

# Critical Theology

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Winter 2021 issue edited by Christine Jamieson

## Introduction

Undoubtedly, 2020 will be remembered through the lens of the pandemic. I suggest that the pandemic might be one of the threads linking the four articles that make up this issue of *Critical Theology*. Richard Renshaw, in his article, “Learning from Life, Marching for Justice,” points out that fundamental changes in life leading to shifts in meaning and value often come in times of crisis. Renshaw takes us on an inward journey appealing to the importance of paying attention to how our experiences impact us.

Marie-France Dion’s article, “Doing *All* the Torah!” is a carefully, detailed exegesis of the first and second chapters of the book of Joshua. Joshua and the People of Israel are called to reflect on the meaning of the Torah not as a law inscribed in history, but as a promise and a guide to the challenges of entering the promised land without Moses. The thought of theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan guides both Renshaw’s and Dion’s thinking in their papers.

Valerie Thomas-Leitao explores the political theology of Dorothee Soelle: in particular, how Soelle approaches theology “as a form of biblical ideological criticism” that reveals both systemic structural challenges and the “human hunger for belonging and for basic human rights.” Thomas-Leitao, through the lens of Soelle, shines a light on the “hunger for social hope” in the dark times of the pandemic.

Christina Conway’s focus on “Reconciliation and the Doctrine of Creation” is carefully attentive to the words of Cree Elder Stan McKay. The Indigenous reverence of the land and all creation was interrupted by a theological reading of the creation accounts in Genesis that came with the Europeans as they gradually colonized

the lands and peoples of the so-called “New World.” The focus on “fallen creation” did not resonate with Indigenous peoples’ experience of the gift of creation.

In all four articles there is a challenge suggesting the possibility that difficult times can be viewed as invitations to reflect on and assess our fundamental stance that shapes how we make sense of our world and our subsequent actions.

*Christine Jamieson*

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# Learning from Life, Marching for Justice

## The Dialogical, Dialectical Search for Truth, Goodness, and Justice

By Richard Renshaw

In this paper, I explore how human beings come to learn and assimilate collective experiences of solidarity. In other words, in addition to exploring “what” is found in experience, I invite you to pay attention to our conscious acts as we do so and then also to how that learning is assimilated into our conscious horizon. I will suggest that these acts of learning and assimilating reshape our inner world as conscious subjects.

There is, I suggest, a specific category of experience that “binds together” our world in such a way that it holds its deepest meaning and value for us. Such experiences provide us with the basic underlying framework for our actions. They are transformative; they move us from one appreciation of our world into another that fundamentally shifts our framework for acting in the world. In this sense, then, the experiences I want to describe include a transformation of our relationships and may express themselves in fundamental options that henceforth guide our life.<sup>1</sup>

Do you remember the first time you participated in a demonstration of solidarity, a march, a rally, a vigil? Perhaps you remember the exhilaration of connecting with people who share your point of view, your values, and of doing something positive together for climate change, for racialized people, for refugees, for justice? Perhaps you even remember that something shifted at that moment, something fundamental in your world: a change of perspective, of values, of self! Perhaps the experience gave rise to a desire to continue along that path of solidarity, to connect more with those issues and with the people who joined you that day. Something came together. A desire to go further arose: to know more about the issue and the people who joined in supporting it. The sense of connection, of belonging, fed that desire to know more, a desire to give a larger part of your life to the effort. The issue became more important to you; you wanted to delve deeper into it. You had changed.

Part of the experience may also have had to do with the singing and the chanting of slogans. Perhaps there was a bit of street theatre, which provided an

additional punch. These elements framed the issue that brought you together with others. It was a first step in defining the general lines of why you were there. Most likely, it is the part you remember most vividly.

What you can learn from the change brought about by your experience at that event occurs not so much through a conscious analysis of what happened at the event but rather by paying close attention to what is happening to you: to your feelings, to your thoughts, to the impact of the event on decisions you make. You are changing; how you are changing will be vital if you are to discover the import of the events and what they could mean to you for your future.

Your participation impels you to try to understand. While it may seem trivial, the example of doing a crossword puzzle or a sudoku may help. When we begin doing these puzzles, we are confronted with an array of confusing spaces and cross-spaces. Where to begin? We search for clues. We begin to notice patterns. These patterns provide the clues that will quite suddenly lead us to understanding, to insight, or even to a whole set of insights falling out one on top of another. Still, while we are looking for the clues, there is no assurance we will find them. They come to us unannounced, appearing unexpectedly as we examine the mass of data. With time, and repeated effort, as we get used to doing more and more of these puzzles, the patterns become more easily decipherable and we become more adept at recognizing them. We become more skillful in interpreting the clues. Such is the process of learning. It is something in us that changes. The puzzles remain the same in their variations. The process of learning is one of acquiring a series of insights derived from the mental operations we engage in as we search for the meaning of the clues.

Let me suggest a more complex example, this time from a movie. *Shadowlands* (a 1993 film directed by Richard Attenborough) describes a barely disguised true story from the life of C.S. Lewis, an Oxford University don and writer of many books (including the *Chronicles of Narnia*). At one point, when he is already

renowned for his writings and lectures, he meets a young American woman, Joy Gresham, who has come to England with her young son. We get the impression that part of her reason for travelling is to meet Lewis (called “Jack” in the movie). Since she has nowhere to stay, he invites her to stay at his home, where he lives with his brother. They become friends and, at one point, she even asks him if he would marry her “just so she can stay in England.” Lewis agrees to a civil marriage but continues to treat her as an acquaintance. For him, it is a legal formality offering her immigrant status. Still, with time, they become very good friends, even though Lewis always remains quite correct in his relationship with her. Then she is diagnosed with terminal cancer. This provokes a dramatic turn in Lewis’s life. He takes great care to help her see and do those things she wants at the end of her life. In her final days, he devotes himself to caring for her and, as she lays dying, he realizes that he has fallen in love with her. Unfortunately, the realization comes rather late and they have little time together before she dies. It is then that he recognizes, “I made two choices in life. The first was for security and the second was for love.” His relationship with Joy changed his world and his values in fundamental ways. His way of considering himself and his life was transformed without his having really noticed or understood until after she was gone. The horizon of his life, his appreciation of people and nature, becomes much larger and much deeper. This would not have happened if, from the very beginning, Lewis had not been curious about the sudden appearance of Joy Gresham and if he had not allowed his curiosity to lead him to accept and even take initiatives to know her better.

Thousands of years ago, the Ancients knew this process well. They called it *religare* (a Latin word meaning “to tie” or “bind together”). I use it here to refer to an experience that brings to light the basic meaning and value that gives direction to our life. Such a radical transformation does not happen overnight. It is slow and sometimes tortuous. Moreover, we often turn to that long history of attempts in our culture to give expression to similar experiences. Music, theatre, paintings, stories, and literature often play a central role in first drawing our attention to something significant that has entered our circle of attention. Human cultures are constructed on such foundations and provide us with a long history of reflection on the import of foundational experiences.

What I am trying to underline is that we, as human beings, grow and develop to the extent that we allow the fundamental intentionality of our inner human consciousness to explore the meaning and value of our life experiences in an attentive and focused way. If we do not take an interest in exploring the meaning of what surrounds us, we will not happen upon their meaning

and value. In practice, we do not easily recognize and address those challenges. Often, we prefer to coast along with what is familiar.

While certain strikingly beautiful or painful events may take centre stage initially, they will not have much impact on our life if we do not pay attention, if we do not try to get to the bottom of them. The trick is to consider how they affect us and what we have to learn from them. This is not just a matter of having a look and moving on. That would be superficial, and we would not grow or develop as persons. It is said that curiosity killed the cat, but I would rather argue that “What is happening to me?” is precisely the question that drives our learning process forward. Still, there would be no curiosity if we did not want to learn. The desire to learn, the desire to go beyond, is fundamental. Gradually, we gather insights that challenge us.

It is also true that sometimes we need to accept that we have made a mistake. At times, such mistakes can be major. It’s not just that we came to a conclusion without considering all the elements or made a judgment that we then needed to correct. I want to point to something more fundamental than that. Sometimes we have to accept that we were not even asking the right question. That we had totally missed the boat. We were so happy to have an insight that we did not take the time to examine whether it was the result of thorough inquiry. We are perfectly capable of following a false lead. Humility about the value of our insights needs to be paired as well with the recognition that we do not always act coherently on our best understanding. At times, we need to ask ourselves not just about the meaning of life’s events, but also whether the understanding we have acquired is accurate. This is not as easy as it sounds. Most of us resist recognizing that some new experience is demanding that we shift in fundamental ways our understanding of both ourselves and our world.

Not only can we be mistaken, we can also be inauthentic. Even with our best insights and correct judgments, we do not always follow through. We fool ourselves into betraying our deepest convictions. Even if we have considered carefully and have arrived at certain convictions, it does not automatically follow that we will be coherent in following through. We know, but we prevaricate. Beyond paying attention to what is happening to us as we walk through life, we need to take responsibility for acting with integrity. We need, then, to ask not just about the value of what we have learned but also what we are going to do about it. Only then are we authentically human.

Finally, curiosity is not limited; there is no end to our appetite for truth, for goodness, for justice, for love. We can get lazy and stop paying attention. And yet,

there is no reason why we cannot always revive our attention to deepening our understanding and, at the same time, enlarging our appreciation. There is always more to learn, more to appreciate. Nor is it enough to have in our satchel an infinite list of truths and values we admire. There is a hierarchy in our values, and we can ask about that as well. We can also ask about what is most important to us. That is precisely why the Ancients called the search for meaning, for truth and for the good, the practice of *religare*.

Our self-transcendence, our personal development, does not occur in isolation. We are part of vast communities of people working intentionally to advance their grasp of truth, their grasp of goodness. There is also a history of others' attempts to confront similar experiences. There is the force of history and of cultural constructions to help provide clues for our understanding. Dialogue across cultures finds its foundation in the intentionality of questing minds. People attempt to give some expression to their fundamental experiences of goodness and beauty through art, music, theatre, dance, and architecture. These inspire and enlighten us.

The experience of meaning and goodness can irrupt into our lives at any point in our journey. When it does, it disrupts our subjective patterns and invites us to reshape the horizons of meaning and value that have guided us up to that point. It does not happen unless we have allowed ourselves to question our prior understanding, resulting in a desire to go deeper, further. It can only happen to those who have dared to really inquire into those fundamental questions about meaning and value in their lives. When it happens, everything is disrupted and disoriented, and life takes a funda-

mental turn. Often there is resistance to the disruption and a desire to return to the more familiar. Those who persist will reshape the horizon of their lives into something they will recognize, perhaps only very gradually, as entirely different from what went before.

Viktor Frankl has reminded us that this process does not necessarily occur only in contexts of joy and peacefulness. He said of his own experience that the most meaningful time in his life was while he was an inmate at Auschwitz. He learned that the survivors were often those who found meaning in their lives there. That meaning often consisted in a simple human expression of empathy.

