be impossible for an entity to actualize. Traditionally, process theologians have claimed that God gives each occasion a single ideal from which it may freely actualize or derivate. The main problem with this idea is that any creativity an occasion expresses becomes a function of

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[36] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 96.
[37] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 136.
[38] This conclusion is implied in Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "The Dynamic God," *Process Studies* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 39-58.
[39] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 69.

the Hebrew notion of "missing the mark" and implicitly results in equating creativity with sin. A more recent option says that God offers more than one equally good way for an occasion to actualize itself, though this improvement still limits creativity to fitting into a pre-determined arrangement.

Instead, I am following a third option that sees the initial aim as itself indeterminate; thus the Divine Eros (i.e. God) offers indeterminate ideals. This allows for the greatest affirmation of the occasion's creativity. Here, the divine lures the occasion into its interstices and the survey or crystallization of the web in which it finds itself. An occasion is to creatively become its most intense and harmonious self, which will be novel and unpredictable. As an image of my own creation, I think of this as a space, place, or range where any decision within this range would be equally intense and harmonious for the occasion's setting without being an objectifiable ideal. It is the empty space, the indeterminate space of decision. The initial aim is an empty space or range of decision, but there also remain lesser potentials for actualization available in a graded scale. One advantage here is that Whitehead never says that the initial aim is determinate. Many have misinterpreted the end of *Process and Reality* on how God gives particular aims for particular entities. However, elsewhere Whitehead says that "each temporal entity . . . derives from God its basic conceptual aim, relevant to its actual world, yet with indeterminations awaiting its own decisions."[40] I am reading this as suggesting that the initial aim is an indeterminate range waiting specificity of subjective aim, i.e. *how* the occasion will integrate its multiple feelings.

[40] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 224.

Another way to consider the nature of aims is to see the initial aim as a gift of both creativity and subjectivity.[41] It is the beginning of the occasion, where it is given to itself before it becomes itself. This subjectivity comes from divine self-difference. It is what allows the occasion to feel, cut, include, and decide. Counter-intuitively, this subjectivity comes before the occasion, yet from the future. As the gift of creativity, it is an invitation to do something unexpected, unpredictable, and novel: to realize something and make a difference. Here the divine exclaims, "This is the range where you can be your most beautiful and intense self: now surprise me!" The divine does not decide but points towards how the occasion can best be itself. There is not a universal standard that an occasion hits or misses: there is only the relativity of intensity and harmony of value to be achieved from this location and context or another. There is risk, for there remain relatively better and worse options to actualize. An occasion may become its lesser possibility, but that is the risk of the creative process, of seeking differences over self-sameness, novelty over simple repetition, and an open future of creative becoming.

For the most part, the world is shaped by causal efficacy, where novelty is at a minimum and the transference of data leads to the endurance of forms of entities.[42] This is the case for what we call inorganic matter, from electrons and rocks on up to stars. They endure for vast quantities of time. Only with the increase of novelty, or the mental pole of entities, do complexity, novel difference, and life emerge. Meaningful creativity requires genuine novelty that avoids perpetual causal repetition. However, there is no severe division between entities that primarily replicate the past and those that exhibit novel concrescences. These tendencies are exhibited in each entity. Whitehead clearly

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[41] Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 96-97.
[42] Rose, *On Whitehead*, 62-63.

expresses this when he says, "[T]he energetic activity considered in physics is the emotional intensity entertained in life."[43] While there is a great deal of difference, it is a quantitative difference instead of a qualitative one; there is no fundamental split between the physical and the mental: process philosophy thus avoids substantialist dualisms.

Mutual Immanence as Divine Matrix

Mutual immanence is the most general metaphysical condition in Whitehead's philosophy, for it is "the general common function exhibited by any group of actual occasions."[44] It is not merely an inert state of relationship but points to movement. It is relationship and becoming, connection and creativity. In this way it holds together the macroscopic and microscopic processes. Whitehead considers this an unavoidable aspect of experience, writing, "The togetherness of things involves some doctrine of mutual immanence. In some sense or other, this community of the actualities of the world means that each happening is a factor in the nature of every other happening."[45] Mutual immanence only appears as a distinct term relatively late in Whitehead's thought, starting in 1933 with *Adventures of Ideas*. It reframes his earlier discussions on creativity, which he considered to be ultimate in *Process and Reality*.[46] Creativity emphasizes the temporal quality of process, where the future is not simply a repetition of the past. Mutual immanence is the condition for relationships and differencing to occur; it is the spatialization of creativity, "the medium of intercommunication," empty except for its instantiations.[47]

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[43] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 168.
[44] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 201.
[45] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 164.
[46] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7.
[47] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 134.

This does not mean that Whitehead's earlier writings on creativity do not hold both the macroscopic and microscopic processes together, though. There are two sides to creativity: there is creativity as an active self-creativity of an entity's constitution, and there is transitory creativity that functionally results in the causal production of other events.[48] In this latter function, creativity parallels the extensive continuum. Marjorie Suchocki describes it thusly: "[T]hat which is concrescent creativity from the perspective of one entity is transitional creativity from the perspective of another: prehension is transitional creativity, subjectively appropriated."[49] The difference is that the extensive continuum is primarily a spatialized way to think about creativity beyond any implications of atomic isolation, which Whitehead is keen to avoid. It allows for the receptivity of entities to one another, uniting all in a common universe of real communication.[50] Thus, as pure receptivity, creativity is not self-present to itself but is kenotically formlessness and movement, being nothing for itself and so "provid[ing] everything as communication with everything else as [a] moving whole."[51] Creativity is a desubstantialized activity that is actual only in its instantiations. Negatively, every entity is empty of substance, but positively, every entity is cumulatively interdependent with every other entity. This is expressed through the notion of creativity, which is the ontological yet empty ground of all events' connectivity.

Overlapping, even redundant, terms help us see from different perspectives the process of becoming. The terms correct the potential excesses of each other. There are many ways to describe this perspective. Steve Odin named the process perspective as

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[48] Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 76.
[49] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (1988; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 88.
[50] Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 79.
[51] Ibid., 80.

"cumulative penetration" in contrast to Hua-yen Buddhism's cosmology of complete interpenetration.[52] In this project, I prefer the term "cumulative interpenetration" as the latter word points to mutual immanence and interrelationship, while the former word shows that this is not a static but dynamic process as the many become one and are increased by one. This relieves the process of becoming from being mislabeled as constituting an all-pervading totality. Whitehead rejects a completely mutually interpenetrated universe of space-time, saying, "Such a conception of complete mutual determination is an exaggeration of the community of the Universe."[53] Mutual immanence, or cumulative interpenetration, functions as the most transcendental condition within process: it is itself completely empty but is expressed in every instantiation of coming together. Additionally, it avoids the logic of the One because there is never a solitary unity that *then* enters into relationships. It is the descriptive condition of all potential becomings. However, just as there can never be a single solitary entity that then pluralizes into a multiplicity of relationships, there cannot be a single term that encompasses this phenomenon. Thus, its mirror term—mutual transcendence—is implied in this construction.[54] No entity or concept provides a totalizing perspective or absolute unification.

Every entity is the center of its own world, transcending its relevant world, but it is only one of an infinite network of alternative centers in a relationship of mutual immanence. There is not a unified consistency to the world but only this plane of intercommunication. As Gilles Deleuze correctly reads him, "For Whitehead . . .

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[52] See Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism: A Critical Study of Cumulative Penetration vs. Interpenetration* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).
[53] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 198.
[54] In this way, it is not unlike the Buddhist realization that Emptiness implies Buddha-nature and vice versa.

bifurcations, divergences, incompossibilities, and discord belong to the same motley world that . . . [are] made or undone according to prehensive units and variable configurations or changing captures."[55] Mutual immanence does not require consistency or a particular order among its entities. Actual occasions are mutually immanent to each other, but that does not necessarily mean they have a common relevance. Without any relevance to one another, they are a nexus which "does not presuppose any special type of order, nor does [a nexus] presuppose any other at all pervading its members" besides mutual immanence.[56] Thus, the mutual immanence of actual occasions can be a type of chaos. For Whitehead, mutual immanence does not guarantee any specific order to actual occasions but is rather the basis that there can be order at all.

Therefore, Whitehead needs a principle of limitation for order to arise, since mutual immanence alone cannot fulfill this function. "Harmony is limitation . . . " says Whitehead, because, "unlimited possibility and abstract creativity can procure nothing."[57] As a relationship among entities can simply be that of a chaotic nexus, the notion of God is his way of enabling patterns to emerge that are not mutually negating. This was explained in the previous section concerning potentials. However, how does the divine relate to the world's mutual immanence?

To talk about mutual immanence is not to ignore the divine for the world: they are inseparable though not identical. Theologically, one way to talk about the relationship of mutual immanence and the divine is through the divine matrix. It is the "space" or place out of which occasions become. It is not identical with God, but is the ground of God and all actual occasions, or the mutual immanence of communication and

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[55] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 81.
[56] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 201.
[57] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 137.

intercreativity.[58] The divine matrix takes place within the world, within God, and between God and the world. In the world, it is the fact of communication and self-creativity between and within occasions, i.e. the macroscopic and microscopic processes, respectively. Without creativity, there could be a web of interconnected relationships, but these would be a static, immobile fact. Without relationships forged through intercommunication, there could be creativity as self-formation, but there would be no new data that would be available for entities to feel in their own self-constitution. Wherever there is creativity and communication occurring, there is the divine matrix.

Talking about God as dipolar emphasizes the relationship of God and world, while talking about the divine matrix emphasizes the relationship of God and creativity. However, these two can be held together, for the world is made up of all actual occasions, and an actual occasion is an instance of creativity and communication. Creativity is not a substance but an activity. Thus, these conceptions of dipolarity and divine matrix can bleed into each other without becoming identical. Whitehead sees this dipolar God as the primordial instantiation of creativity.[59] Wherever one can observe creativity and communication, one finds the divine matrix, either as the nature of God or as the self-emptying of God as non-different creativity in the world for the world's becoming.

The philosophical theologian Roland Faber has previously taken this approach in looking at the non-difference of God and creativity. Using Whitehead's brief mention of the superjective nature[60] and the implications of a reversal of poles between the world and God, Faber reads God's superjective nature as the theopoetic difference of God and

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[58] Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 170-74.
[59] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7.
[60] Ibid., 88.

creativity where God differentiates creativity from Godself for the sake of the world.[61] From God's side, the superjective nature is the divine nature, self-creativity, but from the world's side it is the *khora* where God's kenosis means that there is pure communication empty of God.[62] It is the reconciliation of conceptuality and actuality and the communication of the two sides of God together, i.e. the divine matrix within God. The primordial nature is the Eros luring and desiring the world to make differences or Sophia/Logos from a Christian perspective. It is complete yet creative, not static but dynamic, the infinite aesthetic intensity and the absolute future that offers possibilities to the world.[63] The consequent nature makes into a contrast the multiplicity of the world, and saves or redeems the world.[64] Along with Catherine Keller's tehomic imagery,[65] the divine matrix also expresses the spirit as the communication of entities to each other.

Thus, the ultimate reality of process thought is mutual immanence where God, creativity, and the world are mutually immanent to each other; they are co-arising.[66] In God, the world and creativity are non-different, while in the world, God and creativity are non-different, and in creativity, God and the world are non-different.[67] The ultimate is the cumulative interpenetration of the one, the many, and creativity. This relationship, which is presupposed in any particular actual configuration, is one of mutual immanence (and sets the condition for creaturely mutual interest).

Even as I have been discussing the divine and its functions, I do not wish to further dwell on the speculative side of the internal character of the divine. It is

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[61] Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 184.
[62] Ibid., 212.
[63] Ibid., 102.
[64] Ibid., 164.
[65] Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 219.
[66] Roland Faber, "Emptiness and Nothingness," (class lecture, Mysticism and Process Theology, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, February 22, 2011).
[67] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 225.

necessarily mysterious to the extent that any actual entity in its private self-creative moment is mysterious. What it is for others, however, is public and available. Through aims that connect the divine and the world, mutual immanence, and the two aspects of creativity (as self-creative and transitional) for value intensification, one encounters the non-difference of the divine. Yet it is always the backside of the divine—never the face.[68]

This is not a problem to lament, for I want to subordinate an analysis of the divine nature(s) to a concern for the world and its most pressing problems. How the divine is internally affected by the world is less important in this ecclesiology than how the divine functions in the becoming of the world process. That is not to say that the world's becoming is the only thing that matters but only that internal speculation should be relativized for a more empirical exploration of the divine's insistence on difference and differentially related values for actualization. For Whitehead, God has a clear role to play in the process of valuation, for "the purpose of God is the attainment of value in the temporal world."[69] In this way "God is the measure of the aesthetic consistency of the world."[70] In effect, the function of the divine is by being "that factor in the universe whereby there is importance, value, and ideal beyond the actual."[71] It is to the production of value in the process of becoming to which we now turn.

A Theory of Value Worth Proclaiming

It has been often noted that process thought offers an ethics in the form of an aesthetics. As Whitehead himself declares, "All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the

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[68] For Moses's encounter with the divine backside, see Exodus 33:18-23, NRSV.
[69] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 87.
[70] Ibid., 86.
[71] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 102.

moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order."[72] At first, this can feel off-putting to those of us committed to building a more just world. Marjorie Suchocki includes "justice" as part of the primordial vision of God,[73] and likewise Monica Coleman describes God's vision of the common good as including "justice, equality, discipleship, quality of life, acceptance, and inclusion."[74] For those of us who cringe at inequities of power and seek to increase real capabilities for life fulfillment, the idea that these are simply a matter of aesthetics may feel intolerable. We might feel the need to shout, "God is on the side of the excluded, not on the side of aesthetic satisfaction!"

What does it mean to suggest that process thought offers an aesthetic worldview? I mean that it describes the world as a network of values, composed of intensity and harmony, or as Whitehead names them in the primordial vision, Beauty.[75] The process philosopher Brian Henning helps us better understand ethics in light of aesthetics. For him, "like the creative process of the universe itself, morality must always aim at achieving the most harmonious, inclusive, and complex whole possible."[76] This is often referred to in terms of seeking beauty. Admittedly, there is great risk in saying that "the telos of the universe . . . is aimed at the achievement of beauty."[77] How does this not become a bourgeois ethic, where those with sufficient leisure capacity seek aesthetic stimulation? Henning is at pains to distinguish a process conception of beauty and aesthetics: "Just as creativity is the universe's drive toward a complex unity that does not

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[72] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 91.
[73] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "Prayer in Troubled Times: A Process Perspective" (Center for Process Studies lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, October, 2010).
[74] Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 86.
[75] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 252.
[76] Brian G. Henning, *The Ethics of Creativity: Beauty, Morality, and Nature in a Processive Cosmos* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 3.
[77] Henning, *Ethics of Creativity*, 6.

devour individuality, beauty is the achievement of a whole that enhances the value of each part while not being destructive of them."[78] He finds that there is an "obligation of beauty," where one should "always act . . . so as to bring about the greatest possible universe of beauty, value, and importance that in each situation is possible."[79] In this way, Henning complements my telos of maximizing the potential for future becoming.

It is my contention that a radical process ecclesiology should seek the maximization of potential of intensity and harmony, which requires that we seek the maximization of different experiences and perspectives for potential incorporation. This alludes to Chapter 4 and my understanding of *diakonia*, which includes resisting the dissolution of multiple perspectives, rejecting their assimilation into dominant perspectives, demanding space for multiple views (even beyond the one proposed here), and resisting attempts to diminish them. In fact, this is one of process thought's primary ways of understanding evil: as the destruction or diminishment of what *is* from what *could be*. It is like a person who is degraded to a hog; a hog is not evil, but a person living like a hog and with its limited horizon of concern is evil.[80] In this way, evil is self-defeating as it draws on the production of value through degradation. Left to its own devices, it would eventually destroy all value and lead to a bare nothingness.[81]

Why are the concepts of intensity and harmony the right ones for the problems we face, and how do they assist us in thinking about what a counter-imperial ecclesiology proclaims? Intensity and harmony are expressions of the process of becoming and how value is formed through that process. There are two sides to every event: how much

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[78] Henning, *Ethics of Creativity*, 100.
[79] Ibid., 6-7.
[80] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 84-85.
[81] Ibid., 83. Thus, the destruction or degradation of the other hurts us, as well.

feeling or data it holds in its constitution, and how the data are integrated together. The former is intensity and the latter is harmony. Intensity names two things: "the force or emotional impact of the qualitatively complex and aesthetically organized array of feelings in an entity . . . [and] the ontological status of an entity in temporal processes of becoming transcendent of its own."[82] When elements lack any coordination but are mere diversities, the result is the triviality of experience. They are felt as separate and unrelated. When elements are not recognized as distinct but are felt as the same or identical, the result is vagueness of experience.[83] With appropriate narrowness so that an experience can be definite, and with appropriate width of scope so that it can be complex, an experience-entity is intense and harmonious. For Whitehead, "harmony requires the due coordination of chaos, vagueness, narrowness, and width" and "intensity is the reward of narrowness."[84] Aes/ethically, "morality is always the aim at that union of harmony, intensity, and vividness which involves the perfection of importance for that occasion."[85]

One of Whitehead's themes is the overcoming of oppositions through a contrast. In everyday language, the idea of a "contrast" centers on the difference between two things and how they are opposites or unlike each other. The emphasis is on the difference between them, but this is not what Whitehead means by a contrast. While he focuses on various technical aspects of contrast in his philosophy, one of his primary themes is on the intensification or increased complexity of felt experience through contrasts. The

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[82] Jones, "Intensity and Subjectivity," 281.
[83] Ibid., 283.
[84] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 112.
[85] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 14.

relevance of a contrast is in the paradoxical mutual relevance of previously incompatible terms:

> The intensity arises by reason of the ordered complexity of the contrasts which the society stages for these components . . . . The mere complexity of giveness which procures incompatibilities has been superseded by the complexity of order which procures contrasts.[86]

The significance of a contrast is in its harmonization of seemingly irreconcilable opposites. A contrast therefore does not focus on the oppositional quality of two or more elements—it highlights their novel relational relevance. For example, the notions of peace and justice are often placed into an oppositional pairing. However, when they are made into a contrast, they form the idea of a just peace, where equitable relationships of nonviolence exist in mutual dignity.

Events that can integrate seemingly divergent elements into a related whole are understood as a contrast. In effect, intensity and harmony go together. The contrast of many elements together in a related event leads to a more intense value-experience. Harmonization happens as an activity of concrescence. Yet, even though it is an activity, it does not produce a hierarchical relationship because it is an open harmonization. Whitehead brilliantly summarizes his view of value and actuality, saying:

> Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole. This characterizes the meaning of actuality. By reason of this character, constituting reality, the conception of morals arises. We have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of the universe. Existence, in its own nature, is the upholding of value intensity. Also no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right. It upholds value intensity with the universe. Everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, its individual self and its signification in the universe.[87]

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[86] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 100.
[87] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 111.

By this, Whitehead demonstrates the inseparability of all actualities, whether past or present, with the creation of values for themselves and for others (thus implying a relationship of mutual interest). This is radical good news.

In their exploration of a theology of life, Charles Birch and John Cobb endeavor to explain how entities can have intrinsic value rather than merely instrumental value. Birch and Cobb think it is critical to acknowledge intrinsic value, which they believe should be "measured by richness of feeling and capacity for richness of feeling."[88] In effect, all things have value for themselves, because they all have a measure of agency and subjectivity, however slight.[89] For electrons and particles, conceptual novelty is almost nonexistent to the point that they are almost exclusively physical replications of past prehensions, i.e. causal efficacy predominates. Nevertheless, Birch and Cobb dispute emergent models that claim that "life emerges from the lifeless. Mind emerges from the mindless."[90] Their Whiteheadian epistemology helps them justify this claim because "the non-human world can only be adequately understood in terms of what human beings know directly and immediately – a human experience."[91]

In promoting value, Birch and Cobb's stated primary concern is "the realisation of existing potentialities."[92] However, I believe this is the wrong conclusion. Rather, it should be the maximization of real potential for actualization because this alternative affirms the self-creative moment of what will be done with potential. In fact, even they are eager to affirm this point when describing subjectivity and self-creation as the ground

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[88] Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (1981; repr., Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990), 205.
[89] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 2.
[90] Ibid., 78.
[91] Ibid., 139.
[92] Ibid., 234.

for richness of experience. Birch and Cobb could easily move in this direction, as they say, "Justice entails that people will participate in decisions about their own destiny."[93] Value can only arise from free decisions.[94]

The future potential becoming of humans or other entities is radically shaped by the intersections that novel events make out of their relevant world. To maximize the diversity of events is to increase potential intensity through the harmonization of richer contrasts. While Birch and Cobb use slightly different language, they likewise argue that "to maximise the richness of experience is to maximise the quality of human life with minimum impact on non-human life,"[95] which results in seeking both "quantity of rich experience and variety of types of experience."[96] This is grounded in the unavoidable interrelatedness of planetary becoming, because values or "richness of experience is richness of relations and depends upon the richness of what is experienced."[97]

In Henning's complementary reading of process philosophy, there are no facts in isolation of values, and no values in isolation of facts; there are only fact-values.[98] No entity is ever static: it is a value process of intensity and harmonization. To be a value for oneself inherently means that one is also a value for others. Whitehead's panexperientialism implies "a sea change in the conception of value: if everything is a subject of experience, there can be no mere facts."[99] Panexperientialism is not a term that Whitehead himself uses but rather comes from David Ray Griffin.[100] However, I believe it is an apt way to describe Whitehead's perspective, including his notion of the reformed

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[93] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 238.
[94] I will elaborate on this further in Chapter 4 concerning Amartya Sen.
[95] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 173.
[96] Ibid., 174.
[97] Ibid., 274.
[98] Henning, *Ethics of Creativity*, 4.
[99] Ibid., 39.
[100] Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 97.

subjectivist principle. By this, he claims that there are no actual objects that are not also subjects: "apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness."[101] It is emphatically *not* the same as panpsychism, or the idea that all things, from rocks to atoms, are conscious. These are often aggregates of entities, which as a collectivity have minimal conceptual novelty.

Henning argues for an expanded notion of intrinsic value. He wants to prevent a process ethics of value from collapsing into an "axiological subjectivism" whereby intrinsic value is only understood in terms of concrescing occasions, and once satisfied, past occasions retain only instrumental value for present occasions.[102] Marjorie Suchocki, Judith Jones, and others[103] fit into what Henning calls the "ecstatic interpretation" of Whitehead. Henning goes on to note that satisfied entities do not become merely passive matter for the instrumental use of other concrescing entities.[104] Rather, they maintain a form of activity where occasions as superjects have the activity of being "objects [that] are active in other-creation."[105] Concrescence does not result in a static product, for since the "aim of process is at intensity, what is achieved in satisfaction is an intensity of contrast."[106] As Whitehead himself affirms, "Thus its own constitution involves that its own activity in *self*-formation passes into its activity of *other*-formation."[107] The macroscopic process prevents any axiological subjectivism of solely instrumental value.

Henning distinguishes between several different varieties of intrinsic value, determining that for Whitehead, it means in part that "an entity is the value it has

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[101] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 167.
[102] Henning, *Ethics of Creativity*, 48.
[103] These include persons such as Jorge Luis Nobo and Nancy Frankenberry.
[104] Henning, *Ethics of Creativity*, 54.
[105] Ibid., 52.
[106] Ibid., 55.
[107] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 193.

independent of its being valued by another."[108] However, intrinsic value has been regularly misunderstood by examining entities as autonomous individualities. Entities cannot be atomistic insofar as meaning separated from all others, which is where previous depictions of intrinsic value reflections have made a major mistake. As seen in the previous section, actual entities/occasions should not be understood in light of any essentialized separation but as interconnected through a processual matrix of creative becoming. It is critically important for Henning that intrinsic self-value does not result in solipsism, for "self-value essentially involves the real presence (objective functioning) of other values as themselves."[109] Value intensity for oneself is also value intensity for the universe, and so functioning objectively or publicly does not negate an entity's enduring intrinsic value status.[110] Moreover, it is not merely a question as to whether an entity has intrinsic value, "but whether the intrinsic value of others and of the whole is recognized, appreciated, and affirmed."[111]

With a stable environment, sufficiently complex value entities produce what we call life, which has great intrinsic value. However, it is a problem to understand life itself merely as the stabilization of certain enduring characteristics. According to Whitehead, it is rather "a bid for freedom."[112] As Luke Higgins understands Whitehead, life's intensity is related to "the complexity it is able to traverse or the chaos it is able to render consistent."[113] Therefore, a generally "consistent set of characteristics" is more akin to an

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[108] Henning, *Ethics of Creativity*, 58.
[109] Ibid., 61.
[110] Ibid., 61.
[111] Ibid., 64.
[112] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 104.
[113] Luke Higgins, "Becoming through Multiplicity: Staying in the Middle of Whitehead's and Deleuze-Guattari's Philosophies of Life," in *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, ed. Roland Faber and Andrea Stephenson (New York: Fordham Press, 2010), 147.

inorganic rather than an organic society.[114] Life, however, draws "diverse prehensions into complex contrasts that issue in novel modes of becoming."[115] Higgins observes that both Whitehead and Deleuze-Guattari affirm "an intensity derived from the novel interrelationship of contrasting terms."[116] What distinguishes an "entirely living nexus is its capacity to stay in the deep interstices, *the middle*, of the flows that make up its body and ecosystem."[117] Life happens, value is produced, in that empty middle space of complex, relational decisions.[118]

One implication for church life is that there is not a pre-ordained plan, even in this moment, that Christians must actualize. There is a variety or selection of indeterminate actions that may actualize the greatest intensity and harmony in any particular selection. Therefore, a spirituality of "sitting" or "listening" to the deep, empty spaces within our own becoming is a way to respond to the divine moving within us. However, these actualizations of responses and values need a principle of limitation and cannot be completely abstract. Chapter 4 will explore some political theories as guidelines for how we are to live in the world and demarcate what is the range for these actions.

Planetary Love

> *Prayer concerns are mentioned in worship. People listen and pray in silence. Suddenly, Spirit, a service and companion dog, barks aloud a prayer. The congregation (including me) laughs and says spontaneously in unison, "Amen!" Not every prayer or proclamation involves human words . . . Sherbert the cat*

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[114] Higgins, "Becoming through Multiplicity," 149.
[115] Ibid., 149.
[116] Ibid., 147.
[117] Ibid., 150.
[118] One can see a strong resonance here with a postcolonial theory of hybridity. See Wonhee Anne Joh's *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 59, where she states that radical postcolonial hyrbidity "stresses that identity is not the combination of right parts, an accumulation or a fusion of various parts, but an energy field of different forces. Thus, hybridity's 'unity' is not measured by the sum of all its parts. New possibilities, in fact 'newness,' enters the space between fixed identities by way of interstitial openings." I read this as the entrance of novelty through initial aims for concrescing entities.

slinks into the sanctuary and hops onto a pew next to a congregant. They sit together, sending and receiving affirmations to one another through purrs and strokes on the back . . . Infants are brought forward to receive a blessing one day, and on another there is a blessing of animals, each beloved, each part of the community of faith in their own distinct way. Churching is in no way reserved for the merely human.

The resulting *kerygma* for churching is the proclamation of the value and importance of all entities (both for themselves and each other). One can love oneself and one's neighbor as oneself because each is valuable, both intrinsically and instrumentally. There are no barren facts. As Whitehead puts it, "our sense of the value of the details for the totality . . . is the intuition of holiness, the intuition of the sacred, which is the foundation of all religion."[119] Skeptics should hesitate before washing their hands of this project as an anti-ecclesiology, for this is thoroughly good news, especially as it can counter Empire's proclamation of what is ultimately valuable.[120] This kerygma celebrates that all entities are valuable for themselves, for others, and for the whole world, and thus it demands a multiplicity of diverse value-entities. However, this does not demand just any difference but demands the intensification of value. One could say the destruction of intensity into triviality is a novel difference, but that would reduce value-intensities for themselves and for each other. This obviously has profound ecological implications, as well. To reduce the variety, the multiplicity, is to reduce the potential for new "combinations" or synthesizations, i.e. it is to reduce intensity and harmony of potential life, and it is in complex, novel living where greater value is produced.

With a process theory of value, Birch and Cobb reject aspects within theology and the Western intellectual tradition that understand animals as merely having instrumental worth. Consistent with their support of panexperientialism, by which they affirm

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[119] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 120.

[120] The relationship of Jesus of Nazareth with this good news will be addressed in Chapter 6.

"unconscious or non-conscious experience"[121] and starting with human experience, they conclude that "if our value is not only our usefulness to others but also our immediate enjoyment of our existence, this is true for other creatures as well."[122] In this light, they express how a process theory of value understands there to be continuity within all of creation. However, this does not mean that everything has equal value, for not everything has equally intense experience, such as rocks in comparison with humans. Therefore, "plants, like the cells which compose them, can appropriately be treated primarily as means [but] extremely important means which we abuse at our peril!"[123] They are willing to see levels of value rooted in richness of experience without arguing for an instrumentalism.

As insightful as Birch and Cobb's position is, one relevant critique is that they have an inappropriate hierarchicalization and anthropocentricism of humans at the apex of value. For example, some plants may actually have a center of experience like animals. Evidence has shown that plants will communicate with each other when one is attacked by a pest in order for the others to preemptively release either a chemical that repels the pest or a scent that attracts the pest's own predator. This seems to indicate some level of central coordination on behalf of the whole plant.[124] Thus, it seems that while they are using Whitehead's categories of levels of experience from atomic particles, molecules, single cells, plants, animals, and up to humans, Birch and Cobb have overly objectified these categories. I would affirm their own self-critique that "judgments of value among

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[121] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 123.
[122] Ibid., 151.
[123] Ibid., 153.
[124] Nathan Ingraham, "Fungus network lets plants alert each other to defend themselves against aphid attacks," http://www.theverge.com/2013/5/10/4318740/fungus-network-lets-plants-alert-each-other-to-defend-themselves (accessed May 15, 2013).

species will have a subjective element, and similarity to human beings is likely to play a distorting role at times."[125] All activities are part of a valuing process. Birch and Cobb imply that this is a hierarchical set, but it is truer to say that there are many hierarchies of value rather than only one. Without simpler creatures, such as phytoplankton, more complex ones cannot persist, so there can even be "lowerarchies" of value, too![126]

One implication of regarding values through a prioritization of maximal diversity of potential becoming is that it opens space for novel living entities (which we classify into different species) and their complex experiences. This variety is good not only because it increases intensities of experience but also for its differentiated levels of experience. While a human may have the most intense experience, its consciousness is also a simplification of its environment that "lower" entities may feel more directly. Thus, the multiplicity of species themselves is good, and the loss of any group not only diminishes the intensity of life now but also reduces the future potential becoming of novel living entities (following Higgins), as there is less for future concrescences to work with. While the emergence and extinction of novel species is simply the unavoidable process of the world, their casual elimination is a genuine cause for grief. Whatever their sources of origin, further intensities are most likely when the maximum diversity of potentials are available for their concrescence. Homogenizing or reducing potentiality decreases such future becomings' intensity of contrast and must be avoided.

Process thinkers have done an exceptional job in demonstrating how process thought can help reconceive the value of the "non-human" world. They have been successful to such an extent that for the philosophically inclined, process thought has

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[125] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 149.
[126] John Sweeney (informal conversation, Center for Process Studies, Claremont, CA, August, 2014).

become a key resource in reflecting on environmental ethics and animal rights, and in issues varying from climate change to animal experimentation. These contributions are important and it is not my intention to diminish them. Thus, Roland Faber notes that when rethinking value, "the political consequence, then, is not the preservation of humanity and the struggle for its survival *per se*, but the *diversification of its environment in order to allow for the most creative openness for novelty that does not exclude humanity but does not center around humanity, either* [emphasis in original]."[127] By proclaiming the importance of the maximization of future potential becoming of intensity and harmony, churching should not make this argument only on behalf of humans, but for *the whole life network*. We do not affirm the network of life merely for its own sake nor for our own, but for their related mutual benefit and flourishing. Without this sense of mutual interest, our proclamation becomes either paternalistic or narcissistic.

When discussing processual understandings of value, it is to the "natural" world that theorists generally direct themselves and less towards interhuman relations. Part of the reason for this is that most theories of value have focused on the rights and values of the human world, and so process thinkers have sought to go beyond such anthropocentric orientations. Nevertheless, where does this leave the still crucial role of human relations, particularly when it comes to issues of inequitable power relationships? While some people have addressed this in part, such as Marjorie Suchocki in *The Fall to Violence* concerning sin, this has been an area of less concentration. Chapter 3 will pick up this theme in detail.

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[127] Roland Faber, "Ecotheology, Ecoprocess, and Eco*theosis*: A Theopoetical Intervention," *Salzburger Theologische Zeitschrift* 12 (2008): 89.

