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Possessive Individualism and Human Flourishing: A Christian Theological Response to
Globalizing Capitalism

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Abstract

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In this study I seek to develop a Christian theological and social-ethical critique of capitalism organized around the framework of "possessive individualism. For the purposes of this project, I define "possessive individualism" as a proprietary and acquisitive orientation towards self, world, and the divine.

To carry out my critique, I articulate a boundary between the capitalist imaginary, on the one hand, and Christian understandings of the good and human flourishing, on the other. By drawing this boundary, I argue, we are able to see how Christian understandings of God, God's relationship to the world, and human beings' lived responses to God can challenge – and thereby *interrupt* – the background image of the possessive individual and the wider vision of the good and human flourishing it licenses and normalizes.

My project thus shares concerns found within liberationist and postcolonial theologies, Radical Orthodoxy, and works by Stanley Hauerwas and his disciples. Nevertheless, this study seeks to update the societal analysis pioneered by liberation theologians beginning in the 1970's, as well as develop a more robust and explicit account of rights indexed to concerns about the global economy. In addition, unlike many postcolonial theologies, the vision of human flourishing I foreground is linked to a notion of the triune God who is wholly otherwise to creation and to the human creature. Finally, in contrast to Radical Orthodoxy as well as the positions of Hauerwas and his followers, I have sought to develop a vision of human flourishing and the life of Christian communities that is attentive to the dynamics of "possession" of Christ and the neighbor within those very same communities, as well as an affirmation of rights as a genuine good of modernity.

By interrupting capitalist practice and its moral and social imaginary, I believe Christian thought and practice has the potential both to recognize the value of and to renew modern commitments, especially human rights, within the contemporary world in a manner consistent with its own Christian witness. In accordance with this belief, I seek to affirm human rights discourse theologically and reclaim it from capitalist practice and its moral and social imaginary so that Christian communities may be enriched by the *saeculum,* even as the *saeculum* might receive a helpful critique from those same communities.

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Introduction

Capitalism, we are often told, arose as a powerful, liberating force, beginning in the West, and then slowly spreading across the globe, freeing human beings from the darkness of their ancestral past. Individual freedom was about emancipation from traditional social relationships, including the feudal estate, the family, and the realm of religion. In premodern societies, the individual was merely a particular instantiation of a role within a fixed, unchanging order, the product of a cyclical account of time, marked by the arrival and passing of the seasons. Capitalist modernity emancipated humanity from this order, indeed this whole onto-theology, which God, as the Supreme Being amongst other beings, legitimated.[1] It initiated a decisive break with the cyclical sense of time to a new linear one, marked by a historical teleology of progress out of ignorance to enlightenment, human bondage to human freedom, servility to autonomy. And this sense of emancipation carried a sense of dignity rooted in a newfound sense of human responsibility for forging the good rather than receiving it or discovering it.

But not everyone celebrated these changes. Did this new order not flatten human life, the critics would ask, transforming the good into nothing more than the pursuit of material wealth and worldly pleasures through production, exchange, and consumption? This critique was articulated by 19th-century European critics of North Atlantic modernity like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky and would exert an immense influence on 20th-century theological and humanistic thought, especially in philosophy and aesthetic modernism, both within and outside of the global North. Quite simply, life for these critics of capitalist modernity was about

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[1] "Onto-theology' is an unfortunate label for the most sophisticated theological and philosophical thinkers of medieval, Western Christendom—the time and place where capitalist modernity is usually identified as beginning in earnest---such as Anselm and a Dominican who is often erroneously labeled with this negative epithet: Thomas Aquinas.

more than what the individual could secure for himself and his own in the market, fueled by technology, private property, and the supply/demand circle of production and consumption.