So, the next time you decide to participate in a march or a vigil, or some other celebration of solidarity, ask yourself what your participation means in the larger framework of your life.<sup>2</sup>

**Richard Renshaw** received his graduate degrees from the University of Toronto and the Gregorian University in Rome. Now retired, he taught in New Brunswick and in Peru and worked for the national offices of the Canadian Religious Conference and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – Caritas Canada (CCODP).

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1 My observations are inspired to a large extent by the work of Bernard Lonergan (1904–1984), a Quebec-born Jesuit economist, philosopher, and theologian.

2 Works consulted for this paper are Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1957); Bernard Lonergan, *Topics on Education – Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, No. 10 (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute, University of Toronto Press, 1993), and Frederick E. Crowe, *Old Things and New: A Strategy for Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).



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# Doing *All* the Torah!

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## Introduction: A Few Problems

In this paper, I wish to draw on the cognitional theory of Bernard Lonergan to consider the significance of a Hebrew verb, *sācal*, found in the first chapter of the Book of Joshua, that I translate as “gaining insight.” The significance of this verb, often mistranslated in modern languages, could explain the connection between the first chapter of Joshua and the story of Rahab in chapter 2. It could also provide some insights into the ethics of the people of God in their relationship to others. The story of Rahab is set at the beginning of Israel’s history and has raised many questions as to its place at the beginning of the book of Joshua and to its connection to the first chapter of Joshua. Some scholars argue that the narrative serves to demonstrate that even the actions of an immoral person (Rahab was a prostitute) can be used to accomplish the purposes of God.<sup>1</sup> For others, the story opposes Rahab’s faith against that of the clumsy spies who were sent by Joshua.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, some scholars argue that this account should be read in light of the spy story in the book of Numbers, chapters 13–14. The spies sent by Joshua (in Joshua, chapter 2) represent the new generation; their exemplary faith is contrasted with the faith of the spies sent by Moses in the book of Numbers.<sup>3</sup> None of these conclusions, however, explain the relationship between the first two chapters of Joshua or its purpose. Furthermore, these studies suppose that the focus of the story is on the spies, when it is really about Rahab. In fact, she is the only other character, besides Joshua, mentioned by name. She appears in 20 of the 24 verses of the chapter. Most of the discourse in this chapter is attributed to her (vv. 9–13, 16 and 21a), and, except for Joshua, she is the only one who has a rapport with each of the other characters in the story (the spies, the king of Jericho, and his envoys). To work out the connection between the first two chapters of Joshua, I first focused on Joshua, chapter 1; I realized that the translation of a verb appearing in vv. 7 and 8 was problematic and this could account for the difficulty of understanding the connection between the first two chapters. After doing some research, I concluded that the verb, *sācal*, translated in our modern languages as “to prosper,” should be rendered as “gaining insight.”

In sharing this with a colleague whose background is in ethics and Lonergan studies, the conversation turned to Lonergan’s cognitional theory and the pro-

cess of ethical deliberation. It led me to an “insight” on the connection between the first two chapters and perhaps even the whole of the book of Joshua. The first chapter of Joshua is an excellent example of how biblical writers interpreted ancient traditions for a new context. The Torah and the covenant remain the focus, but the interest is in *how* to interpret the Torah in this new context in a manner that is in accordance with “all the Torah, all that is written in it.” (vv. 7 and 8). It raises the question of ethical deliberation (“What should I do?”); this question refers to reflecting on what is good and acting according to what one decides is good. If chapter 1 does refer to the question of what is good, it certainly clashes with the rest of the book of Joshua. More than any other book of the Old Testament, it exposes the dilemma of the ethics of God’s people in their relationship to others. In a monograph dedicated to the book of Joshua, L. Daniel Hawke sums up the problem by saying that if the book of Joshua intends to provide people with a sense of their national identity, which many scholars believe, it attempts to do so by means of the “annihilation of native populations and the occupation of their land ... The establishment of national identity is thus associated with a program of violence against other peoples, one that is sanctioned and sanctified by divine edict.”<sup>4</sup> So, the problem is not only understanding the connection between chapters 1 and 2, it is also a problem of ethics and the Bible. Since the 1970s, there has been a proliferation of literature on the Bible and ethics<sup>5</sup> in an attempt to understand some of the seemingly unethical stories in the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the increased interest in the Bible and ethics, the study of ethics was mostly associated with philosophy and Greek philosophic thought. But Greek philosophic thought is not present in the Bible. Stories presenting ethical dilemmas, however, are not lacking. In narratives, in historiographies, and even in the interpretation that biblical authors made of the Mosaic tradition, concerns of an ethical nature are represented by the characters in the story.<sup>7</sup>

## Transmitting/Interpreting/Actualizing and Lonergan’s Cognitive Theory

The book of Joshua begins by staging a situation in which the question “What should I do?” opens a path to what Lonergan refers to as a cognitive process that could lead the subject to answer this question. A discourse attributed to YHWH quotes numerous pas-

sages from Deuteronomy and reinterprets them in the light of a new situation. The interpretation is done by additions and modifications that will be attributed to Moses. In a study of the figure and speeches of Moses in the Second Temple period, Hindy Najman examines the practices that took place during the production of the text and its reception:

The idea of a discourse tied to a founder provides ... a helpful way to think about the developing conceptions of the Mosaic Law and figure of Moses. On this understanding of a discourse tied to a founder, to rework an earlier text is *to update, interpret* and develop the content of that text in a way that one claims to be an authentic expression of the law already accepted as authoritatively Mosaic. Thus, when what we might call a “new” law – perhaps even what we might regard as a significant “amendment” of older law – is characterized as the Law of Moses, this is not to imply that it is to be found within the actual words of an historical individual called Moses. It is rather to say that the implementation of the law in question would enable Israel to return to the authentic teaching associated with the prophetic status of Moses.<sup>8</sup>

There are three things to remember from this study. First, biblical writers / editors made very little distinction between the notion of the transmission of a text and that of its interpretation. Second, the transmission / interpretation of a text was done with a view to updating it in a situation hitherto unseen. Third, the updating of a text was seen as an authentic expression of the law. Thus, what scholars refer to as intertextuality was employed to transmit/interpret an ancient text and adapt an old tradition to a new reality. In other words, the interpretation that biblical writers make of Scripture (intertextuality) considers the concrete situation and is made in light of that situation. In fact, the interpretation is aimed at updating the Torah. An answer may be valid only for that concrete situation located in time and space, and could no longer be so in other circumstances or at another time. This is because the question “What should I do?” is always a situated question.

The first chapter of Joshua proceeds in a similar manner: the reinterpretation of the Deuteronomic texts is precisely intended to demonstrate the legitimacy and the need to analyze and interpret the Torah to adapt it to new situations and to answer the question “What should I do?” The process triggered by the question “What should I do?” warrants the use of Lonergan’s cognitional theory<sup>9</sup> to contribute to research on ethics and Old Testament texts. In what follows, I demonstrate that not only is it possible to discern in the biblical accounts the four levels of consciousness

that Lonergan identifies (experience, understanding, judgment, and decision), but also that intentionality<sup>10</sup> allows the process of interpreting to actualize the Torah to be perfected by being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.

What I am proposing is to seek not the ethics of Israel *per se*, but the *process* of ethical deliberation that guides Israel’s deciding and its doing “all the Torah.” I mean to explore the act of understanding in a given situation and to show how it informs the decisions and actions of God’s people. I will first seek to identify the concrete and specific problem presented by the biblical writer: the experience. The text presents various dimensions of a problem. The people are faced with decisions to make. What are the values that engage God’s people and how are they in conflict? How important are the values of the people of God? What data informs their decisions? How do the actions of the people promote progress or resist decline?

### Being Attentive: Experiencing

I begin by being attentive to the experience described in the text. My intention is to capture the experience described by the writer: what is seen, heard, felt, etc., the data provided by the characters in the story. The narrative describes the people about to take possession of the promised land. The writer uses the demonstrative “this,” indicating the proximity of the people to the promised country.

“And now get up and cross THIS Jordan, you and all THIS people” (v. 2)

“... You will pass THIS Jordan” (v. 11)

Their long journey was finally coming to an end, and under the leadership of Moses, they were about to cross THIS Jordan to take possession of the promised land. (vv. 2, 11, 15). Then the unexpected happened: Moses dies. His death is mentioned twice in just two verses (vv. 1 and 2). The account emphasizes the significance of this for the people:

Moses is “servant of YHWH” (vv. 1a, 2a, 13a) while Joshua is “assistant of Moses” (v. 1b).

Moses is YHWH’s spokesperson (vv. 3b, 13, 14, 15).

He assures the people of the divine assistance (v. 5b, 17c).

The promise of the land was made to Moses (vv. 3, 4, 11).

The consequences are many. The story alludes to a destabilization of the social structure: the need for Joshua to organize the camp (vv. 10-13), the call to

solidarity in helping their brothers obtain their parcel of land (v. 18), the possibility of rebellion (v. 18), and the use of the verb “shattered” (v. 9) supposes that the people were falling apart. The multiple mentions of the promise of the land suggest the uncertainty of the people as to its fulfillment. The death of Moses also calls into question YHWH’s relationship with the people (vv. 3b, 13, 14, 15). YHWH was with Moses; he spoke to him directly and transmitted his will for the people. But Moses is no more. YHWH’s assurance to the people suggests that the people were experiencing fear (vv. 5, 9b), a feeling of abandonment (v. 5b, 9b). Multiple questions are raised by the situation described in this story: Now that Moses has died, what will happen to us? Who will intervene for us with YHWH? Does the promise of the land still stand? Will YHWH be with us? What about our identity as the people of God? Who will lead us? In short, the very existence of the people of God is in jeopardy.

### Being Intelligent: Understanding

The answer to many of these questions is provided by YHWH himself by means of a reinterpretation of the Mosaic tradition. This reinterpretation has a purpose: the actualization of the word of God for the people facing a new situation. Here, the text teaches that interpretation is a process which must take into account the particular if Israel is “to do (verb of action) all the Torah.” First, by means of a concentric structure,<sup>11</sup> the author of the text sorts through all the difficulties experienced by the people to identify the essential problem(s) and value(s) which, once understood, can help in finding possible solutions. The focus is shifted from what seems like unrelated disparate difficulties to the root of their concerns, which is their identity as people of God and their relationship with this God. This is first accomplished by a framework that begins and ends the concentric structure.

Two similar clauses that pertain to the divine assistance frame the text of the concentric structure. This framework shows the desire of YHWH’s will to be with Joshua (v. 5b) and then the realization of this wish (v. 9c).

A As I was with Moses, I intend to be with you  
(v. 5b)

↓

A` For YHWH your God is with you wherever you  
go (v. 9c)

Between intent and accomplishment are several verses that provide the key for how to journey from one point to the other. To demonstrate this passage, I first need to explain some notions about grammatical constructions in Hebrew. The mention of the divine presence in v. 5b and 9c is a quote from Deuteronomy

(Dt 31.8.23c). The grammatical structure of the quote, however, is modified in v. 5b to give it a volitional nuance. So instead of reading “I will be with you,” it reads, “I intend (wish/want) to be with you.” This modification emphasizes the volitive mode of the proposition relating to the divine assistance. In the texts of Deuteronomy (Dt 31.8.23c), the grammatical construction renders an indicative future without this volitional nuance, thus, “I will be with you.” Again, the grammatical construction of v. 5b emphasizes YHWH’s intention to be with Joshua, but not its fulfillment. Divine assistance is mentioned once again in v. 9c, this time in a simple nominal sentence that translates into a present tense: “for with you (is) YHWH your God.” The framing of the concentric structure therefore shows a passage, between wanting to “be with” and its realization, “I am with.” This framework draws attention to the purpose of the concentric structure but also indicates the essential value to Israel, that is, its relationship to YHWH and the importance of his presence with the people.