Any ecclesiological construction will necessarily tend to focus on humans and their relationships with one another and their larger environment, given that the church has traditionally (and erroneously) been understood as constituted solely by humans. My primary focus in the upcoming chapters is geared towards the relationships of humans, but a processual notion of intrinsic value also recognizes the distinct and nonanthropocentric value of the biosphere and life forms that make up the ecosystem. To proclaim that all entities have intrinsic value, or better yet, *are* intrinsic values, which are mutually implicated in each other such that the wellbeing of one affects the wellbeing of all and vice versa, means in large part that our spheres of concern are meant to expand to the point of reaching out to the entire planetary system.[128] We are called to proclaim good news that is for all of planetary life, of which we are an inextricable part! It shapes how we should live and interact together with others, and it drives us to serve in particular ways in the midst of values and practices that work to undermine this proclamation.

[128] While it is technically true that such concern could theoretically reach all the way out to the entire cosmos, most of those relationships are relatively trivial even as many set up the condition for the maintenance of life on our planet. If and when we have significant encounters with life outside our planetary context, this qualification would likely need revision. As of 2013, these remain tantalizing possibilities, but more as pure possibilities than real potentials for actualization.

CHAPTER 3

Social Ontology, Mutual Interest, and Encounter

> Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.
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> —Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

As the previous chapter reviewed a process cosmology and theory of value, it is necessary to further elaborate this paradigm with regards to humans in particular. As they are the primary (though not necessarily exclusive) constituents in an ecclesiology and their relationships are key to churching, this chapter devotes a special concern towards them. I begin by reviewing Catherine Keller's work in order to reinterpret human becoming in terms of a socially complex ontology. This framing is followed by my emphasis on the importance of mutual interest as a key insight that helps motivate radical ecclesial living. I will then examine the centrality of liberating encounters through an analysis of some postcolonial missiologies. In so doing, this chapter will also clarify what I believe is the complementary relationship between process and liberation theologies. The result will be that "differentiated solidarity" will emerge as the key element in this ecclesiology's understanding of *koinonia*, rather than traditional Christianity's definition as being the believing community's mutual support of one another.

Catherine Keller's (Trans)Feminist Self-Becoming

Catherine Keller's understanding of the human can be characterized as broadly going through two distinct stages, or "folds," as she might later call them. The first stage uses a process-feminist lens and focuses on the internal relatedness that constitutes each human, while the second stage delves more into poststructuralism and apophatic mysticism. The former is more kataphatic with its positive analysis of a social ontology

while the latter is more an un-saying of that dynamic process. These stages are consistent with each other but are different expressions or sides of her (trans)feminist perspective.

In *From a Broken Web*, her first book and primary work on the construction of the self, Keller boldly questions the idea of the inherent separateness of humans. Traditionally, this idea assumes that humans are clearly and obviously divisible from the world and remain the same over time.[1] Her thesis is that separation and sexism have worked together to form a coherent patriarchal worldview in our culture. This worldview says "that any subject, human or non-human, is what it is only in clear division from everything else; and that men, by nature and by right, exercise the primary prerogatives of civilization."[2] By revealing this alliance, she creatively intends to deconstruct the patriarchal self they have formed.

Keller insightfully identifies two primary tendencies in understanding the self, both of which are dependent on each other and mutually destructive: the separative self and the soluble self. While the former asserts total autonomy, the latter's primary function is to support that illusion.[3] In this construction, a man's selfhood is acquired at the cost of a woman's selfhood.[4] Men do not inherently have a separative self while women have a soluble self, but these are descriptions of how they have been patriarchically constructed. The soluble self is subjectively internalized so as to have the "tendency to dissolve emotionally and devotionally into the other . . . [while] imposed by the superstructure of men."[5]

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[1] Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 1.
[2] Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 2.
[3] Ibid., 8.
[4] Ibid., 4.
[5] Ibid., 13.

There are two basic ways contemporary women have responded to this dichotomy. They have either been complicit by exemplifying the complementary feminine or have been co-opted by taking on the masculine autonomous self as their own. Keller observes that this co-optation has been required for women to be brought into roles traditionally reserved for men. In the moment of supposed feminist liberation, the self was again enslaved to another form of patriarchal power definitions. Therefore, both complicity and co-optation are unhealthy and inauthentic alternatives.[6] Keller proposes a model that incorporates positive aspects of both and in the process radically transforms them.

Keller believes feminists have been seeking a model "of differentiation *in* relation" that simultaneously affirms complex human connection but avoids notions of dependency [emphasis in original].[7] Differentiation does not imply separation or an essential otherness but is inherently a relational activity. She understands that "differentiation, the degree to which an entity becomes *different*, depends upon its ability to embrace its own freedom and so compose spontaneously out of the resources flowing in from reality."[8] It *feels* its difference with others and is so related to them. In revising an understanding of immanence, she asserts that in experiencing others, they enter into one's self-constitution and make a difference in oneself.[9] This "influence . . . is not working *upon* me so much as *into* me."[10]

While looking at a variety of stories and psychological perspectives on the self and its patriarchal construction, Keller determines that the philosophy of Alfred North

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[6] Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 18.
[7] Ibid., 161. Unless otherwise stated, all direct quotations that include italics are in the original quote.
[8] Ibid., 190.
[9] Ibid., 27.
[10] Ibid., 27.

Whitehead offers significant possibilities for moving past a separate/soluble self dichotomy. As Keller reads Whitehead, what connects actual occasions with each other is that they feel each other.[11] It is not that self-sufficient things reach beyond themselves with feelings to connect with other self-sufficient entities. This is impossible because "the feeler does not exist before the feelings. To feel the world means to emerge from feeling the world. These feelings make me what I am."[12] We do not have experiences: we are experiences. She finds Whitehead useful here because for him, "I *am* this 'throb of experience': I *am* the complex unity of feeling that rises up at this moment in response to my feelings of the plural world."[13] Instead of a Cartesian substantial self, separate from everything else, she correctly understands the self as one of composition where substances dissolve in place of becoming-events.[14] This mimics the process of concrescence and formation of value-entities as described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Keller boldly takes Whitehead's thought beyond even his own intent in challenging the fallacious patriarchal notion of the self.[15] Because it is a fallacy, its foundations are always giving way. Therefore, the male ego construction is inherently defensive because this assumed permanent, autonomous self is constantly being permeated by the surrounding world and so is in perpetual need of reinforcement for its preservation.[16] Women have a slight advantage in recognizing their true selves, not because of anything intrinsically superior about them, but because of their contextual

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[11] Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 183.
[12] Ibid., 183.
[13] Ibid., 184.
[14] Ibid., 186.
[15] Ibid., 201.
[16] Ibid., 201-02.

situation. For Keller, women have less prevalently denied their own inherent dynamic connectivity (that is the reality for all people) because of patriarchy's organization: only in this way is being female more relational.[17] Men seek to control women for their perceived relationality, because deep down men recognize the instability of their attempts to maintain an isolated, enduring selfhood. If humans are "ontologically communal, we need not serve as glue for another; being already interconnected, we are moist, sticky and fibrous enough within ourselves to come into new self-composition."[18] An oppressive dependency is not necessary once human nature is recognized for what it is.

In Western culture, a self is supposed to be temporally stable and constant as well as spatially separate.[19] Keller contrasts this definition with her own processual notion, where a "self is the unique, immediate event where an experience takes place and where the world is gathered as a unique composition. A self feels its way into existence; it takes possession of a world; and then it lets itself go."[20] One could falsely interpret her as saying that an individual person is a moment of coming together and passing away, but this is not her intention. Keller posits a differentiation between a self and a person. Her reconstruction of the self and person allows both for radical becoming and continuity through time. A person is not the same self through time but multiple selves that have a personal continuity:

> The soulful streaming of occasions allows a sense of personal continuity without erecting any strict self-identity through time. What I become now arises out of all my previous moments of experience (and out of all the occasions of the nexūs that are my world); it will then contribute its influence to all future occasions of my personal life (and to all future occasions of the world). The image arises of an individual stream among ocean currents. Everything, and most intimately my

[17] Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 202.
[18] Ibid., 206.
[19] Ibid., 162-63.
[20] Ibid., 195.

> soul, flows in and out of the present occasion, which is my self. This is a light and loose sense of the unity of the person. Why would we need more?[21]

Here we find a profound sense of the interrelationship of the momentary self with all other selves of the universe in a complex weaving together, but there is also the interrelationship of the chain of selves that make up the distinct person. Thus, a person is her own self, but yet is not an isolated self. To help clarify this difficult concept, she notes that there are two aspects to consider: the multitude of actual entities that are woven together into oneself in any moment, and the stream of moments that connect like pearls on a string as one's continuous personality.[22] Each moment is a distinct self that has intrinsic value, but none are perpetually isolated enduring entities.

Keller's process-feminist ontology of the self suggests four dyads from which relational selves are complexly composed: being one/being many, being public/being private, being body/being soul, and being here/being now.[23] The oneness of the self is tied up with its manyness, for its integrated complexity is what holds it together.[24] A person's many selves are both public and private as a dipolar continuum of creative extension and singularity.[25] Our personhood is synonymous with our soul, though at the same time, we are not separate from our bodies. We do not merely have sensory perception but rather we feel the world with our whole bodies, which we also feel, even if these feelings are more often than not pre-reflective.[26] Lastly, a self is a particular place and time, but it is connected with everything else and so is a potential for the becoming of

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[21] Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 197.
[22] Ibid., 227.
[23] Ibid., 5-6.
[24] Ibid., 91.
[25] Ibid., 232.
[26] Ibid., 236.

everything else.[27] Thus the feminist self is one that makes up both space and time via self-spacing.[28]

Through her career, Keller has creatively her incorporated interests in poststructuralism and apophatic mysticism, moving her to a more transfeminist stance. However, her understanding of what it means to be human endures, even as she has used novel sources like Judith Butler and Nicholas of Cusa. To Keller's excitement, Butler's more recent work has affirmed that the "I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the way in which I am tied to 'you,' by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you."[29] Except for the poststructuralist terminology, Keller retains the basic insight from her earlier work: "We creatures fold in and out of each other moment by moment, as Whitehead's idea of 'prehension'—transcribed by Deleuze as 'the fold'—would elaborate."[30] The advantage poststructuralism brings is that its deconstructive stance helps feminism transcend its own closures and essentialisms.[31]

For example, one can no longer maintain the binary of gender as a construction while sex remains an essential given.[32] This binary has run its course to exhaustion, which is why Keller finds "Butler's ontological thicket . . . and the Cusan cloud" so promising.[33] Keller sees Butler moving away from pure constructivism and "toward a more nuanced recognition of the constitutive character of our specific relations, indeed

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[27] Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 241.
[28] Ibid., 243.
[29] Catherine Keller, "The Apophasis of Gender: A Fourfold Unsaying of Feminist Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 4 (December 2008): 925.
[30] Keller, "Apophasis of Gender," 928.
[31] Ibid., 914.
[32] Ibid., 918.
[33] Ibid., 918.

toward a poststructuralist relationalism."[34] To name gender and sex as constructions does not make them nothing, for they are constructions of their felt worlds. Keller's nuanced position shows that just because all concepts of human nature or nature in general are socially constructed, that does not mean that we can dismiss the material cosmos as mere construction.[35]

Keller finds a mystical ally in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa: "[A]ll are in all and each is in each."[36] In de-centering the universe, everything becomes its own center even as it remains just one of an infinite number of centers. As Cusa says, "The world machine will have, one might say, its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere."[37] The results are surprisingly consistent with Keller's early work. At this "fold" in her career, she rarely speaks positively of what she affirms outside of poetic-mystical language. However, in a footnote she acknowledges that she remains complicit with Carter Heyward's "relational ontology of the self," of which Keller's earlier work is a profound exemplification.[38]

Following this mystical line of thinking, Keller believes "that the apophasis of gender—not its cancellation . . . opens feminism itself to its own multiple unfoldings" to the point that "the many become the manifold."[39] Looking at four folds in feminist theology, she shows the complication that is the self. First, "the gender fold in feminist theology unfolds as an *affirmation of woman, the affirmation therefore of gender*

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[34] Keller, "Apophasis of Gender," 924.
[35] Ibid., 927.
[36] Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. and ed. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 140.
[37] Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 161.
[38] Keller, "Apophasis of Gender," 923.
[39] Ibid., 927.

difference, as a primary and ultimately theological site of human flourishing."[40] It negates "complementary hierarchies" and sees them for what they are: constructed. The "second fold, this colorfold, com*pli*cated and multi*pli*ed the emergent feminist subjectivity" as it demands accounts of non-Eurocentric white women's experience.[41] The queer fold negates and transgresses earlier biological sex foundations on behalf of expanding former closures of human thriving.[42] The result is that "our racey gender difference is further differentiated by sexuality, but of a sort that deconstructs the binary of straight/gay right along with that of male/female."[43]

Fourth and finally is the manifold, a multiplicity that "is a placeholder, a transition, a passageway into the next multiplicity."[44] The multiple is different from the plural, for while the former folds voices into itself to create something new (like this ecclesial project!), the plural is only a list of many self-enclosed entities. A mere plurality misses the quality of interrelationships, "the mess and the depth of our sociality, the 'ontological thickets' (Butler) or 'rhizomes' (Deleuze and Guattari) of our inadvertent mutual participation."[45] Here Keller's mystic turn comes into full force, for "we cannot even begin to know the full extent of the relations that have shaped us; we cannot give a full account of ourselves. And yet precisely therein would lie the wisdom of the manifold: to instill in ourselves and in our species, a dignified account of our own unaccountability."[46] Keller describes the unknowability of the self as her being unable to "give an exhaustive account" of all that has shaped and formed her, for it is the entire

[40] Keller, "Apophasis of Gender," 919.
[41] Ibid., 921.
[42] Ibid., 922.
[43] Ibid., 923.
[44] Ibid., 926.
[45] Ibid., 927.
[46] Ibid., 927-28.

network of (inter)planetary relations.[47] In a very real sense, one's own self remains a very real mystery. Nevertheless, it remains a real, *material*, mystery, for a mere poststructuralist "formulaic *anti*-essentialism may silence all sense of connection to our bodies, our communities, and our earth."[48] I fully agree with her conclusion that one must avoid any type of romantic essentialism even as poststructuralist-relational thinking requires us to take our embodiment seriously.

Keller's latter trajectory overlaps nicely with certain postcolonial sensibilities, which through the experience of exclusion and seeking pure origins recognize that they are complex selves that do not nearly fit into any one single identity. This is where the notion of hybridity comes from, as people from indigenous and colonized backgrounds encounter a blending of cultures and worldviews. As theologians such as Wonhee Anne Joh have noted, this term is best used descriptively rather than as simply a normative good, because hybridity does not happen in a power vacuum but often under terms of domination. Joh notes three approaches to hybridity and aligns herself most fully with the last option: one, it emerges out of oppression and assimilation; two, it deconstructs established, oppressive binary thinking and undermines its power; and three, it is a way to describe the inherent complexity and mutual agencies of all locations while still challenging unjust structures.[49] Jea Sophia Oh agrees with Joh, suggesting that hybridity occurs not only from oppressive power or by undermining binaries but is "the

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[47] Keller, "Apophasis of Gender," 925.
[48] Catherine Keller, "The Love of Postcolonialism," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 237.
[49] Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 53-54.

multidimensional direction of power . . . suggesting the mutual agencies of all sides."[50] It is another way to describe the complex agential power of the becoming-self.

The work of Brazilian neo-liberationist theologian Jung Mo Sung offers yet another surprisingly complementary understanding of the human person vis-à-vis Keller. One key idea of modernity was replacing God as the subject of history with humans as the subjects constructing history as their object.[51] For Sung, history is not merely an object, and he affirms the phenomenon of the world's self-organization as "autopoiesis," with emerging patterns of complex relationality.[52] In critiquing the Enlightenment notion of the historical subject, which has skewed most forms of liberation theology, Sung suggests that liberation theology needs to dialogue with quantum physics.[53] Such complex self-creation is true for humans and the market, though this latter universal (though not single!) subjectivity is not free from error.

Sung eventually affirms a processive understanding of the human via Franz Hinkelammert: a human being is neither simply a subject (as the Enlightenment would describe it) nor an isolated substance, but it is a becoming potentiality in process where it becomes a subject.[54] For him, it is too much to say that the subject can be reduced to the web from which it emerges, for it also transcends that web,[55] which I understand as the self-creative empty space that makes something out of its prehensions. I believe this is a fair reading, for Sung adds that "to say that the subject transcends the system is to say that no system, no web of webs, exhausts the potentiality and subjectivity (the quality of

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[50] Jea Sophia Oh, *A Postcolonial Theology of Life: Planetarity East and West* (Upland, CA: Sopher Press, 2011), 59.
[51] Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism, and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 37.
[52] Sung, *Subject, Capitalism, and Religion*, 42-43.
[53] Ibid., 36.
[54] Ibid., 54.
[55] Ibid., 57.

being a subject) of the human being."[56] Amazingly, even though humans are his focus, he extends this self-creativity beyond them, which is a rare move for liberation thinkers, but one that is consistent with Keller's construction.[57]

Mutual Interest and Differentiated Solidarity

If humans are as complexly and connectively existing as Keller and cohorts indicate, this will directly impact how we understand the concept of interest. Whereas most discussions of interest work out of the assumption of separate and autonomous selves, interrelated selves will imply an interrelated understanding of interest. Furthermore, as Brian Henning has so helpfully explained, "[S]elf-value is always intertwined with the value of others and with the value of the whole."[58] In a way, this section is a response to this chapter's opening quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as an insight from the apostle Paul. Paul writes to the Corinthians concerning the body of Christ: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."[59] I am endeavoring to make the case *how* these insights are true beyond being mere assertions or beautiful poetic metaphors. Without a deeper understanding of interest, there remain diminished opportunities for cross-cultural and experiential networks of solidarity for creative transformation. To make this case, this section combines process and liberation/postcolonial theological considerations.

An interrelated understanding of mutual interest means that one's wellbeing is tied up in the wellbeing of others, even if this relationship is not immediately clear or

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[56] Sung, *Subject, Capitalism, and Religion*, 58.
[57] One major difference is that Sung limits this self-creativity to social systems like the market, and remains silent about the self-creativity of "nature." This latter notion is a distinct strength of Whiteheadian thought.
[58] Brian G. Henning, *The Ethics of Creativity: Beauty, Morality, and Nature in a Processive Cosmos* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 62.
[59] 1 Corinthians 12:26, NRSV.

obvious to oneself. This happens most often in situations of privilege, where it is in one's narrow self-interest to not understand the situation, even though to understand and respond would be in one's greater interest for wellbeing and justice. Consider the example of white mainline Protestants and their obliviousness, their *unknowingness*, to their racial situation. As James Cone notes in *The Theology of Black Liberation*, they commit acts of oppression from which they need to be liberated, but they do not know the character of the liberation they need.[60] Even if one can accurately say that everybody is oppressed, not everyone is oppressed in the same way, and the ones who primarily benefit will not be able to articulate the way in which they are oppressed. Only those excluded, those experiencing oppression, will be able to do that.[61] They transcend the oppressive act even as it seeks to objectify them.

Persons experiencing the illusionary benefit of unjust privileges are in power positions that enable them to pretend that they are whole selves. They are convinced that they are simply themselves, normatively complete as white, as American, as male, as straight, as able-bodied, as capitalist, as Christian, etc. Yet the experience of disbelonging, of dislocation through the other, can reveal our own ambiguous unknowings of ourselves as complexities.[62] Simply put, people are not as whole as we often think we are, and privilege allows us to avoid confronting this reality. It hides our interest in transformation by making changes appear as a loss we should fear.

One difference between Cone's classic liberationist approach and my argument is that ontologically there is no oppressor and no oppressed in my construction; there are

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[60] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 103.
[61] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 107.
[62] As we saw in the previous section, Keller describes this reassertion of identity in terms of patriarchy.

only oppressive acts and experiences of oppression. While it is possible that certain persons may integrate into their constitution such a network of oppressive acts or experiences of oppression that for all practical purposes it would be appropriate to refer to them as an "oppressor" or "the oppressed" without too much of a gloss, a problem nevertheless remains. There is always a reserve, a complexity in the constitution of persons such that one can say they still remain valuable or retain a modicum of subjective agency that can help them transcend their current dominant functioning.

I have already indicated that mutual interest implies seeking justice, but how can this be appropriate to a processive framing? Monica Coleman notes that Alfred North Whitehead's writings lack any explicit discussion of systemic justice. However, Coleman points out that there is a space for this in his late work, where Whitehead says that a system may "fail in another sense, by inhibiting more Beauty than it creates. Thus the system, though in a sense beautiful, is on the whole evil in that environment."[63] This leads her to conclude that certain systems are evil in that they inhibit more beauty than they create and cause environments to experience a relative loss.[64] Just as a system understood in isolation may have its own limited achievement of beauty, its contribution to its larger environment may function as a decisive loss. Coleman refers to the institution of American slavery as limiting a potential greater "beauty of the freedom and flourishing of African Americans, and the wider society was also constrained because of its acceptance of racism."[65] She thus adds the notion of justice as part of a Whiteheadian aesthetics, which points in the direction of an engagement with notions of mutual

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[63] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 265.
[64] Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 80-81.
[65] Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 81.

interest.[66] From a more limited perspective, not being able to act in certain ways may feel like a tragic limitation of freedom, but from a larger framing it can help set the conditions for a more equitable flourishing of life.

By using the term "mutual interest," I do not merely mean what other philosophers such as Adam Smith have called an "enlightened self-interest." Enlightened self-interest is the idea that instead of having a narrow, individualistic notion of actions that benefit oneself, one recognizes that another's good is part of one's own good. An example of crass enlightened self-interest would be a small business owner who wants the working-poor to be paid a higher wage so that they are able to purchase more of his store items. We can do better than this. For Whitehead, "To be an actual entity is to have a self-interest. This self-interest is a feeling of self-valuation; it is an emotional tone."[67] Interconnected value unavoidably means interconnected interest. Late in his career, Whitehead notes that "at the basis of existence is the sense of 'worth . . . ' It is the sense of existence for its own sake, of existence which is its own justification, of existence with its own character."[68] Mutual interest is possible because of the way value is produced and interrelated amidst the condition of mutual immanence.

As Marjorie Suchocki has insightfully noted, "The responsibility to self and other is not exactly 'enlightened self-interest,' since it could just as easily be called 'enlightened other-interest.' We are interwoven."[69] If both terms are used together, they become synonymous with my notion of "mutual interest." Roland Faber makes a similar

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[66] Justice will be defined in Chapter 4 using the thought of Iris Marion Young, taking care to avoid distributionist simplifications of the term.
[67] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 87.
[68] Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (1938; repr., New York: Free Press, 1968), 109.
[69] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 70-71.

point when he holds self-creativity and self-transcendence together in a dipolar structure: rather than the dualism between egoism and altruism, the poles are connected in moments of creative transformation.[70] The language of "enlightened self-interest" can act helpfully as a middle axiom to the extent that it makes discussions of mutual interest more accessible to those who are not open to process-friendly conceptualities.[71] Religious communities should not speak only in the language that they find persuasive but need to be able to articulate their commitments in such a way that others may "go and do likewise" out of complementary motivations.

Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan advocate for an understanding of mutual interest that they call "deep solidarity." Rieger and Kwok understand deep solidarity primarily in economic terms, where the formerly charitable middle-class realize that they actually have more in common with the working-class and poor than they do with what has recently been called the one-percent. In their eyes, deep solidarity happens when, "Without glossing over the differences, we begin to see their fate as our fate. We are also the 99 percent."[72] They maintain that there is an internal diversity to this unity such that "solidarity in this context is not the support of people who are exactly like oneself . . . [for deep] solidarity is the support of others who are different yet experience similar predicaments."[73] In fighting separation brought out by the one-percent, many say we are all the same, but "the problem with this approach, however, is that although it is preferable to the blatant rejection of others, it tends to turn other people into mirror

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[70] Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 311.
[71] For more on middle axioms, see John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, Institute of Mennonite Studies Series, no. 3 (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 32-33.
[72] Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 18.
[73] Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 28.

images of one's own self, without recognizing them for who they are."[74] In this configuration, Rieger and Kwok want people to recognize that their salvation partially depends on others' salvation and that one's needs and the needs of others are mutually implicated in a reciprocal dynamism.

While Rieger and Kwok use the term deep solidarity, I have chosen a term that moves beyond their economic model. We need to practice "differentiated solidarity," which was coined by Iris Marion Young, though I am utilizing this phrase beyond the scope of her original intentions.[75] When placed side-by-side, these two words function as a paradoxical tension, or more exactly, they exist as a contrast. They are interacting together in much the same manner as Catherine Keller's affirmations of "poststructuralist relationalism" and "differential relations."[76] One modest difference from Keller is that by using the term "solidarity," I hope to better emphasize the power dynamics at work in all relational configurations that she sometimes deemphasizes. By solidarity, one instinctively thinks of a solid, a unity, or a form of togetherness that cannot easily be broken. This is how solidarity is generally understood, as a standing together, often in the face of oppression. Yet the word "differentiated" implies the opposite: distinction, singularity, and otherness. These terms mutually transform one another, for differentiated solidarity is the sense or activity of participating with and encountering those who are not identical with yourself, all the while recognizing that you are partially constituted by others. We are all in this together, and in each other, but we are *not* the same.

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[74] Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 68.
[75] I will discuss Young's position in Chapter 4.
[76] Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 148.

Differentiated solidarity does not pretend that we are all identical, or even desire exactly the same things. Those living with privilege cannot simply declare their profound solidarity with the oppressed and join in a common struggle as if everyone is in it together and from the same location. Such perspectives ironically ignore their own social location! Nevertheless, differentiated solidarity is grounded in an understanding of social ontology and a profound sense of mutual interest. Beyond Rieger and Kwok's more restrictive use of deep solidarity to primarily focus on issues of class, my use of differentiated solidarity extends beyond that context to wherever one sees and is moved by oppressive actions. Our fellowship is one of solidarity, but you likely have certain unjust privileges within this togetherness. Get rid of them, or even better: *use* them to undermine the endurance of these privileges.

More generally, the term solidarity can also be used to mean simply social ontology, as with Marjorie Suchocki, who writes, "Through the organic solidarity of the [human] race, we are affected by the sins of others, and our own sins likewise have an effect upon all others."[77] Suchocki recognizes relationships' power dynamics in this comment. However, I am using differentiated solidarity as a positive term that sees these power relationships but expresses them in such a way that highlights maximum intensity and harmony, particularly for undoing oppressive practices.

This experience generally requires some sort of proximity or encounter, which will be addressed in the next section. However, this experience of mutual interest through proximity is not always mandatory. Whitehead himself discusses this possibility through his notion of "Peace," which transcends the particularity of one's existence and sees oneself as part of the larger cosmos. You let go of your particular utility of intensity and

[77] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 101.

harmony, seeing part of yourself as connected, yet not identical, with the whole. As Whitehead puts it, peace "is a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some deep metaphysical insight," a surpassing of personality that becomes "a trust in the efficacy of Beauty."[78] Moreover, Peace "results in a wider sweep of conscious interest. It enlarges the field of attention."[79] This is mutual love beyond one's own private results and for humanity (and the planet) as a whole. At their best, religious institutions "explicitly express the doctrine that the perfection of life resides in aims beyond the individual person in question."[80] Yet you must remember that both you and others are not separate and stable entities. In my reading, this is the central presumption of mutual interest and a mystical form of differentiated solidarity, which may help motivate novel encounters for the purpose of greater mutual flourishing and value-intensification.

Seeking mutual interest for oneself and others is very similar to how Thomas Oord defines love. According to him, "To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being."[81] Overall wellbeing indicates that love is not merely other-regarding, but implicates oneself, as well. This is in spite of the fact that Oord critiques what he calls the "mutuality tradition." His concern is that it implies that "*all* relationships are loving," when in fact many are abusive and destructive.[82] There may be a place for self-sacrifice, even though this is not the standard requirement for love, for it may at times "promote well-being equally for others and ourselves" and even sometimes be self-enhancing.[83]

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[78] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 285.
[79] Ibid., 285.
[80] Ibid., 289.
[81] Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 17.
[82] Oord, *Nature of Love*, 22.
[83] Ibid., 28.

Whether as *eros* or *agape*, love seeks to promote overall wellbeing as the affirmation and enhancing of values for others and ourselves.[84] Even though this will often be a differentiated love towards those more proximate to us, "in a world of interconnections, the good of the one often coincides with the good of others."[85]

It is important to mention one other area of intersection between process and liberationist thinking. Process aims for the maximization of intensity and harmony, and it is my contention that this maximization is functionally equivalent to a preferential option for the poor. Indeed, it is with the excluded and oppressed where their potential intensity and harmony, i.e. their real opportunities for transformation, is diminished. However, liberation is not *us* achieving results for *them* any more than an entity can actualize the potential of another entity for the latter entity. In spite of this limitation, it involves us using our power to set conditions for their decision since their subjectivity is constrained by an oppressive and an overly limiting environment.

Let us briefly return to Charles Birch and John Cobb, for they also implicitly support such a preferential option. Since Birch and Cobb remove an absolute notion of equal intrinsic value for humans because humans have different experiences, they claim that "one should promote richness of experience wherever possible. There is a gap between what is potential and what is actual in each person."[86] Human flourishing is accomplished by developing potentialities within diverse cultures and by seeking to lure those cultures into affirming such personal transformation.[87] Birch and Cobb do not intend to support a colonialist triumphalism that says that the context that dominant

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[84] Oord, *Nature of Love*, 56-62.
[85] Ibid., 63.
[86] Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (1981; repr., Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990), 164.
[87] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 164.

Westerners have known is the supreme actualization. Rather, they offer a transcontextual critique concerning the vast majority of cultures:

> [They have made a portion of their] members inferior in their capacity to grow and have thus justified denying them the means to do so. The result has been an actual inferiority of experiences on the part of slaves, peasants, women, ethnic minorities and other classes. This actual inferiority has been appealed to as justifying the practices which created it.[88]

Their solution is that to the extent that people have been denied their potentiality, there will be the need for preferential access to opportunities for growth.[89]

Each person needs to "have the maximum opportunity to develop to the full his or her talents and to promote the richest possible experience for all."[90] By this, I am interpreting their phrase "richest possible experience for all" to be equivalent to the maximization of intensity and harmony. As far as mutual interest is concerned, Birch and Cobb believe that "justice requires that we share each other's fate."[91] We primarily have "a responsibility to act appropriately for our own interests and to enhance the richness of the life of others," particularly those close to us, but this responsibility extends even to future generations, paralleling Oord's thought.[92] Thus, we are called to respect "our intimate circle of family and friends" but this extends ultimately to all of life.[93]

Though Cobb and Birch do not explicitly connect these commitments with a preferential option for the poor (broadly construed) as do many liberation theologians, they make numerous implicit allusions to this prioritization. One way we can rethink this is that our primary concern for proximate family and friends should be seen in light of the

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[88] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 165.
[89] Ibid., 165.
[90] Ibid., 206.
[91] Ibid., 206.
[92] Ibid., 206.
[93] Ibid., 206.

larger web of relations. Thus, what may seem to be at odds with proximate wellbeing may actually contribute to the greater overall wellbeing, particularly when it is tuned towards the excluded and marginalized, i.e. those who have not had the opportunity to fully develop their potential because certain possibilities have been unjustly stripped away from them. Though Birch and Cobb do not claim it, it is my contention that seeking the interest of the "other," specifically the oppressed other, may be what is most healing for those closest to us even if they do not themselves believe it. Since Birch and Cobb affirm that there are inevitable limits to growth because of the Earth's limits, then the materially wealthy should not be materially better off until those forced to go without are able to meet their needs.[94] They rightly recognize that individuals opting out from dominant patterns of the desire-oriented consumption that Jung Mo Sung also critiques will not change the planetary situation, but it does contribute to forming a culture that is more open to novel possibilities of transformation.[95]

It is not hard to imagine that some people might wrongly interpret this argument as saying that the sacrifice of some is part of the necessary losses for creative becoming. After all, life is at once both a process of becoming and perishing. In such a reading, sacrificial victims would contribute to the creative becoming of others for the purpose of greater intensity and harmony. This typically occurs in the justification of existing societal patterns, and to our great shame, it is regularly found within Christianity. In Western culture, those less competent of market laws are often sacrificed because of their weak economic productivity on behalf of supposed progress.[96] However, Sung excludes

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[94] Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 247.
[95] Ibid., 329-30.
[96] Jung Mo Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, Reclaiming Liberation Theology (London: SCM Press, 2007), 45.

this option from a Christian process perspective, for as he puts it, the center of our faith is the resurrection of Jesus, which is essentially "the confession of the innocence of a victim of a sacrificial system."[97] Rejecting the logic of sacrifice prevents the maximization of intensity and harmony from becoming a brutal theory of social Darwinism: I cannot feed off another's potential to fulfill my own narrow satisfaction without diminishing overall beauty and degrading our interpenetrating interests.

