

Critical Theology

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Introduction

By Don Schweitzer

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This issue opens with an article by Christine Jamieson discussing a long-awaited and important event in Canada: Pope Francis' journey here in the summer of 2022 to apologize to Indigenous peoples for the Roman Catholic Church's involvement in residential schools. Particularly noteworthy is the intercultural aspect of this article—the way Jamieson uses both Western thought, represented by Bernard Lonergan and Emmanuel Levinas, and Indigenous traditions to understand what happened in this visit that made it meaningful, despite some ambiguities, for many participants and observers. The second article, by Joerg Rieger, looks at what needs to happen in the United States to heal continuing social divisions and traumas of slavery. This article is the conclusion to his recently published book, the latest in a number of fine contributions he has made to critical theology in the United States. The third article, by Scott Kline, examines some troubling cultural developments in the United States associated with Donald Trump's presidency in light of Hannah Arendt's thought. Arendt dealt with similar cultural developments in her time. Her thought continues to be illuminating in this regard. A fourth article shows how an insight into the Holy Spirit's work can be salvaged from Hegel's philosophy of history. Finally, there is an engaging review of the autobiography of Father Jean Boulier, a left-leaning Roman Catholic priest and theologian.

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Apology, Encounter, and Penitential Pilgrimage

By Christine Jamieson

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Pope Francis' words and actions during his visit to Canada in July 2022 constituted a true encounter not unlike that in Rome in late March 2022, when the Indigenous delegation from Canada visited the Pope on his land, in his home.¹ The delegation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representatives travelled to Rome from March 28 to April 1, 2022, to communicate stories of their experience in Canada's Residential Schools, to seek an apology from the Pope and to request that he visit Canada and apologize to the Indigenous peoples in person. Seeking the apology was in line with Call to Action #58 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report, which stated:

We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada.²

Following the Rome visit, we witnessed the Pope encountering Indigenous peoples on their land. It was truly significant that the Pope, representing the Catholic Church, came to Turtle Island (Canada) and apologized on this land, in this place. He came, as he said, on a "penitential pilgrimage," to encounter, to listen, to apologize. The Ojibwe-Anishinaabe speak of this as entering one another's lodge, an effort to come to understand each other's way of being and acting in the world. Many residential school survivors were deeply moved by the Pope's apology; many were grateful and felt the apology constitutes part of their long journey to healing.

The encounter with Pope Francis was full of joy and full of sorrow, in part healing, in part triggering deep wounds from a traumatic past. Reflecting on the two encounters—one in Rome and the other on Turtle Island—presents us with a perplexing dialectic in need of exploration. The dialectic points to a tension between possibility and impasse. The possibility comes from the apology itself and from the person who spoke the

words. As will be explored below, the words spoken by Pope Francis combined with the encounter in the two lodges began or were part of a healing that is needed. The impasse emerged in a vision of the "Church" that continued to display itself in a hierarchical manner such that the cardinals, bishops, and priests took centre stage in the celebration of the masses, both in Edmonton and in Quebec. Each part of this dialectic, between possibility and impasse, will be explored in this paper. The paper will not consider the various political analyses but will stay true to the meaning and purpose of the encounters. The Pope expressed the meaning as "penitential pilgrimage." This pilgrimage, as the Pope reiterated more than once, was aimed at and for the victims of the residential schools.³

Apology: Encounter and Meaning

For the deplorable conduct of those members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God's forgiveness and I want to say to you with all my heart: I am very sorry.⁴

—Pope Francis in Rome to Indigenous Delegates from Canada, April 1, 2022

I have been waiting to come here and be with you! Here, from this place associated with painful memories, I would like to begin what I consider a *penitential pilgrimage*. I have come to your native lands to tell you in person of my sorrow, to implore God's forgiveness, healing and reconciliation, to express my closeness and to pray with you and for you.⁵

—Pope Francis at Maskwacis, July 25, 2022

Pope Francis' April 1, 2022, apology to Indigenous delegates representing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada was heartfelt, eliciting profound emotions of joy and sorrow from those who witnessed it. His apology came after private meetings with each group of delegates earlier in the week. During these meetings, the delegates communicated to the Pope their own personal stories about the legacy of Canada's residential schools. His apology on July 25, 2022, the first of three explicit expressions of apology made on his penitential pilgrimage during the visit to Turtle Island, was a continuation of his apology in

Rome. Several times during his Canadian visit, Pope Francis mentioned the Rome encounter and how deeply he was moved by that encounter. As we will see below, the apology itself, in all its expressions, was and continues to be significant for the power of the words themselves. In the first part of this paper, I will focus on the words or the apology itself. Following that, I will say something about the symbolism of the meetings and the problematic impasse that continues to plague the Church.

Encounter

Three lines from Pope Francis' final address to the Indigenous delegation visiting him in Rome are striking. The Pope said, "I have listened attentively to your testimonies." He stated, "Listening to your voices, I was able to enter into and be deeply grieved by the stories." And the final line was the apology itself: "For the deplorable conduct of those members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God's forgiveness and I want to say to you with all my heart: I am very sorry."⁶ Likewise, during his Canadian visit, his first and perhaps most powerful apology that was spoken at Maskwacis, Alberta, was connected to his deeply moving encounter with the Indigenous delegates in Rome. Why are these words, spoken in Rome and on the soil of Turtle Island, so important to so many Indigenous peoples in Canada? I suggest that it has to do with two things: the encounter itself and the impact of the words "I am sorry."

Encounter is a rare thing. It can only happen when one meets another face to face. Encounter is difficult from a distance or even via a technological application like FaceTime or Zoom. Thinking of the Rome visit, one might ask, why would so many Indigenous people travel so far if not for the actual encounter with the person by whom they sought to be heard and seen, from whom they sought an apology? In her essay "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," French philosopher Simone Weil wrote, "The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: 'What are you going through?'"⁷ Love was sought and received in this rare and some would say beautiful encounter between Pope Francis and the Indigenous delegates. From a place of hope and woundedness, Indigenous peoples sought something vital from a person who symbolized so much pain and possibility in their lives. It seems to me that the Pope was not seen as merely the enemy, the perpetrator from whom one demands justice. I am not convinced justice was the most important or grounding motivator for this journey. Justice is an abstract term denoting the condition of something morally correct or fair, or of righting a wrong. It seems to me that many among the Indigenous delegation to Rome and among those who attended and watched

the Pope's various visits to Canada were seeking something more than justice. One can witness this in the responses to Pope Francis' Rome apology and his apologies in Canada. Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild

felt a swell of emotions and tears in his eyes as he heard Pope Francis apologize at the Vatican on Friday for the Roman Catholic Church's role in residential schools. The words came on the chief's 78th birthday. It was especially meaningful, he said, because during the 14 years he attended residential school as a child in Alberta, he was not allowed to celebrate. "I hoped for it. I prayed for it. I dreamt for it," he said. "But I never expected to live and see and feel it."⁸

Chief Littlechild expressed his gratitude again when he placed a traditional headdress on the head of Pope Francis in reaction to the Pope's visit to Maskwacis and his historical apology.

"For my family, I said to him, 'I accept your apology. You've asked for a pardon. And on behalf of myself. As a student, former (residential) student and my family. We forgive you. 'And may I give you this gift as a gesture of reconciliation?' And he said, 'Yes.' So I put it on."⁹

Similarly, 85-year-old Métis elder Angie Crerar, with tears streaming down her face, said "she could see that Francis spoke with sincerity. 'My heart is so full I can hardly speak.'"¹⁰ In these experiences and in many others that occurred during the week-long visit to Rome and the week-long visit of the Pope to Canada, encounter (or love of neighbour) was prior to justice.¹¹ Meaning was constituted in these encounters.¹² Even though the face-to-face encounter took precedence in these meetings, the *meaning* of the words themselves went beyond the encounter. The meaning exceeded the small group that encountered Pope Francis during those few days in Rome and during his time in Canada. It reached out to many residential school survivors across Canada and perhaps even beyond Canada. The significance and power of his apologies is important to note. There is a force behind them that can heal. Here, the apologies are not descriptive, rather they are creative. They create an act. It is an action that is not merely acknowledged for its truth value, that is, as an apology that has been uttered. Rather, the utterance itself brings about an action, that of apologizing. This, in part, explains the power behind the words and their emotionally charged response. The reverberations of Pope Francis' speech acts, the acts of apologizing, went well beyond the small number of Indigenous people who witnessed the apology in person. I think the power of the apology has

something to do with what Bernard Lonergan identifies as “incarnate meaning.”¹³

Incarnate Meaning

Canadian theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan identifies different “carriers of meaning” or different ways meaning is embodied.¹⁴ These carriers of meaning are intersubjective, art, symbols, linguistic meaning, and incarnate meaning. Each carrier is rich and deep. I have no doubt that all were operative during the meetings in Rome and during Pope Francis’ penitential pilgrimage on Indigenous land—the unspoken meaning of intersubjectivity in the smiles and the tears; the artistic and symbolic meaning of the music, costumes, singing and dancing, of cultures and traditions being communicated; and the linguistic meaning of the words spoken in private and publicly. However, the carrier of meaning I wish to focus on is incarnate meaning. Lonergan speaks of incarnate meaning as *Cor ad cor loquitur*, heart speaking to heart. Incarnate meaning “is the meaning of a person, of his way of life, of his words, or of his deeds. It may be his meaning for just one other person, or for a small group, or for a whole national, or social, or cultural, or religious tradition.”¹⁵ Thinking about incarnate meaning in relation to the meetings between Indigenous survivors and Pope Francis helps one to understand the intensity and the outreach of the apologies. While encounter is face to face, the incarnate meaning of the Pope with Indigenous delegates representing survivors of residential schools allowed for a broadening of the meaning and impact of the apologies. It explains why the apologies spoke to so many survivors even though they were not physically present in Rome or in the various places the Pope visited in Canada. While encounter demands the face-to-face relation, incarnate meaning of the Pope himself allowed the apologies to move beyond the immediacy of those present to the much larger number of survivors watching and listening from their own territories. The Pope’s apologies conveyed a meaning that came from the person he is, his life lived, his words spoken, and the deeds he has done. It also came from his role as leader of the Roman Catholic Church.

As Natan Obed, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, said, “Behind the coverups, behind the indifference over 100 years, behind the lies, behind the lack of justice, this Pope – Pope Francis – decided to go right through it and decided to speak words the First Nations, Inuit and Métis have been longing to hear for decades.”¹⁶

More Is Needed

Testimonies of survivors in Rome and on Turtle Island who were present during the apologies, and from those who watched and listened from other places,

give evidence to its powerful impact. At the same time, there were those who felt the apologies were not enough. There were those who did not experience the “encounter.” They were critical of the specific wording, and they felt not enough was said and done. Also, as journalist Tanya Talaga wrote of the Rome visit in her March 30, 2022, piece in *The Globe and Mail*, “But many in our communities do not believe an Indigenous delegation should be here at all, that the damage cannot be undone.”¹⁷ This sentiment was repeated by others during the Pope’s visit to Canada. Clearly, more needs to be done. In terms of the Rome visit, all three leaders of the Indigenous delegations expressed both gratitude for what had happened during the week-long meetings and the need for further action.