What the writer wants to draw attention to is in the middle of the concentric structure. This focal point is where we find the verb to be translated as “gaining insight” but, I would add to this, insight with discernment. The way into gaining this insight is detailed in verses 7 and 8:

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may gain insight wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Torah always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be successful, and you will gain insight.

Notice how the promise of the land, a central concern of Israel, is now marginalized, so that the discourse centres on the Torah. The passage from intention to realization is done by means of a reinterpretation. Interestingly, it is YHWH himself interpreting the Mosaic tradition. It had to be YHWH, so that it would give credence to the act of interpreting. This interpretation is done through the modification of the grammatical structure (as seen above), but also by means of a recontextualization of the injunction to be “firm and courageous,” which again is a quote from Deuteronomy, here repeated three times (vv. 6, 7, 9). After quoting the Deuteronomic injunction a first time in v. 6,<sup>12</sup> the second mention of the injunction is introduced by the Hebrew adverb *raq*, translated by “however” (v. 7). The function of this particle is to clarify, specify, or introduce a restriction. Placed at the beginning of the sentence, it relates to what follows, “act according to all the Torah,” but it also relates to what precedes it. In Joshua, chapter 1, the injunction is



therefore linked to the mention of the divine assistance in v. 5b, and thus makes it conditional; YHWH will be with Joshua if (and only if) he is firm and courageous. The virtues which in Deuteronomy were required for a military confrontation are here recontextualized and now relate to Joshua's relationship to the Torah: more precisely, to the interpretation of the Torah. It thus seems, then, that new situations require a new interpretation. The Torah is recontextualized. Where the injunction had to do with warfare, it now has to do with moving forward as a people after the death of Moses.

One of the key terms in this chapter is the verb *sācal* (vv. 7d and 8e) that we discussed briefly above and that we translated as "gaining insight." Here, as in Nehemiah 8:13, it is directly related to the Torah. Surprisingly, while in Nehemiah the term is used to say "understanding" the Torah, in Joshua, chapter 1, most biblical commentators translate it by the English verb "to prosper" or "to be successful."<sup>13</sup> The imperfect *hiphil* form occurs 15 times in the Old Testament, while the infinitive or participle forms are used frequently (44 times). Interestingly, never are the participles, infinitives, or imperatives of the *hiphil* verb form translated by "to prosper." It is only with the imperfect or perfect conjugations that commentators at times give it this connotation. And in every one of these cases, this translation could be debated. Indeed, the verb is always used in connection with thought or the heart (Isa 44.18; Pr 16.23), with the notion of understanding (Ps 119.99), intelligence (Jr 3.15), learning (Ps 32.8), or discernment (Gen 3.6). Moreover, the LXX<sup>14</sup> translates the term by "to understand, conceive, perceive, discern" (v. 8). Likewise, the Syriac version (Peshitta) and the Vulgate, far from referring to the act of prospering, also refer to discernment, intelligence, or understanding.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore astonishing that the translations in modern languages have "to prosper." The meaning (and the translation) of this verb is decisive in determining the purpose of the first chapter of Joshua and its place at the beginning of the book. Among the various definitions of the *hiphil* verb *sācal*, we find that of "insight."<sup>16</sup> Bernard Lonergan, who explored the intellectual activity which leads to "insights," explains that insight puts order in the data that our senses perceive, to make them intelligible.<sup>17</sup> Insight follows the effort of concentration employed in understanding or of resolving a difficulty, and it presents itself suddenly and unexpectedly. This effort of concentration when searching for a solution predisposes insights, and according to Joshua 1.8, the study of Torah contributes to this predisposition.

The verb *hāga*, frequently translated as "to whisper/murmur," can also mean "to consider, reflect, plan, plot,"<sup>18</sup> particularly when used in connection with the Torah. The LXX translates the verb as *meletao* (to study, to reflect). In Joshua, chapter 1, it is this ef-

fort of concentration for which the text presents two consequences (v. 8de), each introduced by the adverb "then." The first uses the verb *tsālach*, meaning to be successful or to be prosperous (v. 7d): "then you will be successful." The second consequence is where the verb *sācal* is used (v. 8), and its meaning must evidently differ from the first consequence. Here the effort of concentration results in "gaining insight." According to what has been said above, thinking (*hāga*) or the effort of concentration will promote the acquisition of insight (*sācal*). Studying the Torah will provide Joshua with an internal organization that suddenly and unexpectedly springs to mind (insight) and will guide him wherever he goes. Verse 7cd suggests a notion of intentionality. The protasis and apodosis of verse 7c and 7d, "do not turn away from it to the right or to the left in order to obtain insight wherever you go," insists on self-awareness in the determination to do "all the Torah," and "wherever you will go" includes unprecedented situations. In short, vv. 7-8 are an appeal to consider the Torah at all times: "night and day," and in all places: "wherever you go." Verse 8 explains how the book of the law will not stray from his mouth: by studying it night and day. "This book of Torah will not go away from your mouth since you will study it night and day." In other words, if YHWH is to be with Joshua, then Joshua must study the Torah attentively to obtain insight that will enable him to act according to all that is written. The Torah transcends time (v. 8b: night and day) and space (v. 7d: wherever you go) in facilitating insights. This pericope (vv. 5-9c) interprets the Mosaic law in a new context to explain to the people how YHWH can be with them.

The setting in this story, the structure of the text, particularly the pericope of verses 5b to 9c, and the vocabulary show the main problems for Israel and the way forward:

- The exhortation to mutual aid and solidarity (vv. 12-15) exposes the difficulty involved between choosing one's own survival or the survival of a people.
- One can also discern a dilemma between remaining attached to Moses (the law, the tradition, the words) or moving forward towards a renewal by means of a recontextualization (interpreting to actualize the Torah).

The path forward assures YHWH's presence. He was with Moses, He wants to be with Joshua, and the path from intent to realization is through the actualization of the Torah.

So, thus far, in Lonergan's terms we have moved from being attentive to the experience to being intelligent in understanding the issues at stake and identifying



the most pressing need—YHWH’s presence among the people. The third level of Lonergan’s cognitional theory pertains to the validity of the path forward identified in the concentric structure. Can YHWH be with Joshua and the people despite the death of Moses, who was the intermediary between YHWH and the people? Are the words of YHWH spoken to Moses still valid? The discourse of Joshua to the people will help answer these questions of judgment.

### **Being Reasonable: Judging**

In vv. 10-15, Joshua takes charge of the people as YHWH commanded and speaks to the people. Throughout both YHWH’s discourse to Joshua and Joshua’s discourse to the people, allusions to the Torah or to the words of Moses emphasize the mosaic authenticity of the Torah (vv. 3b, 7b, 8a and c, 13a, 14a, 15b and d). Thus, YHWH and Joshua are not denying the past, they are acknowledging the authoritative stance of the Mosaic tradition. Both speeches (YHWH’s in vv. 5b to 9 and Joshua’s in vv. 10-15) affirm the continuing validity of the words spoken to Moses. But the transcending nature of the Torah is only made possible through reinterpretation that is meant to actualize it in every generation. “Doing” the Torah is actualizing the Torah. Actualizing the Torah is understanding it within a new context. The speeches subtly remind Israel (and us) that YHWH’s presence is not circumscribed to a piece of land. In fact, in YHWH’s speech the concern is not the land, but his presence among his people. The survival as a distinct people is contingent on this transcending truth. The promise of the land is a benefit, but the land in and of itself does not ensure the presence of YHWH. Moses himself does not ensure this presence. When YHWH makes his speech, Moses is dead. YHWH’s presence is manifested by “doing the Torah,” which requires this effort of concentration in understanding the Torah in unprecedented circumstances. In light of what has been said above, “to do” according to all of the Torah is not to abide by laws, traditions, or even a code of covenant. This may seem contradictory, since the text insists on “doing the law.” The key word is the verb “to do.” To act according to the whole Torah is to interpret in order to update it in a specific context. It is to take concrete situations into account and to be attentive, intelligent, and reasonable in judging the validity of our understanding. To do according to *all* the law means also to complete the process. This means action.

### **Being Responsible: Acting**

The people’s response to Joshua in the last speech (vv. 16-18) repeats the conditional elements of YHWH’s speech to Joshua that we saw above. The people will obey Joshua and support him in everything he says, on two conditions:

– only may YHWH your God be with you as he was with Moses (v. 17).

– Only be strong and courageous (v. 18).

Before we discuss in more detail the fourth level of Lonergan’s cognitive process, a word should be said about the quadruple quote taken from Deuteronomy (31.7, 23), “Be firm and courageous.” In my opinion, rather than serving as a recurring theme, these repetitions draw attention to present circumstances and the fear of moving forward, that is, the fear of letting go of biases and false securities. Let us remember that for Israel, to transmit was to interpret in light of new circumstances. This could mean to reconsider previous understandings and to seek true values. We have seen that by means of a literary structure, a recontextualization and modifications made to the quoted Deuteronomistic texts, YHWH rectifies for Joshua the basis of Israel’s identity and survival. The basis is not the land and not the Mosaic tradition (as understood by the people then), it is YHWH’s presence, made possible through an actualization of the Torah, which involves a commitment to being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. The sphere of activity in which firmness and courage are exercised is thus modified. These virtues, “be strong and courageous,” which in Deuteronomy were required for a military confrontation, are here recontextualized and now relate to Joshua’s relationship to the Torah, more precisely to the interpretation of the Torah done by means of a recontextualization. One could say that being a people of God requires courage.

The second chapter of Joshua is an exemplification of what was discussed in Joshua, chapter 1. I first want to remind the reader of the insistence on doing *all* the Torah: this is valuable wherever one goes and whatever the time. Doing *all* the Torah includes action. To illustrate this, chapter 2 of Joshua seems to present the worst-case scenario, challenging Israel’s biases and prejudices. The story of Rahab is an illustration of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.

The laws challenged in the story of Rahab have to do with Israel’s relation to foreigners. The Deuteronomistic code states that Israel is to eliminate all those who are not Israelites: Hittite, Girgashite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite (Dt 7.1ss, 20, 17ff). At the same time, in their understanding of the stranger, they are to consider their own experience of oppression in Egypt to identify with those less fortunate, and this includes the stranger. In this story, it seems the author / narrator takes delight in presenting a caricatural portrait of the ungodly stranger. She symbolizes the ultimate danger for Israel, who will soon take possession of the promised land.