Encountering the Other

> *Walmart workers gather together in response to the mistreatment and firing of their coworkers. Interreligious religious leaders are present for the day's activities, too: speeches, marches, blessings, and civil disobedience occur. Some are there to protect their families and have their dignity recognized, others because they want neighborhood employers to reflect their faith values. They are together in the struggle, but they come from different perspectives and experiences. Arrested and handcuffed, enclosed together in vehicles, they share the stories and experiences that motivate them: this is real fellowship . . . A church in St. Louis visits an Ecuadoran church every other year to do mission work and learn about the struggles the Ecuadoran community faces. They have done this multiple times and real relationships have emerged. In between these southbound visits, every other year a mission group from the Ecuadoran church leads a mission trip to the American community. Financed by the wealthy northerners, they are able to do mission in the USA and learn about the struggles and challenges the American church faces. Americans and Ecuadorans alike encounter one another.*

By utilizing a process social ontology, we can avoid the risk that too many people have fallen into when seeking dialogue with "the other:" there is no space for romantic nativism. The "other" does not become the epistemological true source from which revelation proceeds. Rather, any encounter is a touch-point in which transformation becomes possible. In fact, the other is inherently a relative term. From a different person's location, I will be *their* other whom they can encounter. Avoiding the collapse of anyone into an ontological other is critical to understanding the place of mutual

[97] Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, 49.

interest. At the same time, we are not merely interrelated but are also different from each other. If we were identical, the experiences of others would be redundant or superfluous. Instead, being non-identical, we need each other. One needs the other because the other remains as other, i.e. is non-identical. Her experiences and perspective are non-redundant. As indicated in Chapter 2, they increase planetary value, and because of our inherent interrelationship, they increase the potentials available for future self-becoming.

However, it is important to admit that the *ideas* of an interconnected social ontology and mutual interest will not automatically change human priorities, much less the world. Such claims would fall under a dead-end idealism that laments, "If *only* people would see things differently!" Such utopian wishing ignores the material conditions out of which our relationships emerge. Simply explaining how we hurt ourselves when the powerful among us ignore or oppress others will not be enough. Sin as the logics of structural oppression run too deep; power relations and their privileges remain. As Roland Faber notes, "The repetition of the sinful past enlarges or enhances the demonic within the nexus, thereby introducing *structural oppression* and making resistance more difficult."[98] One may intellectually recognize the advantage of a different position from what one practices but then immediately turn around and ignore it out of narrow considerations. Experience demonstrates that people do not consistently respond to arguments alone.

You may rightly ask: how can relatively privileged people, who may be oblivious to their privilege, recognize that we are not only participating in the exploitation of others but also destroying ourselves? As Cone noted earlier, you may be oppressed, but you will not know how you are damaging your own lives. Many mainline Protestants, pastors, and

[98] Faber, *God as Poet of the World*, 226.

theologians sense that they are enmeshed in oppressive patterns; it is not that they do not care but that these patterns fall out of consciousness all-too-easily. Many compassionate people have the privilege to revert to ignorance at no surface cost to themselves. More typically, mainliners all-too-often see the deconstruction-destruction of their privilege as a tragic loss rather than as a gain. The ability to celebrate this deconstruction, to make it central as part of our mutual interest, can only be done by intentionally entering into solidarity with people who have different experiences of power relationships. This effort would not seek to create a rigid or unified sameness but rather would affirm divergent singularities that are nevertheless relationally connected: this is yet another way to describe differentiated solidarity. By encountering others, experiencing aspects of their struggles, and organizing church life in such a way as to make these encounters of central significance, church communities can enlarge their horizon of concern and become more fully the churches that divine activity is calling them to be.

While it is critically important, even essential, to seek encounters with those who are different from us as we construct an alternative ecclesiology, there are several important warnings to consider. Given that we recognize the intrinsic value of people who are different from us, and we seek to develop forms of relationship that are non-exploitative and of mutual interest, what are some of the risks, especially when there exist relationships of differentiated power that have been historically oppressive or colonizing? Just what does this encounter between distinct groups look like in real life? For the final section of this chapter, Marion Grau and Joerg Rieger will be particularly important conversation partners, especially in terms of their missiological analyses.

Unlike those who uncritically view mission as saving others from hell or rescuing them from injustice, Marion Grau rethinks mission for a postcolonial world, for we are never the only relevant actors. In doing so, she offers us a number of considerations to take in mind when thinking about on-the-ground missional encounters. Entering a novel setting with good intentions does not mean that one will be experienced this way. This is particularly pertinent for those people who assume their innocence historically or naïvely. Grau wisely offers cautionary advice:

> When we step on sacred ground, insult a person, take liberties that offend, refuse to pitch in, or do too much, talk too much or too little, are too careless, barge into events or spaces not open to us, think we should have access everywhere, think people should trust us right off the bat, while we ourselves may reserve not to trust them, and so forth, we are stepping on hidden landmines.[99]

Nuances will be lost in translation in intercultural communication, and there is the constant "danger of overlaying the terms of one's own cultural context on others."[100] One real-life example of this problem is remembering that it is important to avoid too tight a grip when shaking hands in some communities. While a firm grip can be a sign of strong character to a Euro-American farmer, it is often interpreted as aggressive to many American Indian peoples living on reservations. The same logic of exhibiting character vs. aggression follows regarding how much one should look a stranger in the eye.[101] Mutual relationship is a possibility, but it is necessary that those with colonial power need to not feel superior nor try to save the colonized; rather, they must become open to receiving from others.[102]

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[99] Marion Grau, *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony: Salvation, Society, and Subversion* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 265.
[100] Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 266.
[101] This knowledge comes from personal experience and conversations with people of the Yakama and Lakota nations.
[102] Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 276.

Grau offers further practical advice on encountering the other and how it might allow for mutual growth. It is easy to state that one wants to create mutual relationships, but this is difficult if not impossible when power dynamics are ignored. Rather than jumping in blindly and feigning ignorance (either willfully or through naïveté), she offers the following helpful suggestion:

> When encountering cultural, religious, and power differences with painful histories, you might want to consider (1) the history of the community and encounters with past and present others that shape it; (2) how these encounters were informed by certain persons, circumstances, groups, and events; (3) the profound ambivalence in many of our encounters with the Sacred and with each other; (4) what we can learn from history and mission studies for constructive theology.[103]

However, this ambivalence and risk-taking in revealing our own complicity in oppressive actions when encountering the other should not cause us to shirk from these opportunities and replace them with mere charity work. Grau allows people to neither succumb to despair at the supposed infinite power of colonizing regimes nor to view encounter as the consumption of exotic cultures for our own self-gratification.[104] The resulting cultural exchange is a move beyond "simplistic dualisms" and towards becoming a "polydox mutual mission" of "mutually transforming toward greater justice."[105] The other is never simply other to us: she is a relational other (perhaps even a differentiated non-other?).

For such mutual encounters to bear fruit, Joerg Rieger is rightly convinced that projects of benevolent outreach must be abandoned. Particularly for churches, this has to do with their understanding of mission not as mere outreach nor only "relationships" but also "inreach." Missional encounter must also be a way to deconstruct the unjust

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[103] Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 288.
[104] Ibid., 22-23.
[105] Ibid., 280.

internalized relationships of dominance that persist within us. With the one-sidedness of missional encounter, Rieger notes:

> The work performed by these missionary enterprises, whether practical or theological, is usually done by the missionaries themselves; the missionized remain on the receiving end. The position of power in which the missionaries find themselves – backed to a very large degree by the uneven distribution of wealth of the neocolonialist system – once again provides and shapes their theological authority. While few people who embrace mission as outreach would deny that the missionaries are also receiving something in return, this is not where the emphasis lies.[106]

An alternative to this colonizing approach would look at how such encounters shape our self-understanding. Rieger cuts right to the core: "What if the question is not first of all, What can we do? but, What is going on? and, How might *we* be part of the problem?"[107] Most crucially, such benevolent charitable acts of service function in such a way as to perpetuate inequitable power relationships. Rieger continues, "As long as we are preoccupied with helping others – with all the temptations of trying to shape them in our own neocolonial image and make them conform to our world – we will not raise nosy questions about ourselves. As long as we continue to celebrate our own generosity, nothing can really challenge us."[108] At their best, encounters assist us in our mutual transformation.

Relationship itself is not inherently liberating, for relationships of dependency or where one attempts to function exclusively as subject and the other as object preclude the potential for creative transformation. As Whitehead noted, "The relationship is not a universal. It is a concrete fact with the same concreteness as the relata."[109] What matters

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[106] Joerg Rieger, "Theology and Mission Between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism," *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 21, no. 2 (2004): 213.
[107] Rieger, "Theology and Mission," 214.
[108] Ibid., 214.
[109] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 157.

is a recognition of inequitable power relationships, which can best be realized through novel encounters. Without these encounters, how can people know their location and specific relationships with others? We are required to explore our own complexity, for "unless we understand who we are and become aware of these differentials of power, we are simply not in a position to learn from the other and to share authority in any meaningful way."[110] It is through encounters that we are able to see new possibilities for how we can be different. Otherwise, we too easily maintain the illusion of wholeness.

Seeking the wellbeing of others is not simply done out of the goodness of one's heart, but also leads to new understandings of how each of us is wrapped within these patterns of power. This is particularly pertinent for predominantly white, mainline Protestant communities. As an example of a backhanded compliment, Rieger points out that "[w]hile the mainline churches on the whole are past the stage at which they actively promoted colonialism, the problem is that we are not aware of how much of what they do feeds into the invisible structures of neocolonialism."[111] No wonder so many volunteer or mission groups often find that "recipient" communities are less than enthusiastic about their presence, and are sometimes even "ungrateful!"

In his argument, Rieger eventually focuses on the transcendence of God that helps relativize every human endeavor. As a form of postmodern neo-orthodoxy, I do not affirm this transition as it moves away from my process approach. Could we perhaps read his shift towards transcendence in terms of God's reciprocal transcendence of the world by the gift of novel initial aims for the world's self-creation in unexpected ways? If so, we find a similar move with postcolonial theologian Mayra Rivera, who argues for a

[110] Rieger, "Theology and Mission," 218.
[111] Ibid., 222.

relational transcendence where we touch the "irreducibly Other" but do not capture it, where "God can be perceived as the extreme instance of interhuman difference."[112] In fact, this "*transcendence designates a relation with a reality* irreducibly different *from my own reality, without this difference destroying this relation and without the relation destroying this difference.*"[113] Rivera's claim implies a form of what Marjorie Suchocki calls "horizontal transcendence," where the divine can be encountered in the face of the other by expanding beyond the self.[114] The gospel of Matthew famously echoes this claim, saying "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."[115]

The call for intensity and harmony's maximization is simultaneously a call demanding difference over sameness, multiplicity over unity, and relationality rather than identity. This can best be experienced through a process of encountering the other. Jung Mo Sung likewise sees the requirement of encounter offering the possibility of seeing the wellbeing of the "other" as part of one's mutual interest. Sung claims that the enduring value of liberation theology is not its conclusions but its basic commitment and starting point, its ground, which is in the face of the suffering and the desire to respond. Before the cycle of action, commitment, and theologizing, there exists "the 'zero' moment . . . [of] the spiritual experience of encountering the person of Jesus in the face of the poor."[116] Sung gives a concrete example of such encounter:

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[112] Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 2. The touch of transcendence could also be read as the non-difference between God and world in the gift of the initial aim to becoming actualities that is both their truest self and the immanence of God from a process perspective as seen in Chapter 2.
[113] Rivera, *Touch of Transcendence*, 82.
[114] Suchocki contrasts a horizontal with a vertical transcendence. See Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 42-43.
[115] Matthew 25:40, NRSV.
[116] Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, 130-31.

> The first contacts between Nenuca's group [of missionaries] and the street people are difficult and marked by suspicion on the part of the street people. But with the friendship that starts to grow, little by little, insofar as they let each other get closer physically and emotionally, this suspiciousness is transformed into the perception of the 'something different' that not only causes the street people to feel better but also causes the group of volunteers to feel better.[117]

He notes the disappointment of activists who wanted to not just be a face of divine graciousness but to really liberate the poor. However, their disappointment again reflects an inappropriate conception of historical subjectivity rooted in modern Enlightenment assumptions.

A liberationist methodology follows a process of encounter-action-reflection. The first step "is the *praxis* of liberation that grows out of ethical indignation in the face of situations in which human beings are reduced to a subhuman condition."[118] This can be expanded to also mean "ethical indignation in the face of the massive social exclusion of certain groups, of other forms of human oppression, and with the destruction of the environment."[119] Through these encounters, one internalizes the commitment to the suffering other, and only then does theological reflection emerge in light of these experiences. Reading these experiences as revealing our socially complex ontology leads to transformed commitments. Yet encounter alone is no guarantee of transformation: one might simply pull away[120] or anesthetize oneself.[121] As Sung beautifully articulates it, "The wisdom that needs to be taught and understood throughout the world is that which teaches us that one cannot be happy and truly love oneself if one is unable to open oneself to the suffering of other persons; if one is unable to have a solidarious

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[117] Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, 134.
[118] Sung, *Subject, Capitalism, and Religion*, 30.
[119] Ibid., 32.
[120] Ibid., 126.
[121] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, 259.

sensibility."[122] In this statement, social ontology, mutual interest, and encounter reveal their internal complicity with one another.

A width of experiences of difference can lead to transformed self-understandings. Using the term "listening" instead of "encounter," Jea Sophia Oh similarly explains: "Indeed, listening is a very hybrid process of becoming the other. Through the process of listening, one transcends him/herself to become the molecule's level to empty (allow) a space for embracing the other immanently within her."[123] This is why many Americans who have spent time in another country or become fluent in a language beyond English so often see the world differently than those satisfied with a narrower set of experiences. They have partially transcended their constricted location, incorporating an aspect of the other's perspective into their own vision. However, with globalization, aspects of encountering the other through language differences have diminished as English has become the dominant language of international trade and exchange. Around the world, if people want to advance financially or participate in global relations, fluency in English has become almost a mandatory requirement.[124]

Returning to process terminology, this is a problem in its aesthetic affects. Different languages are different ways of experiencing and perceiving the world. For example, there are villages in Papua New Guinea where it is not uncommon for people to speak at least half a dozen languages. One of the results of such multilingualism has been a delay of dementia and Alzheimer's disease; the brain is kept more nimble.[125] Over the

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[122] Sung, *Subject, Capitalism, and Religion*, 138.
[123] Oh, *Postcolonial Theology of Life*, 118.
[124] It also impacts the distribution of books, dissertations, and articles in a globalized theological market.
[125] Barbara J. King, "Jared Diamond, A New Guinea Campfire, and Why We Should Want to Speak Five Languages," National Public Radio, entry posted January 10, 2013, http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/01/10/168878237/jared-diamond-a-new-guinea-campfire-and-why-we-should-want-to-speak-five-languag (accessed May 25, 2013).

past fifty years, language variety has diminished as certain linguistic traditions have been lost across generations. This reduction of variety is a reduction of the potential for new contrasts. Potential intensities are lost as more of life becomes homogenized across the planet; this reduces opportunities for creative transformation.

Sung identifies the need for spiritualities of solidarity to counteract the many injustices the world is facing, which would lead to the First World repenting of its consumer patterns and "limitless accumulation of goods."[126] When we integrate liberationist concerns with a poststructuralist process perspective, we are able to make the following assertion: Rectifying power differentials (with power understood as a relationship rather than as something possessed) and celebrating/demanding a multiplicity of perspectives and locations is *equivalent* to seeking the maximization of potential intensity and harmony for a situation and its relationships. For in the experience of another, when it is critically reflected upon, you find that your own healing process is inextricably tied with the wellbeing of the other. At its heart, it builds a counter-imperial ethos and is central to the formation of a koinonia of churching, which will be further unfolded in Chapter 6. Whereas the ecclesiological koinonia is a radical boundary crossing and subverting activity, it likewise describes our local mutual indwellings.

I am a privileged person, but it is in my interest to dismantle my privilege, for we are interconnected with one another, but without actually encountering others with different experiences, the spiritual calling and motivation to be transformed remains abstract. This is not just my problem but also the problem of any Christian living with privilege in an unjust world. Foregoing an isolationist fellowship of purity, since we live in an interrelated web of mutually-implicating relationships, our fellowship crosses the

[126] Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, 74.

artificial boundaries that are meant to isolate us from one another. We *need* each other for a fuller flourishing of life to reign. When we practice this form of solidarity, which simultaneously recognizes and celebrates our differences, we are that much closer to maximizing intensity and harmony as part of a liberatory planetary fellowship!

CHAPTER 4

Political Influences in the Struggle for (and Struggles of) a Radical Ecclesiology

> In proposing and advancing the possibility of living beyond Empire, resistance recovers the public that Empire threatens to destroy, reinstalls the sense of freedom and hope, and stirs up the forces of the messianic.
>
> —Néstor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*

At this point, we have examined some of the major themes of a process universe, including entities as value-intensities and mutual interest through differentiated solidarity. The former points towards this ecclesiology's *kerygma* (proclamation), while the latter addresses its sense of *koinonia* (community). This chapter emphasizes the *diakonia* of a radical church, while adding new insights to previous themes. Chapter 1 identified several of the problems that this ecclesiology aims to address. At the time, they functioned more as broad strokes, raising more questions than they answered. Specifically, what is political liberalism, how do mainline church's practices reflect it, and why is this a problem? What is the character of globalizing Empire, what are its sacred idols, and how can it be subverted? What do we mean by oppression, and how important are quality of life concerns? To answer these questions, we will need political theories as radical and subversive as the uses of process and liberationist thought were in previous chapters. In developing an understanding of diakonia beyond traditional notions of charitable service to the needy, this chapter intends to accomplish three tasks: one, to show what political forces a radical ecclesiology will be struggling against; two, to show what political forces a radical ecclesiology will be struggling for; and three, to begin hinting at how political theories should affect the institutional organization of a radical ecclesiology.

While process metaphysics offers a profound framework to understand the world, it can be quite abstract on its own. Without a critical engagement with political thinking, it is too easy for a process ecclesiology and lived faith communities to remain settled in the political framework of liberal democracy. We need to find specific political insights that are compatible with process thinking that further revolutionize what it means to live as church. While these thinkers are not directly influenced by Whitehead, I am reading them as symbiotically related, and thus one can offer a Whiteheadian interpretation of them without significantly violating their basic intentions. Whitehead will help us alter them where they linger in modern paradigms or assumptions. In addition, our purpose is not to merely find out what political ideas fit with process thought as if establishing a link is sufficient to permit their inclusion. We need to know the social and political location of churches, and how self-identity is expressed in their network of relations.

Unlike the authoritarian tendencies within many evangelical or fundamentalist churches, congregationally-based mainline Protestant churches tend to exhibit a form of political liberalism. I open this chapter by connecting the work of John Rawls with their thoughts and values. I will close this chapter by shifting towards a political theology that deconstructs the boundary between the "political" and the "religious" and undermines the notion of the separation of "church and state," thus urging religious engagement in seemingly political matters. This modern bifurcation exists as yet another dualism that has constructed what a "religion" is, so Christian reengagement will not maintain this self-identity but reads them as mutually implicated poles on an interrelated continuum.

John Rawls's Liberalism

The political philosopher John Rawls is most famous for his articulation of political justice in his 1971 book, *A Theory of Justice*. However, I am less concerned with his specific theory of justice than with his understanding of what makes for a politically liberal society. This section will critique some of the weaknesses of Rawls's political position, namely his anxiety over conflict and desire for unity. These and other weaknesses are reflected in the political assumptions of American mainline Protestant denominations, like the Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ. In effect, mainline Protestant churches express in themselves a form of religious liberalism in line with political liberalism. To draw out these parallel frameworks, it is necessary to review Rawls's political liberalism, particularly his understanding of comprehensive doctrines, reasonable pluralism, an overlapping consensus, and the background culture before offering a brief political theology critique via Paul Kahn.

Rawls's book *Political Liberalism* is an attempt to answer criticisms that his earlier work received. To do this, his method is to relegate his idea of "justice as fairness,"[1] which was formerly his central insight, to the status of one among many potential comprehensive doctrines. By comprehensive doctrines, he means beliefs or worldviews that explain the world or what humans are to do in that world in a holistic way. They answer questions like "What does it mean to be human?" or "What is the good life?" These doctrines may be grounded in religious or philosophical theories of "the person" that try to answer other questions. These doctrines often are pursuing particular conceptions of the good, which may radically diverge from one another. People regularly

[1] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

address these questions with different comprehensive (or partially comprehensive) doctrines.

Rawls recognizes that there will never be unanimity among comprehensive doctrines, at least insofar as people are able to decide among doctrines for themselves. Since we cannot talk our way to a consensus on ultimate truths, he unrealistically suggests that we bracket this effort out of political considerations. Each person or group is supposedly able to have their own particular conception of justice to the extent that this does not impinge on other individuals or groups being able to have their own conception of justice, or the good, etc.[2]

Rawls fears the expression of comprehensive doctrines because he fears instability and conflict. The religious wars of Europe fought between Catholics and Protestants are paradigmatic of conflict's dangers for him. He understandably wants to avoid future wars that follow this pattern. Neither group could recognize the legitimacy of the other, and so there was great violence and instability for generations. Rawls wants to find a way for societies to endure through time and thus be stable.[3] Empirically, societies have rarely had a consensus regarding comprehensive doctrines, so he endeavors to make these differences irrelevant for the purposes of political justice. He puts the question as such: "How is it possible for those affirming a religious doctrine that is based on religious authority . . . also to hold a reasonable political conception that supports a just democratic regime?"[4]

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[2] In his earlier work, Rawls characterizes his own conception of justice as the "priority of the right over the good." Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 31.

[3] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 141.

[4] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxxvii.

While there can be diversity in the comprehensive doctrines people affirm, not every single doctrine can be incorporated into Rawls's ideal of political justice. They need to fall within what he calls a reasonable pluralism. This reasonable pluralism consists of groups that maintain their comprehensive doctrines but will not require others to affirm something that violates their own particular doctrines. Instead, they should seek to exercise fair cooperation.[5] Since there will never be unanimity among citizens regarding one comprehensive doctrine, Rawls concludes we need a reasonable pluralism.

Reasonableness denotes the mutual concepts of reciprocity and playing fair. By reciprocity and fair play, Rawls means that when someone proposes "terms of fair cooperation, those proposing them must also think it at least reasonable for others to accept them, as free and equal citizens, and not as dominated or manipulated, or under the pressure of an inferior political or social position."[6] So long as different conceptions are willing to support this notion of society for political purposes, Rawls is willing to grant that there is more than one legitimate type of political liberalism. They must all universally adhere to "the criterion of reciprocity, viewed as applied between free and equal citizens, themselves seen as reasonable and rational."[7] Beyond that criterion, there is freedom.

When the many doctrines of a reasonable pluralism are placed side-by-side, they should reveal what Rawls calls an overlapping consensus. An overlapping consensus "does not provide a specific religious, metaphysical, or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself."[8] It exists when people who hold a

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[5] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 48-50.
[6] Ibid., 446.
[7] Ibid., 450.
[8] Ibid., 144.

number of distinct reasonable comprehensive doctrines are able to agree on a political conception. They do not agree for the same reasons, since each will justify their adherence to the political conception from their own framework, which may include understanding their comprehensive doctrine as being more ultimate.

In contrast to a *modus vivendi*, where people go along with a democratic system of governance because they lack the power to overturn it, Rawls wants them to be able to enthusiastically endorse the "society's intrinsic political ideals and values."[9] He considers whether those of faith can support constitutional structures that may threaten their comprehensive doctrines.[10] Rawls believes that reasonable comprehensive doctrines should be able to affirm a reasonable pluralism for its own sake. This means that these doctrines will need to eventually reflect some form of political liberalism. He acknowledges that the ideal he is proposing requires that people accept the possibility of listening to those they oppose as well as only propose structures that they believe are fair for others to accept without feeling oppressed, i.e. they should reflect the value of reciprocity. Shared political reasoning does not mean that it is universal in some ultimate sense even as the overlap attempts to be as wide as possible.

Values that an overlapping consensus cannot contain are narrowly restricted to the background culture, which includes churches. Rawls places unnecessarily rigid limits on what can be argued in the public sphere, even as he attempts to make private space for the particular political reflections of individuals and associations.[11] Essentially, so long as one is thinking to oneself, or arguing out these ideals in one's particular community like a church or university as part of the background culture, then the rules of debate are much

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[9] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 459.
[10] Ibid., 459.
[11] Ibid., 215.

more free. Such debates are not held to the same standard that would define them to be part of a reasonable pluralism. Ultimate reasons and motivations can be legitimately discussed in this background context. Rawls wants to give plenty of space to the background culture when people are in general agreement regarding political justice. However, in the public arena, only noncomprehensive political values should be presented in most circumstances. If you or your community think this agreement is a mistake, you will be marked as unreasonable.[12]

Rawls recognizes that there are problems of extension to his understanding of political liberalism. One of the most crucial areas that he does not challenge is the sacred functions of the American nation that subvert his politically liberal intent. Political theology has for decades studied how political ideas like sovereignty are really secularized theological ideas.[13] The clearest elements of American civil religion include "the Pledge of Allegiance, the iconography of the flag, or the memorialization of citizen sacrifice."[14] The American flag functions as a sacred object, which is implicitly affirmed every time someone laments its desecration, for only something that is sacred can be desecrated. The state declares its exclusive legitimacy over the power to kill and to ask for the sacrifice of life. This is what it means to die for one's country, which is commonly understood as to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others; one's blood renews the redemptive power of the nation for which one gives one's life.

Political theologian Paul Kahn rightly challenges Rawls's theory for never taking seriously this state violence and the larger values to which it justifies itself. Rawls's

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[12] I am inclined to believe that the things that are most important are those that are the hardest to achieve agreement upon, because they challenge dominating loyalties and ultimate values.
[13] Paul Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.
[14] Kahn, *Political Theology*, 2.

liberalism sees violence as merely accidental and not central to democratic political life, rather than what Kahn correctly understands it to be: "Political violence has been and remains a form of sacrifice."[15] Sacrifice exists alongside law, and depending on the situation, one or the other can be the focal response, which Kahn ties to debates about the role of torture.[16] He understands that the function of the rule of law needs to be reconceptualized, because "for Americans, the rule of law is not that which eliminates the need for the violent defense of the nation, but that for the sake of which violence is deployed."[17] It falsely incarnates the sacred to which one willingly dies on its behalf. Here the theological concept of redemptive suffering and the national sacred join. The state is secular neither in the way Rawls claims nor in the way it defines itself.[18] In acquiescing to the narrow paradigm of liberalism, mainline Protestants fail to challenge its theological content.

One of the major shortcomings of Rawls's discussion is that he tries to separate religion from the political by assuming that the focus of religion is primarily belief or assent to particular doctrines. Much of his discussion places religion firmly in the framework of the role of comprehensive doctrines in public reason. What if religion is also the way people live, like practices and rituals that draw them beyond their particular communities and connect them with those who would not identify as part of that same religious tradition? Religious practice can be a way of relating with others and how one lives one's life, especially as it concerns interacting with those who might be considered by some to be "enemies." Religion may be comprehensive, but not as Rawls intends.

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[15] Kahn, *Political Theology*, 7.
[16] Ibid., 15.
[17] Ibid., 11.
[18] Ibid., 18.

Rather than offering articulated comprehensive doctrines, it may offer a comprehensive way to live in the world, including challenging political idolatries. When religion is understood in this way, the religion-political boundary that Rawls is so intent to maintain begins to fade. One sees that there are very political religious practices, and there are very religious political practices.

Nevertheless, one must ask how does political liberalism relate to mainline Protestant churches? In some ways, this should be apparent. For over a century, mainline Protestant churches were close to the halls of American political power.[19] Well over half of our presidents have come out of these traditions even though they make up less than ten percent of the American population today. These denominations were able to have significant political access in part because they absorbed many of the properties of political liberalism and disproportionately represented the American economic and political elite throughout much of the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, now that mainline Protestantism is declining as a cultural force, politicians easily ignore it. Thoroughly enculturated, mainline churches retain the old form without the old benefits!

The problem is not simply that a Rawlsian political liberalism demands that groups such as mainline Protestants diminish their comprehensive doctrines in the wider community. Remember: for Rawls, churches do not need to use public reason when they are internally focused but only when they are externally oriented on fundamental political matters. Nevertheless, mainline Protestants have internalized this disposition to such an extent that they see their own particular theological claims as embarrassing with the

[19] By mainline Protestant, I refer to what is often called the "Seven Sisters." While they consist of precursor denominations, in their current forms they are the following organizations: United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, American Baptist, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

result that they avoid advocating for them not only in the larger public but *even in their own communities*. It is left to each individual to have their own comprehensive doctrines, which they keep to themselves and which too easily dissolve into unthinking. Being different from the hegemonic consensus is anxiety producing in the United States, and to challenge it is counter-cultural, so many church members become anxious by this prospect. Rawls wanted religious groups to endorse the values and political ideals of their society. It has worked lamentably well in mainline Protestant congregations, but the result is the individualization of church life.

Many congregations look like a Rawlsian society. To the extent that an issue is controversial, meaning that it will lack an overlapping consensus, congregations are reluctant to engage with such issues.[20] The overlapping social consensus forbids one to challenge the sacredness of America, á la Jeremiah Wright, without facing marginality. This consensus, which is part of the stabilizing political culture Rawls affirms, remains prevalent *even in what he would call the background culture of churches themselves*! Topics of a controversial nature, whether explicitly political or of a different character, are more often than not relegated to individual opinion without providing a larger relational framework in mainline faith communities. Rawls's theory provides no assistance in challenging an understanding of the autonomous nature of human beings, since a critique of it would be a politically unessential comprehensive doctrine.[21] The liberty of individuals and the freedom of the market go hand-in-hand in political liberal

[20] I observed this when the Disciples of Christ's national gathering (called General Assembly) did not condemn the Iraq War until 2007. By that time, there was a clear national majority that had turned against the conflict. Yet even then, this was done with much handwringing and reinforced language of how our resolution was not a condemnation of the United States armed forces, heroes and patriots all.
[21] In contrast, the first section of Chapter 3 examines a process social ontology.

democracy; Rawls's theory cannot help us resist these values beyond mitigating excessively unequal distributions of wealth.[22]

More locally, church members identify with their nation's sacred images as well as their faith tradition, often expressed in the presence of both an American and Christian flag in sanctuaries. Many ministers know all-too-well the level of controversy generated with suggestions that the former be removed.[23] "God and Country" are seen as complementary elements to life, which is consistent with Kahn's analysis of the political sacred. There is no tension or division in background and public sphere here: there is only a sameness that conforms local groups into affirming the idolatrous image of the American sacred, even if they critique specific policies around the edges.

It is not enough to simply deconstruct Rawls's position and show how mainline Protestants also reflect that position. That will not lead to a change in churches, because these ideas are not merely abstractions that can simply be replaced with better ideas. There is a material context that limits space for new options. It is not merely to national or patriotic loyalty that people devote themselves, for this is in fact geared towards a larger project, that of Empire, to which our next thinkers devote their primary attention.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's Theory of Empire and the Multitude

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri brilliantly describe the world as a productive network that constitutes Empire rather than as a system of sovereign states. Their work revolves around showing how there has been a paradigm shift via sovereignty from nation-centric imperialism to a new logic of rule called Empire.[24] The logic of

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[22] Subsequent thinkers in this chapter will challenge a Rawlsian fetishization with distribution in favor of productive relationships when theorizing on justice.

[23] I am not arguing for the presence of the latter in sanctuaries, either.

[24] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xii.

imperialism focused on particular nation-states controlling and extracting value from subordinate countries for their own use. Through Empire, this has become a more decentralized process. No longer can one simply say that the West is benefitting and the global south hurting, for now one sees the first world in the third and the third world in the first.[25] Empire is open and expanding and includes the entire world potentially, where even the most marginalized group is at the bottom rung of the system rather than outside it altogether.[26] This global network uses perpetual violence and militarism in order to control production.

The United States' use of perpetual violence becomes more important in their book *Multitude* after the attacks of 9/11 and the Iraq War. Hardt and Negri claim that Empire makes war into a permanent exception for preserving the global order as just and inevitable,[27] while also addressing how war as perpetual police actions is used to control the barbarian-terrorists, police forces become militarized, and public protest is delegitimated as threats to Empire.[28] Dominant countries use the global system to try others for war crimes and never to try citizens from their own countries; while torture by others is evil, for liberal democracies it is a tragic necessity. This also means that Hardt and Negri take the role of governments more seriously in books after *Empire*. Before, they focused on governments more as administrators who serve the global order. Yet later, they rightly say that the global economic order cannot function on its own; it is only through government policies and trade agreements that Empire exists at all. The Davos

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[25] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xiii.
[26] Ibid., 445.
[27] Ibid., 38.
[28] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 15.

summit is a clear example of where governments help construct Empire even as none of them directly controls it.[29]

Hardt and Negri's notion of the multitude replaces the function of the proletariat in Marxist discourse. While the latter was generally conceived of as industrial workers, the former includes potentially everyone on the planet. This is made possible through a reinterpretation of production. For them, the multitude is engaged in the social production of life itself, which is called the biopolitical, and overlaps with their notion of immaterial production, where what is produced is relationships and services.[30] In contrast, Empire is more like a vampire that extracts the surplus from this production for its own perpetuation as biopower.[31] By showing that the multitude is involved in production, Hardt and Negri explain how the multitude and even the unemployed are actual agents. As labor increasingly becomes immaterial both at the high and low ends of the scale, it shows that everyone is laboring in the form of producing life and relationships and can thus be an agent of change. Specifically, the multitude can become a force of counter-globalization that avoids Empire's controlling functions.