Natan Obed stated,

The apology that was made was one that is long overdue. It also is an apology that individual survivors and intergenerational survivors all will have very different feelings and perspectives about today. As an institution this is an apology that we have formally asked for through ITK’s [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami] endorsement of the TRC’s calls to action and also in preparation for this particular meeting. It was a very clear position of ITK’s to bring forward a papal apology in Canada in relation to the Churches’ role in residential schools. So today we have a piece of the puzzle. We have a heartfelt expression from the Church that was delivered by Pope Francis in an empathic and caring way. I was touched by the way in which he expressed his sorrow and also the way in which he condemned the actions of the Church in particular regards. There is much more to do. So, an apology is a part of a larger picture.¹⁸

In a similar vein, Cassidy Caron, president of the Métis National Council and leader of the Métis delegation to Rome, said:

On Monday we delivered a message to Pope Francis. One of inviting him on a pathway forward for truth, healing, reconciliation, and justice. All of the messaging that we brought to Pope Francis has come from hours spent with our survivors and intergenerational survivors so that we could do what we could to represent the diversity of the Métis nation and the diversity of their perspectives. In Pope Francis’ statement today, I see that we were heard, I hear that we were heard. He truly reflected the way that we are. That we are all connected in a web of interconnected relationships. I see that in his message and that is truly meaningful to us. The apology that we received today is absolutely historic and so meaningful to so many people. This opens a

door for us to continue to move forward on our healing journeys.... And it opens a door for us to continue to fight for action. Any truly effective process of healing requires concrete actions. An apology is one step forward but there is much work to be done. And much action to be done as well.¹⁹

Finally, Dene National Chief Gerald Antoine, who led the Assembly of First Nations delegation to Rome, states:

Pope Francis ... had issued a long overdue apology for the Church's role in the Church run residential schools. I am very certain that there is a lot of emotions today. We accept this apology as a gesture of good faith that acknowledges he will come to our home to visit with our families. To formally apologize to all our family members. This day for us is very special. Finally, we are going to be able to begin to put some closure. However, despite this positive gesture, it is like hunting, we just spotted a fresh track, and we still need to do work. We still need to follow those tracks. So, we have an amazing tradition, we have an amazing way of life. We all know that this way of life has brought us to this point. We never gave up our teachings, we never gave up our language, we never gave up our culture, we never gave up our governance. There is a change going forward.... We are going to be going home to share what we heard here and what we experienced.... It is indeed an historic step for the Holy Father. We seek to hear these words of apology on our lands and our homes.²⁰

In all three reactions to Pope Francis' apology, we hear clearly that more is needed. In the Ojibwe-Anishinaabe tradition, there are culturally based processes that allow for the coming together of Anishinaabe and non-Anishinaabe people. One such process of coming together is to enter one another's lodge.

[It] is a process of coming together in such a way that the parties put aside their biases and enter into an agreement as to how to live together. Importantly, it entails a willingness for both parties to acquire a degree of understanding of the other's *i-nah-di-zi-win* (ontology), *nah-nahn-gah-dah-wayn-ji-gay-win* (epistemology), and *bish-kayn-di-ji-gay-win* (pedagogy). Inherent in the process is participating in a ceremony such as a Talking Circle, the exchange of gifts, and a Pipe Ceremony to arrive at some mutually agreed form of accommodation – that is, reconciliation.²¹

The delegation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit travelled a long way to enter the Pope's lodge, and subsequently the Pope came to Canada to enter the

Indigenous peoples' lodges. This protocol allows for a "truly level playing field" where Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples can come together in a good way, that is, in a relationship that is mutually respectful.²² The path was laid by the Indigenous delegation entering the Pope's lodge, sharing their culture and their stories, exchanging gifts, and other ceremonies that constituted the meetings during the week. They experienced the world in which the Pope lives. The positive encounter with Pope Francis in Rome facilitated the possibility of this protocol moving to the next stage: the Pope's visit to the land from which the delegates have come. He promised to do so and fulfilled his promise. It seems possible, in this encounter and the entering of each other's lodge, that the residue of colonialism might move closer to healing at least in this concrete instance and in future meetings. It is possible to get to know people in their own setting, and this facilitates getting rid of stereotypes and finding some common ground. The path was launched in Rome and moved closer to closure when the Pope visited Canada.

In his final speech to the Rome delegation on Friday, April 1, 2022, and many times during his Canadian visit, the Pope clearly expressed his deep appreciation of the spirituality, culture, and language of the Indigenous peoples living in Canada. His words convey a profound grasp of the values that inhabit Indigenous peoples' way of being in the world. His recognition of the importance of land for Indigenous people was particularly striking. He stated,

First, your care for the land, which you see not as a resource to be exploited, but as a gift of heaven. For you, the land preserves the memory of your ancestors who rest there; it is a vital setting making it possible to see each individual's life as part of a greater web of relationships, with the Creator, with the human community, with all living species and with the earth, our common home. All this leads you to seek interior and exterior harmony, to show great love for the family and to possess a lively sense of community. Then too, there are the particular riches of your languages, your cultures, your traditions and your forms of art. These represent a patrimony that belongs not only to you, but to all humanity, for they are expressions of our common humanity.²³

Seven Sacred Teachings as Guide²⁴

I wish to point out the convergence between Pope Francis and the Indigenous peoples from Turtle Island, both those who visited him in late March 2022 and those he encountered in Canada during his visit in late July 2022. It seems to me that what made the encounter deep and abiding was the shared concern

to walk a good path in one's relationships with others—both humans and non-humans. One way of expressing this is to draw on the Ojibwe-Anishinaabe seven sacred teachings, which guide one to walk upon this earth in a good way, in a good relationship with others. The seven sacred teachings, also called the seven Grandfather teachings or the seven Grandmother teachings, are core values that guide one in having good relations. They are not prohibitions but ways of living a “good life.” These are the teachings: *Respect*, meaning deeply cherishing each other, taking a second look, and not jumping to conclusions about another. It is for others, the earth, and for oneself. *Humility* is connected to the earth. We are of the earth. It signifies generosity and not looking upon yourself as better than anyone else. *Truth* denotes the “sound of the heart” in the sense of speaking from the heart. It signifies speaking according to one's experiences. *Honesty* points to a way of life or character. Here one strives to be undeviating, straight, correct, and right. *Wisdom* (spiritual knowledge) means seeing more fully. With greater light, a broader horizon opens. *Love* includes ideas of pity, empathy, and deep unconditional love. It should continually flow to sustain those around us. Finally, *bravery* means being strong hearted. It means being courageous even when things do not turn out as one hoped. To follow these teachings is to live ethically. All are equally important. All are needed to walk a good path.

I mention these teachings because I saw each one operative during the encounter between Pope Francis and the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Wisdom, bravery, love, humility, respect, truth, and honesty guided both the preparation for the meetings and the meetings themselves. If these guides to ethical living, to good relations, had not been present, I believe the visits would have failed. The meetings required an integrity from both parties as they entered into dialogue with each other. The seven teachings are the backdrop to living this integrity in relation to each other and all our relations. In line with this, I was struck by the generosity of spirit that exuded from the visits: there was so much hope that could clearly be seen in the sharing of prayers, songs, and dancing. This was expressed well in a description of the sharing that took place in Rome.

The groups have shared their prayers and songs and danced in St. Peter's Square. On Thursday, members from Coast Salish and Squamish First Nations in British Columbia, wearing traditional headwear and regalia, sang honour songs for the First Nations delegation as they left the hotel for the Vatican, then again in St. Peter's Square as supporters and media waited for their meeting with the Pope to conclude.... “What that song means is it means our spirit is coming back to

us. It's really significant that we share that song at this time because our spirit is coming back to us,” said one of the drummers.²⁵

Classism versus Historical Consciousness: A Clash of Cultures

With this in mind, it was striking to note the large clerical presence during the eucharist both in Edmonton and at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré in Quebec. The absence of Indigenous survivors in the procession, on the altar, or sitting in the front seats was startling. The absence of Indigenous symbols and ceremonies on the altar and during the liturgy (drums, smudge, etc.) was disheartening. While the pope sincerely sought reconciliation, reconciliation did not seem to touch these forms of celebration of the eucharist, forms that themselves emerge from a particular culture in history.

At these moments, the clash of cultures was palpable. And it was precisely that clash of cultures that Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and others refer to when they say the Catholic Church has not gone far enough.²⁶

There is a tension within the Catholic Church itself, a tension that was reflected in moments of the Papal visit. The tension is between what Bernard Lonergan calls “classism” (where “culture was understood normatively, in terms of a single ideal that we supposed all women and men aspired towards achieving”²⁷) and “historical mindedness” (the recognition that all human beings and all cultures are historically situated, where “we regard cultures empirically, as presenting different ways of organizing life, even with its own set of ideals”²⁸). The Catholic Church as an institution has not adopted a framework that can come to terms with its role in the spiritual, sexual, cultural, emotional, and physical abuse suffered by Indigenous children attending residential schools. This was witnessed in the lack of sensitivity to Indigenous culture in the celebrations of the eucharist and the presence in the first rows of cardinals, bishops, and clergy that at times obscured the fact that the visit was meant to be an encounter with survivors and Indigenous communities. As many said during the Pope's visit, healing must take place within both parties. Healing for Indigenous survivors will constitute both an interior and an exterior journey. Healing within the Catholic Church must constitute a reappropriation of truth and value in face of all evil it has been part of over many centuries. Part of that evil is the valuation of a particular cultural construction to the detriment of all other forms of culture.

Christine Jamieson is a member of the Boothroyd First Nation in British Columbia. Her paternal grandfather was a respected elder among the Boothroyd First Nation and

among the people of the Nlaka'pamux Nation in the Fraser Canyon, British Columbia. She earned a PhD in Christian Ethics from Saint Paul University in Ottawa. In 1998, she was hired in the Department of Theological Studies, Concordia University in Montreal, and continues to teach courses in ethics, bioethics, Indigenous spirituality, and Lonergan studies.

1 Excerpts of this paper were published in *Journal of Moral Theology* 12:1 (2023), 63–71.

2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 330.

3 See Patrick Jamieson's reflections in "The Papal Tour – Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander," *Island Catholic News* 37 (2022), 6–7.

4 Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis," Meeting with Representatives of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/april/documents/20220401-popoli-indigeni-canada.html>.