We first learn that Rahab lives in Jericho and is therefore Canaanite. The next piece of information the narrator provides relates to her profession: she is a prostitute (v. 2). The narrator's description at the start of the story makes her the embodiment of the stranger that Israel must avoid at all costs. She is a woman, a Canaanite, and a prostitute. As a first encounter, the spies sent by Joshua could not do worse. It is only after this description that we are told her name is Rahab. Other elements in the narrative also allude to her profession. When the envoys of the king of Jericho ask Rahab to bring out the two spies (v. 3), we read: "Bring out the men, the comers to / in you, who entered your house." Note that this sexual allusion comes from the mouths of the king's envoys and not the narrator. The narrator omits the qualifier "the comers to / in you" (v. 1). The text only reads that "they went and they entered the house of the prostitute woman." Rahab's profession and Canaanite identity evoke the dangers that threaten Israel in this new country where Joshua leads them. Situated immediately after the exhortation to obey the "book of the law," this story intentionally alludes to the laws in relation to the foreigner. The *raison d'être* of this account placed at the beginning of the History of Israel has to do with Israel's dealings with the foreigner but also with the first chapter of Joshua in the transmitting/interpreting of the Torah.

In fact, if the story begins with a warning, what follows calls into question the opinion of, or rather the prejudices against, Rahab. The text points out, by various means, that the success of the spies' mission is attributed to Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute! The verb "sent" is used three times in the text. First, Joshua secretly "sends" two men to explore the land and especially the city of Jericho (v. 1). But it seems that Joshua's secret mission is quickly revealed, since upon the arrival of the two men in the house of Rahab, the king of Jericho learns that the sons of Israel have come to explore the country and that they have entered Rahab's house at night. So, it is now the king of Jericho's turn to "send" his emissaries to bring out the spies (v. 3). But this ends in failure thanks to Rahab, who does not hesitate to lie to the king's envoys and leads them in a futile pursuit. Eventually, Rahab herself "sends / frees" (v. 21) the two spies, telling them how to avoid those who pursue them. If Joshua's plan succeeds, it is thanks to Rahab befuddling the plans of the king of Jericho. Rahab's success in protecting the spies is further emphasized by the verb "to find": the king's emissaries "did not find them" (v. 22d), while Joshua's spies told him "all their finds" (v. 23b). The story also depicts Rahab as an observant and intelligent woman. It contrasts the ignorance of the king and his men with the knowledge of Rahab. For example, the king of Jericho and his envoys seek to find out where Israel's two spies are hiding. Rahab, having put the spies in a

safe place, knows where they are, but she misleads the king's envoys (vv. 3-5). She also seems to know the identity of the two men even before the envoys of the king of Jericho arrive at her door. Finally, the information Joshua eventually obtains comes from a long discourse given by Rahab (vv. 9-11), which strikingly resembles a confession of faith. We will notice, in this speech, the repetitive use of the particle *kî* (that), used to underline the extent of Rahab's knowledge about YHWH and Israel. She knows:

- "that YHWH gave you the land," (v. 9a)
- "and that terror fell on us," (v. 9b)
- "and that all the inhabitants of the land are powerless before you." (v. 9c)

The next use of the particle *kî* is not preceded by the conjunction (and). This signals a change in its function. In fact, it is now used to explain how Rahab knows all of these things:

- "For we have heard that YHWH dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt," what you did to Sihon and Og the kings of the Ammorites ... (v. 10)
- "For YHWH your God, he (is) God above in the heavens and here below on the earth." (v. 11d)

The information that the spies report to Joshua is also introduced by the particle *kî*, but this time with an emphatic function, and sums up the gist of the speech: "Certainly YHWH has delivered into our hands all the land, in fact all the inhabitants of the land tremble in front of us" (v. 24). It is this knowledge that sets Rahab apart from the rest of Jericho. All the citizens of Jericho are afraid (v. 9b) because, like Rahab, they heard (v. 10a and 11a) and their courage left them (v. 11). Through this Rahab recognizes YHWH as the God in heaven and on earth. It is to him that she attributes the terror of the people. Rahab's actions are not motivated only by fear, but also by her knowledge of YHWH. It is in the mouth of this foreign woman that we find the first historical summary and the first confession of faith in the Deuteronomic historiography.<sup>19</sup> Another essential point to remember about the characterization of Rahab in the text is her marginalization from her own society. In v. 15, the place where Rahab lives is described as "In the exterior wall of the wall" (literally). This is the only place in the Bible where the two terms *beqîr* and *hachômāh* appear together and probably indicates that Rahab lived in the outer city wall. This is the reason why the spies were able to escape (v. 15). Moreover, the text continues by emphasizing the fact that she lived in the wall: "in the wall, she lived." There is certainly an insistence to express that she lived on the margins of her own society. You cannot be more

marginalized than living in the exterior wall of the city. Not only is Rahab ostracized from her neighbours, but she is also isolated from her own family. The text assumes a distinction between “her house” and her father’s house. To save her family, she will have to bring her father, her mother, her brothers, and all those who belong to them (slaves, workers) into “her house.” The story ends with Rahab negotiating a deal with the spies: if she saves them, they will save her and her family when the city of Jericho is conquered by Israel.

In summary, Rahab’s portrayal at the beginning of the story provokes a first response based on preconceptions, prejudices, and biases. It also recalls the law and the injunctions pertaining to foreigners. She in fact symbolizes the ultimate danger for Israel, who is to take possession of the promised land. However, her role in helping the spies, first in hiding them, then in helping them flee the king’s men, prompts a reassessment of the initial understanding of the character. Likewise, her knowledge, her confession of faith, and her living situation all contribute to elicit sympathy, understanding, and admiration for this woman relegated to the fringes of society. The threat that the foreigner poses to Israel is non-existent in Rahab, although she is initially described as a Canaanite prostitute. The spies will nonetheless make a conditional covenant with Rahab. Her integrity will be revealed in her actions.

The conclusion of Rahab’s story is in Joshua, chapter 6. Here, Rahab’s saving action is emphasized: “only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house for she hid the messengers whom we sent.” This is further underlined in v. 25 of the same chapter: “And she dwelt in the midst of Israel until this day, for she had hid the messengers which Joshua had sent to explore Jericho.”

We could surmise that this chapter is truly the illustration of what was understood from the first chapter: letting go to move forward. That is, understanding the Torah in unprecedented situations and acting according to one’s understanding and judgment.

## Conclusion

The translation of one verb, “to gain insight,” in Joshua, chapter 1 has helped understand the connection between the first two chapters of Joshua. Essentially, chapter 1 insists on the necessity of actualizing the Torah for God’s presence to be manifest among the people. But this is only possible through a process that considers the present as well as the future. It considers the past and makes it resourceful for a new context. “Doing the Torah” is transcending time and space to make the word of God alive.

The first chapter finds an echo or illustration in the account of Rahab in chapter 2. This second chapter evokes the archetype of the stranger, whom Israel must at all costs avoid (prostitute, woman, Canaanite). It challenges preconceptions and prejudices. If it was only a question of the application of a code of law, Rahab and her family would have been destroyed (Dt 7.1ff; 20.17ff). However, an attentiveness to experience, a careful understanding of the situation, and a discernment that considers Israel’s core values shifts a purely legalistic application of the Law to the “doing of *all* the Torah.” The “*all*” precludes a simple application of a code of law.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter 1 is also illustrated in many of the stories in the book of Joshua. Akan’s infidelity, in chapter 7, emphasizes the impact that decisions and actions have on the community—hence the need for discernment that can only come through a careful study of the Torah in light of every situation. The covenant with the Gibeonites, in chapter 9, is an example of a hasty decision without any discernment. The people of Gibeon deceive the Israelites into making a covenant with them; this subsequently engages the community in war against a coalition of five kings (chapter 10). Moreover, the reproach made to the Israelites, saying they had not consulted YHWH (9.14b), alludes, in my opinion, to Joshua chapter 1. Israel could not obtain insight into the situation because they had not been attentive, intelligent, and reasonable. Thus, they acted irresponsibly. These accounts illustrate how discernment and insight obtained by means of the study of the Torah are necessary for its actualization and to ensure the divine assistance, which confers to the people its identity as people of YHWH.

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1 Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary 7 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 34–35. A. Sherwood, “A Leader’s Misleading and a Prostitutes Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31:1 (2006), 45.

2 Y. Zakovitch, “Humor and Theology or the Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence: A Literary-Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2,” in Susan Niditch, ed., *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible Folklore* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 75–79. For a quick summary of authors, see Sherwood, “A Leader’s Misleading and a Prostitutes Profession,” 44–45, n. 2.

3 Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 30–32.

4 L. Daniel Hawk, *Joshua* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), xii.

5 Especially after James A. Gustafson’s comment about the lack of collaboration between biblical scholars and ethicists, “The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study,” *Interpretation* 24 (1970), 430.

6 See John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

7 John Barton addresses this issue in "Reading for Life: The Use of the Bible in Ethics" in *ibid.*, 55–64.

8 Najman, "Mosaic Discourse," in *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*, *Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement 77* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 1–40, at 13; italics added.

9 Lonergan's cognitional theory is grounded in the concrete cognitional operations that human beings go through to come to knowledge of what is true and what is good. The operations are dynamic and part of an ongoing process in all forms of human living (whether everyday activities or academic study). They begin with human advertence to one's *experience* (or to the data): the roots of such advertence is human wonder. Human beings wonder about their experience, and wondering elicits questions for *understanding*. Understanding demands verification that our insights are accurate. And, when we come to *judge* that an insight is accurate, we move on to *discerning* what we ought to do now that we have come to this judgment of truth. (Lonergan's cognitional theory constitutes these four levels: experience, understanding, judgment, and decision.) What became clear in bringing Lonergan's cognitional theory to bear on the book of Joshua is that this dynamic process is going on within characters in the book. This paper unpacks this phenomenon to shed light on ethical deliberation in the book of Joshua. See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, 1957) and *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

10 For Lonergan, the four levels of experience, understanding, judgment, and decision are not only conscious, they are intentional.

11 A concentric structure is a literary device in which a clause has its parallel except for the middle clause, which is then the centre or focal point of the structure: AB/C/BA.

12 See Dt 31.7 and 23.

13 This is the case for most, if not all, modern language translations of the Hebrew Text of Joshua, chapter 1.

14 The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

15 The Vulgate has *intellegas* (vv. 7 and 8).

16 This is its meaning in Aramean and in Syriac: Klaus Koenen, "עֲכָלָה," in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. XIV, Douglas W. Stott, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 113–14.

17 "But the plain fact is that the world lies in pieces before him and pleads to be put together again, to be put together not as it stood before on the careless foundation of assumptions that happened to be unquestioned but on the strong ground of the possibility of questioning and with full awareness of the range of possible answers." Lonergan, *Insight*, 552.

18 Athanase Negoita and Helmer Ringgren, "הַגִּידָה," in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. III, John T. Willis, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and David E. Green, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 321–24.

19 The Deuteronomistic Historiography comprises the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings.

20 It seems to me that this is what Jesus is saying in the Sermon on the Mount. There is the spirit or heart of the law, and then there is the law set in stone. Rahab is presented as one of Jesus' great grandmothers. Interesting that if Israel had applied the code of law, Rahab could not have produced a lineage that gave to the world the Messiah, the Christ.