Hardt and Negri describe two forms of multitude: there is the multitude as it actually exists and engages in the production of all social life and relationships, and there is the political project of the becoming multitude that remains a real potential not yet actualized. When emphasizing the novelty of Empire, I read their early position as implying that the existence of the multitude is enough to create a "spontaneous"

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[29] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 167.
[30] Ibid., 146.
[31] This is not unlike Whitehead's recognition that evil draws upon and destroys the value upon which it depends as mentioned in Chapter 2. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 82-84.

communism of pure immanence.[32] There is a hint of inevitability to this process, though other readers can interpret this comment as saying that if this communism occurs, it has sufficient internal mechanisms within it to not need any form of representation to sustain itself. Nevertheless, in later works Hardt and Negri emphasize much more clearly that the existence of the multitude simply makes revolution *possible* rather than inevitable.[33] There can be a global counter-globalization movement of many singularities communicating on a common matrix (the divine matrix of mutual immanence, perhaps?), but it is also possible that they may be sublated into yet another regime of Empire. The future is indeterminately open. There is the ontological multitude that is producing social life, but they await whether an historical multitude will develop and cast off Empire for a grassroots democracy of direct participation.

While Hardt and Negri have been criticized for their overly immanent interpretation of Empire, they also acknowledge transcendent qualities of Empire in *Multitude*. Specifically, "biopower stands above society, transcendent, as a sovereign authority and imposes its order."[34] In *Empire*, they focus on showing the immanent aspects of Empire at work in the world instead of it being a conspiracy controlled by a few. It is everywhere and it is nowhere at the same time, thus making it possible to attack it from anywhere by anyone.[35] In *Multitude*, they more readily acknowledge that there are elements of transcendence within Empire as it creates fluid and shifting hierarchies and boundaries to control the production of the multitude. They rightly take more seriously

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[32] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 294.
[33] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 340. See also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 344, where they write: "[T]he parallel coordination among the revolutionary struggles of singularities is possible, but it is by no means immediate or spontaneous."
[34] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 94. This is a correction from their earlier work, and even otherwise adept critics often ignore this transition.
[35] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 58.

how the United States, G-7 countries, supranational agencies like the World Bank, IMF, WTO, transnational business interests, and NGOs play an outsized role in Empire as a network of power.[36] Economic systems such as the goal of a free market cannot persist without political regulation and force.[37]

The postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak's notion of contrasting the global vs. the planetary provides parallels with Hardt and Negri's distinction between biopower and the biopolitical. In the past decade, postcolonial theologians have noted Spivak's insightful distinction.[38] She suggests that we need to "imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities."[39] The globe is what can be abstracted and objectified, with lines and grids mapping it out, while the planet is the whole of matter and life that is interdependent upon one another. Likewise, for Hardt and Negri, biopower is the forces of imperial interaction and control, while the biopolitical is the network of life that produces itself. By emphasizing the planetary vis-à-vis the global, I am emphasizing the material conditions and concrete interdependencies of life rather than simply the abstraction of relationship. As Alfred North Whitehead so cogently recognized,

> [philosophy's] business is to explain the emergence of the more abstract things from the more concrete things. It is a complete mistake to ask how concrete particular fact can be built up out of universals. The answer is, 'In no way.' The true philosophic question is, how can concrete fact exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet participated in by its own nature?[40]

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[36] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 59.
[37] Ibid., 168.
[38] Of particular note is the edited collection coming out of the 2007 Drew Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquim. See Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).
[39] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 73.
[40] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 20.

One additional connection between Hardt and Negri with Spivak is that for the former, the multitude as the biopolitical is always productive, even if they are not recognized as such. Likewise, Spivak affirms that a member of the subaltern may be ignored by dominant perspectives and may not even be able to be heard in discourses, but she is still a productive subject, even if she has been silenced.[41]

One area where Hardt and Negri do not delve deep enough in terms of a process understanding of relational value is on ecology. However, they do recognize how Empire promotes ecological devastation and seeks to privatize what they call the "commons" for personal profit, such as building dams on rivers or appropriating indigenous knowledge of the earth for corporate profit.[42] Corporations claim ownership to the genes of seeds, thus contributing to a sense of their bare instrumental value.[43] Pushing beyond their potential political multitude, Spivak adds that what is needed is "a global movement for non-Eurocentric ecological justice,"[44] and even admits to dreaming "of animist liberation theologies to girdle the perhaps impossible vision of an ecologically just world."[45] Furthermore, Catherine Keller has critiqued Hardt and Negri for offering a supersessionist view of themselves vis-à-vis postcolonial theory even though they admit that they are caught up in networks of Empire just as they accuse postcolonialist theorists of being as well.[46] The postcolonial straw men they construct are too-easily dismissed.[47]

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[41] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 308-09.
[42] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 282-84. See also Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, viii.
[43] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 112-13.
[44] Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 380.
[45] Ibid., 382.
[46] Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 121.
[47] I am pleased to discover that their more recent work does at least briefly acknowledge insights of postcolonial work. See Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 78.

In spite of these limitations, there has been a growing consensus affirming their description of Empire. Like Hardt and Negri, Néstor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung agree that there is no dominant center of economic and political power: "Empire is bigger than the United States, [but] that country has a special place in the formation of Empire today."[48] Instead of a "'strong' centre," there are "several 'loose' centers" housed in big transnational corporations and multilateral organizations.[49] However, one area of disagreement is that Hardt and Negri fail to identify the religious transcendence that motivates the biopower of Empire and its institutional support.

While Hardt and Negri, especially in *Empire*, emphasize how Empire's logic works immanently, Míguez, Rieger, and Sung correctly point out that there is a transcendent element of Empire at work: "[T]he fact that Empire's present means of control do not possess a specific location and are articulated in relation to productive functions do not signify in themselves that Empire does not possess or claim to have a transcendent status."[50] This status motivates people to sacrifice even when its advantages are not readily available to them. It is the "*ethos*" of Empire, its theological spirit.[51] For Empire to function as it does, it is not enough for people to submit to Empire: they need to be actively incorporated into it and want its worldview as their own.[52] People erroneously experience its proclamation as good news. This is the element of idolatry and the sacrificial logic that justifies the violence of the logic of Empire that these scholars

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[48] Néstor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key*, Reclaiming Liberation Theology (London: SCM Press, 2009), 28.
[49] Jung Mo Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, Reclaiming Liberation Theology (London: SCM Press, 2007), 78.
[50] Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*, 66. When Hardt and Negri do mention transcendence, it is consistently described as the negative activity of Empire as opposed to the pure immanence of the multitude.
[51] Ibid., 1.
[52] Ibid., 19.

rightly think Hardt and Negri miss. Namely, the process of seeking a utopian pure free market capitalism "orients the great strategies of political-economic action."[53] As there is not yet a perfectly free market of equal information (which is actually impossible), the mission of Empire continues indefinitely. It is the faith in the market or "market fundamentalism [that] plays a central role in the global capitalist system."[54] This is a deeper yet sympathetic analysis to John Cobb's discussion of economism, which was mentioned in Chapter 1.[55] This new Empire attempts to attract through soft power and form mimetic desires within the subordinated, with the goal of perpetual growth via the process of accumulation and consumption, and unending war upon those who resist this attraction.[56] Sung, Míguez, and Rieger hold out for a positive role for transcendence, where the excluded, the economic leftovers of humanity and life, transcend Empire's enclosures and reveal its spirit of death.[57] It is my contention that the good news of our interrelated value and the unmasking of oppressive sacrifice provides a compelling alternative proclamation to the dominant narrative of Empire.

Hardt and Negri's notion of the multitude offers a vision of the productive potential of the service of churching: as resistance to a totalizing economic globalization. In forming affective relationships with exploited communities (as discussed in Chapter 3), church communities are producing immaterially a new context that subverts Empire. The struggles of the multitude can be legitimately expressed in localized actions and concerns, as "each struggle remains singular and tied to its local conditions but at the

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[53] Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*, 72.
[54] Ibid., 84.
[55] In 2011, process and liberationist theologians met and identified a number of areas of resonance. See "Power and Empire: A Process-Liberation Conversation" (conference, Center for Process Studies, Claremont, CA, October 10-12, 2011).
[56] Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*, 89.
[57] Ibid., 22.

same time is immersed in the common web."[58] Through its productive creativity, the multitude resists Empire and its logic of violence.[59] Empire has its own authorizing norms beyond its immanent forces, and so the diakonia of churching challenges Empire not only on the productive level but also on the level of meaning. In this way, it critiques Empire's biopower. Moreover, since the United States and its military might undergird much of Empire's practices, radical American churches have a special calling to likewise undermine proximate practices of Empire whenever feasible and to otherwise speak out as a witness against them even when there is no hope that these practices can immediately be changed.

Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach

From the discussion of the idolatrous sacred unquestioned by political liberalism and the biopower of Empire, one might make the mistake and conclude that the ecclesiological work is liberation or bust. However, there is also the need for addressing quality of life concerns, and for this we need the help of Amartya Sen, an Indian economist and political thinker. For those resisting Empire, Sen offers the wise suggestion that people should avoid "the grand revolutionary's 'one-shot handbook.'"[60]

One of Sen's major contributions and insights is his non-transcendental perspective. It is not enough to offer a scheme that would be the ideal framework for society. Such speculations do not assist someone in determining what are the best steps in which to improve the situation that one currently faces. Rather than seek a perfect justice, it is more important to diminish existing injustices.[61] He gives the example that saying

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[58] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 217.
[59] Ibid., 63-95.
[60] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 100.
[61] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, ix.

the Mona Lisa is the perfect painting does nothing to help one decide between a Dali and a Picasso, i.e. it does not help in comparing the actual options one faces.[62] Therefore, Sen proposes a comparative approach between relevant options. I read this in terms of process thought's aims, which are always towards something that is really actualizable. Sometimes options are between bad and not-so-bad formulations. Picking the better choice may still be unpleasant and may lead to better options from which to choose in the future, making them comparatively "better," but they are still bad in the grand scale of things.[63] In doing so, Sen challenges John Rawls's theory of justice as itself internally inadequate and suggests a revision that points to the importance of capabilities over Rawls's primary goods.[64] By this, Sen is more concerned with what people are actually able to do and become in reality. Rather than having *de jure* options, the *de facto* opportunities from which people can make decisions are more important.

Sen's key contribution concerns his concept of capabilities. These are actual opportunities of what people can be and do, "the freedoms that we actually have to choose between different kinds of lives."[65] These include concerns regarding education, health, accessibility, and many other areas. Sen cares about two aspects of capabilities: that people can make their choice as well as examining what are the actual choices they choose from, i.e. what is the process of choosing. For example, some people need more resources in order to have the capability to fulfill a certain function.[66] Additionally, it matters whether people have real alternatives to choose from when making decisions.[67]

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[62] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 16.
[63] See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 244.
[64] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 64.
[65] Ibid., 18.
[66] Ibid., 66.
[67] Ibid., 230.

Without one ultimate list of multiple capabilities, he focuses on comparing among options of what people can do or be.[68] He argues persuasively that the actualization of capabilities should not be forced upon anyone. Right relations are not primarily about the mere functioning of capabilities if a center actor has coercively imposed them. Rather, what is key for justice is for them to be freely available for multiple actors to choose from.[69]

Martha Nussbaum, one of Sen's frequent collaborators in developing the capabilities approach, has noted that even as he has attended to social justice concerns, his primary focus has been comparing different societies on quality of life measures.[70] His project is not about some absolute, transcendent ideal but rather what makes for better or worse living. Therefore, part of the value that he contributes is a complementary balance with more radical thinkers in the recognition that liberation is not the only goal that should direct an ecclesiology. It is just as important to emphasize survival and quality of life.[71] Sen provides valuable resources for that project.

I interpret Sen's capabilities as a political conceptualization of Whitehead's notion of potentialities. Just as there is a difference between a conceptual possibility and a real potential, Sen wants to differentiate between theoretical opportunities of wellbeing that are available to people versus what they can actually decide to do. Whitehead makes

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[68] This is in contrast to Nussbaum's discreet list of ten capabilities. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 33-34.

[69] Sen's argument that capabilities are for individuals mimics the logic of value-entities in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Only entities have intrinsic value, though they have profound instrumental value for others and the world. See Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 246.

[70] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 70.

[71] This has obvious resonances with womanist theologies. See Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 175; and Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 94.

a similar comparative quality of life claim, though he does so in a temporal comparison rather than between spatially distinct communities. For him, there is a general aim "(i) to live, (ii) to live well, (iii) to live better. In fact the art of life is *first* to be alive, *secondly*, to be alive in a satisfactory way, and *thirdly*, to acquire an increase in satisfaction."[72] Sen's notion of capabilities has a number of parallels with process thought's notion of relevant possibilities to actualize. This theory also works with notions of agency, which has parallels with the "windowless monad" of Whitehead, or the empty space of final causation from which decisions arise.

In addition to offering a persuasive defense of quality of life concerns via capabilities, Sen helps relativize the concerns that any particular group may have. It is too easy to define other groups in terms of one's narrow location. In contrast with prevailing rhetoric of an exotic and otherworldly India, he describes its history, internal diversity, and heterogeneity before British colonialism. Rather than merely reading India in light of the West, he reads India on its own terms in such a way as to relativize the absolute claims the West has made upon it. He sees this argumentative diversity as something to be cherished. I am convinced that Sen is correct to recommend that people should resist (post)colonialism by rejecting subordination, but they should not reject ideas just because they come from the West. Ideas should be critically appropriated and used wherever they can further capabilities-filled living. He offers the image that people should not be well-frogs happily isolated from anything outside their location, which itself becomes diminished through its rigidity.[73]

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[72] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Function of Reason* (1929; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 8.
[73] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Picador, 2005), 86.

The parochialism of closed groups such as nations may diminish justice, which greatly concerns Sen. They will have limited knowledge, and they will have biases. They will misread or ignore priorities that may be obvious to an outsider. He suggests Adam Smith's notion of the impartial spectator as a solution to this problem and to concerns about international justice.[74] The impartial spectator means that discussion is not restricted to the community since others can offer critiques and suggestions. Sen uses the notion of the impartial spectator to argue that if two people agree on something despite the fact that they are coming from different social locations, this strengthens the claim more than if it only came from a single perspective. "External" perspectives hold more parochial views accountable: this is what he takes away from Smith's notion of the impartial spectator.[75] One resulting implication is that there are no self-enclosed entities that are sufficient unto themselves. It is easy to misread the impartial spectator as offering a universal perspective.[76] While this may have been Smith's intention, if so, Sen is offering a counter-reading of the term. In that interpretation, the impartial spectator acts more as an indeterminate horizon for broadening perspectives.[77]

Constructively, churching is not solely interested in increasing capabilities but also in actualizing potentials for its constituent persons. However, it does not seek to actualize aims for the whole world. These aims are diverse and in part self-created by the world's constituents, and only they can actualize their own aims. The presupposition of a level of freedom or indeterminacy in the nature of reality, which Sen affirms, means that churching should not legislate how events become but *can* seek to maximize capabilities

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[74] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 44-45.
[75] Ibid., 246, 45.
[76] Ibid., 118.
[77] Ibid., 70.

that would help reduce gross injustices. For Sen, one cannot ignore human agency, replacing it with an eye merely to consequences.[78] Churching does not worship a god who determines the mode by which actualizations occur, and it does not attempt to do the misguided work of enforcing what a predestining image of the divine demands. Rather, churching seeks to maximize relevant and desirable capabilities for the wellbeing of itself, others, and the whole planet.

Sen's primary limitation for this ecclesiology is that he avoids advocating for a central place for faith communities in political matters as he tries to prevent the state from either giving preference to one religion over another or banning outright their public expressions. He does this by maintaining a somewhat classic articulation of what qualifies as religious, while I want to include global economism as religious idolatry. I affirm his desire for state neutrality between Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity even as I interpret American state neutrality as being subservient to a greater macrotranscendent religious loyalty of economism. Despite this limitation, Sen helps prioritize part of the embodied gospel of a churching diakonia: the enhancement of real capabilities.

Iris Marion Young's Postmodern Feminism

Today, even progressive mainline Protestant churches generally conceive of justice in terms of rights and distribution. Activist churches talk about social justice, which generally means making sure that people get their fair share. The logic goes that since we are all children of God, we deserve our rights. Iris Marion Young offers a different understanding of justice from politically liberal forms, and like Amartya Sen, she is highly committed to the process by which decisions are made. The consequence is

[78] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 23. Process thinkers would rightly add that one should not dismiss any agency, whether human or otherwise.

that Young's understanding of power shifts away from the rhetoric of distribution. People often talk about power as if it is a thing that a person or group has or lacks. However, she insightfully suggests that power is better understood as a relation.[79] She cares about the *process* by which decisions are made: who participates and who decides constitute the dynamics of power in those relationships.

Young identifies the problems of injustice not primarily within the framework of rights and the distribution of goods. Instead, domination and oppression are the lenses through which she thinks about injustice, where the former restricts self-determination and the latter restricts self-development.[80] Oppression itself comes with five distinct aspects: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.[81] Rather than using a pluralization of labels of oppressions that are each isolated and separate entities, (such as sexism, classism, racism, etc.), she believes that applying her "five criteria to the situation of groups makes it possible to compare oppressions without reducing them to a common essence or claiming that one is more fundamental than another."[82] Not every form of oppression exhibits all five categories. One may be powerless in the sense of having no say in working conditions, and face exploitation in the sense of having one's work benefit another, and yet not be marginalized since one has steady employment. On the other hand, a woman on an American Indian reservation may be marginalized from most economic activity (which is all-too-often equated with one's value), experience cultural imperialism from a society that measures her against a white middle-class male norm, and face violence from a domestic partner. As there are

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[79] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 31.
[80] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 37.
[81] Ibid., 9.
[82] Ibid., 64.

manifold instantiations within the logic of oppression, I do not believe particular expressions of churching must witness against all globalizing forms simultaneously.

It is necessary to note that Young expresses a form of postmodern thought not influenced in any direct way by Alfred North Whitehead. However, her postmodern feminist perspective presents an alternative orientation that is not cosmological but nevertheless exhibits this interrelated pattern of difference.[83] Her project is assisted by a postmodern critique of the logic of identity via Adorno, Derrida, and Irigaray.[84] Still, Young articulates a politics of relationship and differentiation, and in doing so, she fits well with Whitehead's cosmology and aspects of Keller's social ontology. Indeed, for Young, all normativizing theories of justice require a social ontology.[85] While one can read her in light of Whitehead and draw out themes she misses or was not interested in, one can equally see certain implications with Whitehead that he missed or was apathetic towards, such as how the conditions of domination and oppression are expressed in a world of interrelated difference. Additionally, Whitehead's dipolar position that articulates how the material and the mental are poles within entities resonates with her claim that "an ideal can inspire action for social change only if it arises from possibilities suggested by actual experience."[86] If one focuses exclusively on humans and their relationships of power, I find that Young satisfactorily demonstrates that Whitehead is optional for a processual project. However, as we have seen, he makes key contributions in terms of the planetary and cosmological framing of the context. A poststructuralist

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[83] Wonhee Anne Joh notes that Young's 'unassimilated Otherness' "resonates with Whitehead's related entity." Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 151.
[84] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 98.
[85] Ibid., 25.
[86] Ibid., 241.

process position that demands variety and multiplicity is in sync with her desire for the representation of distinct perspectives and experiences, particularly of groups that have otherwise been marginalized.[87]

Concerning politics, Young believes that political discussion needs to happen at more than one location and more than one time. There is not one arena or public sphere but multiple overlapping spheres where people gather and discuss what concerns, ideas, and hopes they have for their society. This is one of the legitimate values she sees in identity politics. People can gather outside of the dominant context in order to have their own discourses and planning outside of the rules of dominant settings. This does not mean that different public spheres are free from intercommunication. Indeed they must communicate, but not everyone needs to be in the same conversation at the same time. This type of residential and civil clustering is what she means by "differentiated solidarity."[88] My usage of the term in Chapter 3 obviously differs from hers.

I find that Young provides a persuasive challenge to liberal political concepts that cut out impacted voices from decision-making and offers alternative ways of giving voice in society. She does this in part by addressing internal exclusions that block people from full political participation. For example, someone may be formally included in discussions but their claims or concerns are not taken seriously because of the cultural mode in which speakers present them. They may be taken as naïve or simple. Rules of debate or presentation are often shaped by the dominant cultural assumptions, which in the United States are typically the presentation styles of white men. This means being dispassionate, logical, and offering step-by-step arguments from premises that the

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[87] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 187.
[88] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 197.

dominant group agrees to.[89] If someone does not present this way, they are functionally excluded. As Young insightfully recognizes, being eloquent should be considered a political virtue to aspire for, but it should not be a condition to be able to speak at all. Partially motivating her advocacy of differentiated solidarity is her commitment for there to be multiple avenues for people to communicate with one another.[90]

Young makes several useful suggestions to remedy instances of internal exclusion and other problems of deliberative democracy theory (which also benefits radical churching!). She suggests the steps of greeting, rhetoric, and narrative.[91] Greeting encourages people to gather together informally before political decisions begin, share food, and introduce who one is and where one comes from.[92] Rhetoric affirms that passion goes along with arguments and reasons. Anger can have a role especially when social injustices are severe. These activities can include unfurling banners, interrupting parliamentary procedures, shaming those that dismiss certain voices, organizing public rallies and demonstrations, and acting in guerilla theatre.[93] Some of these latter examples require formal access to indoor as well as outdoor spaces.[94] Lastly, narrative or *testimonio* involves the sharing of stories from particular experiences and allows for people to hear the location from which people will be speaking. Dominant groups frequently have biased assumptions about issues or other communities. Sharing stories of what has happened in one's neighborhood or family may help dismantle some of the ignorance of those listening. Young bristles at the ideal of politically liberal democratic

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[89] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 171.
[90] Ibid., 172.
[91] Ibid., 53.
[92] Ibid., 58.
[93] Ibid., 65.
[94] From Marcella Althaus-Reid's perspective, many of these activities could rightly be called "indecent." See Chapter 5 for her notion of indecency.

participation and debate as essentially "polite, orderly, dispassionate, gentlemanly argument."[95] Especially when there is a structurally marginalized group whose interests are ignored in public debates, disorderliness and anger can be important methods of expression as a form of agonistic pluralism.[96]

As mentioned with regards to Rawls, churches tend to fear conflict, for it implies disunity and chaos. Therefore, most mainline congregations are uncomfortable with its expression and seek to curtail it. However, conflict *can* be productive. Bonnie Honig offers a complementary perspective with Young on the idea of an agonistic pluralism, where agonistic means passionate. When churches normally imagine conflict, they think in terms of antagonism, which is not the same thing. In antagonistic conflict, differences are seen as natural, perpetual, and binary exclusions, but agonistic conflict works through differences productively. Rather than seeing differences of perspective as permanent boundary markers, they are reflective of different perspectives or locations. Disturbing dominant and uncritical perspectives through offering differences of opinion are often necessary for the emergence of new ideas and practices.

Honig sees social movements (of which religious communities are to be part) as a form of agonistic cosmopolitanism. Rather than having to justify alliances with particular groups in a universalistic context, movements can partner with those who are *close* to them.[97] The proximity of new neighbors, not necessarily in terms of spatial nearness but relational internalization, acts as an opportunity for forms of solidarity that do not need to

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[95] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 49. May we kill it in churching, too!

[96] Ibid., 49. An example of this was when Medea Benjamin, the CODEPINK activist, interrupted President Obama during his speech on Guantanamo prisoners and their hunger strike in May 2013. Many news commentators responded that it was improper for her to do so: Young would say that they were uncritically supporting decent political order and rhetoric.

[97] Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 122-23.

be justified in terms of their place in the universal. Closeness is not in terms of spatial proximity, but relational togetherness! Because there is a relevant relationship, there is an opportunity of working together. This offers distinct advantages over what she calls a normative cosmopolitanism, which struggles to explain the particularity of group difference that stands in tension with its universalism. For Honig, groups such as churches can work with others precisely *because* they have particular relationships.[98] She also wisely offers space for political action that is not merely targeted at state laws but also at non-state social actors.[99]

Using Honig's notion of "agonistic cosmopolitanism," the outward life of churching can understand a key part of what it does as participating in movement politics rather than seeing the political as solely focused on voting or passing laws, although these remain necessary features. In participating in the upbuilding of social movements, churching engages in the construction of how the world can be different. Churches can use this notion in their mission partnerships: 'why partner with Christians in Palestine and not Peru?' can be answered because churches will have ongoing relationships with some communities in one location and not in another. In this way, we can practice a cosmopolitanism that does not have to explain away particularity. Like the multitude, agonistic cosmopolitanism is not a transcendent universalism but an immanent universalism that grows out of the productive relationships between distinct communities.

One of Iris Marion Young's strengths for my project is that she offers applicable insights and critiques to some of this chapter's previous thinkers. For example, she offers

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[98] Many people may rightly recognize this dissertation itself as a work of agonistic cosmopolitanism. The particularity of Christianity, with its images, themes, and specific social location are put to work out of a cosmological commitment to the entire planet, life, and people. Its location does not have to be explained away, for its recognition is the very condition for its radical praxis.

[99] Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 134.

another way to interpret Amartya Sen's impartial spectator. At first, it would appear that Sen and she are mutually incompatible. She does not like universality as impartiality, but this comes primarily out of her concern that one subject will declare itself the impartial decider.[100] Though she is critical of the term "impartial," she has a different definition than Sen. Her problem with the idea of impartiality is that it has "no particular desires or interests in view."[101] She basically equates it with neutrality. The result is that she actually supports the content of Sen's intentions even if she would quite rightly prefer another word. She continues, "But there is another way the subject moves beyond egoism: the encounter with other people."[102] But is this not *precisely* what Sen has in mind when he discusses the impartial spectator: allow the perspectives of others to shape and reform our own solidifications so that they loosen up and become something new? Both Sen and Young reflect a radical perspectivalism of particular loci of truth-knowledge that declares that groups need each other but can never be subsumed into one ultimate and final perspective.

Concerning representation, Young believes that there needs to be space for both direct democracy as well as forms of representation. Formal representation should not be of opinions or interests, nor should people think that representatives speak on behalf of an identity or should have a perfect correspondence to the identity they supposedly represent. Instead, representation should be of social perspectives. Not every opinion or interest is legitimate, but every social perspective is legitimate.[103] We should never object to someone's experience or angle from which they observe events. Having multiple sites

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[100] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 105.
[101] Ibid., 106.
[102] Ibid., 106.
[103] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 146.

of representation and modes of diverse social perspectives is absolutely necessary to diminish the risk of one voice pretending to speak for everyone.

For Young, participatory democracy is great for maximizing self-determination, but participation alone may not help with self-development. The latter is the ability to thrive, to have certain opportunities made available to oneself. Political self-determination alone cannot guarantee this goal, and so there is a limit to solely participatory democracy.[104] The theme of self-development aligns with Sen's capabilities approach, since her understanding of social justice includes having governments encourage equal opportunity for the development of what she calls "capacities."[105]

In effect, Young helps articulate another weakness of Hardt and Negri: their consistent disregard for any positive role for representation. For them, representation in its myriad forms is the transcendentalization of the immanently productive biopolitical. As noted earlier, they see representation as something that Empire does: it is a transcendent activity while they alternatively desire a politics of pure immanence.[106] However, Young provides strong reasons for a representation that occurs in multiple and overlapping locations.[107] Alongside her, I do not see a path to a functioning purely direct democracy. Even in groups of fifty, not everyone speaks for an equal amount of time; certain people dominate conversations. This is representation by ego. The social production of the multitude produces society and can lead to expressions of self-determination, but these do not guarantee that there are equal opportunities of self-

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[104] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 180-86.
[105] Ibid., 187.
[106] The one late exception is where they suggest their openness to institutional organization beyond direct participation to the extent that such institutional configurations are open-ended, contestable, and conflictual. See Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 357.
[107] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 133.

cultivation, or that resources are distributed in ways beyond those whom produce them. There needs to be some forms of representation to address these issues of capabilities and resource distribution. Empire may be a form of transcendent extraction, but I remain convinced that there are ways to represent people in an egalitarian fashion.[108] This way, the multitude is able to participate both through its production in a direct immanent democracy as well as be represented through a differentiated representation of the multitude's social perspectives. Hardt and Negri overemphasize the role of direct democracy through their pure immanent communism even as they rightly challenge the unjust extraction of Empire.

Beyond offering a better approach to conflict, how does Young shape an ecclesiology of churching? Particularly, she offers a style of communication through the difference of diverse social groups. While she presents a more formal process of deliberation, it is also a way for groups with different cultural experiences and expectations to be able to listen deeply to each other's stories and struggles. The ecclesiology that I am constructing requires this type of listening so as to help initiate transformed outlooks for those who come from dominant social locations. Her weakness is that she lacks sufficient appreciation for the potential engagement of faith communities in their societies through radical praxis.

Implications of Political Theology

> *Mennonite missionaries train white congregations in anti-racism awareness. Lakota communities are seeking church partners to help resist the expansion of biker bars being built on sacred burial grounds . . . A small group ministry brings supplies and listens in on an "Occupy" assembly gathering at an encampment in downtown Los Angeles. Building another world means building the multitude . . . Activists, farmers, and First Nation peoples protest the prospects of a tar sands*

[108] Likewise, Míguez, Rieger, and Sung reject the communist ideal of a stateless free association of producers as being impossible. Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*, 103-05.

pipeline and the threat of more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The planetary commons are not for narrow economic appropriation . . . A church sends volunteers in response to requests for tutors at a nearby elementary school of children of immigrants. The faith community deepens its ties to a population on the other side of the freeway. All children deserve the option to choose a better quality of life . . . A denomination decides to divest from businesses that profit from the suffering of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Resisting Empire in whatever form it takes and loving one's persecuted neighbor trumps an extra 0.5% annual retirement yield any day . . . CODEPINK activists interrupt a president's speech when he avoids addressing issues of injustice and suffering. Many others, including myself, rally for the release of prisoners, fasting and demonstrating on behalf of Guantanamo detainees whose imprisonment is a sacrifice made out of an idolatrous desire for perfect security. The multitude lives its service.

Those doing political theology have noted that we are entering a post-secular era in the West. Many scholars supposed that secularity would expand as time passed, but like Sigmund Freud's "return of the repressed" the religious has returned with a vengeance, especially within what is traditionally separated as the "political." I have not argued what the proper role of the church is in its society politically speaking, because this assumes that there is a clear division between the fields of religion and politics. In recent decades, political theologians have been at work showing how this division is a false construction from modernity and have been deconstructing this separation, in part to explain the resurgence of religious practice as a postsecular development. I stand within that line.

In his political theology, Jeffrey Robbins combines death-of-God radical theology with the radical democratic theory of Hardt and Negri.[109] Robbins misreads the option for a radical process political theology by claiming that it is either radical theologically and conservative politically, or radical politically and conservative theologically.[110] I believe

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[109] Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*, Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.
[110] Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*, 11.

this dissertation demonstrates that such a project is indeed possible. Democracy means the potential capacity of participation in decisions, not liberty or independence, and thus "democracy is rightly feared by those who have the most to lose."[111] He challenges process theology as a viable model for political theology on two accounts: its adherence to "Whiteheadian dogma" and its "Christian confessional framework."[112] While Robbins primarily critiques process and liberationist thought, Clayton Crockett's radical political theology finds a more positive stream present within both, especially in Catherine Keller's process trajectory.[113] In Crockett's reading, the term "'potentiality' is a good contemporary postmodern name for freedom."[114] In fact, this potentiality-freedom is experienced as divinity after the death of God.[115] He follows Hardt and Negri in analyzing the multitude, and like them also problematically avoids any language of transcendence.