5 Pope Francis, "Apostolic Journey to Canada: Meeting with Indigenous peoples, First Nations, Métis and Inuit," <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2022/7/25/popolazioneindigene-canada.html>.

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7 Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," in *Waiting for God* (London: Routledge Classics, 2021), 69.

8 Kelly Geraldine Malone, "I prayed for it: Emotions, tears as pope apologizes for residential schools," *Toronto Star*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/04/01/indigenous-delegates-set-to-have-final-meeting-with-pope-francis-at-vatican.html>.

9 Danielle Paradis and Chris Stewart, "It was not about religion: Littlechild defends gifting headdress to Pope Francis," APTN National News, August 5, 2022, <https://www.aptnnews.ca/featured/it-was-not-about-religion-littlechild-defends-gifting-headdress-to-pope-francis>.

10 Malone, "I prayed for it."

11 I am drawing on the work of Emmanuel Levinas: in particular, his two major works *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

12 I am grateful to Cristina Vanin, Associate Professor at St. Jerome's University, for this insight into constitutive meaning in relation to Pope Francis' apology.

13 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 73.

14 See *ibid.*, 57–73.

15 *Ibid.*, 73.

16 Malone, "I prayed for it."

17 Tanya Talaga, "In Rome, I have seen Indigenous people bring hope and resistance to the Pope's doorstep," *The Globe and Mail*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-in-rome-i-have-seen-indigenous-people-bring-hope-and-resistance-to-the>.

18 Natan Obed, in "Indigenous delegates react to Pope's apology for Church role in residential schools," April 1, 2022, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umYT5U7TYcE>.

19 Cassidy Caron, in "Indigenous delegates react to Pope's apology."

20 Gerald Antoine, in "Indigenous delegates react to Pope's apology."

21 Jerry Fontaine and Don McCaskill, *Di-bayn-di-zi-win: To Own Ourselves* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2022), 19.

22 *Ibid.*, 20.

23 Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis."

24 For this section on the seven sacred teachings, I draw on Anishinaabe/Ojibwe academic and jurist John Borrows' book titled *Law's Indigenous Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019) and his paper titled "Seven Generations, Seven Teachings: Ending the Indian Act," a research paper for the National Centre for First Nations Governance, 2008, https://fngovernance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/john_borrows.pdf.

25 Willow Fiddler, "Through gifts and customs, Indigenous delegates to Vatican share their history and hopes," *The Globe and Mail*, March 31, 2022, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-indigenous-delegates-shared-gifts-customs-with-vatican-pointing-to>.

26 Listen to Niigaan Sinclair's interview with his father, former Truth and Reconciliation Commission Chair Murray Sinclair, on CBC's *The House*, aired July 30, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thehouse/cbc-the-house-july-30-1.6536307>.

27 Kenneth R. Melchin, "The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Healing Divisions in the Church," *The Lonergan Review* 7:1 (2016), 87.

28 *Ibid.*

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Reparations, Religion, and Theology

A Proposal for Perpetual Reconstruction

By Joerg Rieger

Vanderbilt University, Nashville

The topic of reparations has been discussed controversially around the globe in various contexts and at various times.¹ In the United States, the ongoing conversation about reparations has a specific location in the history of slavery, although the concern for reparations can also be applied to ecological destruction, class relationships, and the intersectionalities of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. In this article, the history of slavery will be the starting point. From this history, other problematic relationships will be addressed. In the process, we will also touch on related religious challenges. For theologians, finally, reparations are the context in which reflections on confession of sin and repentance need to prove themselves.

On the political scene in the United States, demands for reparations entered a new stage when, on April 14, 2021, the US House Judiciary Committee voted for the creation of a commission to address the matter. H.R. 40, as introduced on January 4, 2021, by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee² (and every year since 1989 by Jackson Lee and the late John Conyers) calls for a commission to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans.

The matter of reparations for the descendants of enslaved African Americans in the United States keeps gaining urgency, as the realities of systemic racism were exposed again for all to see in the damage done by the Covid-19 pandemic to the African American community, whose death rate was 1.4 times higher than that of white communities,³ and in the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others that have sparked the Black Lives Matter social movement. Strong conservative pushback—no Republicans voted for H.R. 40, and critical race theory is being challenged by conservatives across the board⁴—only demonstrates the potency of the call for reparations, which cannot be ignored indefinitely. Time alone will not be able to heal this wound.

At stake is not whether reparations are in order or not but what kinds of reparations might be most appropriate. Mere apologies for evil done, or simply

assuming that the past is past, would hardly be acceptable in any relationship, be it interpersonal, communal, national, or international. Germany recognized this after the Holocaust,⁵ even though the process was long and arduous. Many of us who grew up after the war in Germany were raised to understand the importance of reparations and were better for it. From a theological perspective, apologizing or confessing without repentance and transformation would be not only insufficient but counterproductive and ultimately harmful for all involved.

In the United States, powerful arguments for reparations have been made at various times, many of them related to religious discourses. One of the most prominent examples is the Black Manifesto, presented by civil rights leader James Forman at Riverside Church in New York City in 1969, which specifically addressed white Christian mainline denominations and Jewish communities in order to hold them accountable to their stated mission to care for others.⁶ Other examples of calls for reparations include Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s proposed 1964 "Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged" that pointed out the intergenerational nature of sin registered by the prophets of the Hebrew Bible⁷ and A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and King's 1967 "Freedom Budget for All Americans" that linked racial and economic justice and was endorsed by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.⁸

A more recent prominent argument to white America for reparations was made by author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates in 2014,⁹ pointing out the systemic problems of slavery and the kind of racism that remains shackled to it. Coates, referencing historian David W. Blight, notes that in 1860, enslaved people had been turned into assets whose combined worth surpassed America's manufacturing, railroad, and productive capacities. Problems continued even after this atrocity was ended. Even after slavery was abolished in the United States, African Americans were excluded from progress—for instance, from the increase in homeownership from 30 percent in 1930 to 60 percent in 1960. Coates describes the profitable business of redlining, using the example of Chicago. Whites were actively pressured into selling their houses by

unscrupulous white businessmen, who spooked them into selling for cheap. These businessmen then sold these houses to Blacks on contract for double the price, making them pay all the costs of housing without actually gaining ownership until everything was paid off, forfeiting the properties altogether if only one payment was missed.

These basic points, narrated by Coates, not only show the structural nature of American racism during and after slavery; they also show how closely racism has always been related to matters of the economy and of class. Based on these observations, an argument can be made that the common definition of racism as “prejudice and power” needs to be expanded to something like “prejudice, power, and capital.” As economist and political scientist Jessica Gordon Nembhard argues, drawing the conclusions of her study of the history of African American cooperatives in the United States, “Early on African Americans realized that without economic justice—without economic equality, independence and stability (if not also economic prosperity)—social and political rights were hollow, or actually not achievable.” Theologians will be interested to know that religion played a role here as well—Gordon Nembhard references W. E. B. Du Bois’s observation that “religious comradery was the basis for Black economic cooperation.”¹⁰

Already in the nineteenth century, twenty African American religious leaders (nineteen of whom had been enslaved) recognized this combination of race and class. Their thoughts are recorded in a conversation with General William Tecumseh Sherman, which fed into Sherman’s famous campaign for “forty acres and a mule” (immediately abandoned by his successor). In the understanding of these religious leaders, labor is crucial when dealing with reparations. According to their spokesperson, Garrison Frazier, “Slavery is, receiving by irresistible power the work of another man, and not by his consent. The freedom, as I understand it, promised by the proclamation, is taking us from under the yoke of bondage, and placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, take care of ourselves and assist the Government in maintaining our freedom.” This concern for the ability to labor and have agency underlies the demand for land: “The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor—that is, by the labor of the women and children and old men; and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare.”¹¹ Having experienced slavery in their own bodies, the analysis of these leaders is still as relevant as ever. Note that in Native American struggles, labor and community wealth also shape the often-noted concern for land, putting together human and nonhuman productive and reproductive labor.¹²

The topic of reparations can be deepened in light of these insights: if slavery and racism are so closely related to the economy and money, it follows that reparations need to involve the economy and money. Even the most ardent religious confessions and repentance for sin have to be embodied in material relationships, as became clear both during and after slavery. For Coates, this connection between racism, the economy, and money means that reparations should take the form of payments by white America to Black America, similar to the payments that Germany has kept making to Israel for many years. These payments, Coates points out, were fundamental to building the Israeli economy into what it is today (although US support should not be overlooked). What Coates fails to notice, however, is the problematic nature of an economy that was created in this way, as Israel (tied with the United States) has the worst inequality in the developed world.¹³ This fundamental economic inequality is made worse by the other inequality that it enables—namely, Israel’s sustained and systemic pushback against Palestinian interests, which is often misunderstood as merely some kind of family feud.

On this background, another argument for reparations becomes necessary. This argument has implications for the ongoing exploitation of African Americans in the United States and extends to exploitation everywhere manifest in the lives of the working majority, which in the present embodies human diversity more than any other group or body. Moreover, this argument has implications also for the nonhuman working majority, which experiences the exploitation of its vast and still largely unexplored biodiversity and the systemic extraction of its resources. The argument to be developed here picks up the importance of reparations in monetary and economic terms but suggests another way forward by taking us back to the original distortions and what might be done about them. What I have called “theology in the Capitalocene”—the geological time when capital rules supreme not only over people but also over the planet—can benefit from these considerations.

One of the most significant aspects of slavery—even if not the only one—is a fundamental distortion of labor relations, combining the matters of race and class. As Karen and Barbara Fields point out, this distortion of labor relations under the conditions of slavery was “so abnormal ... that it required an extraordinary ideological rationale—which then and ever since has gone by the name race.”¹⁴ In general, labor and class relations can be considered distorted if one party profits disproportionately at the expense of another; moreover, as I have argued extensively elsewhere, this distortion affects every other area of life, including religion and theology.¹⁵ A classic example of a

distorted labor relation is wage theft. While there is considerable disagreement about the profit employers make from the labor of their employees and about how much is too much and how much is enough, there is little disagreement about wage theft.¹⁶ Even conservatives—conservative religious bodies and theologians included—who rarely worry about employers making too much profit would for the most part agree that wage theft is wrong.

In the context of labor and class relations, slavery amounts to wage theft, a conversation that goes back at least as far as Frederick Douglass.¹⁷ We might even say that slavery is the ultimate wage theft, as what is stolen is not merely wages but everything: lives, relationships to family and community, and sometimes even people's spirits and souls. This is arguably the core problem of the history of slavery in the United States. As this problem is being revisited, it should also be kept in mind that while the legal enslavement of African Americans was officially abolished in the United States in the eighteenth century after the Civil War, slavery continues today in other forms both nationally and internationally. More people from a greater variety of backgrounds are enslaved today than ever before in the history of the world, literally owned by others who exploit them for profit. Worst of all, these enslaved individuals have become more expendable than anyone enslaved in the past.¹⁸ Addressing the history of slavery in the United States will have to have implications for addressing and eradicating contemporary slavery as well.