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# Critique and Hope

## An Exploration of Dorothee Soelle's Political Theology

By Valerie Thomas-Leitao

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*Apocalypstein*, the Greek word meaning to unveil or to unmask, is for Dorothee Soelle closely tied to her understanding of theology's main premise: Revelation. Soelle understands the event of Revelation not only as one that is directed toward individual souls, but that also pertains to institutions and to the whole of socio-economic and political life. Her approach to theology as a form of biblical ideological criticism reveals or unveils the underlying institutional context in which and from which certain languages, discourses, and texts are forged and emerge. This unveiling is not meant to reveal solely the institutional contexts, but also to uncover the underlying human hunger for belonging and for basic human rights. Through some of Soelle's early influences, we will explore how hope and critique are intertwined in her political theology, which she also names a political hermeneutic of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

For Soelle, Revelation is tied directly to ideological criticism, which she views as an instrument of self-criticism for theology, that is, as the means by which the absolute basis of theology, the gospel *Kerygma*, is freed from its ideological fixations.<sup>2</sup> Particular to Soelle's political-biblical hermeneutic is her critique of theology itself, which encompasses her critique of her own academic and ecclesiastical institutions. This hermeneutic is differentiated from theologically grounded politics, which can become totalitarian and oppressive, as history has shown. With this expression of a political hermeneutic, or a political interpretation, Soelle aims to dispel the misunderstandings that may be attributed to the term "political theology" due to its interpretation by Carl Schmitt, or due to any dualism that would contradict the proclamation of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

Dorothee Soelle was a German Lutheran theologian who was born in 1929 and died in 2003. She, along with Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, was at the centre of a new political theology that she would later suggest shares in the same preoccupations as the Latin American liberation theologies.

### A Post-Auschwitz Theology for the Deprivatization of Faith

This theological perspective, in being self-critical, does not aim to offer specifically Christian solutions

to problems in the world.<sup>4</sup> The predisposition allows such a theology to enter into a constructively critical dialogue with a variety of current issues. Soelle's political-biblical hermeneutic does not pose itself as a supreme or infallible theory. Rather, it attempts to hold open a horizon of interpretation in which "politics is understood as the comprehensive decisive sphere in which Christian truth should become praxis."<sup>5</sup> This implies that a Christian spiritual experience of faith should not be separated from social and political reality.

As a German born between the First and Second World Wars, Soelle's experience of the Third Reich is the reason for her critical stance. She questions a theology that allowed for the rise of the Third Reich and that stood silent before the atrocities of the Holocaust. These events make her radically question a theology that does not take socio-political history and sociological reality seriously. Consequently, she seeks to develop a "Post-Auschwitz Theology" that can no longer understand God as existing solely beyond history and human misery.<sup>6</sup> Rather, she conceives of a God who intimately shares in the suffering of the victims. Her work arises from an understanding of truth that stresses the inseparable unity of the theory and praxis of faith, that is, of spiritual experience in socio-political history. Accordingly, the task of theology in this perspective also includes the examination and questioning of the structures of power in society.

Social historical inquiry always recedes—especially in today's mysticism boom<sup>7</sup>—in favour of a *perennial philosophy* (to borrow the name of Aldous Huxley's famous anthology), a way of thinking that is outside of time. It looks at God and the soul alone, without any social analysis. At the very least, this approach is an abridgment.<sup>8</sup> Thus Soelle concentrates on denouncing and unveiling forms of privatized faith that ultimately do not translate themselves into the world. Instead, they manifest as a continuous retreat from the world and from solidarity with the human family in the very real conditions of existence.

Soelle seeks to erase the distinction between a mystical internal and a political external.

Everything that is within needs to be externalised so that it doesn't spoil, like the manna in the desert that was hoarded for future consumption. There is no experience of God that can be so privatised that it becomes and remains the property of one owner, the privilege of a person of leisure, the esoteric domain of the initiated.<sup>9</sup>

The concern here is that spirituality be made a "something" that can be owned, that can be instrumentalized and accumulated. Soelle argues that "inner experience" cannot be protected and kept private; it must be received and given.

### **The Jewish Roots of Christianity**

Soelle is concerned with hegemonic power structures and relationships of power that subjugate human beings to an imposed order for the benefit of ruling elites. These hegemonic power structures can manifest in all spheres of human existence and in any institutional context. The larger vision that bears her critique is fundamentally eschatological; it is concerned with the liberation of humankind, which for Soelle is necessarily in continuity with the Jewish tradition. The Jewish roots of Christianity are for Soelle another underlying and essential influence that she evokes as being, to its detriment, largely overlooked in the Christian tradition.

It is Soelle's insistence on going back to the Jewish roots of Christianity that incite her to affirm: "I do not believe that we can separate Jesus from his Jewish background and stylize him as a private redeemer of individual souls."<sup>10</sup> Her strong ties to the Jewish tradition allow her also to critique an increasingly individualistic and private form of Christian religiosity. Her theology bears the weight of the atrocities of Auschwitz and is pulled forward by the Judaeo-Christian eschatological hope for liberation.

Soelle distinguishes between the Christian Constantinian tradition and the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition.<sup>11</sup> She insists on and identifies more with the latter as a form of radical Christianity. The term "radical" here signifies "returning to the roots." The expression "radical Christianity" can translate into returning to the Jewish roots of the Christian tradition. This radicalism as it is understood here is one that seeks to set the deepest foundations in such a way that an abridgement of faith is not possible.

### **Toward a Historical Ontology**

Christianity finds its roots in the Jewish tradition, which understands the experience of God as taking place in history. God reveals himself through historical events and leads the people of Israel through their walk toward liberation.

Israel's concept of God grew out of the historical deed of God's deliverance of the Hebrew people. It is in light of the Hebrews being freed from oppression by a foreign military superpower that one ought to approach the conceptualization of Creation in the biblical narratives of Genesis 1 and 2.<sup>12</sup>

Creation narratives here are understood as projecting an ontological conception of humankind's relationship with God, while the Exodus narrative is understood more as presenting a historical conception. Soelle suggests that the Exodus narrative, having been written before the Creation narrative, should be read first. This would allow for an initial historical conception of human life, which can then integrate the ontological questions. This way, the Exodus narrative would shape the reception of the Creation narrative.

We can observe a movement toward a historical ontology, one that would read the Exodus narrative and then read the Creation narrative in light of this historical backdrop. The opposite would result in a fixation on an ontological conception that can easily and readily forgo the social and political location of the reader and therefore fail to integrate and to consider the historical, social, and political dimensions of human existence. Thus, for Soelle, to confess a Christian God is to confess a Judaeo-Christian God who is primarily understood historically rather than ontologically. "In the Jewish understanding, acting, making decisions and creating situations are where man reforms himself and is converted to God or worships other gods."<sup>13</sup> This historical dimension takes seriously the often-forgotten Jewish roots of prophetic hope, which give depth and direction to Christian belief. This issue will lead Soelle to be extremely vigilant toward individualistic and private forms of religiosity that would contradict the very essence of a Judaeo-Christian heritage and confession.

### **The Influence of Rudolf Bultmann's Existential Theology**

Unsatisfied with the dogmatic orthodox and neo-orthodox theologies of her time, which conceived of God as floating above and beyond history, Soelle found a more accessible and practical theology in the more recent liberal paradigm to which Rudolf Bultmann belongs. This new paradigm arose from the clash between the old orthodoxy and the new secularized spirit<sup>14</sup> and was constructed around the historical-critical method. "Liberal theology emphasised very strongly that the Bible is not an unassailable authority of orthodox thought."<sup>15</sup>

The method of historical criticism applied to the Bible was initially aimed at emancipating theology from rigid

structures. Soelle's own theology was determined by the offshoots of liberal theology and was eventually driven beyond this paradigm.<sup>16</sup> It is on the basis of Soelle's encounter with Rudolf Bultmann's liberal existential theology that she came to affirm her own understanding of a religious and confessional discourse that she would characterize as being radical and biblical. Her discourse is primarily founded on a particular conception of history, as was mentioned above. Soelle understood that Bultmann's real contribution lay in the clear distinction he makes between the conceptions of history found in Greek thought and in the Old Testament. The Old Testament's conception of history takes the categories of human decision, responsibility, and man's relation to the future seriously, which may oppose a Greek understanding that would perceive history as being cyclical and in some way preprogrammed. The Old Testament's historical understanding of human existence predisposes the Bultmannian position toward a political and social understanding of human life within which eschatological decisions pertain neither to the inner man nor to another world after death.<sup>17</sup>

Soelle's shift from existentialist theology to political theology was itself a consequence of what she called "the Bultmannian position." Soelle worked from the base of Bultmann's existential theology to build a foundation for her political theology. However, she argued that Bultmann's theology was truncated, in that he does in fact ground theological reflection in an understanding of the structures of concrete human existence but fails to see that this existence is inherently social and not simply individual.<sup>18</sup> The problem for Soelle was posed by "the abandonment of the question of meaning in history."<sup>19</sup> This question would be reduced to the meaning of individual existence. Soelle argued that Bultmann had adopted this reduction. "The result of this [existentialist] way of thinking about Christian faith and history is that meaning always lies in the present."<sup>20</sup>

### **The "Pure Present" of a Dominant Ontology**

This reduction of meaning to a 'pure present' brought Soelle to eventually distinguish between present eschatology and futurist eschatology, both of which she deemed necessary and which could not become mutually exclusive. "The already there and the 'not yet' represent a complex structure, a 'both-and' which cannot be grasped by positivist logic. The eschatology of love destroys itself in a pure present without expectation."<sup>21</sup> Thus she critiqued Bultmann's theology, which limits eschatology to a personal sense of meaning and to a phenomenon belonging solely to the present, thereby cancelling out any historical di-

mension and eliminating any expectation or hope that feeds love.

For Soelle, this reduction creates a 'dominant ontology,' which she also translated as a 'false ontology.' The consequence of this false ontology of being-in-itself is that "one not only regards the objects as objects, but treats them as objects. This false ontology in which relationship is nothing but domination, also leads us to disguise and tame the contradictoriness of the reality."<sup>22</sup> Soelle argued that this dominant ontology would only feed the positivist notion of science that makes us believe that reality cannot be contradictory. This idea or this scientific postulate could then be maintained by a dominant ontology that can serve to neutralize reality—so that it no longer affects, touches, or confronts us.<sup>23</sup> Subjectivity is injected into the hermeneutical process; however, it swallows up any past or future, any element that could introduce a contradictory and complex reality. Only what is appropriated existentially, what is relevant for that subjectivity in that moment, could pass for understanding.<sup>24</sup> This expresses what Soelle would go on to characterize as a form of "timeless bourgeois faith."