Besides being a theory of political philosophers, political theology is also a name for the proto-liberation theologies in Europe during the 1960s, which often challenged political regimes' idolatrous claims and acts.[116] More recently, it has been noted that the very definition of religion is a very political act, dividing the properly "political" from the "religious." The way this is done is through identifying the religious with the private, individual, spiritual side of life against the public, collective side of life. Protestantism remains the hegemonic religious model in the United States, so that faith communities that want to be recognized as a legitimate religion are pressured to separate out the more

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[111] Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*, 71.
[112] Ibid., 194, ft. 17.
[113] Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics after Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 55.
[114] Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*, 3.
[115] Ibid., 17.
[116] One political theologian in particular, Dorothee Sölle, was a helpful resource in this ecclesiology's broad paradigm of kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia, which was expressed in Chapter 1.

political and social elements of their traditions from the more so-called religious elements. They have to become and look like denominations. This process is not my focus, but it means that Protestantism is the primary culprit in this bifurcation. It is the model that groups such as American Muslims or indigenous traditions are pressured to emulate, but what if mainline Protestants themselves got it all wrong in the first place?

Until Christians in mainline churches are able to say boldly who you are and what you are about in society, you will remain increasingly irrelevant, both to American society and to a growing portion of your own members. This needed process of radicalization should include disentangling yourselves from political liberalism of the Rawlsian variety, identifying the theological character of the American state, and offering a subversive (and many will say an unreasonable) counter-witness to the extent that your state and society project loyalties to globalizing Empire's *ethos* that dehumanize others. Resisting Empire and enhancing capabilities makes much of our diakonia counter-cultural, but it is out of a loving commitment to our planet and those that dwell on it that we take such a radical stance. The return of political theology indicates that there can be no clear division between the secular and the religious, as they are co-constituted in their very constructions. The next chapter brings us to theology proper, even as its primary thinkers deconstruct this separating barrier through their own particular politically-oriented ecclesiologies.

CHAPTER 5

Prehending Missional, Processual, and Indecent Ecclesiologies

> [We are] not concerned with the survival of the church as institution, but rather with its de-institutionalization. From this perspective, church and theology may be working not to support each other but to undermine each other in order to make space for a second coming of different forms of working together, challenging systems not from within the system but from its margins, and remaining there.
>
> —Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*

The previous three chapters have developed a radical process *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*, respectively. The concluding chapter will synthesize these elements and explain more fully how they can be lived out in actual communities. This transitional chapter continues the process of creatively weaving many voices together as it primarily explores the implicit and explicit ecclesiological constructions of Jürgen Moltmann, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, and Marcella Althaus-Reid, while also placing them in conversation with other figures like John Howard Yoder and John B. Cobb, Jr. The first three sections describe their respective ecclesiological projects and where I find resonances and dissonances with my own project. While I can affirm much that Moltmann and Suchocki have to say *in the abstract*, Althaus-Reid functions as a radical critique to both of their decent, systematic approaches to theological reflection. The fourth and final section addresses ecclesial marks. Rather than affirm the classical marks through reinterpretation (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic), or inverting them (as many, secular, particular, and novel), I am attempting something different. I will offer churching's ecclesial marks as a creatively interrelated contrast in such a way that neither set overwhelms nor becomes the final norm for the other.

Jürgen Moltmann's Missional Ecclesiology

Jürgen Moltmann's ecclesiology is one of the most influential liberative constructions of the 20th century, shaping much that follows him. His major work on ecclesiology comes from the 1970s, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, in which he envisions major changes to ecclesiological structures even as he highlights practical changes for actual congregations. In a preface written fifteen years later, Moltmann explains how his purpose was to encourage moves away from large organizations to small-scale communities. In so doing, there would be a "transformation of the church from a religious institution that looks after people into a congregational or community church" in, through, and with people.[1] In rethinking the church, Moltmann relies on three broad themes: Jesus Christ as Lord, the coming kingdom of God, and the social Trinity.

The first two traditional themes, Christ and the kingdom, are held in a dialectical continuity of past and future. In Moltmann's grand scheme, the most important element is the church "as witness to the promises of God, embodied in Christ's life, death and resurrection, and in the expectation of the kingdom."[2] Scott Paeth identifies this dialectical relationship between social transformation and critique in the themes of resurrection and the cross.[3] J. Stephen Rhodes likewise affirms the dialectic, explaining that the church endures by "*remembering* what God has done and *hoping* for what God will do."[4] Whether this metanarrative works beyond the abstract remains to be seen.

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[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xiii.
[2] Scott R. Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society: Public Theology and Social Theory in the Work of Jürgen Moltmann* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 49.
[3] Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society*, 24.
[4] J. Stephen Rhodes, "The Church as the Community of Open Friendship," *Asbury Theological Journal* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 43. Unless otherwise noted, all italicized quotations are from the respective cited author.

Moltmann makes Christ central: "Christ is his church's foundation, its power and its hope."[5] Said in its simplest terms, "Without Christ, no church."[6] Even though Moltmann believes Jesus is its foundation, he does not believe Jesus intentionally founded the institutional church.[7] Rather, the witness of Jesus's whole life and the recognition of him as the Messiah constituted the earliest Christian faith, and only in this way did he found the church.[8] While Christ is the foundation, doctrinally, ecclesiology orients itself toward eschatology, specifically the coming kingdom of God.[9] The promise of the coming kingdom gives the church its initiative. The kingdom of God is the future for which the church works, and the church does not control this promise that God has offered. At its best, the church is "an *anticipatory sign* of the definitive reign of God."[10] Decades later, Moltmann still maintains this orientation, saying that the end of cultural Christendom provides the opportunity for the church to be reborn "as an independent and resisting community, a community with a universal mission and an all-embracing hope for the kingdom of God as the future of the world."[11]

Moltmann is driven by the idea that the church does not have a mission: God's mission has a church.[12] In broad strokes, the Holy Spirit provides the internal energy to the church, Christ goes before the church as it looks to the future, and God's mission directs it. Helpfully, the role of the church is relativized in that the kingdom, rather than

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[5] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 5.
[6] Ibid., 66.
[7] Van Nam Kim, *A Church of Hope: A Study of the Eschatological Ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 40-41.
[8] Kim, *Church of Hope*, 45-46.
[9] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 205.
[10] Ibid., 27.
[11] Jürgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 17.
[12] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 10.

the church, is to be spread throughout the world.[13] The church does not exist for itself, nor is it called to paternalistically look after people. Rather, it is to be in the midst of people, existing in solidarity especially with the oppressed, who are themselves "*co-subjects* in the kingdom of God."[14]

For Moltmann, the church can be like leaven in bread, producing discord in its location and acting as the leading edge, the vanguard of its society, towards God's promised future of justice and equality.[15] The church cannot see itself as standing above the world,[16] but must instead understand its relationships with "other social forces and institutions."[17] It can be involved in revolution while challenging all partial political orders that deny that universal lordship of Jesus Christ and seeks the salvation of all spheres of life. Essentially, the church has a destabilizing mission against the status quo for both its members and society in light of its eschatological hope.[18] Even so, Christian identity must not become identical "with particular social movements."[19] As the church is involved in this movement of history, it also self-transcends the current moment as the Spirit leads it towards the ultimate future goal of the kingdom.

The church's normative organization is an open community of equals, of which Moltmann's key image is the trinitarian *perichoresis*. This divine life of mutuality "only corresponds to a human fellowship of people without privileges and without subordinances. The perichoretic at-oneness of the triune God corresponds to the experience of the community of Christ, the community which the Spirit unites through

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[13] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 11.
[14] Rhodes, "Church as the Community of Open Fellowship," 42.
[15] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 49.
[16] Rhodes, "Church as the Community of Open Friendship," 43.
[17] Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis: JoPa Group, 2011), 135.
[18] Rhodes, "Church as the Community of Open Friendship," 44.
[19] Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society*, 27.

respect, affection and love."[20] Just as God opens the divine life to the world, so the church opens its life to the world. This means that the church "is a non-hierarchical fellowship of equals in the Holy Spirit."[21] Nevertheless, Paeth notes that it is critical to make this analogy between church life and divine life only provisional because of the uncertainty of the immanent nature of God.[22]

Moltmann's view of the church's koinonia differs from mine in his use of the immanent life of the divine as an ecclesial model, which reflects his orthodox bearings. Rather than the relational nature of the church and humans existing through divine perichoresis, I have suggested in Chapters 2 and 3 that these exist through the perichoresis of the entire cosmos.[23] In contrast, Moltmann starts with the internal interdwelling of the three divine persons before applying that relationship to creation. Specifically, the Spirit of Christ in the church corresponds to the Spirit of Life active throughout creation: "If Christ is not perceived in all the things of nature as the Wisdom of creation," affirms Moltmann, "then he is not rightly perceived in the church either."[24] While God's relationship starts in Godself, this presence expands to all creation equally. One difference between Moltmann and myself concerns where this incarnational stance begins, either with a divine foundation, or in the very quality of existence, divine or otherwise. We will see that many of the differences between us rest in his foundational approach that prefers theological abstractions over the actual world.

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[20] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (1981; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 157-58.
[21] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 224.
[22] Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society*, 45.
[23] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 168-69. Whitehead notes that while classical theologians offered a form of mutual immanence in the divine nature, they "never made this advance into general metaphysics." The same problem is true for Moltmann.
[24] Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!*, 69.

As a messianic fellowship, the church is dependent on its relationship with Christ and being involved in Christ's mission toward the kingdom of God.[25] This *missio dei* is the church's origin but extends to all of creation.[26] The salvation to which Moltmann's political church acts as a witness encompasses life to its full extent, including faith, politics, and economic life.[27] This means that the undivided lordship of Christ demands the recognition that any "theological conception of Christ's church is therefore always at the same time a political and social concept of the church."[28] In its proclamation and service, remembering Christ crucified enables the church to deny the national and economic values that become destructive idols. When it does so, it acts "atheistically" to the religion of political oppression among nations.[29] True church fellowship as open friendship exists only through the removal of privileges, and is not done "for its own sake but only 'for others.'"[30] His discussion of privilege and the affirmation of solidarity with the oppressed clashes with my argument in Chapter 3 on mutual interest, and his uncritical use of terms such as "Christ's lordship" reminds us again of Moltmann's adherence to traditional theological terminology.

Moltmann's kerygma aligns with much of Chapter 2's understanding of the good news as affirming planetary value. Van Nam Kim sees that "for Moltmann, the Church's mission ultimately is the affirmation of life, through the practice of liberation for human beings and the rest of creatures, including nature."[31] The kerygma helps a person see how she is God's creation and thus "will suffer over the disfigurement of enslaved creation

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[25] Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!*, 137-38.
[26] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 10-11.
[27] Ibid., 10-11, 15.
[28] Ibid., 5.
[29] Ibid., 154.
[30] Ibid., 107.
[31] Kim, *Church of Hope*, 392.

and will hope for and work for the new creation."[32] Of course, Moltmann interprets these themes through the foundationally normative prism of Christ and kingdom. For him, proclaiming the gospel of the history of Christ and freedom for the coming kingdom is accomplished in many ways: preaching, group conversations, teaching, the celebration of sacraments, and comforting one another, to name but a few.[33] Chapter 6 will highlight some of the complementary ways that Moltmann supports what proclamation looks like in actual church living sans his universalizing history.

The church's essence is conserved through the maintenance of kerygma and diakonia, thus preserving the church's identity over time.[34] It always proclaims and appeals to "the tradition of the messianic liberation and eschatological renewal of the world."[35] Though Moltmann's substance-inflected position is especially frustrating as he addresses the church's inherent nature, he again offers some practical relief: neither proclamation nor service are reserved for ordained persons. He rightly lambasts the inadequate preparation congregants receive in proclaiming the good news:

> The fact that the congregations who listen to sermons with us are hardly enabled to give any personal testimony also paralyses personal Christian life, and the development of personal conviction. Many people are quite satisfied to belong to the church, to go to church occasionally, and to agree by and large with the church's doctrine, even if they do not know much about it, and it does not mean very much to them.[36]

"Holistic diakonia," writes Moltmann, "is healing action directed toward all of the unhealthy distortions and estrangements of human existence, whether in personal, social,

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[32] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 213.
[33] Ibid., 206.
[34] Kim, *Church of Hope*, 376.
[35] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 3.
[36] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 186.

or religious life."[37] Could perhaps a friendly Moltmannian position link the network of colonizing Empire with his remark on unhealthy distortions?

If his idea of diakonia was restricted to the work of resisting social and political evil, and accepting that there will be counter-resistance as a consequence, Moltmann and I would be largely in agreement, but he needlessly goes further. For him, diakonia essentially means "to participate in suffering, to accept suffering, and to take on the suffering of others."[38] This is absolutely infuriating to read. This faulty emphasis claims that suffering is not merely fortuitous but essential to the church. In effect, he is asking the church to celebrate its suffering as what it means to be church! With this logic, if the church is not suffering, then it must not be the church! Moltmann forgets that abuse, exploitation, and marginalization are things to *lament* as evil, rather than as essential signs of faithfulness. It is more accurate to say that while divesting from one's privilege and speaking truth to power is a radical church's calling, any suffering that persons experience in light of this stance is contingent, even if it is unavoidable for those living under the conditions of Empire and especially when they resist Empire. Unavoidable suffering *does not equal* necessary suffering.

Beyond the problem of his abstract theological language, there are a number of additional weaknesses to Moltmann's ecclesiology that need to be mentioned. While Tony Jones, an Emergent Church ecclesiologist, largely recommends Moltmann's ecclesiology for the Emergent Church Movement, he claims that it is too idealistic

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[37] Jürgen Moltmann, "Diaconal Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God," in *Hope for the Church: Moltmann in Dialogue with Practical Theology*, ed. and trans. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 27.

[38] Moltmann, "Diaconal Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God," 31.

because of Moltmann's "anthropological naiveté."[39] This is expressed in his obliviously uncritical affirmation of new Christian charismatic movements.[40] For example, while many charismatic communities exemplify a concern for the Spirit, they run the risk of fostering unaccountable structures and abuse among their leadership. Additionally, Moltmann ignores the decline of the base community model of church in Latin America, even as Pentecostal movements that affirm a prosperity gospel have increased. This latter phenomenon directly contradicts his commitment to the poor, since they often exhibit authoritarian leadership tendencies, which circumvents his desire for a more democratic church participation.[41] Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz adds that "a renewal of the community from below [has] largely been rejected by the established parish communities."[42] This alone likely reflects institutional power structures within the church suppressing alternatives, but the fact that Moltmann does not name and critique this phenomenon indicates that he is more interested in cherry-picking examples that fit his idealistic model than starting with the lived experience of radical faith communities and building his ecclesiology from the ground up.

Moltmann thinks of the church as an eschatological vanguard that prefigures the coming kingdom of God. This is only half-right: I believe that churching reflects a participatory or ethical eschatology. This follows Marcus Borg[43] and John Dominic Crossan's understanding of the message of Jesus of Nazareth.[44] Humans cooperate with

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[39] Jones, *Church Is Flat*, 149.
[40] Ibid., 151.
[41] Ibid., 149-50.
[42] Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, "In the Fellowship of the Spirit of God," in *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 105.
[43] Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 259-60.
[44] John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 273-89, 317.

divine aims for the world, thus participating in their own divinization. Moltmann understandably does not want to say this consummation takes place through evolutionary development as if the kingdom of God is the peak or apex of the process. Accordingly, "this future does not *de*velop out of the potential of the past, but *ad*vances towards the present—that is to say it cannot be perceived with the category of evolution, but only with the category of the new."[45] However, he rejects that our world contributes to that coming reality at all, even though our actions participate in Christ's messianic mission towards that reality.[46] For him, God's redemption and the kingdom come from the absolute future of God. However, I believe it is better to say that our participation contextualizes and informs that coming future potentiality. What is done in this world sets the condition for the relevant possibilities to which the world can become even as the divine lures it towards its truest (i.e. most intense and harmonious) self.

Another clear weakness with Moltmann for my project is that his focus on Europe's official church model is less directly applicable to a North American context. As Jones recognizes, Moltmann does not address the United States' implicit Christendom approach like Hauerwasians do, though the latter's atemporal church, unaffected vis-à-vis the secular world, is no model either.[47] Paeth appropriately criticizes Moltmann for focusing too heavily on a European church-state model and for thus having an inadequate analysis of how civil society impacts Christian public life.[48] Paeth goes on to suggest that

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[45] Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!*, 222.
[46] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 65.
[47] Jones, *Church Is Flat*, 153-55. As John Cobb recognizes, a more radical church will have similar practices but provide a different analysis and motivation from postliberal Hauerwasians. Three primary differences are that they will pursue actions when they can make a positive difference, will form alliances with others of diverse persuasions, and will offer an alternative picture not just for church but also for the world. See John B. Cobb, Jr., ed., *Resistance: The New Role of Progressive Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), xiii.
[48] Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society*, 112.

church can influence civil society for social change to occur, even though it risks becoming a civil religion if it is too sociologically oriented.[49] I believe church can avoid devolving simply into a form of civil religion to the extent that it maintains a critique of social movements in light of its theology and expands its sphere of concern to other societies and to the planet itself. In effect, Moltmann's analysis would be improved by incorporating Bonnie Honig's insights from Chapter 4: political life responds not just to the state but also works with social movements for a culture's transformation.

Moltmann is a frustrating theologian to read: for pages on end there is so much to affirm, but then one finds residual dogmatic claims of the Christian tradition clogging up the works and theological abstractions that are divorced from lived experience. He is a brilliantly creative theologian, but churching does not need his systematic tone or answers.

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki's Institutional Process Ecclesiology

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki is the leading process feminist theologian who has engaged with ecclesiological questions and church life.[50] In her passion for the church, many of Suchocki's books have a practical angle, such as how to pray or preach from a process perspective. To demonstrate the profound influence of process thought on her work, I examine her analyses of kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia, and look particularly at her understanding of institutions. While she is a compelling Whiteheadian theologian and incorporates feminist thought in her work, she continues to write in a classical systematic theological format that first grounds the church in the nature of God and the life and work

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[49] Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society*, 129, 149.

[50] In fact, we have already found her to be of great help in Chapter 2 for cosmological questions and in Chapter 3 regarding mutual interest, solidarity as social ontology, and the difference between horizontal and vertical transcendence. My critique in no way wishes to dismiss her many clear contributions.

of Jesus Christ. Readers will recognize this structure to be a significant methodological difference from my project.

Not unlike Moltmann, Suchocki looks for an essence to the church that extends beyond contemporary settings and connects with its foundation in Jesus Christ and points also into the future.[51] For her, ecclesiology appropriates christology, while it is also directed towards the future from God's actual harmony to the world's possible harmony.[52] Jesus's ministry of healing transformed people in his time, and the church is to do likewise in its time. This means "the church is called to witness by its life and words to a social mode of communal well-being," so politically, the church "can also be a counterforce in the wider society" to the extent that well-being is denied or undermined.[53] The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper proclaim Christ and simultaneously create community, in such a way that the church "becomes once again *the anticipatory sign of God's reign* in the midst of history [emphasis added]."[54] Clearly, Suchocki's ecclesiology also appropriates eschatology.

Suchocki holds kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia together when she writes, "[T]he church is a society embodying and calling for an openness to life and mutually assured well-being, not destruction."[55] Resurrection affirms that new life is possible, that transformation can occur, and the church is called to proclaim that reality and invite its larger society into such transformation, as well. The church proclaims the gospel of the

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[51] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 138.
[52] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 129-30.
[53] Ibid., 123.
[54] Ibid., 160. Such language unmistakably mimics Moltmann.
[55] Ibid., 121.

reign of God even as it is expressed in cultural and relational terms rather than propositional ones.[56]

Kerygmatically, while Suchocki recognizes that the value of entities is a critical aspect of the church's proclamation, she wisely cautions that it is impossible to make value judgments outside of one's perspective.[57] Making decisions on the gradations of value is inevitable, and humans will only recognize a small piece of those values "into our active care and concern." The experience of universal well-being is a limit concept in terms of our perspectival appropriation. Nevertheless, she not-surprisingly believes it is critical that we continue to insist that this value acts as a check against the all-too-easy tendency of individuals and institutions to draw the circle of concern too narrowly than what our interrelatedness warrants.[58]

Koinonia for Suchocki emphasizes the consistency between what is proclaimed and how the church lives: "In order to be true witnesses to God's fullness of action for us in Christ, we too must be living words; embodied proclamations, living in community that which we proclaim."[59] However, the church's fellowship is not itself the reign of God but only its anticipation and the way in which it is proclaimed. To declare that it is the norm that judges all other societal arrangements and proclaim it as a model of perfection risks the idolatrization of the church itself. Therefore, diversity and multiple cultural perspectives relativize any particular configuration of the church as does the norming reign of God.[60]

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[56] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 133-39.
[57] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 70.
[58] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 72-73.
[59] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 139.
[60] Ibid., 165-66.

Suchocki helpfully connects the Whiteheadian relationship of the one and the many with the individual and community for the church. Individuals contribute to their community but also presuppose that very community, thus making Christianity a communal religion.[61] Individuals respond to the gospel and the possibilities offered to them by God, but focusing only on individual responses would be a distortion. This is because "the church is not a collection of individuals who all happen to come together; rather, it is through the community's faithful proclamation, in word and deed, that individual responsiveness is made possible."[62] Ultimately, she defines church as "the community of all those whose identities have been so formed through faith, and . . . the community through whom the proclamation is given that makes possible in time this hearing that makes for faith."[63] Unlike those who argue for church as a simple voluntary association of individuals, here the community gets inside the individuals.

As part of a larger discussion on original sin, Suchocki delves into the transmission of solidarity and nature of institutions, which is one of her major process-feminist contributions to understanding koinonia. Like other feminist theologians, she notes that sin is not rebellion against God via pride. Rather, it is rebellion against creation through violence. In particular, she discusses how sin can pass institutionally and from generation to generation, which has significant ecclesial implications.[64] While institutions have many problems, she does not advocate for their total dissolution. They can still be forces for good and expressions of the gospel. In a hopeful tone, she proclaims, "[R]eligious organizations are themselves systemic forces. The church, through its

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[61] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 133.
[62] Ibid., 137.
[63] Ibid., 137.
[64] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 161.

national headquarters and through its coalitions, such as the National Council of Churches, can itself be an intensification of Christian witness, and a powerful force toward the good."[65]

Suchocki offers a very powerful process-relational analysis of institutions that I wish to follow. The preservation of any institution, including the church, enables a form of social inheritance of the privileges and sins of past generations, with the result that "institutional forms of cultural life play a strong role in the transmission of sin from generation to generation."[66] In addition to the past sociological analyses of Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr on the effect of institutional evil on individuals, she believes that process-relational thinking can help explain certain ontological structures and their effects on individuals.[67] The possibility of transcendence in institutions does not rely on a single unified conscience with a single body, which would make communal self-transcendence of past evil impossible, but rather relies on institutional intersubjectivity.[68]

Unlike those who idealize participation as the key to just institutions, Suchocki maintains that there are limits to participation in intersubjective relations. Only in very small groups can this be expressed through consensus and conversation. However, as groups become larger, their organizational structure becomes necessarily more complex.[69] Thus, she leaves some space for structural hierarchies (or we might add, representation). The mission and purpose of the institution gets inside participants, even

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[65] Marjorie Suchocki, *Divinity and Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 118.
[66] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 113.
[67] Ibid., 115-18.
[68] Ibid., 120.
[69] Ibid., 120.

as their concerns and priorities shape institutional life. This may or may not be conscious within each individual such that the "institutional purpose is reflected myriads of times as if in some great hall of mirrors created by all of its participants."[70] This creates a "corporate consciousness" that may ignore a person's subjectivity even though it presupposes subjectivity's ongoing activity.[71] The real risk hierarchy poses is that it becomes easier for particular persons to hide their lack of taking responsibility and self-transcendence within a larger institution, which they may articulate in ways that seem to defend the institution.[72] Unlike Niebuhr's conclusion of the impossibility of institutional transcendence, Suchocki convincingly affirms that it is indeed possible. In fact, it is a person's responsibility to self-transcend the institutional limitations of such structures to the extent that they do evil.

Since we are "individuals-in-community," we cannot avoid having larger structures of some form or another in church koinonia. Indeed, just as organized Christian fellowship may continue patterns of violence and sin, "they are also heirs to the possibility for institutional transcendence and transformation. Communities and institutions can be far more effective against the problems of social sin, outgrowths of original sin, than can any individual acting alone."[73] Minimizing cumbersome structures is a way Suchocki rightly recognizes that we leave fewer spaces for people to avoid taking responsibility for self-transcendence, but we should still have enough structures that groups can productively cooperate with each other and hold themselves covenantally accountable. Finding ways to critique past institutional failings to which persons belong

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[70] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 121.
[71] Ibid., 121.
[72] Ibid., 122.
[73] Ibid., 157.

acts as a sign of hope for the larger world's structures. Church fellowship is to embody Christ, "to be love and justice, to be openness and mutuality," and to grow in these qualities.[74]

According to Suchocki, the church's diakonia promotes "inclusive well-being and addresses the challenges "of the marginalized."[75] It does this by challenging the structures that promote ill-being in its culture, and especially in resolving its internal oppressive structures, i.e. transforming its koinonia fellowship. Friendship remains a key element in her understanding of the church's service, for God has called us "to convert the world towards friendship."[76] To that end, she believes that it remains essential to continue sending people to other lands and making global friendships for the purpose of valuing each other's well-being.[77] She understands this within a religiously pluralistic context of mutual respect; friendship should exist between followers of Christ and other religious pathways, which she sees as a high priority.

It is especially in terms of diakonia that we begin to see one of the primary flaws in Suchocki's ecclesiology. The problem is not with the basic contours of her intent but in her lack of specificity. While she offers a largely insightful process ecclesiology, especially in terms of institutional life, my engagement with alternative political theories is more critically explicit of this political layer and also more aggressively seeks to reconstruct the church's practices for our time than does her approach. The closest Suchocki comes to addressing this political diakonia is by encouraging self-critiques within a society to the extent to which it expresses ill-being. Yet what is this well-being?

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[74] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 149.
[75] Suchocki, *Divinity and Diversity*, 79.
[76] Ibid., 109.
[77] Ibid., 115.

Who are marginalized and what does marginalization mean? Answers to these questions are left underdeveloped as she views them as accidental or contextual to the larger concerns of systematic ecclesiology.

Stated even more critically, while Suchocki argues for the radical openness and relativity of the church in light of God's reign, she does not analyze the current context in which the church finds itself in order to argue for specific alterations in its formation. By trying to be applicable to many contexts, she ends up lacking concreteness to any context. The closest she comes to clear claims is in asking for humility of Western churches in thinking that they are the true church in light of recent church growth in Africa and Asia. Likewise, she is keen to reflect on the situation of religious pluralism as it effects how the church should interact with other traditions and its self-understanding in light of the salvation it has experienced in Christ. I applaud these efforts. In truth, there is much to appreciate about Suchocki's ecclesial work. However, all the process-relational thought in the world will not suffice if the results remain situationally abstract.

While Suchocki does recognize that all theology, including her own, is shaped by the context and culture from which it emerges, she does not discuss the material economic conditions which shape the possibility of Christian theologizing at all. While it is true that she mentions insights of liberation theology, and frequently notes problems in the world, these problems are understood as issues to address. This is all the more surprising given the fact that she has a very nuanced understanding of institutional sin, including its perpetuation in the church. Ironically, she wants to maintain a process ecclesiological formulation that is as much in keeping with the tradition as possible, when

in fact these very formulations are conditioned by the demonic structures she is so keen to point out!

While Suchocki encourages reforms within the church, one can find resources within her that would push towards a more thoroughgoing transformation of church. Respecting tradition does not necessarily mean repeating past institutional configurations of church life. In her own words, "tradition is like the crest of a wave always pushing beyond itself. Faithfulness to a tradition is not gained through treading water in repetition of some aspect of the past, but through swimming with the crest into fresh interpretations of God's gracious presence with us."[78] This might mean that denominational configurations, which themselves have not been perpetual elements of church organization, may get in the way of new models of living out Christian faithfulness. Suchocki does not make this move, and she has been active in the United Methodist Church in hopes of its internal reform, but she does leave space for others to take this step. It is time more of us did just that.

Church needs a radical reconstruction *because of* this institutional heritage of sin and privilege. If we want to dismantle this heritage, we cannot simply remove unjust pieces without changing the institution or creating a new institution, in keeping with her analysis of institutions. Catherine Keller wisely recognizes that this leads to a major problem:

> [To the extent] religious thinkers dwell on the 'cutting edge,' they lose their traditional constituencies—and *ipso facto*, ironically, the activist potential that distinguishes *progressive* theology. Inasmuch, however, as we honor the constitutive accountability of, say, Christian theology to the church, we cannot escape the dogmatic drag, the vortex of swirling symbols and insecure

[78] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *In God's Presence: Theological Reflections on Prayer* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996), 11.

> institutions. This double bind disorients even the most forward-looking theologies.[79]

It is no use avoiding this double bind, and yet it might become a potential gift. What we must not do is oppose these two trajectories against each other. Rather, we can and must form new ecclesiological coalitions. Suchocki is right that institutional formations are to some extent unavoidable, but that says nothing about constructing new institutions in light of new communities. We need to push further than Suchocki while retaining the immense ecclesial value she has produced.

Marcella Althaus-Reid's Indecent Church

Marcella Althaus-Reid provides us with a much-needed contrast to our first two theologians. Here we do not find a politically liberatory yet European systematic ecclesiology á la Moltmann, nor do we find Suchocki's process-relational construction from an American feminist perspective devoid of political stakes. Althaus-Reid breaks us out of these paradigms: she is a destroyer of systematic worlds. Political liberation alone is not enough; feminism and relational thinking are not enough; here she adds queer and postcolonial theories, a Latin American social location, poststructuralist philosophy, and the deconstruction of the theology industry itself, all the while retaining the insights of political liberation, feminism, and relationality. If nothing else, she is *radical*.

As she takes on the religiously hegemonic context of Catholic Argentina, Althaus-Reid unsurprisingly emphasizes ecclesial deconstruction: she finds much historically, socially, ideologically, and theologically to deconstruct. After reading her critiques it would be understandable for many to declare that she has nothing positive to say about ecclesiology at all! Thus, few commentators have directly addressed what constructive

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[79] Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 229.

ecclesial comments she actually makes.[80] Nevertheless, one can find such clues when using the framing devices of kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia. This section unfolds both her criticisms and affirmations of ecclesiology, while the chapter's final section includes some of her most original conclusions that result in the utter subversion of traditional ecclesial marks.

The majority of Althaus-Reid's ecclesial analysis is directed at either the Roman Catholic Church or liberationist Basic Ecclesial Communities (referred to as BECs).[81] Latin American liberation ecclesiologies have emphasized base communities, which have been understood through a particular lens of being poor: the virtuous poor of rural villages rather than the sexually indecent urban poor of Buenos Aires.[82] For the BECs, what mattered was political and economic liberation, while other topics were distracting secondary concerns. While recognizing the amazing work they did in the 1970s and 80s, Althaus-Reid challenges this perspective, saying, "It is not true that poor women – if conscientised – only care about fighting for economic and political liberation."[83] The BECs soft-pedaled gender and sexuality issues when they could have challenged prevailing hierarchical models and the false dichotomy of being sexual versus being political.[84] Liberation theologians were able to affirm the village poor in a procession carrying "the Virgin Mary and demanding jobs," but they could not accept transvestite

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[80] One of the primary exceptions is by Robert Shore-Goss, "Dis/Grace-full Incarnation and the Dis/Grace-full Church: Marcella Althaus-Reid's Vision of Radical Inclusivity," in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, 1-16, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010).

[81] Her family was Methodist and she was part of a fundamentalist church before returning to a Methodist community and working with BECs. Néstor Míguez (informal group discussion, Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 11, 2013). She also participated in Quaker, Anglican, and Metropolitan Community Church groups while living in Scotland.

[82] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 64-66.

[83] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 129.

[84] Ibid., 132.

Christians carrying a transvestite Christ with "a Drag Queen Mary Magdalene kissing his wounds and singing songs of political criticism"—these were not included in the preferential option for the poor.[85] Some readers might find such imagery extreme or even offensive, but this is the beauty of Althaus-Reid's concreteness: it is in such moments that one finds her indecent ecclesiology.

Alistar Kee observes that like other postmodern critiques of various liberation theologies' ontological essentialisms, Althaus-Reid challenged Latin American liberation theology for problematically essentializing the poor as part of a modernist project of emancipation. This is one reason why the poor were declared to be asexual, because they needed to be a solid ontological unity in order to act collectively. As the urban poor experienced significant changes to their lived experience via globalization, the BECs' unity-based model and use of dependence theory proved ineffective.[86] As the experience of the poor diversified through globalized markets while simultaneously historical metanarratives were ending, base communities became impossible to sustain.[87]

These essentializing or homogenizing tendencies regularly happened not only within BECs but also in how such communities were interpreted by outside observers. When Western Christian leaders or theologians would visit, Althaus-Reid was regularly essentialized as a poor virtuous woman even though she was a university student working two jobs who also had her own sexual needs.[88] For a time when liberation theology was fashionable in the West, Europe saw base communities as a return to the primitive church

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[85] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 25.
[86] Alistar Kee, "Queering Ontologies: A Critique of Three Liberation Theologies," in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010), 139.
[87] Kee, "Queering Ontologies," 138.
[88] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 26.

ecclesiastical movement, together with the romantic construction of the native, poor, down-to-earth woman.[89] Westerners would visit for a short period and then take their new knowledge back with them for a new presentation or book. While Althaus-Reid never mentions Moltmann by name, he certainly falls under the critique of Western theologians who used BECs as theological fodder for their production of new systematic books for the theological market.