Keeping in mind the history of slavery, wage theft may be a good starting point for a conversation about reparations today, as it has taken on epidemic proportions in certain industries such as construction and food services. It should give us pause that the value of stolen wages each year is higher than all other theft combined.¹⁹ Most affected are often undocumented immigrant workers and other minority workers and women. Wage theft is now being addressed by a growing number of worker centers with the goal of returning as many stolen wages as possible. Through these efforts, returning stolen wages might be considered a form of reparations today, serving as one model for past wage theft.

The responsibility for the repayment of stolen wages, including the wages of enslaved people, is on those who pocketed them. Who exactly is responsible for stolen slave wages in the history of the United States will need to be examined, but examples often mentioned include government, NGOs, institutions of higher education, and religious communities.²⁰ At stake is not just what they once gained but what they continue to gain. Beyond this list, special consideration will need to be given to those whose gains are greatest,

above all to the substantial concentration of wealth in corporations and the role of financial capital.²¹

In addition to reparations for the blatant exploitation of labor, there is also the matter of reparations for blatant ecological exploitation and extraction, addressed by womanist ethicist Melanie Harris. Harris notes that “ecological reparations problematize some of the framers of environmentalism, acknowledge the impact of colonial ecology, and replace dualistic understandings that divide the earth from the heavens, for example with a more fluid frame that values interconnectedness and interdependence.”²² Harris's comments point to important theological matters such as the relation between heaven and earth and the spiritual and the material. In conversation with these insights, theology in the Capitalocene needs to develop the theological concerns for interconnectedness and interdependence in relation to the topic of solidarity as it grows out of collective experiences of exploitation and extraction and an analysis of class.²³

While theology in the Capitalocene can sometimes embrace mainline solutions, it always needs to move beyond them. Compared to the “three Rs” of established environmentalism (reduce, reuse, recycle), four other “Rs” suggested by environmental sociologist Hannah Holleman are more fundamental: restitution (of land and sovereignty), reparations, restoration, and revolution. These four Rs are connected in that they are all “moving away from capitalism.”²⁴ How might reparations, in particular, aid in moving away from a form of capitalism that is built on the exploitation of people and the planet, and how might theology be part of this?

When discussing reparations, who deserves repayment and what form such repayments should take require another look. Beginning with the latter issue, if labor and class relations are at the heart of the problem of both slavery and its aftermath, merely redistributing money does not go far enough. Wage theft may serve as the example: while repaying stolen wages is preferable to withholding them, it does not address or change the skewed class relationships (backed by racial, ethnic, and gendered relationships) that enable wage theft in the first place. And even if wage theft were to cease, most relationships of exploitation would continue, as they are backed by perfectly legal labor relationships under the conditions of capitalism, often supported by religious claims and theological arguments.²⁵ Similar insights can be applied to the problem of extraction of natural resources: ending the most pernicious forms of extraction does not put an end to the exploitation of the nonhuman world in order to create profits for the few rather than the many, one of the foundational principles of capitalism (as

corporations are required by law to serve the interests of stockholders rather than workers).

This brings us back to the problem of the Capitalocene, in which capitalism shapes not only the economy but also our political, religious, and theological imagination at the deepest levels. Historians have argued that capitalism has taken such severe forms in the United States because of the history of slavery. As enslaved people were exploited in the production of cotton, resources were extracted from the land, whose biodiverse vegetation was cleared for a single crop. Slavery produced an intricate hierarchy of labor, exploitation, and extraction—utilizing numerous middlemen and meticulous bureaucratic control—resulting in enormous wealth for plantation owners. At the beginning of the Civil War, there were more millionaires in the Mississippi Valley than anywhere else in the United States. The meticulous methods of control over slave labor in the South predated the use of these methods over industrial labor in the North.²⁶ Based on that history, as historian of religion Juan Floyd-Thomas argues, the United States still finds it difficult to acknowledge the rights of labor because it has never addressed and remedied the problem of enslaved labor.²⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that US labor relations continue to be among the most restrictive in the world.²⁸

All these observations emphasize the need for reparations that go beyond the quick fix, pointing to another solution that can no longer ignore the reparation of labor relations. In response to the history of slavery in the United States, reparations need to begin with African Americans, whose ancestors have been enslaved and who still experience the aftereffects of these abusive relationships over a century and a half later. If the legacy of relationships of exploitation and extraction are rectified where they have been most distorted, this would affect other relationships as well and result in a virtuous circle, with implications for other people and the planet.

Reparations that transform relationships of exploitation and extraction might pick up on, but would also go beyond, the politics of recognition (“I see you,” “I hear you”) currently in vogue in faith communities and theological circles. Without reparations and the systemic transformation of relationships, such a politics of recognition is too easily co-opted by capitalism, which can also benefit from recognition and diversifying the ranks of its supporters. In sum, if reparations were tied to the transformation and reversal of exploitative and extractive relations of production and reproduction, several problems could be solved together, with major implications for a theology in the Capitalocene.

Those most severely affected by distorted labor and class relations would find some relief and gain that which matters most: the agency of which slavery and the exploitative labor relations that were devised in its aftermath deprived them. Here, confession of sin and repentance would truly lead to salvation for the many rather than just for the few whom the dominant system mistakenly considers the elect. In the United States, this would benefit African Americans first of all, but it would also benefit immigrants and women, with added beneficial consequences for the nonhuman environment. Ongoing racial discrimination, which is part of the live legacy of slavery, could now be addressed where it is often most destructive and painful but often ignored: at work, where people spend the bulk of their waking hours and where the well-being of whole communities is decided not only in the form of wages and benefits but also in the availability or absence of economic democracy. This would have consequences for addressing racial discrimination everywhere, including omnipresent microaggressions. If theology fails to pay attention to this, it may not have much of a game, no matter what its theological arguments are.

In sum, if labor and class relations are revised and improved with an eye toward those who are most adversely affected by them, this would have beneficial effects for all who are suffering from distorted labor relations. This is the deep wisdom of the Black Lives Matter movement—namely, that starting with those lives who are most endangered and threatened at present is nonnegotiable if all lives are supposed to matter.²⁹ Such an approach would ultimately benefit even white working people, who, in the process, could gain the motivation to reexamine their racial prejudices when they learn that they are up against not people of other races or nationalities but something else—the Capitalocene. These insights are backed up by the observation that improving labor relations via unionization tends to have benefits not only for workers within the union itself but for all who work in related areas, decreasing wage gaps and improving the power of working people everywhere.

The basis for all of this is not primarily morality, which is often where theology ends up and gets stuck, but solidarity—not as another moral demand on well-meaning people but as the levelheaded observation of systemic affinities and common interest. As Touré Reed has pointed out, while Coates may assume “that moral suasion is the engine of political change, the historical record makes clear that coalitions built on mutual interest ... have been essential to blacks’ material advancement.”³⁰ The solidarity among working people that emerges from this is not without its complexities, but it is so powerful because it is built on shared interests (self-interest is not selfishness),

and it extends to solidarity with the nonhuman environment as well. For theology this means that its work is rooted not primarily in morality but in reconstructed relationships, which are inseparable from a reconstructed relationship with God from which new ethical inspiration eventually emerge.

Finally, reparations that address labor relations are less prone to fueling other inequalities, like Germany's reparation payments to Israel did. In this model, agency changes hands from elites in business and politics and returns to those whose lives and relationships are most affected—beginning, in the United States, with the majority of descendants of enslaved Africans who continue to struggle. Agency in every other realm can then begin to change hands as well, leading to surprising discoveries of the difference people are able to make in solidarity with one another and the world around them. Networks of worker cooperatives that are emerging around the globe and that have a long history in African American communities in the United States serve as inspiring examples.³¹ To be sure, such solutions will never be devised from the top down; instead, they will have to be promoted and pushed by those with whom the power in a democracy supposedly lies: “we, the People,” not only in national but also in international perspective. For theology, this means that divine agency will have to be reconsidered as well in these ways, completely transforming what popular civil religion in the Pledge of Allegiance now calls “one nation under God.” Perhaps a statement along the lines of “humans and other-than-humans cooperating in solidarity with each other and with God” would be more like it.

Religion and theology have a particular role to play in these conversations for various reasons. For starters, religion and theology have been part of the problem of slavery, distorted labor relations, and ecological destruction from the very beginning. Slavery was not only religiously condoned; it was endorsed and promoted.³² Moreover, all of these distorted relations have always resulted in distorted images of the divine as well. God has too often been made to look like the powerful of any age, including white Southern plantation and slave owners of the past and CEOs and politicians of the present, working via relationships of exploitation and extraction.

At the same time, however, religion and theology also have been part of the struggle against oppression and exploitation from the beginning, embodied in the lives and theologies of enslaved Africans and their descendants but also in often-forgotten efforts to reshape the interrelated relationships of class, race, and gender in popular religion linked to people's movements at the grass roots.³³ In the process, alternative images of the divine and divine agency have

emerged that are at the core of the work of theology resisting and pushing beyond the Capitalocene. That these efforts continue today testifies to powers at work that scholars of theology and religion, and the faith communities to which they relate, ignore at their own peril.

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1 “Reparations, Religion, and Theology: A Proposal for Perpetual Reconstruction” by Joerg Rieger is excerpted from *Theology in the Capitalocene: Ecology, Identity, Class, and Solidarity*, published by Fortress Press in 2022. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

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3 “The Covid Racial Data Tracker,” The COVID Tracking Project, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://covidtracking.com/race>.

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5 “Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany,” *Wikipedia*, accessed March 25, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reparations_Agreement_between_Israel_and_the_Federal_Republic_of_Germany.

6 Juan Floyd-Thomas, “The God That Never Failed: Black Christian Marxism as Prophetic Call to Action and Hope,” in *Faith, Class, and Labor: Intersectional Approaches in a Global Context*, ed. Jin Young Choi and Joerg Rieger (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publishers, 2020), 66. See this chapter for a comprehensive account of the importance of the Black Manifesto for faith communities today and on the background of debates about reparations since the US Civil War.

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9 Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

10 Jessica Gordon Nembhard, “Interventions Forum Co-ops,” *Wendland-Cook Program in Religion and Justice*, October 2020, <https://www.religionandjustice.org/interventions-forum-coops>. For the full study, see Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African-American Economic Development and Practice* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

11 “Newspaper Account of a Meeting between Black Religious Leaders and Union Military Authorities,” *Freedmen and Southern Society Project*, June 2021, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/savmtg.htm> (emphasis in original).