Soelle criticized Bultmann for thinking solely within the context of a bourgeois understanding of science; one that is timeless and objectivizing. She postulated that perhaps his existential interpretation was not existential enough to deliver him from the ontology of oppression.<sup>25</sup> This timeless and objectivizing language increasingly excluded confessional speech, as it rid itself of every form of doubt or other emotion and used theological terminology in a purely instrumental manner.<sup>26</sup> It could not express the sacredness of life but instead acted like a protective mechanism that would not transcend the technocratic language game.<sup>27</sup> The problem with remaining in a "pure present" is that the language that protects it in most cases is a positivist and hence techno-scientific language, which cannot confess, remember, or hope.

Soelle argued that we cannot resist technocratic language by reducing our horizon of interpretation to a pure present. This reduction would only give way to an even greater emphasis and use of positivist logic. Soelle's political theology is rooted in social hope. "No one can be saved alone. Subjectivity is injected into this process of social understanding but not for the purpose of seeking understanding and faith for itself alone. Rather it believes in and calls for the indivisible salvation of the whole world."<sup>28</sup> Soelle arrived at this conclusion based on her religious ties with Judaism. Political theology has drawn several conclusions from the Jewish-Christian dialogue, namely, the Old Testament's understanding of history and of prophetic hope.



## Ideological Criticism for Theology

It is through her study of Marxist and Neo-Marxist philosophers, Ernst Bloch as well as Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm, that Soelle begins to articulate her critique of neo-orthodox theology as being caught up in systems of power and rationalistic orthodoxy. From her dialogue with these authors she comes to critique liberal theology at the other end of the spectrum as being uniquely centred on the subject, reducing this paradigm to the private and bourgeois spheres of existence.

Though the Marxist and Neo-Marxist traditions may present important inconsistencies with the biblical tradition, Soelle nonetheless draws parallels between these two. Marx would essentially have adopted the Jewish view of history. For Soelle, the need for a fundamental analysis of structures and of ideologies comes from a biblical faith in the God of Justice. The gospel should then be inconceivable without critical analysis and without "law." Association with the prophetic tradition should encourage and motivate theology to push its projects toward the liberation of all.<sup>29</sup> Only the liberation of all is understood as being a valid liberation for the individual.<sup>30</sup>

For Soelle, a theological education that awakens no sense of need for an economic theory betrays its own goal.<sup>31</sup> Her encounter with Marxism deepened her Christian understanding of the historical and social dimensions of human existence. As we all know, the Christian God all too often remains a disembodied heavenly being distant from history's victories and defeats, experienced only by individuals for their own happiness. This is an idealistic God who has neither a bodily nor a social dimension. This God has nothing to do with what happens to the body or to social structures. Marxists encouraged Christians to go back to the apocalyptic tradition, which emphasizes redemption and which preceded the Constantine tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Soelle, having drawn heavily from Hegel, Marx, and the Frankfurt school of ideological criticism, sketched basic features of a political anthropology that contrasts with the individualistic and personal emphases of existentialism.<sup>33</sup> The guiding hermeneutical principle of her political theology, as was mentioned, does not ignore individual existence, nor does it result in depersonalization. From the perspective of this political theology, which is also a political anthropology, a person first becomes a concrete tangible reality precisely when he/she becomes aware of his/her dependence on society. "Any attempt to keep Christian proclamation free from this mutual relation between man and his society leads to ideology, ideology without foundation in praxis."<sup>34</sup> Bultmann's existential theology, then, is considered as effectively keeping Christian proclamation free from

the relationship between man and society as it is absorbed by the exclusive interest of the individual.

As was mentioned earlier, the problem of revelation in political theology is directly tied to ideological criticism as a tool for self-criticism.<sup>35</sup> The method employed in political theology attempts to use ideological criticism as a means of freeing the substance of the gospel from its disguises. It becomes an instrument of self-criticism for theology, and the gospel can become free once again from its illusory destructive systematic fixations. This does not, however, make ideological criticism the sole valid standard for theology, but only a necessary corrective for the theological expressions that are to be scrutinized for their social implications.<sup>36</sup> Argumentative and reflective discourses offer internal criticism that can prevent an interpretation of faith as an escape from the realities of the world. Ideological criticism also dismantles any form of elitist or privatized interpretation of faith. For Soelle, the experience of faith must continue to be subject to criticism inwardly, to prevent each and every thing from emerging as an experience of the divine.<sup>37</sup> While faith is certainly more than theology, it necessarily calls for critical reflection, self-understanding, and the need to be in relationship with the world. Essentially, ideological criticism poses this analytical question: Who profits? This translates into discerning what and/or who is being served through different structures, theories, and ideologies as well as who could be left out.

For Soelle, theology should have a critical role, one that is anything but neutral and that is rightfully apocalyptic, one that seeks to unveil hidden or concealed forms of exploitation, one that works toward the division of power and works against the individualization of hope. The method of ideological criticism can question Bultmann's theology, for example, by asking what interests produced it. Whose interests are served by perceiving the meaning of history only in the present? To which class do persons who talk this way belong? Does such a perception not suppose that one has been saturated by bourgeois ideals? Who is the dialogue partner of such a theology?<sup>38</sup>

Political theology carries on in the best tradition of liberal theology while preserving the methodological achievements of ideological criticism. It includes social and ecclesiastical structures, along with their ideological superstructures, in its interpretation of texts and of human existence.

## From a Marxist Hermeneutic of Suspicion to a Biblical Hermeneutic of Hunger

Ideological criticism as a hermeneutic of suspicion does not stand as the sole valid standard for political theology. Soelle questions whether suspicion should



be the only lens through which one examines religion, tradition, and social structures. She questions whether critical consciousness should be the only consciousness we have and asks if “self-attestation of negativity is all we can accomplish.”<sup>39</sup> Soelle wanted to move beyond “a totalizing suspicion.”<sup>40</sup>

To comprehend the mystical element in religion, we have to go beyond the hermeneutic of suspicion. Suspicion is appropriate wherever religion exercises unrestricted total power over the life of men and women. In our situation, one in which organized religion is much less present, Soelle affirms that “rather than asking what political domination religious power uses to consolidate its own power, we need to ask what it is that men and women are looking for in their cry for a different spirituality.”<sup>41</sup> She then depicts a hermeneutic of hunger as a shift from suspicion. The hermeneutic of hunger enters the realm of mysticism as it addresses the basic human hunger for union with God.

Soelle’s hermeneutic of hunger differs from that of suspicion, but also differs from what Soelle identified as “postmodern aestheticization.” “An aestheticization of mysticism often occurs where the social ego denies itself, and in a greedy hankering after experience that is reminiscent of late medieval crazes for the miraculous, falls in line with the trend that is making the social values of communal life disappear.”<sup>42</sup> Soelle makes a stark distinction between mystical traditions and postmodern aestheticization. This aestheticization is understood as one that incorporates and appropriates selected elements from mystical traditions and directs them solely toward the individual. “Real hunger is different. It learns to listen to the silent cry.”<sup>43</sup>

Dorothee Soelle’s political theology is a powerful reminder of the Judeo-Christian relationship between Incarnation and shared social hope. Her critique consistently admonishes attempts to escape or negate the human experience. It is fuelled by a desire, a hunger, to embrace the real conditions of social, political, economic, and historical human life, as complicated, contradictory, and complex as they may be. These conditions structure our being, and in tending to them as the place of transcendence, we may build stronger, more sustainable, and embodied relationships and institutions. At its very core, Soelle’s critique holds the promise of belonging.

## Conclusion

As we navigate our current time of crisis and uncertainty, Soelle’s political theology resonates profoundly. We are confronted with our urgent need to remedy our ailing institutions and to find solutions to complex problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on many gaps and shortcomings in our perspectives,

systems, and policies, which became strikingly obvious and explicit with the tragic deaths of many seniors neglected in our nursing homes. We have become painfully aware that our only way out is through collaborative coordination and solidarity: working together. This quickens our need to unmask dominant ideologies and heavy bureaucracies that have set us apart and have marginalized our elders, among many other groups, to our own detriment as a social body. The cultural imperatives to individualize hope and progress have attempted to dispose of the old: to negate, neglect, and escape certain human realities in favour of what Soelle coins the “bourgeois ideals.” This has caused the tragedies brought on by the pandemic to be exacerbated and to reflect back to us our undeniable responsibility for one another.

These days, we can almost sense an ambient soaring and roaring hunger for social hope, an urgent need to shift our ideals, to embrace now more than ever our human experience as the place of transcendence. For many, this is a sombre time, with the ravaging effects of social isolation. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the urgent need to tend to the shared silent cry, to soothe it with concrete embodied responses in our personal, social, political, and economic lives. Far from any ideal or perfect solution, we can begin by embracing our complex situation as a place of transcendence and, in keeping with the Judeo-Christian tradition, meet adversity with a hope that translates into love.

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1 Dorothee Soelle, *Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 58.

2 Ibid., Preface.

3 Ibid., 61.

4 Ibid., 59.

5 Ibid., 62.

6 Ibid., 27.

7 “Today’s mysticism boom” refers to the renewed popular interest in spiritual practices divorced from their broader traditions or context, extracting them and applying them solely to the individual for his or her own self-realization, benefit, and interest. Though there are new movements emerging that respond to a real and crucial need for transcendence and meaning, they can at times be limited when directed to the individual dismembered from any social body.

8 Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 63.

9 Dorothee Soelle, *On Earth as in Heaven: A Liberation Spirituality of Sharing* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 63.

10 Ibid., 66.

11 Dorothee Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 27.

12 Dorothee Soelle, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 7.

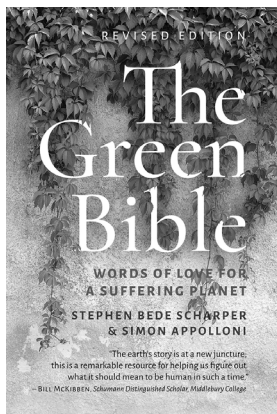
13 Soelle, *Political Theology*, 47.

14 Dorothee Soelle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 12.

15 Ibid., 32.

16 Ibid., 33.

- 17 Soelle, *Political Theology*, 47.  
 18 Ibid., 48.  
 19 Ibid.  
 20 Ibid.  
 21 Soelle, *Thinking about God*, 140.  
 22 Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability*, 125.  
 23 Ibid., 126.  
 24 Soelle, *Political Theology*, 59.  
 25 Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability*, 129.  
 26 Ibid., 155.  
 27 Ibid.  
 28 Soelle, *Political Theology*, 60.  
 29 Ibid., 69.  
 30 Ibid., 67.
- 31 Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability*, 26.  
 32 Ibid., 27.  
 33 Soelle, *Political Theology*, xvi.  
 34 Ibid., 46.  
 35 Ibid., xv.  
 36 Ibid., 63.  
 37 Soelle, *Thinking about God*, 3.  
 38 Ibid., 37.  
 39 Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, 47.  
 40 Ibid.  
 41 Ibid.  
 42 Ibid.  
 43 Ibid.