One of Althaus-Reid's key themes is indecency challenging decency, the latter being "a sexual, social, political, economic and theological system – that shapes our entire way of thinking and acting in relation to ourselves, each other, and the natural world," sometimes also called a heterosexual matrix.[90] Decency reflects a binary yet hierarchical form of thinking which she sometimes calls heteronormative. This predominates in an Argentinian culture of *machismo* infused with economic exploitation and is embodied in colonizing theological discourses of the Roman Catholic Church as well as the previously mentioned assumptions of the BECs. The excluded urban poor, sex workers, LGBT community, and transvestites have remained marginal in church life, and this has consequences for her ecclesiology. For Althaus-Reid, the transvestite Christ is crying outside the gates of the church with all those who have been excluded and pushed outside and may not even come back inside if invited.[91] As I read her, it is the end of the Church as we have known it, but the birth of indecent church. Since decency is about more than just sexuality, indecency is likewise about more than sexuality. In my

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[89] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 32.
[90] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Talking Dirty, Speaking Truth: Indecenting Theology," in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010), 255.
[91] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 116.

interpretation of her, "indecent" and "subversive" should be understood as *synonyms*. An indecent church is theologically, culturally, politically, and sexually subversive.

Althaus-Reid rejects the notion that any one symbol can act as a universal image of sexual and political indecency. Whenever one image is lifted up as catholic, it inevitably stands on the side of sexual and political oppression.[92] Instead, many sacred images are needed that are particular to the struggles of communities.[93] In fact, the alternative images found in these faith communities challenge the decency codes of the greater *machismo* society. During the 1976-1983 Argentinian dictatorship, men were beaten for not conforming to military dress or having long hair, and women were harassed for not wearing dresses or looking men in the eye.[94] Althaus-Reid celebrates the group called *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* as women acting indecently by gathering and demanding to know what became of their disappeared children during the military junta even as they also study the Bible together.[95] In this group there is the kerygma of study and naming the importance of knowing what happened to loved ones, the koinonia of mutual support, and the diakonia of challenging a regime that says that it is best to forget. Both Althaus-Reid and I consider this a primary example of a beautifully subversive ecclesiology. While base communities (or BECs) were worthwhile for a time, she approves of their displacement in favor of more popular movement constructions like

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[92] For example, the Virgin Mary only appears to ask for a new temple to be built and never appears to demand houses or a free hospital be built for the poor, or to condemn human rights abuses. See Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 60.

[93] There are other images people already turn to: some Brazilian transvestite Christian communities interpret the Virgin Mary as a divine drag queen; some groups invoke the name of *Santa Librada*, the transvestite Christ who assists people who have to cross legal boundaries for the sake of survival, while others focus on the Deceased Correa, who died on a journey with her infant but whose breasts continued to lactate so that the infant survived, who is also invoked for those taking journeys. See Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 79-85.

[94] Ibid., 105, 188.

[95] Ibid., 193. As of July 2013, they continue to meet in Buenos Aires's central plaza every Thursday at 3:30 p.m.

Las Madres: they "[set] aside reductionist projects" and focus on what helps real people more than what helps "some theological market."[96]

One of the ways the kerygma is expressed for Althaus-Reid is through popular Bible readings that focus on real life while maintaining the themes of "justice, peace and love/solidarity" as interpreted by the community's struggles. In these gatherings, "women remember and re-member their communities, by continuing the traditions of giving testimony and of assuming their responsibilities as witnesses of the tragedies and struggles of our continent."[97] Yet in the communities she rightly lifts up for exemplification, they proclaim not merely the challenges and injustices people face: they also include celebration and testimony to where the divine is encountered. Whether as a women's community in El Salvador, a "Widows' Group formed by Dolores or the Women's Group of Andrea in Usulatán, the reading of the Bible goes together with the reading of the *realidad* of a country at war, and the conviction that God wants God's people to live a life where human rights are respected."[98] In gatherings of worship, proclamation occurs through the collective work of the people, which involves fewer words in liturgy; instead it incorporates women's experiences like breast-feeding as well as opportunities for voluntary fasting.[99] Nowhere in Moltmann or Suchocki do we find such beautiful concreteness as liturgical breastfeeding!

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[96] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 35.
[97] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 106. It is indeed curious that even at a queer/liberation/postcolonial conference in Buenos Aires given in her memory in 2013, no presentation mentioned this book but instead focused almost exclusively on her more famous work, *Indecent Theology*.
[98] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 119.
[99] Ibid., 121.

For Althaus-Reid, an indecent ecclesiology means that church rituals should upend society's typical power relationships.[100] In particular, she envisions rituals that subvert dominant paradigms of power: "[O]ne day the Christian liturgy might be built around the symbolic exchange of priestly clothes amongst people as an act of redistribution of power and responsibility and that the Eucharist might involve children distributing the bread amongst people."[101] Additionally, "sacraments are more than enclosed encounters with God: they act as ways of understanding love, or even ways of having voices of protest symbolically heard" as a form of indecent proclamation.[102] Robert Shore-Goss notes that late in her life, Althaus-Reid found the Metropolitan Christian Church in Edinburgh's radically open table invitation personally meaningful as well as its priority of open commensality.[103]

Those who would deny her interest in ecclesiology should note that in her last public paper, at which point she was too ill to present in person, Althaus-Reid addresses ecclesiology explicitly. Rather than proclaiming a universal and eternal grace, she believes churches should affirm a dis/grace that avoids any images of a restored essence or identity.[104] Such a church of dis/grace must proclaim no original meanings or final closets, which results in doing redemption in reverse, i.e. "outside origins without firm final destinations."[105] This is rooted in what she calls a "Queer hermeneutics" of secrecy,

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[100] Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 127.
[101] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2003), 123.
[102] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 122.
[103] Shore-Goss, "Dis/Grace-full Incarnation and the Dis/Grace-full Church," 10-11.
[104] Marcella Althaus-Reid, "Hard Core Queer: The Church as Dis/grace" (paper presented at "Queering the Church" conference, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA, April 18-19, 2007), 3.
[105] Althaus-Reid, "Hard Core Queer," 4, 7.

which has no direct access to any transparent master narratives or totalizing teleologies and thus prevents essential beginnings or natures.[106]

Althaus-Reid's approach is to find the divine in concrete experience, especially in what mainstream society would consider sexually deviant experience. In effect, this is grounded in her epistemology that marginalized sexual stories are "the starting points for an incarnational queer theology."[107] For example, while most people think of Eucharist as a sacrament, she is perfectly willing to consider semen as a potentially equivalent means to commune with the divine.[108] Though she would find the term distasteful, I find this to be an instance of the radically "incarnational" quality of her thought. In a context where the urban poor, LGBT persons, sex workers, and transvestite Christians have been declared to be without value, Althaus-Reid provocatively focuses on what they can contribute as examples that critique the liberation church and Argentinian society. Unsurprisingly, when your voice has been persistently ignored or forcibly silenced, it is often the best strategy to focus on your distinct contributions.

Like the term "indecent," the term "queer" has a definite sexual lens to it, but it does not exclusively refer to sexuality. For example, Althaus-Reid affirms South American movements that "have come together as a result of many Queer alliances amongst people of different spiritualities, political ideologies and locations of race and class."[109] For her, it is critical that we "become witnesses and to participate in the act of giving testimony, of sharing our experiences of pain and joy," for doing so "makes the

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[106] Althaus-Reid, "Hard Core Queer," 2-3.
[107] Shore-Goss, "Dis/Grace-full Incarnation and the Dis/Grace-full Church," 8-9.
[108] Hugo Córdova Quero, informal conversation, Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 11, 2013. He is a Queer postcolonial theologian living in Argentina, and Althaus-Reid directed his dissertation until her death from cancer in 2009.
[109] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 148.

sharing of experiences (such as exclusion) not only translatable but also gives them the quality of salvific events."[110] In our proclamation, fellowship forms through "the process of sharing stories [whereby] we reach for the 'other' and we enrich the struggle for liberation by becoming witnesses of the suffering of the 'other.' Solidarity grows from these indecent encounters, for the 'other' is always marginal."[111]

This form of reading must be done as a koinonia-fellowship, for "individuals get crushed easily. The community's support and sustaining is crucial. The community carries the task of resurrection of crushed individuals all the time."[112] This fellowship of sexual difference provides a space to expose ideologies of naked power and decolonize bodies sexually, politically, and economically: this erotic desire of an orgiastic-koinonia points to a new ecclesiology.[113] Althaus-Reid believes that solidarity beyond the market is a key part of what being indecent means: "To claim the right to love and befriend people outside the metaphysics of the market, that is, outside the pattern of profit or advantages, may be more than abnormal. In the market, solidarity is an indecent value."[114] In practice, koinonia involves "walking alongside the poor on the same road, sharing the same life experiences, observing, judging, acting and celebrating together."[115] The path is held in common even as the companions themselves remain different.

This resonates unmistakably with the themes of Chapters 3 and 4 that emphasize the need to form a solidarity that included encountering the "other" as a network of differentiated solidarity and to agonistically work through conflict. Althaus-Reid models

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[110] Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology," in *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, ed. Ivan Petrella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 25.
[111] Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology," 25.
[112] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 130.
[113] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 168.
[114] Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology," 33.
[115] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 18.

one aspect of that approach through her discussion of sharing stories of life struggles within a faith community. Solidarity as traditionally understood in liberation theologies is no longer appropriate or helpful if it ignores women's and non-heterosexual people's experiences of sexual oppression.[116] Such patriarchal and heterosexist homo-solidarity must come to an end. Any koinonia and its indecent undressing (i.e. unmasking) of both Latin American sexual culture and the larger neo-liberal world order must incorporate a postcolonial understanding of complex identities, where the oppressions people experience are not always held in common but instead form a multiplicity.[117] Koinonia-living needs to move towards the ability to hear and "become witnesses in the story-sharing of multitudes."[118] In her thought as well as in mine, an indecent-subversive ecclesiology is always a multi-vocal practice.

When describing her indecent diakonia, Althaus-Reid's approach is so radical and concrete that I can only stand back in awe and let her speak for herself. By doing so, I hold up the next few paragraphs as what a really powerful pluralistic ecclesiology can do.

In subverting decent norms, both sexually and politically, Althaus-Reid defies the status quo along with the consequences of globalization. The resulting "model of the Christian church is a model of a church in permanent exile, as a protest against systems of injustice that dehumanizes God's creation."[119] Devastating in her critique, like a queer-prophet, she proclaims, "The ideologues of this world care very little about presbyteries and elders or popes and bishops per se . . . [for] what they care about is that economic

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[116] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 91.
[117] Ibid., 168-69.
[118] Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology," 26.
[119] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 28.

thought is not de-sacralized."[120] Yet this is precisely the work of marginal Christian communities, even as this means that they will not contribute in either finances or members to dominant institutional life or will be ignored. Indecent, subversive faith communities have a critical role to play because only "people whose bodies are living parables of transgression" will be able to challenge the binaries that both church and society have supported and ask the right questions against sexual decency and neo-liberal capitalism.[121] In the service of church life, "the margins of sexuality in theology are constitutive parts of . . . the disruption of real, dissident holy praxis in the church."[122]

According to Althaus-Reid, "issue-based theologies" did not recognize that confronting the heterosexist culture would help initiate "a wholly more transformative praxis of the church."[123] The church mimics the political-economic mode of production and its orientation to growth. By following its self-marginalization or *kenosis* of economic norms, church is not to be concerned about its preservation as an institution and thus transcends the current systems and logics in which it operates.[124] This includes ignoring the demands of the theological market: church is to be people-centered, thus breaking the mutual dependency of decent theology for a decent church in a decent culture.[125] In her materialist reading, "the church, as an institution, is doomed to extinction because institutions do not survive the ideological discourses which made them."[126]

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[120] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 111.
[121] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 179.
[122] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 161.
[123] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 111.
[124] Ibid., 111.
[125] Ibid., 112.
[126] Ibid., 112.

New popular movements beyond BECs are "a highly positive consequence of the socio/theological decentralization of praxis," for such decentralization defies "the protectionist ethos of church ecclesiology."[127] In effect, Althaus-Reid is pointing towards a kenotic self-emptying of church where it dissolves institutionally and is reborn as a social movement. However, a problem emerges here. Ecclesiology cannot become fully immanent within indecent struggles over the long-term: her own examples include a reserve of rethinking church practices, such as reading the Bible together and singing religious songs. Such practices become relevant only because there is an institutional ecclesial framework to which such popular movements are responding. While these movements counter-culturally use the tools that are part of their material context, new ways of organizing movement groups in relation to each other would need to emerge in light of a movement's success. Althaus-Reid does none of this institutional rebuilding even though I am convinced she does recognize it as a future necessity, and it is here that Suchocki's thought serves as a necessary corrective. I believe that new institutions need to emerge out of novel spiritual social movements when old ideological discourses have run their course if their gains are to endure.[128]

Althaus-Reid's ecclesiology partially follows the model of a Radical Reformation church, particularly in her notion of addressing society while remaining culturally marginal. One of the most famous radical reformers in the second half of the 20th Century was John Howard Yoder. Unlike typical criticisms made against the Radical Reformation, Yoder rejects the option of social withdrawal from society. Emphasizing

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[127] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 171.

[128] Ivan Petrella agrees that this is the trajectory Althaus-Reid sets out. See Ivan Petrella, "Liberation Theology after Marcella," in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010), 204.

critique and flexibility while minimizing conformity and patience, the church does not seek a "responsible involvement" but rather its "critical independence may include an occasional radical opposition" even if that results in them being excluded: they participate through critique.[129]

For Yoder, the church's commitment leads it to be separated from the world to the extent that it allows its witness "to be appropriately in mission to the world."[130] The church is to be a counter-cultural element, especially in questioning societal elites that identify Christian faith with their ideologies.[131] This parallels Althaus-Reid and points towards my second critique of her. She goes so far as to compare queer secrecy and epistemic knowing with sects, affirming the usefulness of queer theologies (and presumably ecclesiologies) using their own sectarian knowledge locations. She provocatively writes, "Hard Core Queer theologies need to continue working from their sectarian locations as cut off reflections."[132] The result appears that, at least for her, queer theologies can be relationally cut off from other epistemological locations. Here she fails to acknowledge indecent sexual practices as but one epistemological perspective for subversive incorporation.

Regarding Yoder, he fails in a number of ways as an indecent ecclesiology. Most obvious is the fact that in spite of having a postmodern sense of the particularity of the church, he overemphasizes the unity or purity of the community, in spite of rejecting the charge of purity.[133] More damningly, Yoder admits to a high degree of homogeneity

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[129] John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 11.
[130] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 85.
[131] Ibid., 85.
[132] Althaus-Reid, "Hard Core Queer," 6.
[133] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 96.

within the church vis-à-vis the world.[134] This comes in part through the desire to reach a final internal consensus, while Althaus-Reid would be more inclined to the conflictual yet still interdependent approach of Young and Honig. With his neo-orthodoxy shining through, I read Yoder as retaining a strong resonance with aspects of Karl Barth, particularly his emphasis on "the lordship of Christ."[135] Of course, his disparaging comments against "adult homosexuality" and his own personal sexual abuse of power would also fall under Althaus-Reid's withering critique.[136] If Althaus-Reid's ecclesiology has a resemblance to the Radical Reformation, it is quite an indecent relationship!

What Althaus-Reid's project reveals is that the ecclesiologies of Moltmann and Suchocki, along with so many other systematic thinkers, are not queer enough, neither sexually nor subversively. In effect, they are both theologically decent projects, no matter how radical their content. Moltmann's very conception for his ecclesiology as missional serves as a condemnation of its decency. Moltmann takes a missionary position on ecclesiology, but he needs to queer it up! Suchocki is considered by many to be the last great systematic process theologian, and it shows in her work. Nevertheless, I have not sought to uncritically side with Althaus-Reid over and against Moltmann and Suchocki, and the final section on ecclesial marks will attempt to show the interrelationship of their thought.

Ecclesial Marks as Contrasts

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 CE established the four primary marks of the church, which orthodox theology has since attempted to follow. As we saw

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[134] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 162.
[135] Ibid., 11.
[136] Ibid., 101. In his own abuse of power, Yoder reveals that all theology is indeed sexual, though not necessarily liberative or healthy, especially when closeted and expressing power differentials.

previously, Moltmann and Suchocki maintain this continuity with the tradition, and this continues with their discussions on ecclesial marks. Within the political-missional and process-relational paradigms they work from, respectively, they endeavor to give these marks the most positive interpretations possible. Althaus-Reid, on the other hand, explodes this paradigm. As I review both tendencies and how these positions are argued, I intend to show that there is space for understanding ecclesial marks beyond these binary options and into a contrast.

For Moltmann, while there may be marks in addition to the core four, such as Word and sacrament, ultimately the church is essentially one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.[137] These are not merely distinguishing but also creedal marks, for these four attributes come in the linking of Christ, Spirit, and the coming kingdom. Moltmann makes the strong claim that they "become the inalienable signs of the true church."[138] While he upholds these four orthodox markers, he attempts to reinterpret them in such a way as they might further his political ecclesiology as a "unity in freedom," a "holiness in poverty," a catholicity in "its partisan support for the oppressed," and an apostolicity in "bear[ing] the sign of the cross."[139]

Like the core of Moltmann's systematic ecclesiology, these marks exist from both the messianic mission of Christ as well as the Spirit's eschatological gift.[140] Each is grounded in Christ: church unity comes from Christ's uniting activity, church holiness comes from Christ's sanctifying activity, church catholicity comes from Christ's universal lordship, and church apostolicity comes from the mission of Christ and the

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[137] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 340.
[138] Ibid., 338.
[139] Ibid., 341.
[140] Ibid., 339.

Spirit.[141] Likewise, these four marks are predicates of the subject of the coming kingdom.[142] Statements about the church's unity, holiness, and catholicity are not empirical judgments but are what the church will be when justified like a person is when she is justified by faith.[143] They must point towards the kingdom and how the church is to live out its calling. Each of the marks overcomes the church's present failings: its division, sin, and particularity.[144] In this way, the four traditional marks remain normative for him.

For Moltmann, the church is one in freedom. Emphasizing the diversity of gifts within the church, Moltmann attempts to hold together the church's unity through its diversity, where difference and particularity are constitutive elements of it.[145] Because Christ is fundamentally one and Lord of all, division in the church means that Christ is divided.[146] The church's unity is shaped by the trinitarian unity, and since the Trinity is not a hierarchical relationship, the church's unity is not a monarchical one, either.[147] The church is not trying to will itself into becoming one; rather, it is one because its unity originates in God and comes through Christ, though it will not be fully expressed until the arrival of the kingdom.[148] The church's common origin in Christ provides the unity in its diversity "and moves towards the fellowship of the Spirit."[149] Moltmann goes on to make a claim quite compatible with process thought, saying, "It is therefore a creative unity, in which every created being is intended to arrive at itself and to develop its own unique

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[141] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 338.
[142] Ibid., 339.
[143] Ibid., 22.
[144] Ibid., 25.
[145] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 184.
[146] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 343.
[147] Kim, *Church of Hope*, 54.
[148] Ibid., 55-64.
[149] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 233.

character, being through that very fact related to other created beings. The creative Spirit loves originals, not imitations."[150] This creative relationality is quite similar to Whitehead's idea where the many become one and are increased by one.[151] However, the rhetoric of unity remains supreme. In the midst of conflict, the church is to be united in Christ and the Spirit, and thus is united and in fellowship with the oppressed. In accepting the conflicts that will arise from such a unity, Moltmann knows that there will be tension between a unity of fellowship and a unity of service, maintaining that this tension must be held together "for unity in freedom, and freedom in unity."[152]

The church is holy for Moltmann to the extent that it acknowledges its sin and is sanctified "for the service of the kingdom of God."[153] Jesus Christ, crucified and exalted, is the poor one and so the church's fellowship with the poor reveals its holiness.[154] Moltmann substantiates this conviction via biblical sources that "the hidden presence of the Coming One [is] in the poor."[155] By taking up its cross in suffering and persecuted resistance, the church reflects the holy poverty of Christ, and is sanctified by participating in his poverty.[156] In so doing, holy Christian poverty "is a protest against poverty" and reflects "the fellowship of the messianic mission and the hope for the kingdom."[157] Essentially, this holiness is for the world's coming future where poverty is overcome.

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[150] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 233.
[151] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 21.
[152] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 345-47.
[153] Ibid., 354.
[154] Müller-Fahrenholz, "Fellowship of the Spirit of God," 83.
[155] Ibid., 89.
[156] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 355.
[157] Ibid., 356.

The church is catholic insofar as its "catholicity is a correlative term to its unity."[158] Moltmann affirms that the universal church enfolds every distinct, particular church.[159] While the present church is only partially catholic, in the eschatological kingdom of God, it will be fully universal. Because the lordship of Christ is universal, the church must be universal. While the church is currently particular in its location and concerns, this reflects a lack of wholeness. Normatively, it should be related to the whole and be a universal witness to the world's divisions, but for now "it is not *yet* itself the summing-up and unification of the universe [emphasis added]."[160] The *way* the church is catholic, however, is in its partisan support of the poor and oppressed, and it is their liberation that also offers salvation for the oppressor. This means that his universalism is not neutral in conflict situations but rather takes the side of the oppressed just as "Jesus turned to the sinners, tax-collectors and lepers in order to save the Pharisees and the healthy."[161] Moltmann adds, "If God will only be 'all in all' when the rule of Christ is consummated in the rule of God, then the kingdom of glory can only be called catholic in the fullest sense at that point."[162] A major problem arises here, for his claim of the church's eschatological universality is prone to being triumphalistic.[163] Most egregiously, while Moltmann recognizes that worldwide trade and renewed missionary zeal went hand-in-hand in the 18th and 19th centuries, his abstractions ignore the link between missional work and colonialism.[164]

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[158] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 348.
[159] Kim, *Church of Hope*, 79.
[160] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 349.
[161] Ibid., 352.
[162] Ibid., 350.
[163] Müller-Fahrenholz, "Fellowship of the Spirit of God," 102.
[164] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 9.

The church is apostolic in a way that is different from the other three marks in Moltmann's thought. While the other three marks are to be fulfilled in the eschaton and "describe the one, all-embracing and holy kingdom of God,"[165] the church's apostolicity is the way that it continues the mission of Christ until the eschaton is reached. At that point, the church will no longer need to be apostolic. Like Jesus, the church embodies the dialectic of crucifixion and resurrection.[166] Kim notes that "the continuity of the content of the proclamation" is what makes for apostolicity, including the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.[167] While there is continuity, apostolicity is not merely a mark of legitimation but also of commission in the "proclamation of the gospel of the risen Christ,"[168] which continues "by means of word, deed and fellowship . . . to the ends of the earth and to the end of time."[169] Nevertheless, apostolic identity does not come through mere repetition of the past. As the church is oriented towards the future, it is geared towards novelty, i.e. "to what is new and surprising."[170] As it lives out this apostolic calling for freedom, fellowship and mission, the church will necessarily suffer, which is lamentably Moltmann's fullest meaning of apostolicity.

There has been some debate about whether Moltmann's understanding of apostolic suffering is essential or simply unavoidably since there will inevitably be resistance against the mission it lives out.[171] As we saw earlier with regards to diakonia and suffering, Moltmann feels the need to push beyond what is warranted. Since the risen

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[165] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 358.
[166] Jones, *Church Is Flat*, 132.
[167] Kim, *Church of Hope*, 84.
[168] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 359.
[169] Ibid., 360.
[170] Ibid., 360.
[171] For example, Müller-Fahrenholz suggests that apostolicity comes through witnessing to the kingdom and resisting principalities and powers, which results in the cross and consequent suffering. See Müller-Fahrenholz, "Fellowship of the Spirit of God," 83.

and crucified Christ go together, and the church witnesses to both, he concludes that the church's service is expressed "as active suffering and as suffering activity."[172] He digs his hole deeper still, writing, "Fundamentally only the suffering God can help, for only he loves in a fully selfless way."[173] If suffering is necessary for God in some ultimate way, it is necessary for the church that remembers and anticipates God's work. He does recognize that suffering is inescapable to the extent that the "powers of unfreedom" resist its mission."[174] As mentioned before, if he stopped there, Moltmann would have made an apt descriptive comment, but he erroneously pushes suffering into the *prescriptive* mark of apostolicity by subsuming particular instances of suffering into his universal vision of God.

While Marjorie Suchocki uses different terminology from Moltmann, she is still beholden to the same orthodox framework of ecclesial marks. As I am with Moltmann, I am critical of her need to assume too much continuity with the tradition of orthodox ecclesiologies. Using the categories of apostolic, one, holy, and catholic, she offers a positive process theological interpretation on these seemingly essential marks. That said, her insightful use of a process metaphysic provides a number of improvements to Moltmann's conclusions.

For Suchocki, apostolicity has both a constant and relative pole. The constant side is proclaiming "the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ," which she connects with God's call for "communities of love and justice."[175] The relative side means that the way this proclamation happens must not be set in stone or become a prescription. Churches

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[172] Müller-Fahrenholz, "Fellowship of the Spirit of God,", 361.
[173] Moltmann, "Diaconal Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God," 28.
[174] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 361.
[175] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 139.

must be willing to let go of past articulations in order to be faithful to their call.[176] Indeed, the best way to be faithful to the past is through a radical openness to the future. Thus, both "constancy and openness form the dynamism whereby the apostolic church witnesses to the world."[177] Suchocki believes that the church is constantly called towards the future, "and even if this future is actualized, God will transcend it once again with yet another call to anticipate God's reign in new ways."[178] Thus, like Moltmann's construction, the church is perpetually novel. One key improvement over him is that for Suchocki, apostolicity does not end because the kingdom of God is not a stable destination. The church lives perpetually between the times of the reign of God as embodied in Jesus Christ but also as expressed in God's everlasting harmony from the future.[179] We should gladly affirm that suffering no longer becomes an essential component of apostolicity in her model.

The church is one not from the past but from the church's "shared future."[180] The past's diversity is the context for the church's becoming, but there is also a togetherness in relationship for future possibilities for well being. Looking to the past alone will not show the church's unity. The members of the church have to discern how God is calling them to live faithfully for the future together.[181] Therefore, Suchocki holds together apostolicity and unity as interrelated elements, the former coming from the past and the latter from the future. It is in this "moving rhythm between the past and the future,

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[176] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 141.
[177] Ibid., 141.
[178] Ibid., 191.
[179] Ibid., 189.
[180] Ibid., 144.
[181] Ibid., 145.

wherein the church in the present is ever formed anew."[182] Here she makes clear how past facts are the inescapable ground for the church's activity.

The present instantiation of faithful response to past context and future possibilities becomes Suchocki's third term: holiness.[183] "If apostolicity relates to the church's continuity with the past, and unity relates to the church's creation from the future," invokes Suchocki, "then holiness is the effect of apostolicity and unity held together in the present."[184] To be a holy community is to live "from its identity in Christ."[185] She uses the process of the internalization of the church in God's consequent nature and its subsequent integration within God's primordial nature as the living Christ's offering of initial aims as another way to defend the claim that the church is essentially holy. Holiness is not an either-or proposition: to the extent that initial aims are responded to more or less, the church is more or less holy. However, since God offers initial aims that are relative to the circumstances one finds oneself in, then likewise holiness must also be relative to one's context. Because of this quality, holiness becomes "a basis for the diversity and ecumenicity of the church."[186]

John Cobb's book *Spiritual Bankruptcy* functions as a critical interlocutor with Suchocki's ecclesiological construction on holiness. Cobb suggests that the church should just as much be about the work of secularizing itself (but *not* making itself secularist) in contrast to her emphasis on the church as holy. He goes so far as to say that "participation in the tradition of secularizing the Way is the most faithful form of Christianity today."[187]

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[182] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 145.
[183] Ibid., 146.
[184] Ibid., 148.
[185] Ibid., 148.
[186] Ibid., 149-50.
[187] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Spiritual Bankruptcy: A Prophetic Call to Action* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 12. Later, Cobb writes, "To secularize a tradition is to bring it effectively to bear on the real problems of

By secularizing, he means that the focus of Christian faithfulness should be oriented primarily towards this world and its problems: it is in fact the utility of mystical experience.[188] While this does not mean that churches should ignore things like the otherworldly or afterlife, these become subordinate concerns vis-à-vis the world. Elsewhere, Cobb shares the Moltmannian notion that the church is to be an anticipatory sign of the kingdom, what he elsewhere calls the "commonwealth of God."[189] However, he also notes that "there is . . . a lack of a shared sense of the primary importance of that to which the church witnesses. As long as this sense is lacking, the church cannot convincingly call for primary commitment or loyalty. It must inevitably settle for third, fourth, fifth, or sixth place in the priority system of most of its members."[190] A secular church is oriented to the creative transformation and salvation of this world, which calls for one's primary loyalty. I would add that initial aims may be actualized, more or less, but they always occur with regards to *this* world, so they should just as readily be called secular as Suchocki calls them holy.

Suchocki's fourth and final mark of the church, catholicity or universality, is rooted in her understanding of holiness. In light of its future unity, the holiness of the church "must be expressed through diverse actualizations of holiness."[191] The catholicity of the church is not through its uniformity but through the diversity of its apostolicity. Catholicity or universality means that any culture can express Christian faith, even those

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human beings and society in a healing and creative way." In effect, the otherworldly or afterlife are not dismissed but they become subordinated concerns.

[188] Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, viii.

[189] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Commonwealth and Empire," in *The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God: A Political, Economic, Religious Statement*, David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb Jr., Richard A Falk, and Catherine Keller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 144.

[190] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do about It* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 8.

[191] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 150.

that are beyond its original Palestinian and later European contexts.[192] Because the church exists in many cultures even as it seeks to transform those cultures in light of the reign of God, a relativization process takes place. No single instantiation of church can claim to be the church universal, because it is only appropriate to a particular context. In effect, the very fact that the church exists in multiple cultures relativizes every cultural instantiation of the church.[193] Universal validity is for the gospel itself, rather than for the particular culture's response to the gospel. Treating the church as the definitive revelation otherwise results in its idolatrization.[194]

One cannot help but be convinced that the sirens of orthodoxy are luring Suchocki to their rocky, dogmatic shores. She desires to show how process theology can be just as orthodox and Christian as other theologies with the added bonus of being intellectually compelling. Insofar as she does so, she makes a conserving move that unintentionally or not lends credence to the legitimating frame of the Christian tradition, which was formulated under the conditions of Empire. If one wants to maintain the orthodox formulations of one, catholic, apostolic, and holy church, Suchocki creatively interprets them through the lens of the process of becoming: the perspectival many become one and are increased by one through the inverted polar relations of God and World. However, she does not convince me why these should be the discursive boundaries for an ecclesiological construction. Is it possible that the church should instead be considered many, secular, particular, and novel?

The traditional four marks, as expressed by Moltmann and Suchocki, reflect heterosexist ideology. As Althaus-Reid notes, "[H]eterosexuality is, after all, a way of

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[192] Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 164.
[193] Ibid., 165.
[194] Ibid., 167.

thinking."[195] By this she means that it functions as a logical and hierarchical binary, where one side of a dualism functions as the norm for the other side. In this way, heterosexual thinking is not just about sex (though it is never not sexual), but is an ideology. The marks of the church fall under this ideology, for the many are all-too-easily swallowed by the one. The particular expressions are subsumed by a universal frame. The secular is understood in terms of the holy, and the novel is understood in terms of the apostolic. Althaus-Reid manages to queer this relationship. By making ecclesial marks indecent, she converts them into a non-hierarchical pattern of difference over identity. Queer theologians recommend that we should not disregard but turn upside down certain church traditions.[196] What happens when this is done with the four creedal marks of the church? Althaus-Reid emphasizes church as Queer (particular), materialist and political (secular), avoiding one answer, approach, or formulation (many), and not seeking reform but living out new formulations (novel).

We can see Althaus-Reid holding these indecent marks together when she claims that Indecent theology (or church) seeks "diversity, possibility and the sense of irreducibility which comes from the experiences of people at the margins and the margins of theology itself."[197] Diversity is manyness, possibility is novelty, and irreducibility is particularity, and theology being produced in church communities for and by real people at the margins of life is secular. She does not systematically name these four indecent marks as such, for she uses a deconstructive method. Nevertheless, I see them there, barely hidden below the surface of her writing. For example, faith communities need "different practices of dialoguing and reflecting in communities. That may also involve

[195] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 63.
[196] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 8.
[197] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 143.

the theological dialogue of different communities reflecting plurality more than homogeneity."[198] Just as theology and capitalism have problems with plurality,[199] the same should be said for orthodox ecclesiologies that emerge out of historic patterns of economic domination.