12 For more on this see chapters 1 and 2 of *Theology in the Capitalocene*. See also Kari Marie Norgaard, Ron Reed, and Carolina Van Horn, “Continuing Legacy: Institutional Racism, Hunger, and Nutritional Justice on the Klamath,” in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, ed. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman

(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 25, talking about “the importance of land for the accumulation of wealth, and its absence for the production of hunger” in a specific Native American community.

13 Alanna Petroff, “U.S. and Israel Have Worst Inequality in the Developed World,” *CNN Money*, May 21, 2015, <https://money.cnn.com/2015/05/21/news/economy/worst-inequality-countries-oecd>.

14 Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2012), 266–67. The Fields continue, “The initial designation of Afro-Americans as a race on the basis of their class position has colored all subsequent discussion of inequality, even among white persons” (268).

15 Rieger, *Theology in the Capitalocene*, chapter 3.

16 David Cooper and Teresa Kroeger, “Employers Steal Billions from Workers’ Pay- checks Each Year,” *Economic Policy Institute*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.epi.org/publication/employers-steal-billions-from-workers-paychecks-each-year/>.

17 As Floyd-Thomas, “God That Never Failed,” points out, Douglass’s assumption that “his new life as a free man began the first day he received his earned wages” creates other problems, as wage labor implies another relationship of exploitation.

18 Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), notes the awful truth that, compared to today’s enslaved people, the African American slaves were “sizeable investments” for their masters.

19 Brandy Meixell and Ross Eisenbrey, “Wage Theft Is a Much Bigger Problem Than Other Forms of Theft—but Workers Remain Mostly Unprotected,” *Economic Policy Institute*, September 18, 2014, <https://www.epi.org/publication/wage-theft-bigger-problem-forms-theft-workers/>.

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22 Melanie L. Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 145.

23 For the complex topic of solidarity, in particular the notion of “deep solidarity,” see Rieger, *Theology in the Capitalocene*, chapter 3.

24 Hannah Holleman, *Dust Bowls of Empire: Imperialism, Environmental Politics, and the Injustice of “Green” Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 162.

25 For theological support of capitalism, see Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

26 “It was not so much the rage of the poor white Southerner but the greed of the rich white planter that drove the lash. The violence was neither arbitrary nor gratuitous. It was rational, capitalistic, all part of the plantation’s design.” See Princeton historian Matthew Desmond’s “In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have to Start on the Plantation,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html>.

27 Floyd-Thomas, “God That Never Failed,” 58.

28 The Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2021 (PRO Act) before Congress may remedy some of this, but there is no denying that the United States is far behind other developed countries and that it would take a long time to catch up.

29 This need to lift up Jesus’s concern for the “least of these” is also the heart of liberation theology’s preferential option for the poor, and this is what those who perpetuate the callous motto that “all lives matter” in opposition to “Black lives matter” overlook.

30 Touré Reed, *Toward Freedom: The Case against Race Reductionism* (New York: Verso, 2020). Reed rejects Ta-Nehisi Coates’s call for reparations based on “altruistic noblesse oblige.” My argument here is that reparations can and need to be based on stronger motivations. Reed concludes his book with the statement that “the fate of poor and working-class African Americans—who are unquestionably overrepresented among neoliberalism’s victims—is linked to that of other poor and working-class Americans” (172).

31 See Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: “U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives—Work It. Own It.”* US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://www.usworker.coop/home/>.

32 Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 654, describes how the idea that “slavery was a ‘positive good’” gained increasing support in the 1830s.

33 See, for instance, the popular images of the historical Jesus emerging in such contexts, which are almost completely forgotten in religious and theological studies; Burns, *Life and Death*.

Truth and the Stories We Tell in Dark Times: An Encounter with Hannah Arendt

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We humans are storytellers. Stories are how we remember and memorialize. They have the capacity to shape, reshape, and explain our experiences. They help us make sense of the world and our place in it. They can inspire us, teach us, and call us to action. They communicate something core about what we as human persons value, or ought to value, in life. Our stories connect us to a past and provide direction for the future. As a Christian ethicist, I am interested in how stories help us answer fundamental ethical questions such as “How shall we live?” and “Who do we hope to become?” Alasdair MacIntyre, in his book *After Virtue*, characterizes the basic premise of narrative ethics in the following terms: “I can only answer the question ‘what am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”¹ These stories stem from our communities and our traditions. They convey our understanding of the human person, our worldview, as well as our moral norms and values. MacIntyre concludes, “For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity.”²

Figuring out what stories mean can be a bit tricky. Stories must be interpreted and reinterpreted if they are to mean something to us. What a story means to us today may mean something different to us later as our horizons expand and as we grow in knowledge and wisdom. As the Catholic theologian Gregory Baum argued in the early 1970s, as he began to consider ways in which critical social theory could inform Christian theology, even the Church's doctrines and symbols—that is, the Christian story—may come to mean something new and different to us as we move through history. Baum argued that we need to take account of the *Sitz im Leben*, the historical context, to clarify what these doctrines and symbols meant at the time and what they might mean to us today. Because truth is always conditioned by history (creating a “historicity of truth,” as he called it), Baum maintained that “critical theology always moves from story to theory.”³

But what happens when the stories we tell become infused with “truths” that are rooted in untruths? How do we interpret these stories? These may seem like

new questions, especially when we consider Russia's justifications for invading Ukraine or the “Stop-the-Steal” stories fuelling insurrections in the United States and Brazil. But the reality is that all the stories that define who we are, what we believe, and why we hold certain moral values contain untruths. In other words, our stories are ambiguous. As storytellers, we tend to shine a bright light on those elements of our stories that we want to define us. Conversely, we often deflect the light from the sexism, racism, classism, colonialism, religious biases, chauvinism, and other ugly injustices that are just as central to our stories and to our identity. To help gain some insight into how we can begin to answer this question of truth in our storytelling, I want to turn to Hannah Arendt, one of the 20th century's most provocative public intellectuals, who spent decades trying to understand how truth can become manipulated by political leaders and social movements when the truth cannot be questioned. My underlying concern here is that we have entered, or perhaps re-entered, a phase in history where many people believe that truth is and should be determined by creed, history, or ideology, thus stifling any questioning of truth claims or of those in positions of authority. My hope is that we embrace a contested, critical understanding of truth that compels us to ask questions of the truth claims, those in positions of authority, and the structures that support both.

Truth in Dark Times

Donald Trump turned Hannah Arendt into one of Amazon's bestselling authors in 2017. He had some help. On January 22, 2017, just two days into the Trump presidency, Kellyanne Conway, one of Trump's key advisors, responded to a question on the Sunday morning news program *Meet the Press* about the facts surrounding the number of people attending the Trump inauguration. Trump had claimed that between 1 million and 1.5 million people attended the event, which would have been roughly equivalent to the estimated 1.8 million people who attended the Barack Obama inauguration in 2009. Despite numerous photographs, extensive video, and comparative Washington Metro subway rider numbers, which seemed to indicate a crowd roughly one-third of

Obama's 2009 inauguration crowd, the new White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, in his first meeting with the Press Corps, passionately defended Trump's claim with other photographs, statistics, and great deal of bluster. Conway told the interviewer, Chuck Todd, that the Secretary had presented "alternative facts." A befuddled Todd retorted, "Alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods." Conway then proceeded to argue that crowd numbers can never be accurately counted. Convinced that the Secretary had juked the numbers and misrepresented the photographs he shared, Todd let out an uncomfortable laugh. Conway went on the counterattack, claiming that Todd's laugh was, she said, "symbolic of the way we're treated by the press."⁴ Conway wanted "her" story told: the mainstream media is an elite class of truth gatekeepers that relishes in belittling Trump's base at every opportunity.

Conway's statement sent Trump critics into a state of frenzy, convinced that the Trump White House was engaging in the worst forms of propaganda, on par with some of the most despicable regimes of the 20th century. Perhaps. But it was also plausible that Conway was merely stroking Trump's rather large and tender ego. As pundits have pointed out ever since his trip down the escalator at Trump Tower to announce his candidacy for president, Trump's advisors, business partners, and political allies often say and do things for an audience of one: Donald J. Trump. Whatever the reason, Arendt's *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*, first published in 1951, joined George Orwell's *1984*, first published in 1944, as "must reads" for anyone concerned by Trump's totalitarian tendencies, including his penchant for heaping praise upon strongmen like Russian President Vladimir Putin and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.⁵

Arendt became a type of prophet who could explain the Trump presidency and his MAGA (Make America Great Again) followers to an audience baffled by Trump's rise to power and the crude populism riling up his base. For instance, the *Washington Post* opinion editor Ruth Marcus appealed to Arendt in declaring, "Welcome to—brace yourself—the post-truth presidency."⁶ Michiko Kakutani, the former *New York Times* literary critic, authored an article entitled "The Death of Truth: How We Gave Up on Facts and Ended up with Trump," in which she used Arendt to explain the Trump phenomenon in historical context. Kakutani wrote, "Arendt's words increasingly sound less like a dispatch from another century than a chilling description of the political and cultural landscape we inhabit today."⁷ And the social philosopher Richard J. Bernstein, one of Arendt's most trusted interpreters, declared in the *New York Times* that, in Arendt's work on totalitarianism, "we can hear not only a critique of the horrors of 20th-century totalitarianism, but also

a warning about forces pervading the politics of the United States and Europe today."⁸

Another one of Arendt's books that experienced a revival during the early Trump years was her collection of essays entitled *Men in Dark Times*, first published in 1968. In the book's Preface, Arendt informs readers that the collection, written over a span of 12 years, is primarily about individuals who shared an age, the early part of the 20th century, in which its defining features were political catastrophes, moral disasters, and "an astonishing development of the arts and sciences." Given the book's title, it would have seemed reasonable that she would look to profile individuals who were emblematic of the time—heroes, of sorts, who demonstrated extraordinary leadership, courage, or some other virtue in the face of political, moral, and cultural chaos. Readers would have certainly been familiar with that approach given John F. Kennedy's popular *Profiles in Courage*, which was published in 1955 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 1957. But Arendt was not interested in creating political, social, or cultural heroes of the age. Instead, she cautioned readers, "Those who are on the lookout for representatives of an era, for mouthpieces of the *Zeitgeist* ["spirit of the age"], for exponents of History (spelled with a capital H) will look here in vain."⁹ Indeed, she engaged politicians, philosophers, theologians, and literary figures—people like Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Jaspers, Walter Benjamin, Pope John XXIII, and Isak Dinesen (also known as Karen von Blixen, the author of *Out of Africa*)—to help sharpen her criticism of the times.