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# Reconciliation and the Doctrine of Creation

By Christina Conroy  
Ambrose University, Calgary

In the fall of 2020, after working together for several months, an ecumenical group of theologians and pastors, Indigenous and Settler, gathered online to hear from elder Stan McKay (Cree) on questions related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action pertaining to the church.<sup>1</sup> Stan McKay is no stranger to this topic. As both a Residential School survivor and former Moderator of the United Church of Canada, The Very Reverend McKay has navigated the waters of spiritual violence and healing for decades. Each one of us leaned in toward our computer screens and listened. We were prepared when our Elder suggested that churches could respond more collaboratively to both the TRC Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>2</sup> But we were not prepared for Stan McKay's assessment that a flawed doctrine of creation perpetuates spiritual violence in and between First Nations faith communities.

Stan McKay arrived in Norway House as an ordinand in 1971; colonial mission goes back to 1840 there. It is a community of 8,000, with several churches, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, and United Church of Canada. The historic mission of the church, suggests Rev. McKay, has been motivated by the story of the fallenness of creation, and the effects of this story made their way into the imagination of both individuals and faith communities. When Indigenous churches sing of the world not being our home, that we are "just passing through," they absorb the assumption that the earth and flesh are evil, temporary, and waiting to be replaced. Rev. McKay draws a direct line between this telling of the Christian story and the frustration and despair of Indigenous young people. When it fails to embrace God's creation, human and non-human alike, with thanksgiving and humility, the message of Christian mission denies the value and identity of Indigenous peoples, "removing the very ground of our being." Creation as fallen has tipped the balance of the Judeo-Christian story. Goodness has been withheld. Instead of the presence of the church being Good News for the communities of Norway House, Rev. McKay observes that family and community are now deeply divided by faith loyalties, and they are estranged from their kinship with the earth. The usurping of the foundational aspects of Indigenous identity by an imbalanced doctrine of creation manifests in a variety of ways, ranging from alienation to suicide. When

we forget that flesh and earth and water are sacred, we continue to enact harm on the world around us. "The weakness of the TRC Calls to Action is that there is not a component there about the need to address right relations with the earth as part of reconciliation; it is both about the binding of peoples together and about binding the earth and each other."<sup>3</sup>

Our ecumenical working group nodded as Stan McKay reminded us that the teachings on creation that motivated colonial Christian mission do not reflect the balance present in the doctrine of creation before colonization.<sup>4</sup> It certainly does not reflect the balance that Indigenous theologians have been writing about for years.<sup>5</sup> If we are to understand Rev. McKay correctly, the legacy of this imbalance continues to perpetuate a measurable spiritual violence in Indigenous communities like his own in Norway House. In post-Residential School Canada, the doctrine of creation is not just a matter of theology but of reconciliation. As theologians and pastors, what might it mean for us to take our Cree Elder's land-based worldview and theological insights as a starting point for reform? If we believe that those who originated the oppressive system cannot see clearly enough to lead the way out of it, Stan McKay's critical intervention and call to interdependence come as a gift. And Rev. McKay is anxious for action. "Our churches have been separated for a long time," he says.<sup>6</sup>

## The Scriptural Witness

It is a shock for my conservative evangelical students to discover that Christian scripture aligns more closely with Indigenous theological criticism than with colonial Christianity. These are students for whom loyalty to the text is the highest form of piety. Even so, they may be familiar with scripture verse by verse rather than story by story. Lingering in the strangeness and complexities of the text, oddities are unearthed, such as our two creation accounts (Genesis) or two slayers of Goliath (Samuel). We are used to approaching our Judeo-Christian origin stories by way of theology, which, of course, is not the same as exegesis. Creation *ex nihilo* allows theologians to insist that God's creative activity has neither limit nor source other than God's own will. The idea of "nothing" is not in the text. Likewise, though we have a story of Adam and Eve's exile from the garden, "fallen creation" is not an ongoing theme in the Hebrew Bible. Exegetically, we do have goodness,

diversity, and interdependence. We have exuberance. We have rhythm. There are cycles and seasons, plants and animals. Over all of it, again and again, the author(s) of Genesis say, “and God saw that it was good.”<sup>7</sup> The text begs us to recognize the beauty of everything that is as well as the deeply interconnected nature of the world. The text calls us to community.

Indigenous theologians such as Terry LeBlanc address the Western obsession with the doctrine of fall.<sup>8</sup> It is certainly not true that Western thinkers have experienced the cruelties of the world more intensely than Indigenous thinkers.<sup>9</sup> However, the doctrine of fall is one way that we have responded to the observation that, as we say in academia, the world is messed up. The doctrine of redemption comes along to fix everything we declare is wrong. Redemption becomes almost exclusively anthropocentric in contemporary Western theologies, despite the scriptural witness that redemption reaches for entirety of creation. From God’s covenant with Noah *and* every living creature (Gen. 9) to the vision of God bringing liberation to all things (Rom. 8), our sacred text embraces the whole world, human and non-human alike.

David Clough is one of the few Western theologians who systematically addresses the issue of anthropocentrism in theology in his two-volume work, *On Animals*. Walking through both text and the history of Christian thought, Clough argues that the telos of creation is not the human alone, and that the human distinction of bearing the image of God is best understood as an extension of our vocation, a call to “image God to the rest of creation.”<sup>10</sup> Clough does not use the language of kinship between human and non-human animal as Randy Woodley does.<sup>11</sup> Clough, however, recognizes the basic theological declaration of God’s transcendence as a claim of “solidarity among all that is not God.”<sup>12</sup> The categories of theological distinction are primarily between Creator and created. You, me, trees, and elephants participate in the designation of “created.” We also participate in the designation “good.” For Clough, the biblical witness indicates that human animals and non-human animals share the breath of life, are subject to God’s blessing and judgment, and are responsive to God’s commands.<sup>13</sup> The creaturely distinctions that theology and philosophy have employed in order to elevate the human over the animal have proven unsustainable as our knowledge of the created world enlarges. Even the honeybee uses tools, an adaptation that was once the marker of human superiority.<sup>14</sup>

Clough’s creature-centric theological system extends beyond the scriptural witness. I draw attention to Clough’s work with the biblical narratives to suggest that it is not the text itself that has led colonial Christianity to interpret itself, in Stan McKay’s words,

as separate from others and separate from the earth. Something else is going on. One example may illuminate this point. By the 16th century, the colonial era of history is well on its way. We see the ideology of the Doctrine of Discovery underwriting the aims of empire and concepts like “wilderness,” prominent in the Hebrew Bible, shaping the imagination of Western explorers in new ways. Colonialism is (in part) an enterprise of human over animal, with certain people groups relegated to the category of animal as a way to validate domination.<sup>15</sup> My students default to reading domination into the vocation of the human (“dominion”) in the Genesis creation narrative. Clough cites Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* to suggest that eventually, wilderness becomes defined solely in terms of the absence of the human, the absence of resources that would support human life, and the elements that pose a threat to the existence of human life.<sup>16</sup> It should be no surprise that redemption, tethered as it is to the doctrines of creation and fall, means for an early modern theologian like Martin Luther an “end to wilderness, with all creatures brought under human authority.”<sup>17</sup> Theologically, a shift occurs, and redemption rather than creation becomes the display of God’s power. Power, then, becomes measured in terms of might. And all that is less than human becomes tamed. This is what theologian Wendy Farley calls “the logic of domination,” and it has settled like a film over certain streams of Western colonial theology.<sup>18</sup>

We can see here how anthropocentrism nuances the way we tell the stories of scripture and the way these stories go on to shape our relationship to other creatures, human and non-human alike. Stan McKay sees this play out in his community in excruciating ways. Indigenous ways of knowing and connection to the land are silenced by a theology that speaks of evil instead of good, wrong instead of right. When theologians like David Clough challenge the anthropocentric interpretation of scripture, we access the voice of a much older and broader faithfulness in the Christian tradition.

## The Creedal Witness

It is an equal shock for my conservative evangelical students to learn that there are other Christians for whom the apostolic tradition holds the kind of reverence they reserve for scripture alone. I could very easily turn again to David Clough for his survey of the patristic considerations of animals in the theological vision. Clough guides readers through Irenaeus and Origen on to Thomas Aquinas and Barth. However, it is the recent scholarship of Rebecca Copeland that imagines the possibility of community beyond creaturely divides.



In *Created Being*, Copeland is interested in Christological claims, particularly creedal formulations that articulate the incarnation as the “defining event of created reality.”<sup>19</sup> Copeland turns to the Nicene Creed to commend an inclusive incarnation, one that is consubstantial (*homoousios*) with all of creation. Her treatment of the early Christian conceptual debates about *homoousia* is worth exploring in full. Copeland’s resulting translation of the Greek *ousia* as something closer to “being,” what we might think of as the actuality of any given thing, redirects the anthropocentric, segregating commitments of colonial Christianity in the direction of Woodley’s community of created beings.<sup>20</sup>

The Council of Nicaea’s claim that the Word was *homoousias* with the Father and corresponding rejection of the possibility that the Word derived from created *ousia* carried an implicit affirmation that everything that is not God shares in created *ousia*. This first ecumenical pronouncement undermines any later hierarchization among the created order. Instead, it positions humanity in solidarity with the rest of created cosmos, as envisioned by cosmic Christologies.<sup>21</sup>

Copeland reclaims what she calls Nicaea’s “two-*ousia* framework” that affirms the classical ontological distinction between Creator and created. The two-*ousia* divide “undermines human hubris by placing all of humanity firmly on the ‘everything else’ side of [the ontological] distinction.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, the distinction that matters theologically is that which is created vs. that which is Uncreated.

We recognize this claim from Clough’s theological consideration of non-human animals. However, Clough stops where Copeland does not. This two-*ousia* structure compels Copeland to attend to everything created with equal consideration. After Creator, no further divisions exist. Fungi and human alike share the status of beloved creature of God. Notice that Copeland’s use of the Creed allows her to extend David Clough’s reach beyond the category of the non-human animal. In a particularly delightful section of her monograph, Copeland confronts the very distinctions theologians and philosophers use to support notions of human superiority by exploring the science of plant and insect life. Attention to the processes and life-cycle of biological limestone reveals a mutuality and mutability normally attributed to animate life. On the creatureliness of limestone, Copeland writes, “Marine life funds its origin, other bodies take up its elements as it disintegrates, and the whole web of life flourishes in an atmosphere that limestone helps to regulate.”<sup>23</sup> Attention to the classically declared “irrational” category of insect reveals that *A. cephalotes*, what we might know as ants,

perceive the world around them and communicate with one another. They are deeply interdependent with other species: the colony grows through a complex metabolic pathway that includes leaf and fungus as well as ant biology. ... Like other material bodies, the way that they live shapes their surrounding environment. They participate in the ongoing cycles of transformation, growth, and death that seem to characterize all of created reality.<sup>24</sup>

Rebecca Copeland’s application of the Nicene Creed does not sound anything like the anthropocentric, segregating doctrine of creation that has divided the missional churches of Stan McKay’s community. The Creed, through Copeland’s reading, bears witness to Woodley’s community of creation by throwing us all in the same lot. Copeland turns to Barth’s use of patristic Christology to tell a story that, like the Hebrew Bible, does not have fallen creation as a preoccupying theme:

Rather than God creating, then becoming incarnate in response to some defect within creation, and finally through that incarnation electing certain people for salvation, God elects Jesus in the incarnation, then through Jesus God elects the rest of creation, which ultimately explains why God created in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