Indecent church will be *novel* more than apostolic, for while many people tried to reform patriarchal structures, others have "created new ideas, organizations and institutions. Meanwhile, no matter how many Basic Christian Communities have been created and dismantled in recent years, this has only been cosmetic surgery, a face-lifting operation in the life of the church."[200] BECs erred in trying to return to some original meaning to be re-enacted rather than being open to the possibility of the unknown breaking into their old narratives.[201] Instead of affirming rupture and creativity in forming new ecclesiologies, even the militant Latin American church clings to hegemonic theological categories, or as Althaus-Reid quips: "We are still putting new patches on old wineskins."[202] To the extent that the ecclesial ideological structure is sinful, and it is clear that this is the case for her, conversion fundamentally means turning one's back on that system.[203] Both Moltmann and Suchocki incorporate the novel, but Althaus-Reid gives it pride of place. It is not so much about finding a place of inclusion for women and sexual minorities within the existing institutional structures of the church than about radical transformation of what church means.[204]

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[198] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 17.
[199] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 177.
[200] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 74.
[201] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 24.
[202] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 74.
[203] Ibid., 3.
[204] Ibid., 97.

Unlike Moltmann who says that radical discipleship groups and mainstream church need each other,[205] Althaus-Reid is indifferent to the survival of mainstream decent religious formulations. In this way, church is about being *many* more than it is about being one. Provocatively, she is unwilling to ground her ecclesiology or its unity in Jesus Christ, yet without discounting him. Moltmann says that "it is not faith that makes Jesus the Christ; it is Jesus as the Christ who creates faith."[206] Althaus-Reid, on the other hand, believes that women of past, present and future and their struggles and defeats give meaning to Christ, and in fact make Jesus into the Christ.[207] Even "the consciousness of Jesus was subject to historical limitations," such as him not critiquing the cultural assumption about the uncleanliness of women's menstrual flow.[208] The difference between Althaus-Reid and Moltmann here is that while he wants to go beyond the historical Jesus by looking to the future, she is willing to subvert the perfection of Jesus, which prevents him from being a foundation in the first place for church unity.

Third, church is *secular*, for Althaus-Reid emphasizes the material, worldly, sexual bodies that are the starting point for indecent ecclesial living. It is about their struggles, their marginality, their exclusion and domination that her queer theology seeks to address. While she does retain a space for holiness, it is a Queer holiness that is the concrete starting point for a community.[209] The sacred is revealed in the secular, as "a Queer path of disruption made by curious amatory practices of adding people to

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[205] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 99, 326.
[206] Ibid., 197.
[207] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 56.
[208] Ibid., 6.
[209] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 4.

communities of solidarity and resistance."[210] One can find the sacred, the holy, but it is *through* the secular struggle.

Fourth, church is *particular* as it uses a particular rather than universal set of epistemological experiences for its construction, as we saw in the previous section. It does not attempt to speak in a universal language nor to everyone. Althaus-Reid affirms that what we need is a "feminist epistemology, non-dualistic, non-hierarchical and relational."[211] At the same time, critiquing and leaving the church's sexual project as it is currently configured is a calling not just for LGBT or transvestite persons but for heterosexual persons as well.[212] While her project is particular, it is not isolationist. Her queer, particular church is constituted by "Queer dissidents in search of paths of holiness though social practices of justice in sexual, religious and political areas of their lives."[213] In this way, she points towards the interrelationship of orthodox and subversive marks, which will conclude this chapter.

By incorporating Althaus-Reid's critique, the paradigm of the traditional four marks becomes neither normative nor adequate. Moltmann and Suchocki try to negotiate a way for the terms to be interrelated, but the results are disappointing. One side of the ledger (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) always dominates the other side (many, secular, particular, and novel) regardless of how generously they interpret the terms. The only realistic justification is out of fidelity to historic dogma. For them, the orthodox terms are ultimately not up for debate but only how they will be interpreted. While one rationale may be fealty to ecumenical partnerships with confessional and creedal

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[210] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 149.
[211] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 82.
[212] Ibid., 100.
[213] Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 165.

traditions in order to promote mutual recognition as true church, this exhibits a circular logic. One becomes forced to affirm marks such as unity because the many (and supposedly divided) churches demand a unity. However, by inverting orthodoxy's logic through Althaus-Reid's concerns, we reveal that we can make a reasonable case for the very opposite of the traditional ecclesial marks. But where does that leave us? I suggest we understand them in terms of a dipolar continuity of mutually contrasting terms.

We have seen in Chapter 2 how dipolarity works within an occasion as well as between the divine and the world, and in Chapter 3, we saw Keller's four dyads concerning the human as one/many, private/public, body/soul, here/now. However, can this dipolar structure express the character of churching in terms of marks? One could be tempted to misread the relationship of the traditional and subversive marks in a number of ways. One could choose one set as normative over and against the other as does the orthodox tradition. Second, one could add them together so that there would be eight marks and we need both sets. Third, one could affirm a total relativism where we have eight marks and you choose your favorites among them. However, none of these options would make the marks anything more than a plural list of self-enclosed entities and thus miss the interrelationship between them. The marks do not exist in a static pattern, but in a relationship that is itself a process that issues forth in novelty. Following Whitehead, what was previously an opposition can become a more intense contrast.[214]

First, churching is both many and one: many people come together into one network, relating to one another, but that very unity is then offered back to the many

[214] John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 99-100. Concerning creative transformation, Cobb and Griffin write, "Growth is not achieved by merely adding together elements in the given world in different combinations. It requires the transformation of those elements through the introduction of novelty. It alters their nature and meaning without suppressing or destroying them."

without becoming a rigid relationship. In any given moment in the activity of churching, the physical pole feels the many which condition and invite its becoming, while the mental pole feels the one real potential it can become. It is neither simply one diverse group nor many individual ones, for the one and the many become a multiplicity, a multitude of relating together in differentiated solidarity, never as an enclosed unity, but as an open-ended many-one that is offered to the novel many.

Second, churching is both holy and secular: holy in reflecting the divine aims for itself and the world, and responding to the divine, but secular in that the value produced in its life and work is always to, for, and with the world. It turns initial aims into indeterminate aims, which are both holy and secular: gifts of creativity from the divine, but made determinate by the creative decisions of those entities for the intensification of value.

Third, churching is both universal and particular: it is universal in terms of its unavoidable interrelatedness with other churching moments and activities of practicing the way of Jesus, but it is particular in that this interrelatedness is felt in a specific way and from a specific perspective. Every particular location *universally* acts this way, but in so doing, it does this as a pure *singularity* of decision.

Fourth, churching is both apostolic and novel: apostolic in that it feels past churching practices not merely as a constraint but as potential patterns to faithfully actualize again, but novel in that it is directed towards the not-yet horizon of how its world can maximize the potential for intensity and harmony in creative non-actualized forms. Churching is thus most faithfully apostolic when it is most appropriately novel for its relevant world.

One—many, holy—secular, universal—particular, apostolic—novel: each side of each pair is reinterpreted through the other without becoming the other as they interact as contrasts and instances of creative becoming. And these acts are themselves instances of the divine presence in the world, the divine matrix of intercommunication and creativity, not the face, but the backside of the divine within the world, as experienced by Moses!

It has been too easy for churches to claim only one side of this polarity. The traditional focus has been on the left side of the poles: one—many, holy—secular, catholic—particular, and apostolic—novel. At its best, the right side of the ledger has been included but only insofar as it is subsumed by the left side.[215] This logic still falls until the power of the One. Of the three major ecclesiologies we have explored in this chapter, and unlike the vast majority of ecclesiologies, only Althaus-Reid significantly breaks this mold. Because her approach is so striking in its nonconformity, its *indecency*, to many eyes it may appear that she has not constructed an ecclesiology at all. Or one might be inclined to conclude that she has constructed an anti-ecclesiology. But this is true only if one takes as normative the traditional creedal marks of the church. As we have seen, Althaus-Reid dwells much more positively on the right side of the ledger: many, secular, particular, and novel.

While I consider the ecclesial marks as best understood as a dipolar contrast, from a rhetorical perspective it is appropriate in many instances to emphasize the subversive

[215] This is particularly true with other process ecclesiologies. To the extent that they discuss ecclesial marks, they always emphasize the marks of one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. See Clark M. Williamson, "Companions on the Way: The Church," in *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 256-59, and those process ecclesiologies reviewed in Chapter 1. In contrast, I say that churching is holy to the extent that it seeks to discern initial aims, but these are always directed for and in relation to itself, others, and the world; therefore it is just as true to say it is secular!

side of the polarity. This is because it is the side that has been underserved and interpreted historically in a secondary relationship of marginality. Church is both one and many, in their interrelationship, but simply saying this does not break the mindset that cannot help but think of *The Church*, with its many parts. In this way, rhetorically using the subversive side of the contrast can help people think about church anew in such a way that the traditional marks do not become the unspoken mental norms. If church is really particular, this rhetorical subversion is a legitimate calling for radical churches to undertake. The rhetorical emphasis on particularity motivates my removal of the definitive clause "the" before "church" within my project. In its place, one can more appropriately say "a church," "churches," the condition of being "church," or my favorite, the process of "churching." Church is best understood as one-many, holy-secular, catholic-particular, and apostolic-novel, held together in an intense creative contrast.

While these dipolar marks describe what church *is*, the final chapter will describe what churching *does* by reiterating Chapters 2 through 4 and offering more specificity to their broad claims. This follows the New Testament description of church as kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia, all of which were present in Moltmann, Suchocki, and Althaus-Reid. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, a counter-imperial process ecclesiology is more interested in exploring the practice of churching than in what the nature of the church *is*. In this way, ecclesiology and missiology become non-different, inextricably woven together in a contrast of mutually enriched perspectives. Churching should help us more faithfully and creatively follow the way of Jesus for our hurting world. At its best, that is what church has always sought to do.

CHAPTER 6

Living Out a Counter-imperial Ecclesiology

> It is not a harmless churchy balance of love and justice that we need, but an *ekklesia* (community) of just love, an eros that readies us for deadly dangers and for delightful surprises.
>
> —Catherine Keller, *God and Power*

Weaving the Strands

In the course of this dissertation, our journey has been through many areas: the problem of American ecclesial communities and their larger planetary context, the insights of process thought in reformulating a theory of value in contrast to neo-liberal economic value, rethinking human interrelationships and mutual interest, the importance of encounter for dismantling privilege and fostering transformation, alternatives to idolatrous political liberalism in the United States, and ecclesiologies of mission and indecency. These have been read through the traditional Christian themes of kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia, but why should a radical process ecclesiology attempt to demonstrate this relationship? Whitehead offers one important justification: practically speaking, to the extent that one can refer to tradition with integrity, the likelihood of effectiveness increases.[1] We cannot jettison the material context, the many, the apostolic tradition of churching in our effort to construct the novel integrating practices we are seeking. Without reference to the past, it becomes much more difficult for people to positively prehend the potentials being offered to them. Even more critically, I cannot help but call upon a Christian framework: it is my context and I demand from it compelling answers to the questions I have been raising. In doing so, I have been

[1] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 171. He writes, "But it is a question for discussion why the more radical schools should not cut entirely free from any appeal to the past, and concentrate entirely upon the contemporary world and contemporary examples. The summary answer is that in so far as such an appeal to tradition can be made with complete honesty, without any shadow of evasion, there is an enormous gain in popular effectiveness."

reworking the tradition as a way to increase the likelihood that others will want to participate in this project.

The kerygma is expressed in Chapter 2: all have value for themselves, for others, and for the world through a process of cumulative interpenetration, and thus we are called to affirm the difference of others. Koinonia is practicing differentiated solidarity in light of our mutual interest from Chapter 3; it is also forming indecent intentional communities through Marcella Althaus-Reid while still being open to larger institutional structures using Iris Marion Young's defense of representation in Chapter 4 and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki's analysis in Chapter 5. Diakonia is resisting the Empire of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, opposing oppression and domination via Young, seeking liberation and doing mission á la Jürgen Moltmann, and expanding Amartya Sen's capabilities for quality of life in the face of idols of sacrifice and neo-liberal globalization. This chapter will weave together these tasks into a novel contrast by summarizing elements of what has come before while also expanding its analysis, making concrete recommendations for enactment, and connecting its conclusions with other thinkers who make similar moves even as it acknowledges differences of emphasis. While my position is not utterly unique, what has been unique is the *way* that I have constructed this alternative.

A close articulation to my own project comes in the latter half of Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan's *Occupy Religion: A Theology of the Multitude*. Rieger and Kwok believe the core of their theology of the multitude comes from experiences of otherness and (horizontal) transcendence, whether these are through "religious" experiences or not, and from avoiding their suppression into "a transcendence that backs up the status quo."[2] Like

[2] Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 75.

Rieger and Kwok, I affirm an "open invitation to all members of the body of Christ to participate in ministry, instead of limiting ministry to the clergy."[3] Here, priesthood is a function or role within the community rather than a special calling. Buildings are less needed, for in an ecclesiology of the multitude, one aptly challenges the division of sacred and secular space and time, for "sacred space is not bound by a place or dwelling."[4]

Similar to my differentiated solidarity, their deep solidarity at its best is a mark of the church's faithfulness to participating in what the divine is doing in the world.[5] Again, Rieger and Kwok describe this type of solidarity by rethinking what it means to "follow Jesus" or practice "discipleship": rather than "refer[ring] to involvement in service projects; rather, these terms refer to joining in solidarity with the least of these and acknowledging and reinforcing their agency. In short, discipleship means becoming a productive agent in relationship with other productive agents."[6] Thus, the spiritual practice of encounter should mean that "practioners" affirm the presence of those the dominant society considers untouchables. It is not merely a toleration of someone's presence but rather an embracing of people's difference. Reflecting on those differences together and on how they have been constructed is a spiritual practice to transform oneself and how one relates to others. Bernard Lee helpfully describes this form of discipleship as an apprenticeship.[7]

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[3] Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 124.
[4] Ibid., 117.
[5] Rieger and Kwok call this "theopraxis." Ibid., 86.
[6] Ibid., 78.
[7] Bernard Lee, "Reconstructing Our American Story: Intentional Christian Communities." *Chicago Studies* 26, no. 1 (April 1987): 17.

As Rieger and Kwok aptly note, privileges are often doled out so that those receiving them will continue to follow the status quo. However, those with privileges can use them to undermine the ongoing distribution of privileges. For example, "instead of using their privileges to create power differentials, members of the middle class can use their knowledge, expertise, and connections to strengthen [a justice] movement."[8] This functions as a long-term divestment of privilege. Prayer helps us prepare to be open to this self-divestment and process these experiences of encounter, enabling us to celebrate these connections, and urging people to claim their self-respect when objectified by others. When we reflect together on our shared stories, and listen deeply to each other in ways that seek to feel another's feelings, we can become creatively *different* from what was otherwise not possible.

My construction maintains a friendly yet critical distance to the emerging church movement (ECM). Like the ECM, it challenges the use of traditional religious space and time. It seeks active participation among worship attendants, such as with the use of prayer stations. It is more decentralized than pastor-driven churches and is open to forms of postmodern philosophy. It directs itself to younger persons and holds a place for kenotic thinking. However, Rieger and Kwok express a major critique concerning the ECM: though there are many good things happening, as a whole it "lacks a focus on issues of class and fails to see postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism," i.e. it misses its privileged place in globalizing empire.[9] Catherine Keller likewise furthers an implicit critique of this approach of many emergent communities when she says, "It is not (as some postmodern theisms imply) that Christianity can stand here at its ancient

[8] Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 70.
[9] Ibid., 123.

gate, innocent of the aggressions of the West, ready to receive refugees from secular modernity."[10] I am not convinced that many in the ECM are prepared to take seriously the spiritual practice of divesting from their privilege, prioritize encountering others, or put world-loyalty ahead of church renewal efforts.

Like myself, Catherine Keller recognizes the limitations to resistance as an end in itself. She says, "We have a chance not just to resist the garish monocultures of the newest empire, but to stir alternative desires. Some who resist nobly, however, do not relay the vibrancy. Let us honor but not emulate them. For without the message of the rhythmic spirit, without the drumbeat and the tides, the good tidings run dry."[11] Thus, through my encounter with her, I believe the key is to offer a kerygma of alternative desires that expresses the differentiation of values for themselves, each other, and the world. As Whitehead and other process thinkers have indicated, this expresses the three-fold character of the universe.[12] Creatively aiming for transformative desires, and seeking the maximization of the potential for the novel becoming of value-entities, is the ground through which resistance occurs. Its vibrancy is in the power of desires for novel becoming rather than the desire of acquisitive Empire. As has been repeatedly noted, all entities are internally complex, including humans. One must not conclude that setting one's will against Empire as analyzed in Chapter 4 will be enough:

> In Christian circles in the United States in particular, resistance against Empire is often seen as a conscious rejection that requires personal commitment, resolve, and a strong will. More subtle thinkers point out that resolve is not enough and that we need to form habits, which come from inhabiting particular traditions.[13]

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[10] Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 230.
[11] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 231.
[12] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 48.
[13] Néstor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key*, Reclaiming Liberation Theology (London: SCM Press, 2009), 137.

There must be no intellectual dualism of pure church and demonic Empire, for Empire is in us; it is our condition.

It is dangerous to define oneself against Empire, for it risks creating a new dualism or essentialized binary. As Keller wisely states, "It is tempting to take up a righteous apocalyptic stance of anti-imperialism. However, within its Northern Hemisphere context at least, the church will do better with counter-imperialism, along with an honest dose of Niebuhrian irony, for Christianity long ago lost its innocence."[14] While resisting Empire is the primary task of diakonia, one should not pretend that it is the only problem facing our planet nor the cause of all problems.[15] Empire is not the sole material condition in which we develop ourselves ecclesiologically. Markets themselves are not the problem but rather the problem is when people attempt to make them the absolute measure of value. However, in this time, and in this world of globalizing Empire, if the values that churching aspires to are undermined, i.e. intrinsic value and interrelationship, encountering the other and divesting of inequitable power relations, then churching must include resistance to Empire in its manifold forms. By practicing differentiated solidarity, churching says no to the logic of Empire and subverts the logic of instrumental value and necessary sacrifice.

We have seen how we are each a locus of distinct value even as we are related to one another. As Keller notes: "For the plurality of our relations to a complex world requires attunement each to our own complexity: the multiplicity of the world is both

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[14] Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 20.

[15] Jung Mo Sung agrees: "Today one of the favorite scapegoats is neoliberalism and its representatives. It seems that neoliberalism is the cause of everything bad that exists in the world, even those things that had existed before neoliberalism and that will continue to exist following the end of the neoliberal hegemony." Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism, and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 142.

within and without. So this sort of fluid positionality is a kind of spiritual practice, always as internal as it is external, as personal as it is political."[16] Becoming open to change is the call of those experiencing unjust privileges; seeking some stability, endurance, and preservation of value is the call for those swept up in the flux of becoming. Their different locations demand diverse responses, while recognizing their interdependence through encounters demands of them a dose of apophatic humility. Keller affirms Ivone Gebara's claim that "we believe in the dimension of 'not-knowing,' a fundamental dimension of our being, a not-knowing that makes us more humble and at the same time more combative, in order to gain respect for differences and the possibility of building an interdependent society."[17] This apophatic humility is consistent with Tony Jones's "epistemic humility," and being combative resonates with Bonnie Honig's "agonism."

Churching does not exist merely for its own sake, nor is it practiced to simply fulfill the perceived spiritual desires of individual persons. It is valuable in its own right, but it *persists* as a vehicle that counters all idolatries for the sake of the good news of divine liberation and wellbeing for all creation-values. Churching cannot be done alone, for transformation can only occur to the extent that there are other superjects to prehend. Kerygma points towards both self-love and a critique of structures and practices that negate that intrinsic-relational love for wellbeing. Within the context of the United States, this unavoidably includes a basic critique of the dual idolatries of neo-liberal globalization and American-exclusive loyalties. Such a witness will therefore bleed into diakonia, or service, with the goal of moving participants to become living, verbal witnesses of repentance (*metanoia*) and the dismantling of all "isms."

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[16] Keller, *God and Power*, 148.
[17] Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 132.

Dorothee Sölle believes that the proclamation of the kingdom of God gives birth to the church, and its service is towards that kingdom for the liberation of the oppressed.[18] For my parallel project, kerygma is the proclamation of universal value relations and the call to live these out in light of a process cosmology. Just as every concrescence for value is a concrete growing together, Sölle's kerygma is a concrete rather than a timeless universal.[19] For her, kerygma is encouragingly understood as "preaching, teaching, instruction" not just doctrinal content but also "a call to new life and to conversion" such that it "is always a matter of bearing witness, testifying to the truth."[20] Discipleship goes together with the message that we proclaim, for we are ourselves the product of the message and invite others to recognize this reality and live differently with others in light of it.

Sölle appropriately sees koinonia as "communion with God and communion between its members . . . grow[ing] out of the church's message and diakonia," which functions as solidarity with others.[21] From the previous chapters' presentations, one can say that this communion is part of the nature of reality as a cosmic process of becoming, where we are unavoidably interconnected. Through encountering others in all their related difference, we can take up a differentiated solidarity of relationship over sameness.

Like my affirmation of the praxis of encounter, Jung Mo Sung agrees that face-to-face encounters are where we have spiritual experiences of grace, but he warns us of the risky "temptation for us to withdraw into communitarian environments and into local,

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[18] Dorothee Sölle, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," in *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology*, trans. (London: SCM Press, 1990), 137.
[19] Sölle, "Kingdom of God and the Church," 146.
[20] Ibid., 141.
[21] Ibid., 142-44.

microsocial struggles."[22] Likewise, it is a mistake "to desire that large religious, economic, and political institutions function like our small communities; or to struggle for the project of a society that is simply the quantitative amplification of our communitarian relations," for this ignores the fact that new qualities emerge from the microsocial to the macrosocial.[23] This complements Iris Marion Young's insight that while self-determination can happen without institutions, self-cultivation needs institutional support. We see here an instance of diverse thinkers—an American postmodern feminist political philosopher and a Brazilian neo-liberationist theologian—making a complementary point from different locations. Along with Suchocki's analysis, we have ever-expanding and overlapping evidence that there will need to be some institutional alignments of churching. To reject this would be to transcendentalize the critique and could easily lead to denigrating partnerships that may otherwise help further differentiated solidarity. There can be no simple escape to small groups as the final normative model for society, for what works in ecclesial small groups will not always work on a large scale for either church communities or society in general.[24]

As long as humanity endures on this earth, there will always need to be institutions. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's desire for no representation goes too far in dismissing all forms of representation, or in other words, all forms of institutionalization. Separate "manys" need structures and patterns through which they can relate. Churching does not become a spontaneous anarchy of just particular manys; it remains many—one and particular—universal in its creative becoming. Many institutions need to be understood as partial, fragmentary, and subject to revision or replacement

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[22] Sung, *Subject, Capitalism, and Religion*, 47.
[23] Ibid., 48.
[24] Ibid., 87.

when they no longer serve their function of structuring larger networks. Wherever there are gatherings of those following the way of Jesus beyond small-scale groups of consensus-making and reciprocity, there will need to be larger organizing frameworks that help coordinate these networks. Decentralized institutions with many modules of decision-making are preferred without a centralized leadership, whether of bishops, clergy, or CEOs. While there many be a non-difference between churching and socio-cultural life as holy and secular, there is not an easy identity where churching dissolves into the life of society as a form of absolute immanence: they remain dipolar. In like manner, Sölle says that resisting the institutionalization of Spirit is not faithful but comes more "from the extreme individualism which dominates our culture."[25] It is too much to seek a totally free and spontaneous self-organizing process of churching. Self-organization happens, but its occurrence will not guarantee that the particular form of self-organization will be just.

While many elements of this construction focus on the local congregation and its practices, we must be careful not to worship the local. Sung suggests that the significant risk of postmodern thinking is the almost "exclusive valorization of local and specific works without linkage with more comprehensive social and political projects."[26] Must we choose between transforming society vs. practicing concrete actions of solidarity?[27] No, for a process worldview shaped by liberationist, postcolonial, and radical political sensibilities cannot make this false separation. As I have shown, the microcosm is within the macrocosm and vice versa. Through this reciprocal polarity, churching gatherings can

[25] Sölle, "Kingdom of God and the Church," 137.
[26] Jung Mo Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, Reclaiming Liberation Theology (London: SCM Press, 2007), 53.
[27] Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, 54.

oscillate in their orientation between the local and the planetary without establishing a dualism or trying to actualize every relationship in every activity in a totalizing project.

Likewise, are the activities of churching done for the purpose of liberation or to improve the quality of daily life? This debate has occurred throughout many contextual theologies in recent decades, from Latin American Liberation Theology[28] to Black and Womanist theologies.[29] From Amartya Sen's thought as well as process thought's emphasis on maximizing relevant possibilities for actualization, we see an emphasis on quality of life. However, hopes and efforts for liberation and r/evolutionary shifts can also emerge when patterns change. The question that quality of life discussions beg is "whose quality of life?" This is where encounter becomes so critical, such as in helping tutor the children of immigrants, because it relativizes and expands the edges of churching communities' sphere of concern. Again, we need both together to find the fullest meaning of churching.

Churching exists within the dipolar framework of mysticism and activism, or as described in Chapter 5, of the holy and secular. We should not simply be activists running around crying out for justice from one issue to the next. Yet critically, spiritual communion cannot be disentangled with *this world*. Discerning initial aims towards greater value require a listening and waiting that cannot be predictably programmatized.[30] These ideals are always towards the world rather than away from it. The subjectivity of interrelated mutual immanence is the spiritual and political project of churching, of

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[28] Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, 102.
[29] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1993), 196.
[30] At his best, Moltmann sees this as well: "Mysticism does not mean estrangement from action; it is a preparation for public discipleship." Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 209.

encountering so that mutual interest becomes manifest, and self-transcendence becomes possible so that one can divest oneself from unjust power differentials and privileges. This is not done through force of will, but in building new contexts for novel subjective actualizations and potentialities. By transforming desires and aims, the novel becomes. Listening for the call and henceforth responding by constructing a world organized around the capability of choosing more intensity and harmony necessitates a certain level of social activism as a way of life.

Following John Cobb, this secularizing tendency in Christianity is not a problem, for it is done out of affirming the sacred value of all planetary life. Unlike Karl Barth's concern for Nazi civil religion, "it is not secularizing Christianity that weakens resistance to demonic forces. What prevents appropriate resistance is assimilation into the culture that should be resisted."[31] It is time for mainline Protestant communions to recognize that it has become a contextual necessity of churching to say "no" to the system of Empire in which it finds itself immersed, as did the original Kairos Document's condemnation of apartheid South Africa and the Confessing Church's challenge to the Third Reich of Germany.[32] In doing so, we will counter-culturally stand in solidarity with anyone or thing experiencing abuse and expendability amidst Empire. In doing so, churching affirms planetary value and seeks to maximize the potential becoming for that value for itself, others, and the world. Churching seeks to be a space in which participants may actualize themselves in light of the divine primordial vision while their secular (and holy)

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[31] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Spiritual Bankruptcy: A Prophetic Call to Action* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 50.

[32] David Ray Griffin, "Resurrection and Empire," in *The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God: A Political, Economic, Religious Statement*, David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb Jr., Richard A Falk, and Catherine Keller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 155-56. Griffin considers this moment as likely creating a *status confessionis*.

living makes certain potentials more relevant and desirable, increasing capabilities for the maximization of value.

One of the original contributions of Moltmann was the centrality of eschatology and the idea of *anticipation*, which we also saw Suchocki utilize. Part of eschatology's importance is that beyond resistance, it addresses the novel.[33] This novel becoming is never-ending, because it comes from the inexhaustible fullness of the divine life, ever urging on new value-productions even after intense aims for transformation are realized. In this interpretation, I am following an orthodox process theological position as well as the neo-liberationist position of Jung Mo Sung.[34]

The faith that churching practices "is the confidence to act in the face of an open-ended future, thus to act in great humility and in great love" that participates in the "planetary struggle for 'justice, peace and the integrity of creation.'"[35] Practicing differentiated solidarity through encounter and in light of our complex self- (and other) constitution in light of our mutual interest are not enough to change the dominant power of Empire. But this is practiced not out of certainty of victory but faithfulness to divine-planetary value. As Sung incisively indicates, "We need people and groups who incarnate those values in their lives and religious and social practices and who, in that way, serve as models of desire, as catalysts of new social and religious movements."[36]

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[33] Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*, 131.
[34] For a deeper analysis of eschatology in terms of a non-totalizing revolution which includes an analysis of both Catherine Keller and Jung Mo Sung, see my article: Timothy Murphy, "Reconceiving Revolution: Towards Micro-Revolutions of Becoming," *Claremont Journal of Religion* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 87-113. Accessed November 8, 2013. http://claremontjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Reconceiving-Revolution-Towards-Micro-Revolutions-of-Becoming-by-Timothy-Murphy.pdf.
[35] Keller, *God and Power*, 151.
[36] Sung, *Subject, Capitalism, and Religion*, 93.

When discussing the kingdom of God, or *basileia tou theou*, I prefer the term *the divine commonwealth*.[37] This divine commonwealth is a never-ending process of value creation, specifically as the ongoing struggle to recognize and maximize value wherever possible. This includes not only liberation from oppression but seeking endurance of value as survival and quality of life. There is never a point in which one arrives at a final point and says it is finished, because there is always more yet to come. The struggle for just relations is never complete, as the process of becoming is never complete. As Sung declares, "[T]he value and validity of Liberation Christianity are not based on the promise to build utopia but on the justice of the struggle itself."[38] Even as certain struggles achieve better relations, there will be new challenges:

> The choice to keep working, 'in spite of all this' is not the fruit of an irrational or meaningless choice, much less the result of a sacrificial choice . . . It is something positive that maintains [one] in her choice: the humanizing experience that arises from an encounter with the poorest people and friendship with them.[39]

In my appropriation of Keller, the faith that churching practices "is the confidence to act in the face of an open-ended future, thus to act in great humility and in great love.[40]

As you may recall from Chapter 2, this dissertation's kerygma is that all entities are related value-intensities; this constitutes the good news. One key question remains before we transition to my specific recommendations for churching: "What about Jesus?" Does a radical process ecclesiology have no need of him? To varying degrees, the

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[37] There has been a long and ongoing debate on the appropriateness of English terms for the basileia. Some prefer kingdom, empire, or reign. For their limitations, see Melanie Johnson-Debaufre, "The *Basileia Theou* and the Space/s of Utopian Politics," paper presented at the Twelfth Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium, Common Good(s): Economy, Ecology, and Political Theology, Drew Theological School, Madison, NJ, February 10, 2013. While John Cobb prefers "Commonwealth of God," I have chosen the word "divine" over "god" because of the tendency of to objectify the latter in English. The result is "the divine commonwealth."

[38] Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, 146.

[39] Ibid., 148.

[40] Keller, *God and Power*, 151.

ecclesiologies of Chapter 5 ground themselves in the life and work of Jesus. Jürgen Moltmann and Marjorie Suchocki both utilize Jesus/Christ/Jesus Christ/etc. in their ecclesial interpretations. Marcella Althaus-Reid, on the other hand, sees him as an important yet historically limited figure. Both positions are appropriate to the extent that they are interpreted in light of a kerygma of universal value relations and production through the process of cumulative interpenetration. It is possible to reject Christ as Lord without making Jesus superfluous to an ecclesial project. As this dissertation is neither a systematic theological project nor a Christology, it is only at this late stage that we can finally come to Jesus.[41] For this project, Jesus functions primarily epistemologically. He does not initiate the process cosmology nor is he the source for solidarity. Yet unlike a simplified caricature of Abelard, I do not understand Jesus to be solely a moral example, for through a social ontology one could say that Jesus, or better yet, *his way*, gets inside us whenever we positively prehend it. And what was this way? As Cobb aptly recognizes, "Jesus was crucified as a threat to [the Roman] empire."[42] There are costs to resisting Empire: loss of privilege, of status, and even sometimes of life.

Confessionally, I am inspired to this position because of the witness of Jesus. However, I am not interested in claiming that Jesus constituted this possibility of value production, as if it was not possible before his life and ministry. Rather, he reveals it in a *novel, particular* way that becomes *universally* decisive for churching. He is epistemologically revelatory, but in a hidden way, given that the production of value is an open-ended rather than a closed or totalizing process that swallows up creative becoming

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[41] Keller likewise delays discussing Christ until near the end of her book of constructive theology. See Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 133-55.

[42] Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, 27.

as objectifiable.[43] This prevents us from making Jesus into the foundation for churching's kerygma. Could it be that perhaps the most faithful way to follow Jesus is to let go of him on behalf of the divine commonwealth that he pointed towards? Rather than Cobb's Logos-Christology that equates the Christ as creative transformation,[44] Christians can say that they have encountered creative transformation through the epistemic lens of Jesus without exhaustively identifying him as such. The scripture that embodies this quality is Mark 7:24-30 where Jesus meets the Syrophoenician woman.[45] Christ challenges our certainties and totalizing values,[46] and epistemologically reveals this openness through Jesus's own upending of narrow certainties.