So, what did Arendt mean by "dark times"? She confesses that she borrowed the phrase from the German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht, who declared in the first line of his poem "To Posterity," "Truly, I live in dark times."¹⁰ And she acknowledges that, for Brecht, "dark times" meant political disorder, hunger, death, slaughter, but no public outrage. It was, after all, a poem Brecht wrote in 1937, depicting his mood just prior to World War II. But Arendt does not concentrate on the horrors of the early part of the 20th century. Instead, she wants to expose more subtle forms of darkness. Foremost among them are authorities within society—the "system," as she calls it—that "camouflage" truth. For Arendt, as with Brecht, the evil of the totalitarian regimes of the early 20th century was, she writes,

real enough as it took place in public; there was nothing secret or mysterious about it. And still, it was by no means visible to all, nor was it all easy to perceive it; for, until the very moment when catastrophe overtook everything and everybody, it was covered up not by realities but by the highly efficient talk and double-talk of nearly all official

representatives who, without interpretation and in many ingenious variations, explained away unpleasant facts and justified concerns.¹¹

She continues:

If it is the function of the public realm to throw light on the affairs of men by providing a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better or worse, who they are and what they can do, then darkness has come when this light is extinguished by “credibility gaps” and “invisible government,” by speech that does not disclose what is, but sweeps it under the carpet, by exhortations, moral and otherwise, that under the pretext of upholding old truths, degrade all truth in meaningless triviality.¹²

For critics of Trump’s post-truth presidency, Arendt’s scorching criticism of both public figures who obscure the truth and an indifferent public that fails to shine light on the truth was precisely the kind of illumination that the times needed.

While Arendt remains appealing to those perplexed by the ineffectiveness of fact checking on Trump and his ardent supporters, any attempt on the part of Trump critics to coopt Arendt or her work for their political agenda, social movement, or cultural cause is bound to end in a fit of frustration. We must remember that Arendt was a philosopher, trained by Martin Heidegger, one of the 20th century’s most original and controversial intellectuals. She was also a social theorist, a political theorist, a scholar of intellectual history, and a literary critic. She was a humanist, not a social scientist. She was not a systematic thinker. She was a journalist, of sorts, because she would doggedly pursue a story, a line of thinking, until it was publishable. This does not mean, however, she ever believed her work was perfect or complete. It was always a contribution, a dialogue, that engaged others who had gone before her and with the pressing political, social, and ethical issue of the times. The arguments she ended up publishing often stemmed from conversations, both oral and written, with friends and peers, including Karl Jaspers, Mary McCarthy, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, Martin Kazin, and her *Doktovater* and former lover Martin Heidegger. In some cases, she bitterly disagreed with her friends on substantive matters, including many of her Jewish friends who felt betrayed by her criticism, however nuanced, of Zionism and Israel. Her controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) led to accusations that she sympathized more with the Nazi Eichmann, who was convicted of war crimes by a Jerusalem court, than with the Jewish leaders of the Nazi-imposed Jewish Councils (the *Judenräte*) and those Jewish and Israeli officials who had prosecuted and tried Eichmann.

To put matters bluntly, many of those who look to Arendt for an unnuanced defence of truth or, more cynically, for a pithy quote or two from one of the 20th century’s most insightful public intellectuals have undoubtedly misappropriated her work.¹³ Take, for example, the use of fact checking to establish truth. Arendt was appalled and angered by it. On a personal level, Arendt hated to be fact checked. In an exchange of letters from 1959 between Arendt and her friend the author Mary McCarthy, they commiserated about having been fact checked by *The New Yorker*. Arendt wrote of the “torture” of having some self-appointed prosecutor, who could only aspire to be a writer, inflict punishment on those who could actually write. On a broader level, Arendt’s criticism of fact checking emerged from her objection to the imposition of scientific terminology and methods into all aspects of life. Fact checking, for Arendt, is a pseudo-science that camouflages truth by constructing arguments in language that sounds scientific but does not have the ability to know things or predict things that can be known or predicted. Under the guise of “objectivity,” Arendt says, truth is reduced to scientific truth—or, more accurately, “phony scientificity.” To reiterate, Arendt was a humanist who found truth in creativity, not a social scientist seeking objective truth.

Arendt’s criticism of the pursuit of truth and objectivity is a prominent theme in *Men in Dark Times*. In the book’s first chapter, which focuses on the 18th-century German philosopher, dramatist, and literary critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Arendt lauds Lessing for his courage in opposing objectivity as the sole arbiter of truth. She writes, “One component of Lessing’s greatness was the fact that he never allowed supposed objectivity to cause him to lose sight of the real relationship to the world and the real status in the world of the things or men he attacked or praised.” Portraying Lessing as an ally, Arendt knows that any criticism of objective truth creates tension because it is, at the same time, a criticism of power and the structures of power. In the case of Lessing, Arendt argues, he garnered few, if any, allies or accolades while he was alive because his German audience—a group including political leaders, the clergy, academics, and the artistic class—was simply unprepared to understand the nature of criticism as a necessary element in the development of human freedom. As a result, Arendt writes, “It was hard for the German to grasp that justice has little to do with objectivity in the ordinary sense.”¹⁴

For Arendt, the willingness to criticize “truth” and “objectivity” is an essential component of bringing illumination to dark times. Truth that cannot be questioned is, she argues, ideology—and whether in its totalitarian forms of Russian Bolshevism and German National Socialism or in its more subtle forms,

like fact checking or even the social sciences, ideology denies the human person the freedom to be creative.¹⁵ Again, Arendt thinks that Lessing's commitment to ask difficult questions of those who were supposed to represent the truth was indicative of the kind of action needed in dark times. Criticism does not rely on history for validation. Rather, criticism both enhances and is enhanced by a world view that challenges the human person to make judgments in the present—aware of the past, but not determined by it. Arendt writes, "Criticism, in Lessing's sense, is always taking sides for the world's sake, understanding and judging everything in such terms of its position in the world at any given time. Such a mentality can never give rise to a definite world view which, once adopted, is immune to further experiences in the world because it has hitched itself firmly to one possible perspective." As is evident in her study of totalitarianism and the human condition, Arendt thinks that the path to unfreedom is by way of unquestioned truth and the witting or unwitting acceptance of ideology. Lessing is, she believes, someone who could teach her generation how to criticize, question, and dissent because the situation in the 20th century had its historical roots in the 19th century, which Lessing had already presaged in the 18th century. With Lessing at the forefront of her mind, she writes, "The nineteenth century's obsession with history and commitment to ideology still looms so large in the political thinking of our times that we are inclined to regard entirely free thinking, which employs neither history nor coercive logic as crutches, as having no authority over us. To be sure, we are still aware that thinking calls not only for intelligence and profundity but above all for courage."¹⁶

Contested Truth and Lying: A Difference

Trump critics who look to Arendt for clarity often fail to mention her often petty-sounding criticism of fact checking. They also tend not to provide Arendt's broader criticism of science or pseudo-scientific methods of establishing truth in the modern technological world. Indeed, these kinds of criticism are more in keeping with the kinds of argument Trump supporters make in his defence.

This leads to the ironical question: Are Trump and his MAGA followers the kind of liberal-minded thinkers Arendt has in mind when she celebrates courageous challenges of the status quo? While Trump critics will find such a question to be utterly absurd, we must acknowledge that it is not beyond the realm of possibility that at least some individuals within Trump's orbit looked to Arendt as an ally against "fake news" and "cancel culture." In fact, when Trump proposed an "American Heroes" statue garden in 2017, Arendt was among those on the list.¹⁷ But again, coopting Arendt

for any political, social, or cultural cause is bound to end in frustration.

How Arendt would have responded to Trump and his surrogates is beyond our capacity to judge. Indeed, it is not my purpose here to coopt Arendt. But we know that Arendt had a habit of calling out political leaders who engaged in systematic lying. In an essay entitled "Lying in Politics," from 1969, Arendt criticized President Richard M. Nixon and the Nixon administration for promoting blatant lies that were intended to deceive the public and to undermine the public's trust in the individuals and institutions that are tasked with the responsibility to tell the truth. Arendt was building on a key distinction she made in an earlier essay entitled "Truth and Politics" between "rational" and "factual" truth. Truth is rational if it must be true (or axiomatic). For example, a mathematical equation is rational truth, such as $2 \times 2 = 4$. Factual truth, however, relies on the interpretation of facts to arrive at a shared understanding of the truth. In other words, people understand rational truth if they can agree on a shared set of facts. Such an example would be "It snowed in Berlin yesterday." For Arendt, "deception, self-deception, image-making, ideologizing, and defactualization" are the tools that politicians use to manufacture doubt and sow public division for political gain.¹⁸ The primary targets of political lies are those individuals and institutions tasked with conveying accurate accounts of the facts. They are, for example, historians, scientists, philosophers, journalists, teachers, judges, and medical researchers. Inundated with an onslaught of lies, the public begins to lose trust in their universities, school systems, health care providers, news organizations, and other institutions. In the end, Arendt writes, "Contemporary history is full of instances in which tellers of factual truth were felt to be more dangerous, and even more hostile, than the real opponents."¹⁹

Fifty years later, it is not a stretch to conclude that Trump and his surrogates knowingly asserting falsehoods and attacking journalists, public health experts (particularly Dr. Anthony Fauci), and universities (using short-hand signals like "critical race theory") amounted to nothing more than a political ploy to "defactualize" truth so that Donald Trump could be (re-)presented as a patriot and, in some cases, a divinely anointed leader who had the backs of people feeling as though the story of America no longer included them. In short, the difference between a contested (or a "critical") understanding of truth, which Arendt defended her entire life, and political lying is that asserting falsehoods as facts is not, in any way, a reasonable attempt at the pursuit of truth. It is a cynical attempt to blur the lines between a "critical" understanding of truth, which invites questioning, and a lie presented as an unquestioned truth. Genuine criticism of the truth is dialogical, and it

invites further questions and arguments. Asserting lies as unquestioned truth for political means is deceptive, and it silences further questions and arguments.

For Arendt, something happens when a deceiver comes to believe their own lies. In the political sphere, new stories—and new histories—are created to support the lies. Old injustices and grievances are revised to bolster the new story. And new solutions, whether in the form of public policy, armed conflict, or charismatic leadership, are deployed to enact long-awaited justice. Moreover, lies retold to reinforce a manufactured logic within a system become the foundational elements of propaganda. In this regard, propaganda provides a story that justifies the system and people's place in it. Arendt writes, "What convinces masses are not facts, not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably a part." People in search of a story that makes sense to them, regardless of the facts, are vulnerable to deception, often in the form of ideology, that masquerades as historical and eternal truth. In *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*, she writes, "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist." In the case of the Trump presidency, "Make America Great Again" is not only an argument from history, real or invented, it is also a signal to his devoted followers that the old system—based on an eternal truth—will once again be effective. In that history, people who feel that they have been neglected become part of a story that explains their situation and promises them a better future. They are told that, with the re-emergence of the old order, the old values will regain their rightful place in society. And they are also told that, once right order is re-established, they will flourish.