Here, God’s love of creatures is the *cause* of creation. In Wendy Farley’s words as she cites Pseudo-Dionysius, God was beguiled by beauty.<sup>26</sup> God couldn’t help Godself. This is the kind of love that calls the other into being. It is a call to life, not to destruction. It is a call to interdependence, not segregation. Martin Luther’s redemptive vision of humanity “taming” the wilderness is nowhere to be found in this system. The anthropocentric dream of having all creation come under human authority has not worked out well for non-human life. Our domination of the natural world has caused both environmental collapse and creaturely suffering. However, the anthropocentric dream has not worked out well for humans either. We will not survive if the rest of the community of creation does not survive. We are deeply interdependent, and life is deeply interconnected. We may be motivated to live in respectful relationship with the earth as a means of our own survival. But this is still an anthropocentric approach. If we are to become more like the one who created us, we will let ourselves fall in love with the world. Can we awaken to the curiosities of biological limestone and ants? Can we awaken to the goodness of a creation that displays God’s glory through diversity of form and function? Do we have the courage to awaken to the beauty of each other and ourselves? Wendy Farley reminds us that when we fall in love with the world, we honour its existence. “Beauty opens the

door to the significance of beings and having seen and recognized this, we can no longer be unmoved or indifferent. Awakening to the beauty of beings cannot be separated from the desire for justice.”<sup>27</sup>

## Toward a Doctrine of Creation

Stan McKay was calling us to this kind of justice. Justice is the structural form of love that attends to the structural ways we prevent communities, human and non-human alike, from flourishing. Our ecumenical group of theologians and pastors repeated the words Rev. McKay spoke: “Reconciliation: it is both about the binding of peoples together and about binding the earth and each other.” As we discussed the implications of this for a doctrine of creation, we recalled what we already knew. Some of us bore stories of community segregation and despair underwritten by colonial theology. Some of us spoke of the Elders and knowledge keepers who call us to solidarity with one another and with all God’s creatures. Some of us offered names, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who teach a Christianity of goodness and right relationships. Rev. McKay is right: churches have been separated for a long time. As an act of reconciliation, we will work together, pooling our resources, falling in love with the world as we write.

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1 This working group was convened by the United Church of Canada (UCC) and is comprised of Indigenous, Newcomer, and Settler Christians who can speak to issues related to the Catholic, Anglican, UCC, and Evangelical communities. In June of 2016, Stan McKay wrote a letter to the then Moderator of the United Church asking for us to consider how the churches could respond more collaboratively to the TRC’s Calls to Action, specifically as they relate to spiritual violence and mission. Originally from Fisher River Cree Nation, Stan McKay was moderator of the UCC from 1992 to 1994.

2 The call for Canada to adopt and implement UNDRIP is mentioned specifically in Call to Action 43. UNDRIP is named in 16 of the 94 Calls to Action.

3 The information in this paragraph and this quotation specifically are from my personal notes of our Zoom meeting with Rev. Stan McKay that took place on October 5, 2020. Any errors are my own.

4 This is a critique levelled by scholars of colour broadly. With my own theology students, we discuss Erna Kim Hackett’s expanded claim in a paper given at the NAIITS Symposium at Acadia University in 2018. Erna Kim Hackett, “Justice from the Margins: Rejecting White Theologies of Justice and Trusting Theology from Communities of Color.” Paper presented at NAIITS Symposium, Wolfville, NS, June 2018.

5 I would like to acknowledge just a few of the Indigenous theologians from diverse First Nations bringing critiques about doctrine of creation to the broader Christian community. Randy Woodley (Keetoowah Cherokee) writes extensively about the community of creation and decentering the anthropocentric lens with which we

usually read scripture. Tink Tinker (Osage/wazhazhe) talks about reciprocity and balance in creation by way of a linguistic analysis of Settler languages that impose categories of cognition, such as anthropocentrism, that are then normalized in our understanding of the world and scripture. Terry LeBlanc (Mi’kmaq) critiques the Western church practice of skipping over the actual Christian creation story and starting the theological conversation with fall. Ray Aldred (Cree) insists on beginning with the theology of a good world that leads to a particularly reciprocal theology of land. Carmen Lansdowne (Heiltsuk) insists that loving creation can’t be just an individual feeling but must be enacted by communities who then advocate for creation care systemically.

6 This quotation is from my own notes of the same ecumenical gathering mentioned above, October 5, 2020. Any error is my own.

7 The redactional origins of Genesis (and the Torah generally) are complex and not my area of specialty. For the purposes of this article, I wish to flag this without suggesting that I am an expert in textual criticism.

8 This is a theme Dr. Terry LeBlanc explores when he gives a plenary address through NAIITS. I most recently heard this presentation at Mino-Maawaniit’itiwag 2019: Coming Together in a Good Way. Living Hope Alliance Church, Regina, SK, November 9, 2019. Randy Woodley and Ray Aldred address this as well.

9 The West is certainly diversifying and contains diverse people groups and thinkers. By West and Western, I am referring to a certain lineage of knowledge formation and thought, often, but not exclusively, originating in western European countries and shaped by the changes of modernism.

10 David Clough, *On Animals, Vol. 1: Systematic Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 166.

11 Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

12 Clough, *On Animals*, 174.

13 Clough produces biblical examples for each of these claims. I have already mentioned the Genesis narratives of both creation and flood. Hosea also speaks of God’s promise to make a covenant with Israel, animals, birds, and insects. The Hebrew prophetic books are rife with examples of humans, animals, and land bearing the consequences of God’s judgment. Clough covers this extensively in chapter 2 of his systematic theology.

14 Douglas Main, “Honeybees found using tools, in a first – to repel giant hornet attacks,” *National Geographic*, December 9, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2020/12/honeybees-use-tools-dung-repels-giant-hornets>.

15 I do not intend to trivialize or reduce the scope of colonialism, but rather suggest one application of the colonial lens.

16 Clough, *On Animals*, 163, citing Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 1–7.

17 Clough, *On Animals*, 165, citing Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Helmut T. Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan, eds (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), I.62.

18 Farley uses this concept throughout her work. An example is Wendy Farley, *Gathering Those Driven Away* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 10.

19 Rebecca Copeland, *Created Being* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2020), 11.

20 *Ibid.*, 14.

21 *Ibid.*, 19.

22 *Ibid.*, 24.

23 *Ibid.*, 37.

24 *Ibid.*, 44.

25 *Ibid.*, 70.

26 Wendy Farley, “A Liturgical Via Negativa: The Role of Those Driven Away by the Church in Its Worship.” Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA, November 2019.

27 *Ibid.*

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## Book Review

# Confronting Finance-dominated Capitalism

Kathryn Tanner. *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. x + 241 pp.

Kathryn Tanner is Frederick Marquand Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School. In this book she juxtaposes the ethos of a Protestant version of Christianity to that of finance-dominated capitalism. She begins by briefly examining Max Weber's thesis that Calvinism created a life-orientation that paved the way for the rise of capitalism. Tanner shares Weber's view that religious beliefs can powerfully shape people's life-orientation. Her aim, though, is prophetic. She analyzes the nature and ethos of finance-dominated capitalism, but seeks to counter it. The result is an insightful, timely study of the relationship of Christian faith to a significant development in the global economy.

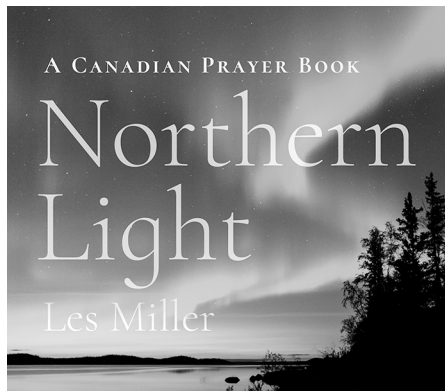
According to Tanner, since the 1970s it has become more profitable to invest in the financial sector of the economy—banking, real estate, investments and their spin-offs, etc.—than in the production of goods and services. As investment money tends to follow the greatest returns, this has led to the creation of a new layer of secondary markets for derivatives: things like futures and options, decoupled from the productive value of companies and goods, but still oriented largely by the potential for return on investment. Capitalism has now become finance-dominated. Profit is all, the larger and faster the better, and companies become colonized by investors who may gut these for quick returns. This gutting often includes maximizing employee workloads and minimizing benefits and corporate responsibility to the surrounding community. In times of economic scarcity, government services and legislation may be similarly reordered to create a more favourable business climate for corporations while downloading costs and responsibilities onto private citizens, without concern for how they can bear these. Tanner also analyzes the social imaginary that finance-dominated capitalism creates and seeks to instill in people. In this worldview, everyone competes against everyone else, the present and immediate future is all, responsibility for a person's well-being rests solely with themselves, and one's identity is determined by one's performance. Against this, Tanner juxtaposes a Christian ethos in which one's identity and value is determined by what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, the future rests in God's hands, and we are called to support each other and together build a community that celebrates the goodness of God and the presence of each other.

Tanner's dire and accurate depiction of what life can become under unbridled finance-dominated capitalism ends on a hopeful note. Weber thought that capitalism had ushered in an iron cage from which escape was impossible. Tanner asserts that the gospel has a world-shaping power that has been effective in the past, that continues to be at work and that can undermine and resist the ethos of finance-dominated capitalism in the present. She is right. This is a welcome and thought-provoking book. But at its end one wonders, where do we go from here?

Part of this book's power is its focus and succinctness. Yet this is also a weakness. Tanner's argument is, in one sense, historically abstract. Christian theologians and ethicists have wrestled with capitalism for over a century. No mention is made of this, of insights arrived at through this, such as liberation theology's notion that God has a preferential option for the poor, or of the myriad social programs and legislative initiatives like universal health care that can express Christian faith in the social realm. While Tanner illustrates her arguments with many examples, she offers no case studies examining the impact of finance-dominated capitalism in real life. These are important because no one lives by only one story, either that of Christianity or capitalism. The effect of either is often influenced by other factors. Tanner also does not consider differences from country to country or region to region in legislation affecting financial markets, such as those that made the 2008 financial crisis less severe in Canada than in the United States. Finally, churches and theological schools have wrestled with the fact that through their investments they partake of what Tanner denounces as opposed to Christian faith. The Holy Spirit has not been idle in the face of what she describes. Attention to historical precedents and more contextual analysis of finance-dominated capitalism's effects and attempts to resist it would be helpful for looking forward.

Still, this is an excellent addition to the discussion of how Christian faith relates to economic matters. Theologians, ethicists, clergy, and educated lay people will all benefit from reading it.

**Donald Schweitzer**, *McDougald Professor of Theology at St. Andrew's College, University of Saskatoon.*



## Northern Light: A Canadian Prayer Book

BY LES MILLER

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**Les Miller** retired as Religious Education, Family Life and Equity Coordinator with the York Catholic District School Board and then taught with OISE (University of Toronto), York, and Niagara universities. He has written or contributed to over 20 books in the area of spirituality and Catholic education. Currently he is involved with catechist formation with the Archdiocese of Toronto. Visit his website at [lesmiller.ca](http://lesmiller.ca).

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