Ecclesially, Jesus is no longer understood as the head of the church. If the church had a head, this would set up an overarching unity that would overwhelm the diversity, which would violate churching's dipolarity. A headless church removes the logic of the One,[47] the unity that overwhelms the differences. We would never want to impose the church's unity in the way Dietrich Bonhoeffer does with Christ as head.[48] In fact, Bonheoffer goes so far as to say that the members of the church are not connected to each

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[43] As Whitehead notes, "The essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world." Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 167.

[44] Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 92-93.

[45] In this story, Jesus begins with a horizon of concern that excludes the woman and her daughter. However, he experiences creative transformation through his encounter with her and finally responds. Soon after this encounter Jesus travels to the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee to feed the multitude, where before he had restricted this ministry to the Jewish people. This claim is similar to Althaus-Reid's understanding of Jesus's historical limitations, but emphasizes that he reflects an openness to creative transformation. Brian McLaren makes much the same point concerning Matthew's version of the story. See Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 155-58.

[46] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Lay Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1994), 93.

[47] Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A theology of multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 1-5.

[48] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1995), 243.

other directly but only through Christ.[49] Nevertheless, we still have a way of discussing the relationality of the body to itself as a related multiplicity, a many—one. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, Paul maintains that there is one body, but he indicates it has a dynamic quality such that it is not a hierarchical unity: "On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect."[50] Paul is making the move towards a dynamically related body. If we go one step further, we can avoid an essentializing unity or single ultimate perspective and see the connections as happening in each and for each other, thus approaching the church as a body without organs,[51] even an entirely living nexus,[52] in which roles are not essentialized but arise from multiple located perspectives.

Keller describes Jesus as a revealed mystery, even "the parable of God," which is a wonderful image.[53] If parables are revelatory without a single meaning ever becoming possible, and open up the potential for new understandings and ways of living and responding to one's situation, then this title is thoroughly appropriate. Jesus becomes a window through which the divine reflects; he is a luminous darkness, a revealed mystery, a parable.[54] Jesus's life and ministry revealed the divine character and concern for the world with words and deeds that his followers encountered as an ongoing potential of

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[49] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 25.
[50] 1 Corinthians 12:22-23, NRSV.
[51] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 30.
[52] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 103-05.
[53] Keller, *On the Mystery*, 155.
[54] William Herzog offers the distinct position that the parables of Jesus "were not meant to be stories with either a clear moral or a single meaning . . . [but] were meant to be discussion-starters, whose purpose was to raise questions and pose dilemmas for their hearers" about their lives and the larger realities in which they were caught. William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 259.

creative transformation. But the point of a parable is not its inner hidden meaning. It moves beyond itself even as it is the starting point for reflection. Likewise, one does not need to be concerned about Jesus's inner nature or relationship with the divine primordial nature. Any ontological answers would necessarily turn to speculative theology, which may be interesting, but they are of secondary importance to how Jesus functions for this ecclesiology's kerygma. Beyond himself, Jesus invites us to look to the divine commonwealth: itself an ever-present yet open-ended horizon. To seek and to affirm the divine commonwealth is to affirm the maximization of planetary value through the cumulative interpenetration of the world's becoming. To love oneself and one's neighbor as oneself is to affirm each as mutually interested values for themselves, for others, and for the world.[55]

Concrete Recommendations to Actualize

There are a number of spiritual practices and organizational implications that a radical process ecclesiology entails. For one, it takes embodiment seriously and does not separate the mind from the body. Traditionally, mainline Protestants have had a preference for the inner over the outer. For them, the former is the true self while the latter is a reflection or representation of it. There is a suspicion of emphasizing practices out of concern for exhibiting "works righteousness." One's actions are supposed to come out of one's faith as an expression of it but not as a condition of faith. The true self is on the "inside": what one thinks, believes, and feels. Applied process thought helps dismantle this assumption. There is no core, true self with a clear division between outer and inner as was shown in Chapter 3. Spiritual practices should take seriously the notion

[55] If that is the case, proclaiming, teaching, and witnessing to these values are ways to reflect not so much faith in Jesus but *the faithfulness of Jesus*. Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, 29.

that our embodied acts shape our internal disposition as much as our expressions of it. People are sometimes reluctant to engage in an activity because it does not feel "authentic," such as not receiving communion, because they do not feel worthy. Churching suggests that it is better to practice until one internalizes the change: as the cliché goes, "Fake it until you make it." Do the practice, and you will change.

Today, churches need to become mission centers for the transformation and salvation of the world with their loci of activity emerging out of their web of relevant relationships. Whether connecting across the street or with partners halfway around the planet, they are to realize creative possibilities for the salvation of their world. The practices of solidarity, resistance, discernment, community, and celebration of sacred plurality departs from focusing on recruiting reluctant Sunday School teachers and distributing the interest income from the endowment to various charities. Instead of misdirecting the institutional churches' priorities at survival and repetition, novel faithfulness may mean letting go of cherished traditions like Sunday School altogether and replacing them with activities that people are genuinely excited about in light of their experiences of resisting injustice, encountering the other through differentiated solidarity, and practicing divine listening for new sacred directions to their ministries.

One method of practicing encounter in faith communities is through small group gatherings in which people share their faith journeys, struggles, and hopes, even as they are invited to critically reflect on their experiences. One important element of such gatherings is that groups are not homogeneous. If they are, sharing runs the risk of having people experience a group as a replication of sameness and identity. With heterogeneity, and skillful guided facilitation, differences can be heard for what they are without too

quickly shifting to find the common in another's voice. For example, the starting point to deconstructing internalized racism among white Americans is not by arguing that race is a socio-cultural power construction (which is accurate if efficaciously irrelevant) but by *being with* people who identify with a different race and hearing their stories, hopes, and struggles, followed by critical reflection in light of the kerygma and larger structural patterns. In this way, when you see a group of teenagers walking down the street, you can draw on your small group experiences, thus making an inculturated negative reaction to the racialized other less likely. If unconscious racism today is in part a sense of uncomfortableness around people of a different race, the way out is partially through encounter and incorporating into one's vision new experiences and new possibilities for solidarity.[56]

Thus solidarity and storytelling become spiritual practices that groups can undertake in order to reconstruct and deconstruct who they have been, the types of relational patterns they have expressed, in order to become something different—increasing the relational intensity and harmony of disparate perspectives and experiences. If we want and expect people to change, we must change their surroundings and with

[56] In light of the kerygma, a koinonia of encounter and love for creative transformation involves two sides for the postcolonial process position of Clayton Crockett and Jay McDaniel: "On the one hand, love involves listening for hybridity in the other, with a willingness to be creative[ly] transformed by [the] singular hybridity of the other person. This creative transformation can best occur through empathy: perspective taking, active concern, and also 'feeling the feelings' of others. But it also requires a conscious bracketing or 'negative prehending' of existing stereotypes: an active forgetting which has an apophatic quality of its own. This can be called relational unknowing or compassionate forgetting." Clayton Crockett and Jay McDaniel, "From an Idolatry of Identity to a Planetization of Alterity: A Relational-Theological Approach to Hybridity, Sin, and Love," *Journal of Postcolonial Theory and Theology* 1, no. 3 (November 2010): 15. Accessed November 15, 2013. http://postcolonialjournal.com/Resources/Crockett%20JPTT%20Dec%2027.pdf.

whom they regularly engage and then give them tools to critically reflect on their encounters.[57]

In addition to her utterly subversive style, Marcella Althaus-Reid does infer at least one practical suggestion for existing progressive congregations. For the growing number of progressive mainline Protestant congregations, becoming "Open and Affirming" (ONA) has been a sign of inclusive welcome. These congregations are in a situation significantly different from the one Althaus-Reid wrote in the early and mid-2000s where LGBT rights were not even speakable in "decent" company. Since then, a growing number of countries in the Americas have expanded protections for the LGBT community, including Argentina and the United States. However, within mainline congregations, there rhetorically persists a homosolidarity of "identity," where LGBT persons are "no different" from the rest of "us." It seems that among such congregations, relationship is contingent on the relating of like to like. However, Althaus-Reid suggests we move towards an ecclesiology that breaks through such a pattern. For her, accepting or including without "welcoming the different" is part of the logic of hegemony, something an indecent faith practice must reject.[58] Welcoming the difference of LGBTQIA persons cannot simply be one more issue to consider. The logic of heteronormativity is revealed in the encounter with the sexually marginalized, whom churches so often seek to reincorporate under a decent (and unified) banner.

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[57] In a similar fashion, people become LGBT-affirming not because of arguments but from experiencing something different and being offered some conceptual tools to make sense or meaning out of it.
[58] Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology," in *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, ed. Ivan Petrella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 28.

As explained in Chapter 4, mainline Protestants struggle with working constructively through conflict.[59] The preferred model going forward is one where the diverse priorities and concerns of a community are expressed with an attitude that can move towards consensus without seeking uniformity. However, this requires at least two things: one, that people are not afraid of disagreeing and hearing distinct perspectives on things they care about, and two, that participants develop their own theological thinking by being practicing theologians. You need to work through your anxiety around conflict, pray for Al-Qaeda during worship, and be ready to discuss such statements afterwards. When people are not sure about what they believe and are committed to, and why, they are much more hesitant to discuss these things with others. They will tend to fall back on the dominant culture for their justifications, which typically will not provide adequate resources in thinking and living out a radical faith.[60]

Churching is not a refuge for the lost, a place for private solace, or a community of the saved separated from the remainder of the world. It is a sacrament, a means by which divine values and desires are reflected and revealed for the world. This follows Andrew Blume, who claims that the church is a sacrament of Christ, for a sacrament is manifest and Christ is present "to the extent that the church—as a community and not

[59] One scripture passage that can be understood as affirming a notion of productive conflict comes from one of Jesus's more unsettling sayings. In Matthew 10:34 (NRSV), Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." There will not be easy agreement or consensus, but conflicts will emerge, even within the same household! The peace of passive acquiescence gives way towards a process leading to a contestable consensus.

[60] I once led a meeting among a pro-LGBT church group and suggested that it would be helpful for us to explore how our faith helps us affirm and welcome LGBT persons. I was quite surprised when a member immediately chimed in with "I don't consider this a religious issue at all; this is about rights!" John Cobb explains this tendency when he writes: "Secularizing churches made up of people who are not encouraged to be reflective about their faith have little chance of avoiding enculturation into an increasingly secularist environment." See Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, 130.

necessarily as an institution—does reflect God's love in action."[61] This does not define the character of the institution, but rather describes events of churching. Just as experiencing Jesus's priorities was to know the priorities of the divine character, so experiencing churching is to know likewise. By doing church, we manifest and witness to how the divine is working in the world, or in process language, as the real potentialities being offered for the world to actualize in light of entities' relevant contexts. As Blume explains, traditional church sacraments are *foci* for understanding the larger divine incarnational reality of "purposeful love in action."[62]

Like Bernard Lee,[63] I support developing intentional communities, but they cannot be understood as dependent on strong-willed individuals who seek to resist evil. As shown in Chapter 3, we cannot forget that human beings are complex,[64] being especially intertwined with processes of internalized colonization. Furthermore, thinking of them as voluntary strong-willed collectives does not necessarily challenge the problematic notion of autonomy and may in fact be a symptom of it. Nevertheless, one of the primary ways to resist Empire is "simply to live, individually and in communities, in a countercultural way" like early churches.[65] It is for this reason that I support Moltmann's emphasis on adult baptism, and I agree with him that infants should receive blessings (and we should add: animals should too!).[66] Rather than being a non-committal

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[61] Andrew C. Blume, "Towards a Process Sacramental Ecclesiology," *Process Studies* 37, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2008): 48-49.
[62] Blume, "Towards a Process Sacramental Ecclesiology," 42, 45.
[63] Lee, "Reconstructing Our American Story," 11-24.
[64] Brynolf Lyon also incorporates this insight, as is mentioned in Chapter 1.
[65] John B. Cobb, Jr., ed. *Resistance: The New Role of Progressive Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), xii.
[66] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 240. Of course, people who have already been baptized do not need to be re-baptized. At any rate, baptism is not a requirement for participation in churching or for leadership, though it is a potentially powerful event of divine encounter and response.

group, churching emphasizes each person's "call to liberating service."[67] Baptism into this commitment is not for the dedicated volunteer but for one responding to an invitation to live differently. Being part of an alternative community should be intentionally done, even as you recognize the need for ongoing grace in light of your internalized oppressions and oppressive practices.

There is no compelling reason to restrict celebrated sacraments to two. If you want to repeat activities that Jesus and his disciples performed, foot (or hand) washing can be an experience of spiritual welcome and intimacy. But even more important during Jesus's ministry were teaching, healing, and table fellowship with peasants and expendables in Galilee. More importantly, there can be novel sacraments wherever divine love is encountered, so that listening to the stranger, kenotically divesting yourself of privileges to be in solidarity with another, proclaiming the value of the planet and its inhabitants, and working against their degradation can all equally be sacraments of divine disclosure and love. Life together includes the spiritual practices of interstitial centering and contemplative prayer, encounter, and the ways we prepare for this in worship gatherings through songs, stories, scripture, and prayers.

I concur with Althaus-Reid's support for a radically open table regardless of religious persuasion.[68] One must not first believe before being invited to eat, but one first eats in order to encounter radical love.[69] Quite friendly to the Disciples of Christ tradition, Moltmann recognizes that "there should be no congregational assemblies for

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[67] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 242.

[68] We could even go one step further and welcome attending animals beyond the human to Holy Communion, such as with blessed doggie treats. Instead of saying, "The bread of life and cup of blessing," one could say, "Good dog! Good dog!" This is one of many ways animals can more fully be church, encountering and proclaiming good news.

[69] Chapter 5 provided several other helpful recommendations for concrete indecent churching practices by Althaus-Reid and will not be repeated here.

worship without table fellowship, no proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom without eating and drinking in the Kingdom with Jesus!"[70] Moltmann also encourages Agape meals, which I agree are critically important for what they teach and the form of interrelationship they proclaim.

A radically open table also functions as an implicit (and sometimes explicit) critique of ways that people are (de)valued based on their productivity or other attributes. Either way, church gatherings should include meeting at least once a month for shared meals, and if participants live in close enough proximity to each other to make this feasible, weekly meals are even better. These could be done after the "worship" section of the community's life, either in a potluck style or with several members being responsible on a rotating basis. For example, a faith community could conclude worship with Holy Communion and then move directly into a shared meal in a different room. As people finish eating, there could be facilitated discussion about the themes of worship in light of the particular lived experiences people are having. This is especially relevant if sermons remain more unidirectional within the worship gathering and are less necessary to the extent that sermons themselves are participatory facilitated discussions.[71]

The arranged order for gathering could be meal-worship-discussion, or alternatively, worship followed by a meal integrated with discussion themes. If done in more public settings, the gathering could easily invite any and all passersby to participate in any element of the gathering (worship, meal, discussion), especially homeless and

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[70] Jürgen Moltmann, "The Life Signs of the Spirit in the Fellowship Community of Christ," in *Hope for the Church: Moltmann in Dialogue with Practical Theology*, ed. and trans. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 55.

[71] "It is certainly true that our regular, mainline church services display a wealth of ideas and reflections in their sermons, but are poverty-stricken in their forms of expression, and offer no opportunity at all for spontaneity. They are disciplined and disciplinary assemblies for talking and listening. But does the body of Christ really consist simply of one big mouth and a lot of little ears?" Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 184.

marginal people. This would show how churching extends beyond the covenanted participants, since churching is never an isolated entity or a local-only endeavor. Encountering other groups, hearing their stories, learning from them, and being transformed is also the practice of koinonia.

In practice, resisting Empire and America's use of military hegemony for its enforcement means taking a stance of nonviolence. It is the call for American Protestants to find creative third alternatives beyond silent withdrawal and violent resistance. If we are each values for ourselves and each other, and our task is to proclaim this and resist all that needlessly destroys them, then taking a pacifist stance is critical. In this way, churching attempts to reflect the divine invitation to creative transformation. Taking deliberatively violent action consistently results in the internalization of that violence, while persistent pressure and engagement, even in the face of no guarantee of victory, is the best stance of a radical church.[72] Items that support American exceptionalism, or function to justify our violence as redemptive, such as the American flag, have no business in churching (except for perhaps being one among dozens of flags from around the world, especially those with whom communities have deep ongoing partnerships).

Emphasizing the this-worldly aspects of ecclesiology does not result in rejecting all "religious practices and beliefs."[73] This is particularly true for things like worship and prayer, which are ways to internalize the kerygma and create koinonia. Diverse communities will find a variety of ways to express the particulars of appropriate worship,

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[72] For more on the relationship between process thought and pacifism, see Justin Heinzekehr, "Pacifism from a Process Perspective: Redefining Process Ethics through an Anabaptist Lens," MA Thesis, Claremont School of Theology, 2011; Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Christian Pacifism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); and Timothy Murphy, "The Pacifism of Duane Friesen: Engaged Realism, Process Thought, and Critical Assessment," *Process Studies* 42, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2013): 110-31.
[73] Cobb, *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, 163.

for just as we encounter divinity through a multitude of initial aims, we respond in a multiplicity of ways. This may or may not include a "sermon," though most if not all formats should offer the opportunity for respond and dialogue, either during or after designated worship times. A process-liberationist worship liturgy should include participatory elements such as the sharing of prayer concerns, potential for movement such as with prayer stations, which requires a flexible space, the singing of songs, and the sharing of both apostolic and novel sacraments. These should be used to help people draw connections with their own lived experiences—of struggle, friendship, or privilege—while also giving them resources to survive in the face of domination even when there is no evidence that things will get better.

A poststructuralist process ecclesiology will affirm a spirituality of moment-by-moment mindfulness that does not predetermine its direction.[74] Value is produced in the empty space, so one ecclesial spiritual practice will be akin to contemplative or centering prayer.[75] It is the interstitial inbetweenness of spirituality, "a *planetary spirituality of the interstices.*"[76] Keeping the space of becoming open reduces the human proclivity to think that humans can direct other entities in their becoming. This connects with what was said in Chapter 2 on the notion of indeterminate initial aims that open up a space for creativity, which is the non-difference of the world and the divine.

Solidarity and spirituality necessarily go hand-in-hand. The goal is to feel the feelings of others, to relativize our own perspectives, to be able to hear each other more

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[74] Luke Higgins, "Becoming through Multiplicity: Staying in the Middle of Whitehead's and Deleuze-Guattari's Philosophies of Life," in *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, ed. Roland Faber and Andrea Stephenson (New York: Fordham Press, 2010), 154.

[75] Keller says as much when she writes, "For the plurality of our relations to a complex world requires attunement each to our own complexity: the multiplicity of the world is both within and without. So this sort of fluid positionality is a kind of spiritual practice, always as internal as it is external, as personal as it is political." Keller, *God and Power*, 148.

[76] Keller, *God and Power*, 130.

deeply, to sit within the matrix of relationships, to remain in that indeterminacy so that something novel, a contrast that we could not see before, can emerge. Rather than having a definitive telos prejudging our interactions, we try to sit in that empty space, to allow for a new synthesis to emerge, to become the process of decision.[77] It takes concerted spiritual practice and prayerful openness to become moved to participate in solidarity with those struggling against very unique challenges, like white churches resisting the cultural imperialism of biker-bars on Lakota land.

We have seen that even though churching lives out the way of Jesus as a spiritual social movement and blurs the distinction between the inner and outer life of its practices, it does not mean that there is no room for gathered times of worship. It is not simply that one's spirituality is lived out through social justice activism, resisting Empire and encountering those who are different, though these are seen as resources for spiritual transformation. Worship remains, though it is transformed from an individualistic form of self-therapy into a time of spiritual training and renewal for the world as the divine works in and through us for the planet's healing and liberation, offering new possibilities. It reminds us that our efforts are not merely from our own projects but rather participate in an ongoing project of mystical love.[78] In this space, and in these gatherings, through participatory measures participants are invited to encounter the divine non-other as preparation for finding the divine in "the least of these."[79] For those experiencing oppression, worship becomes more than a time to recharge our batteries so we can endure

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[77] This is close to a Quaker spirituality of waiting on the Spirit.

[78] "The power of God is the worship He inspires. That religion is strong which in its ritual and its modes of thought evokes an apprehension of the commanding vision." Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 192.

[79] Matthew 25:31-46, NRSV.

but rather a time that connects our struggles with the healing and liberating way of churching.

Many mainline congregations assume that there should be one primary leader for a congregation. They strive for the ideal of having at least one full-time, paid clergy member to lead them. In larger, programmatic-sized congregations, there may be multiple staff/clergy but still a "senior" pastor. This is an application of the logic of the One. As there is one God, one church, and one savior, so there is one leader for each community. Churching should reject this structure and focus on people sharing their particular gifts and using worship as a training-ground. Unlike more authoritarian models, it diminishes the likelihood that churching participants become passive.

Moreover, there are financial reasons to have multiple part-time staff who are bi-vocational than having one full-time salaried pastor. My critique is not merely a pragmatic concern out of costs as if one pastor is the ideal that many faith communities can no longer afford. Embedded in an imperial system in which they cannot fully extricate themselves, congregations need to structure themselves in a way to minimize the negative impact of these consumerist arrangements. They become producers. In contrast to a Constantinian monarchical leadership[80] in ministers today, a more appropriately vision "would be to reorient the notion of ministry so that there would be no one ungifted, no one not called, no one not empowered, and no one dominated."[81] Joerg Rieger accurately notes that "since pastors and other religious professionals are dependent on these [ruling class] powers—through their salaries and their ranking in a system that decides on merit and the next steps in their careers—their performance is

[80] John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 52.
[81] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 60.

severely handicapped."[82] Countless ministers have confessed to other colleagues and me that they can only "push" their congregations so far as it will not threaten their livelihoods. This is not just a failure of courage but also a failure of the way congregations are structured. It has short-circuited serious critical theological reflection and engagement (though for some interests, perhaps it is working precisely as they intend it to: as a silencing mechanism!). What better way to counteract this all-too-common pattern than to offer up bivocational ministry as the norm whereby no clerical figure is dependent on her congregation for their sole source of income?

Some people may object, saying that bivocational ministry means that either clergy will be even more overworked and underpaid than they are now, or that many aspects of ministry may fall by the wayside. I have suggested that multiple bivocational ministers serve in congregations that would normally pay for one full-time paid staff person. There still needs to be seminary-trained leaders, though what seminaries will look like as well as how they train graduate students is evolving, but these questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Many students who graduate with M.Div.s have no intention of entering full-time, solo parish ministry, yet they have acquired certain skills and have specific gifts that they can share as part of church teams. Chaplains can train people in active listening skills and nonviolent communication as a specialized ministry. A minister who cares little about Christian education and children's ministries may be passionate about worship and spiritual formation in church life while working part-time as a faith-based community organizer. Let leaders live out their passions for ministry rather than force them into being a jack-of-all-trades, calling or not be damned. Again, I find myself in practical agreement with Moltmann that there is no hierarchical division of

[82] Joerg Rieger, preface to *Subject, Capitalism, and Religion*, xix.

gifts, even as there may be "functional differences" in the forms of service people provide for a community.[83] All participants in the way of churching are invited or called to engage in kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia, but not everyone has to do everything in the same way. Just as there are infinitely diverse avenues for producing value and forming subjectivity, these tasks can look radically different depending on the context one finds oneself.

A community can better manage expenses by either selling a building or not buying one in the first place.[84] Churching does not need a building, but communities should be situationally encouraged (and depending on their size) to rent space, meet in homes, or gather in public spaces like city parks. Public spaces remind us of our interconnectedness with a wider network of life. Outdoor worship offers another way for animals to attend; perhaps you may be greeted by some first-time visitor squirrels! Philip Clayton notes how more frequently young seminary students are serving in novel settings such as pubs, office building discussion groups, and even sidewalks.[85] There are several advantages to not owning a building. For existing/struggling congregations, an increasing percentage of their income is devoted to maintaining a building, including heating and repairs. This can often add up to over twenty percent or more of a church budget, especially for smaller congregations.

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[83] Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 298.

[84] Similarly, Philip Clayton has argued for a kenotic ecclesiology, where the church must knock down its walls and become homeless, with over fifty percent of church life done outside of a building. As the dominant church turned to empire in the 4th century with Constantine, there is a basic choice between a theology of dominance vs. a theology of kenosis. Philip Clayton, "An Upside-Down Politics and an Inside-Out Church: Moving Occupy From Tent to Pew" (American Academy of Religion conference, Chicago, IL, November, 2012).

[85] Philip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 53.

Christian communities should not worry about increasing budgets so that "we don't have to close our doors." You can't close doors that you don't have! To maintain buildings, especially ones that were built for much larger establishment-era congregations, churches often try to maximize their income. This leads to a vicious cycle where the major internal drive of a church becomes its own preservation, which gets in the way of its mission and message (unless its preservation indeed *is* the mission and message!). Surely koinonia fellowship can be done without a building! Strong small-group ministries that meet in homes, public spaces, or even bars can build up individual participants and strengthen faithful relationships. This reduces the diffusion of participants' time and energy on wasteful projects like parking lot repavements, which are not only institutionally myopic but even subsidize the cultural eros of consumption.

A strong symbolism persists in the minds of most Americans concerning church buildings. People say that they are "going to church," and they typically mean a building. Church edifices are symbols of stability, order, security, and institutional continuity. Orthodox ecclesiologies too readily worship the same symbols. These symbols undermine the intended witness of a counter-imperial (anti-)ecclesiology; avoiding a building likewise prevents reifying "church" as the building. As Palestinian Christians urge Christian pilgrims when traveling to the Holy Land and visiting ancient sites, it is well and good to come to these locations and see the church edifices that have existed for hundreds, if not thousands of years. But more important to visit are the "living stones," which are the people that constitute these faith communities. Such encounters can move us to economically and spiritually divest from the Empire within us: these are what one needs to experience more than any building.

As churching exists not only for itself but also for the other and the world, a counter-imperial ecclesiology will insist on focusing a large percentage of its budget to mission and project expenses. Ideally, this would amount to at least fifty percent of a church's budget annually. Without full-time ministers or an owned building, this becomes more possible. Mission includes trips (not of tourism or entertainment) and inviting over groups from long-term partner communities and churches who can collaborate in one's own setting, like churches in the United States and Ecuador offering reciprocal mission trips. Mission involves not just going somewhere else but giving others the capability to do likewise. These types of missional partnerships with marginalized communities will have both local and worldwide elements. One cannot simply ignore one's particular location, declare the United States a lost cause, fear potential local partnerships because they are in the wrong part of town, and abandon intra-US relationships for the "exotically foreign" other. Learning from local groups as well as planetary-wide dispersed groups should strengthen each other in a web of mutually interested cooperation, fellowship, and transformation (even as they remind us about power differentials and the need to divest from one's privileged position!).

Creative resistance includes the indecent proposals that Iris Marion Young says persons in dominant positions find improper or out of order, like interrupting a leader's speech when he evades accountability. Likewise, churching actions can be another form of prayer as people disrupt unjust proceedings, create dramas, sing songs, lead chants, engage in civil disobedience (such as getting arrested for trespassing with Walmart workers), organize marches and rallies, and occupy buildings significant to the economic

engine as well as government institutions. A warning is warranted: following the way of Jesus requires you to spiritually prepare yourself for the consequences!

As a subversive community, one of my most potentially controversial positions is for churching to consider avoiding non-profit status. Accepting the church as a non-profit institution for "religious purposes" constrains communities to the extent that the federal government defines religion as concerning beliefs and intra-communal practices. What is appropriately spiritual-religious, as opposed to what is political, has been structured to avoid challenging economism and militarism directly.

For faith communities that are seeking to focus on younger generations, social justice activists, the economically exploited, and marginalized populations, none of these groups will generally have much income. Increasing their participation and commitment, even ten-fold, will not necessarily lead to a surplus of church income if most people are simply scrapping by. But if these are the groups that we want to focus on reaching and partnering with in the process of our collective liberation and transformation, something has to give. What would it mean for churching to include activists who are deeply grounded in spirituality and creating community in their efforts to construct a more equitable world? What kind of theology would they need? How would they understand themselves and what they did together? Would they not be a community of/in process? In part, it is for them that I have been constructing this counter-imperial process ecclesiology. This reconstructed church will look more akin to churches that have followed in the tradition of what is often called the Radical Reformation. That is, they will act as counter-witnesses (*martyria*) to the general direction of the dominant culture through the testimony of their lives and the values they seek to actualize. This church will

not try to be all-things-to-all-people but is intended for those who are seeking to make a deep commitment to an alternative way of living, of connecting, and of resisting.

A politically-oriented ecclesia can attract social justice activists who are currently alienated from churches and their own spiritual lives. Ecclesially, this can be an element of mutual interest. Rather than fret about dwindling numbers of dollars and participants, there are faithful alternatives. As Keller wisely suggests, perhaps it is time that "we who repent the spectacular failure of Christendom to do justice, practice kindness or walk humbly with our God, are ready for new and stranger coalitions."[86] If ecclesiology normatively means supporting Christendom, then paraphrasing James Cone, we had better get on with it and kill ecclesiology altogether! But I think we need not go quite so far as declaring this project ultimately an anti-ecclesiology, for would this not give Christendom even in its death throes the normativity it has so desperately claimed as its own? As Gary Dorrien has noted, Keller offers the idea of "pitching theology to environmentalists, radical feminists, liberation movements, and antiglobalization activists."[87] Why not an ecclesiology for them, too? Diverse groups attempting to prevent a new pipeline for oil can understand their struggle as a spiritual one, where affirming planetary value has kerygmatic value. In other settings, a church can sell its building and rent a space or meet in homes, abolish a full-time clergy member position and replace it with a collaborative ministry of several part-time clergy whose financial wellbeing are not fully wed to keeping their jobs, and understand its existence as a relational network. As an institution seeking its own preservation, "the Church" needs to end and accept its

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[86] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 230.

[87] Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, & Postmodernity, 1950-2005*, vol. 3 of *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 512.

own process as subject-superject: to die to itself and become a living movement as an interrelated value-network of solidarity and resistance.

Conclusions

While some people may misread my ecclesiological construction as an attempt at a universally normative ecclesiology, I would prefer to describe it as *a*, rather than *the*, model for ecclesiological reconstruction. It has particularly emphasized an American setting, while churching is certainly beyond the limits of the United States' frame. It has been a perspectival approach, even as it has made gestures across differences. I have sought to remain in conversation with various relationally different perspectives and disciplines, including liberation theology, process thought and theology, postcolonial thought and theology, alternative ecclesiological formulations, and political thought. The world needs a counter-imperial ecclesiology rooted in the American location even if the particular model I have offered is found to be wanting. The United States needs a genuine ecclesial alternative.[88]

I want it to be inconceivable and nonsensical for someone to say, "I'm heading off to church now." This inappropriately makes church into an object, or an identity, with clear inside and outside boundaries. Questions like "Are you a member?" point to the church as a club. To what extent is a church willing to subvert the dominant ethos of its location, particularly when that ethos dominates and oppresses both people and the earth? Mainline Protestant denominations like the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ need a thoroughgoing dismantling even as I have been

[88] I would like churching to be an alternative in faithful praxis not unlike the way the news organization Democracy Now! is an alternative to corporate media in the United States. Thus, churching is an alternative to a corporatized, commercialized, christendomized church. Radical churching is to Democracy Now! as mainline Protestant Christianity is to the mainstream media.

reconstructed churching. It may be that what emerges will not be called by the same name, or even look or feel like "church" anymore. But it will also not be an *ex nihilo* creation: it will be a repetition with a difference, a novel concrescence from past actualizations. "The church" should no longer be considered a noun, an entity, an object to which we relate to in a subject-object form. Rather, church or churching is the activity or process of actualizing and practicing discipleship with others in the way of Jesus. It is an event! We do not simply mimic the activities of Jesus, fetishizing them. Rather, they become a repetition with a difference, novelty bursting forth from the newly emerging creative possibilities offered to us.

We need new communities in order to create a new cultural context. Certain ideals cannot be actualized unless there exists the necessary material conditions for their achievement. This is one of Althaus-Reid's abiding insights. If mainline Protestant communities were founded in the material context of colonial pioneer expansion and the development of bourgeois capitalism, then they will *necessarily* reflect those material foundings. As we continue living into a globalizing world racked with massive power differentials yet increased opportunities for encounter, of ecological instrumentalization and planetary solidarity, a new ecclesiology needs to emerge. As Rieger and Kwok state beautifully, "We cannot ask people to believe that another world is possible without creating an environment where people can have a moment to experience and live into it."[89] The formation of new ecclesial communities works to create a new context and offers new possibilities that were not previously envisionable. May it be so!

[89] Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 123.

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