Under these conditions, where there is a sharp divide between those engaged in willful deception and those clamouring for objective truth, all the fact checking in the world will change very few, if any, minds. On the one hand, those convinced by the objectivity of the fact checking believe that any questioning of the facts is a slippery slope toward a "post-truth" fiction. And on the other hand, those convinced by a story that both explains their situation and promises redemption cannot be bothered by claims of objective truth because, for them, the truth actually resides in a future outcome—in this case, making America great again (MAGA).

Conclusion: Hope in Dark Times

In 1991, in the wake of the Gulf War and the crumbling of the Soviet Union, Gregory Baum announced in

the pages of *The Ecumenist* that it was a "time of mourning." In spite of his joy in seeing the collapse of Eastern European communist regimes and the end of the Cold War, Baum lamented that the United States and Canada had rejected Keynesian-inspired welfare capitalism in favour of a neo-liberal economic agenda that relied solely on the free market. The "capitalist empire" had won—and left unchecked it would seek to integrate global markets into this new, unfettered economic system. Gone were any visions of implementing or even maintaining a social democratic system of government, which would prioritize the welfare of its citizens through social service projects, the protection of labour rights, and adequate access to natural resources. Also gone were the dreams that accompanied the *kairos* of the 1960s, a time when the churches would participate in radical social change and movements seeking greater justice. Baum wrote,

The dark times have also affected the Churches: they have become more conservative and withdrawn. In the Catholic Church a new emphasis on Catholic identity is making the hierarchy more self-involved, reluctant to seek cooperation in favour of the common good with other churches, other religious traditions, and secular movements. Fear is becoming the Church's counselor.²⁰

We seem to be once again in dark times. The neo-liberal economic model is teetering as it has wobbled through the Great Recession of 2008, a massive trade imbalance between the United States and China, tax cuts for the wealthy (especially in the United States), and spiking inflation. The post-Cold War order is cracking. The German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has declared, for example, "The world is facing a *Zeitenwende*: an epochal tectonic shift. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has put an end to an era. New powers have emerged or re-emerged, including an economically strong and politically assertive China. In this new multipolar world, different countries and models of government are competing for power and influence."²¹ Our healthcare systems are on the verge of collapse—the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated long-term problems in funding and working conditions. The social order appears to be unravelling as people take sides in culture war issues such as abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, systemic racism, and the limits of government authority in implementing vaccine mandates. Battle lines have been drawn in debates over climate change. Politicians, on both the left and the right, have discovered that, in these times, it is politically advantageous to keep the extremes in their parties riled up and engaged. The result is that our politics are now more about preserving ideological purity than finding common ground or building consensus. In the case of the United States,

those who seek compromise are labelled by the base and their political leaders as RINOs (Republicans in Name Only) or DINO (Democrats in Name Only). Ultimately, our defining stories have become narrower and more divisive. Even some conservative Catholics, who belong to a global Catholic Church that has supported the United Nations and other global institutions as part of its social teachings, scoff at the term “globalism” because global institutions pose a threat to local identity and autonomy. Meanwhile, progressive Catholics who seek to prioritize the voices of the oppressed have little patience with calls from those on the margins of society, the “deplorables,” who desire a politics rooted in traditional values, including conservative Christian values, denigrating this as “populism” or “fascism.” Missing in these interpretations is a dialectical, critical perspective. A critical approach to understanding these stories would seek to understand the injustices, both real and perceived, that gave rise to their stories. For example, Gregory Baum looked to the German theologian Paul Tillich²² and the Hungarian economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi²³ to understand the foundations of the polarizing narratives that led to conflict in World War II. Baum concluded that nationalism could be a good, since nationalism can foster a sense of community against globalizing forces, both political and economic. But nationalism must never devolve into chauvinism, self-interest, or exclusion.

For Arendt, times like these call for illumination in the form of action. She writes, “Even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and that such illumination may come less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering, and often that weak light that some men and women, in their lives and works, will kindle under almost all circumstances and shed over the time-span that was given them on earth.”²⁴ For Gregory Baum, writing amid the despair of the Gulf War and the immediate fallout of the Cold War, there remained hope. For Baum, that hope came in the form of Christians becoming even more involved in their social justice networks and, where there were no networks, building them. For Catholics, it meant raising radical critiques of neo-liberal capitalism and social injustices by appealing to Catholic social teaching. In his autobiography, Baum argued that it also means committing to the establishment of a critical culture, supporting social movements, spreading the humanist objectives of the United Nations while recognizing the autonomy of sovereign nations, and participating in community development projects and creating a social economy. Doing that work requires us to tell stories rooted in factual truth. It also requires us to invite and encourage others to engage in a critical examination of our stories, exposing any injustices and untruths that might lie in our stories’ darker corners.

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1 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 201.

2 *Ibid.*, 205.

3 Gregory Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 4.

4 “Conway: Press Secretary Gave ‘Alternative Facts,’” NBC News: Meet the Press, January 22, 2017.

5 Michiko Kakutani, “Why ‘1984’ Is a 2017 Must Read,” *New York Times*, January 26, 2017.

6 Ruth Marcus, “The Post Truth Era of Politics,” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2016.

7 Michiko Kakutani, “The Death of Truth: How We Gave Up on Facts and Ended up with Trump,” *The Guardian*, July 14, 2018.

8 Richard J. Bernstein, “The Illuminations of Hannah Arendt,” *The New York Times*, June 20, 2018.

9 Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), viii.

10 Brecht’s German original is “Wirklich, ich lebe in finsternen Zeiten.” In some English translations, this reads, “Indeed I live in the dark ages.” The German is “An die Nachgeborenen” (1937). An English translation is Brecht, *Selected Poems*, ed. and trans. H.R. Hays (New York: Harcourt, 1947).

11 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 4.

12 *Ibid.*, viii.

13 This point has recently been made by Rebecca Panovka, “How Hannah Arendt’s Fans Misread the Post-Truth Presidency,” *Harper’s Magazine*, August 2021.

14 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 9.

15 I have made a couple of passing remarks that would suggest Arendt is no admirer of the social sciences. She was, in fact, an ardent critic of a type of social science that reduces phenomena to their function (functionalism), such as a certain approach to psychology and sociology, and to any academic method that becomes trapped in its ideal types, analogies, and data gathering, thereby creating barriers for the discovery of historical novelty. See Hannah Arendt, “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12:1 (1950), 49–64.

16 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 11.

17 Andrew Solender, “Grover Cleveland, Hannah Arendt, Walt Disney: Trump Puts Out List of 244 ‘American Heroes’ for Statue Garden,” *Forbes*, January 19, 2021.

18 Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics,” in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1969), 44.

19 Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: 1977), 277. Note that this essay, first published in *The New Yorker* (Feb. 25, 1967), has been published several times, with minor revisions.

20 Gregory Baum, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 142–43.

21 Olaf Scholz, “The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era,” *Foreign Affairs* (Jan./Feb. 2023).

22 Gregory Baum, *Nationalism, Religion and Ethics* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 62–83.

23 Gregory Baum, *Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996).

24 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 6.

Salvaging a Pneumatological Insight from Hegel's Philosophy of History

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In his most recent book on the Holy Spirit, Michael Welker praises Hegel's presentation of how the Holy Spirit works through different domains toward the increase of freedom in history. Welker also criticizes the totalizing nature of Hegel's thought.¹ In attempting to comprehend the Spirit's work with an all-encompassing logic, Hegel incorporated the imperial aggressions of Alexander the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte into the Spirit's activity. Paul Tillich similarly appreciated Hegel's attempt to concretely grasp the Spirit's presence in the domains of art, religion, politics, and philosophy. Yet he, too, criticized Hegel for attempting to conceptualize the Holy Spirit's work in one all-encompassing pattern.² Hegel failed to heed Paul of Tarsus' observation that human understanding in history always remains partial and incomplete (1 Cor. 13:12). He did not recognize the embattled nature of the Holy Spirit in history—the sometimes conflicting ways in which it works and how religions and cultures that stubbornly refuse to be absorbed into the dominant social order may harbour resources for a better future. Still, Hegel's accurate insights should not be overlooked.

Taking a cue from Welker and Tillich, what follows will attempt to salvage Hegel's insight that the Holy Spirit can work indirectly in history in unforeseeable ways to achieve greater freedom and justice and better living conditions for people. It does this through what sociologists call the latent effects of an individual's or social group's actions. In his philosophy of history, Hegel described this aspect of the Spirit's work as the "cunning of reason." Many recent discussions of the Holy Spirit focus on how it works directly to inspire, reveal, or unite. But the Spirit also works indirectly through the latent effects of people's actions to create new opportunities for its more direct work.

We will not present a reading of Hegel's texts³ due to lack of space and because Hegel employed this notion but did not expand on it.⁴ Instead, after briefly outlining Hegel's idea, we will show how aspects of it have been exemplified in recent historical developments and a biblical tradition, and how it can be understood in a non-totalizing way.

The Cunning of Reason

For Hegel, the actions of individuals such as Alexander the Great or Napoleon who are driven by pride and desire for fame can have the unintended effect of enabling what Hegel called the "World Spirit" to become actual in history on a higher level.⁵ Reason or the World Spirit is "cunning" in using the actions of such persons without their knowledge to attain its own ends, which are contrary to theirs. The Spirit works through the passions and immoral actions of an Alexander or Napoleon to create societies in which such passions and immoral actions are curbed and limited.⁶ In this way, the Spirit brings into being communities characterized by greater justice and freedom for all.

Hegel's understanding of how the World Spirit works surreptitiously and indirectly in historical events and cultural environments erred in justifying the immorality of Alexander or Napoleon by the unintended effects of their conquests and in arguing that their conquests were necessary for the Spirit to accomplish its aims. However, Hegel's insight that the Spirit can work indirectly in history, even through the latent effects of events that contradict and wound the Spirit, is not obviated by this.

Some Historical Examples

An example of the Holy Spirit's indirect work is the effect that the United Church of Canada's (UCC) mission work in Korea had on the UCC itself.⁷ The overseas mission work of the UCC and its predecessors from the late 1800s to the 1960s presented notions of Western and white superiority to non-Western and non-white peoples. Yet, this mission work by the UCC in Korea, China, India, and Africa helped establish Protestant churches in these parts of the world and often created lasting connections between these churches and itself. In the case of Korea, these connections enabled forms of reverse mission to develop between Korean Christians and the UCC. Originally, missionaries went from Canada to Korea to evangelize, serve, and educate. But by the 1970s, "the movement of ideas, people, and resources was no longer one way but two

way – and, in fact, was starting to tip in favour of the flow from Korea to Canada.”⁸

A significant moment in this change in their relationship occurred at a consultation between the two held in 1974. Here it was recognized that Koreans were travelling to Canada “to evangelize and serve the Canadian church.”⁹ As well, at the request of representatives of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), the mission properties owned by the UCC in Korea were transferred to the PROK. A large house in Seoul in which missionaries had resided was turned into a mission and education centre. It became the home of the theological school from which Minjung theology emerged.¹⁰ This house, which had been a symbol of Western privilege, became the cradle of a liberation theology native to Korea. This “could not have been foreseen,”¹¹ either by the Canadians who provided the house or by the Koreans who suggested that it be used as a lay training centre.

The Canadian Korean mission not only facilitated these unexpected developments in Korea, but also it established connections that impacted the UCC in Canada. By the mid-1970s, many Koreans were immigrating to Canada, among them Protestant clergy. Some of these immigrants entered the UCC, and a significant Korean diaspora developed within it. Some members of this diaspora, such as the Right Rev. Sang Chul Lee, undertook to be missionaries to the UCC, challenging its colonial practices and ways of thought.¹² The end result of this reverse mission that the earlier colonial mission indirectly facilitated has been to make the UCC critical of and repentant of its former participation in colonialism.¹³ The Holy Spirit worked directly through the UCC personnel who went to Korea to spread the gospel and do medical and educational work. It also worked indirectly through their presence and activity to create bridging social capital, contacts, and relationships with UCC personnel that Koreans utilized to facilitate their travel to Canada and their involvement in the UCC. Thanks to what UCC work in Korea and elsewhere indirectly made possible and to the Spirit working through Korean Christians and others who made use of this, the UCC now sees itself as called to be an intercultural church.

A second example of the Spirit’s indirect work comes from the latent effect of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches working together in Holland to protect Jews from Nazi persecution during the Second World War.¹⁴ This cooperation, begun in 1942, continued until the end of the war. It had the unintended effect of creating a unique ecumenical conscience in Holland known as Dutch ecumenism that continued after the war.

These examples show the Spirit working in a way similar to Hegel’s notion of the cunning of reason.

Elizabeth Johnson notes that the Holy Spirit acts unexpectedly in history to open up a different future.¹⁵ It does this in human history directly by inspiring charismatic leadership in church and society. It also does this by working indirectly, below the surface, unbeknownst to the people it is working through and sometimes against their declared intentions. This indirect work can set the stage for its more direct work, as it did for the Right Rev. Sang Chul Lee’s challenge to the colonial worldviews and practices in the UCC.

A Biblical Precedent, a Theological Precedent, and an Example from an Individual’s Life

There are biblical and theological precedents for this notion of the Holy Spirit working indirectly in history. Perhaps the most prominent biblical example is the acclamation in Isaiah 44:24–45:7 of Cyrus the Persian king as Yahweh’s servant. Here, the prophet announced that God was at work in history in a hidden way in Cyrus’ war with Babylon. Cyrus was God’s agent,¹⁶ whom God would use to set Israel free from captivity in Babylon. God’s liberating intentions for Israel would be partially fulfilled through the latent effects of Cyrus’ military campaigns. Similarly, in his doctrine of providence, Augustine also described God as working in history through the actions of peoples and individuals who pursued their own ends and who were not conscious of what was being accomplished indirectly through them.¹⁷

The Holy Spirit also works indirectly in the lives of individuals. An example of this is Frank Sudol’s conversion from racist bigotry against Indigenous peoples to admiration and respect for them.¹⁸ Sudol (1933–2006) was an internationally known woodworking artist who lived in Paddockwood, Saskatchewan. His artistic interests led him to travel to the southwestern United States and British Columbia. Sudol’s impressions of the art and culture of Indigenous peoples that he observed in his travels challenged his racial prejudice. Sometime later, when he attended a dance near his home, he was shocked to see that the leader of the dance band was a local Cree man, Lawrence Joseph. This decisive encounter led Sudol to renounce his racist beliefs and issue a public apology for them, and it moved him to a stance of admiration and respect for Indigenous peoples. Through the indirect means of Sudol’s travels, his attending a dance, and his pride in himself as an artist and a person of integrity, the Holy Spirit worked to overcome his prejudice.

Conclusion

The Spirit did not inspire the military aggression of Alexander or Napoleon. But it can work indirectly

through the latent effects of even such individuals. This does not legitimate their immorality, but it does show how the Spirit can be a source of hope for a different future even in times of great suffering and oppression, when the Spirit is being wounded and its goals directly contradicted. Even then, the Spirit may still be at work indirectly to create the basis for a different future, in which churches, society, and creation may move closer to the coming reign of God.

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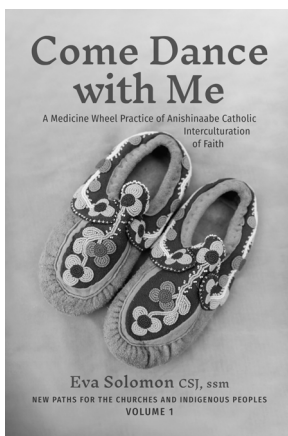
- 1 Michael Welker, *In God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 42.
- 2 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 373.
- 3 The relevant texts are discussed in Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 121–36.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 5 Robert Tucker, “The Cunning of Reason in Hegel and Marx,” *The Review of Politics* 18:3 (July 1956): 269–71.
- 6 McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 126.

7 The history of this mission work in Korea and its subsequent decolonizing effects on the United Church of Canada are described and analyzed in David Kim-Cragg, *Water from Dragon's Well* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022).

- 8 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 137–46.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 198; Sang-Chul Lee, *The Wanderer* (Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1989), 115.
- 13 Kim-Cragg, *Water from Dragon's Well*, 239.
- 14 Armin Boyens, “The Ecumenical Community and the Holocaust,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 450 (July 1980): 150.
- 15 Elizabeth Johnson, “Creative Giver of Life: An Ecological Theology of the Holy Spirit,” in *It Is the Spirit Who Gives Life*, ed. Radu Baordeianu (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 205.
- 16 Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Vol. II* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 415.
- 17 Dino Bigongiari, “The Political Ideas of Augustine,” in *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, ed. Henry Paolucci (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1962), 357–58.
- 18 For an account and analysis of this, see Don Schweitzer, “Pride Overcoming Prejudice,” *Religious Studies and Theology* 23:2 (2004): 99–119.

Come Dance with Me

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Book Review

Post–World War II Social Christianity and Its Relevance to Pope Francis’ Criticism of NATO

Jean Boulier. *I Was a Red Priest: Memories and Testimonials*. New York: Red Star-CW Publisher, 2022. 724 pp.

This book offers through its protagonist a Christian social analysis that is now minimized but was widely held in the post–World War II era and continues to be held by those like Pope Francis who, in May 2022, criticized NATO as “barking at Russia’s door.” It is the autobiography of Fr. Jean Boulier (1894–1980), translated from French into English, complete with newly added scholarly appendixes, indexes, graphics, and a bibliography.

Fr. Boulier was professor of Christian Legal Principles at the Catholic University of Paris. The book is not only about Fr. Boulier but is a social history of his era from the Christian social perspective. It includes the analysis of theology and philosophy, religious associations and movements, liturgy and sacraments, political parties, trade unions, Jewish affairs, early Christianity, European history, and socialist countries and leaders.

According to Fr. Boulier, the main international peace issue that faced believers after World War II was the American-led Cold War, which was waged to take back the advances made by the working class as a result of capitalism’s World War II debacle. The priest-professor took a stand, based on Christian authority, first, against anti-communism, and second, against America’s atomic policy because it violated the Christian principles of war and peace. Third, he maintained that Christians can be good citizens of the socialist order, but they could not accept the bourgeois state and its fundamental law: make money, get rich.

In his scholarly writings and his autobiography, Fr. Boulier found Marxism compatible with Thomism, ecumenism, mysticism, liturgy, and hierarchy. His allies included Cardinal Suhard of Paris and Msgr. Angelo Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII, who in the post-war period was the papal nuncio to France. The American Dorothy Day articulated the opposition of social Christianity to the warmongering of Cardinal Spellman, the CIA, John Foster Dulles, and Harry Truman. In her *Catholic Worker* newspaper, Day defended the collaboration of Fr. Boulier and that of American priests with the communists.

The book describes how Fr. Boulier’s activism began in 1912 when he joined the Jesuits. For 20 years he was

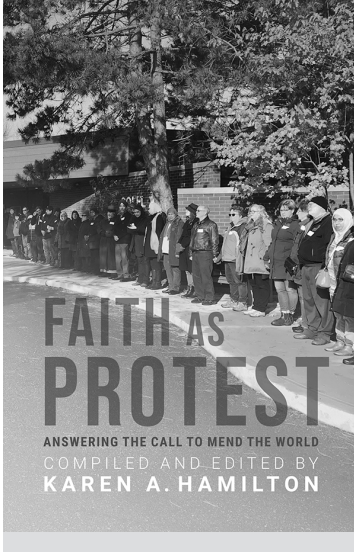
with the “Company,” then he became a priest of the Parisian clergy. Because of his work on the side of the Jews in the World War II resistance against the Vichy and Nazi government, he is now being considered by Israel (Yad Vashem) for its title “Righteous among the Nations.” After the war in 1950, fighting the same interests he faced during the war, he helped write and promote the Stockholm Appeal to prevent nuclear war in Korea. The petition gained 273 million signers, most of whom, as he pointed out, were Christians, not communists. Still later, in 1958, he was convicted of a felony for defaming the French military concerning its conduct in the Algerian War.

In the early 1960s, from within the peace movement during the Second Vatican Council, Fr. Boulier worked with theologians Fr. Marie-Dominique Chenu, OP and Cardinal Suenens to help it support peace. The language in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* contained the essence of Fr. Boulier’s proposed text: “Every act of war which tends indiscriminately to the destruction of entire cities or vast regions with their inhabitants is a crime against God and against man himself and it must be condemned firmly and without hesitation.”

Fr. Boulier’s activism extended into Eastern Europe, where Christians in significant numbers sided with the communists in the post-war period. This included priests, nuns, and some bishops. Fr. Boulier worked with their clerical organizations, including PAX in Poland, the Association of Priests for Peace in Hungary, and the Movement of Patriotic Priests and Catholic Action in Czechoslovakia. They published his writings and sponsored his speaking tours to their countries. Their members held political offices and contributed positively to their socialist societies.

To sum up, from Fr. Boulier’s view, the interests that supported fascism during World War II sought to unify Europe in order to destroy the communists. Ultimately, they won the war. They unified Europe and in time destroyed the USSR. NATO is used to make the world a police state in order to enslave the working class. Believers, including Fr. Boulier and Pope Francis, resist.

Toby Terrar



Faith as Protest

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COMPILED AND EDITED BY KAREN A. HAMILTON

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