But the critics did not stop with these concerns. Without any objective good beyond the will of the consumer, they asked, was there anything or any agency left to secure a universal morality? Hume tried to salvage a universal morality through an appeal to sentiment, since, he argued, there were no generic, natural relations, and thus no longer any universal natural law now that facts (i.e., the world of objective reason) were understood to be distinct from the realm of subjective values. Influenced by Hume, Kant would try to reconcile freedom and morality with his categorical imperative. But it remained a point of contention whether his various formulations were philosophically convincing, opening up a path whereby his intellectual posterity came to more starkly emphasize the power of raw will to shape reality. In these thinkers, it would appear that both what is and what is good are determined by the will of the strongest, a stance that can be seen in a figure like Nietzsche, who celebrated the possibilities opened up to the will, and in post-Nietzscheans like Foucault, who with great rhetorical power argued that what is true and what is good are shaped by the disciplinary apparatuses of an anonymous collective will, forming subjects of a certain desire within modern society.

Religion, it would seem, could offer no help. Indeed, the term "religion" itself had changed in the passage to capitalist modernity. Rooted in the notion of reverence, bond and obligation, especially to divinity, *religio* presupposed the reality of God. In the European Middle Ages, religion came to be linked with the monastic life, which was contrasted with (although not opposed to) the secular, which referred to life outside the monastery. But the division between the religious and the secular belied a more fundamental unity of all reality before and under God, with the *saeculum* referring to the *time* between Christ's ascension and return. Coinciding with

capitalist modernity, and speaking with varying degrees of asperity, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment critics of Christianity like Hume, Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud, all characterized "religion" as false consciousness, even if that false consciousness was a mistaken or distorted outlet for a real need. While other thinkers had a more positive attitude towards religion (Durkheim and Weber, for example), they nevertheless could not affirm that any religion, let alone Christianity, referred to a reality beyond the immanent realm of human meaning-making. Furthermore, as the western idea of religion was shaped by the development of modern natural science, the colonizing adventures of Europe, and the development of the nation-state, it came to be relegated to a realm of privacy, interiority, and personal morality. The other realms of the differentiated societies that came into being under the nation-state--with human flourishing largely to be found in and through the economic sphere--were to remain, at least in theory, free from the value-judgments of religion. Within this new framework, the non-religious or secular spheres were conceived in terms of *space* rather than *time*, and were largely untouched by considerations of God's will for human beings.

Much 19th- and 20th-Christian (especially Protestant) theology accepted the strictures modernity had imposed upon religion, and sought to work within the space that religion had been given, even as other thinkers (Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox) worried that such moves cut God down to size, fitting God to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the modern age.[2] These latter opted instead for creative bricolage, utilizing modern forms of thought in conjunction with the retrieval of premodern resources (*resourcement*) to speak to the modern

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[2] Of course the boundary between so-called "liberal" and "orthodox" thinkers is much contested, and often obscures rather than aids, interpretation of historical figures, as Bruce McCormack is at great pains to show with regards to theologians like Schleiermacher and Barth. Barth himself was shaped by the liberal Protestant concern to turn to Jesus as the epistemic and ethical point of departure for Christians. See Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

world in a manner that was contextually relevant while remaining abidingly faithful to the God of scripture, tradition, and the life of the church through the ages.

Two strands of theological thought in this latter vein deserve mention because of their influence on my own position. First, there is the work of Karl Barth, with his understanding of God's revelation and God's commands freely given to human beings, opening up room for a vision of human life in the contemporary world whose beginning and end lies with a loving God sharing his very life of radiant glory.[3] While shortcomings in Barth's thought are numerous (including his failure to adequately come to terms with the integrity of material creation and created life as well as the work of the Spirit), he provided an undeniable fillip to a whole host of theological critiques of modernity, including its capitalist dimensions, that simultaneously utilize the intellectual resources of modernity, and in the contemporary age, postmodernity.

Second, is the seminal event of Vatican II within the Catholic Church. Like Karl Barth and his 19th-century Protestant predecessors, the council recognized the inextricably historical dimension of the church's life and teaching. The claims of a universally valid reason, invoked by Catholic thinkers in everything from fundamental theology to natural law, were complicated by questions of history, pluralism, and power.[4] Ironically, of course, the appeal to a universally valid reason open to the truths of the Christian revelation had often been utilized to support a

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[3] In following Barth here, I reject the notion of an analogy of being serving an epistemological function. Rather, in Jesus Christ, and the witness of scripture inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit, which conforms human beings' lives to Christ, human beings receive the ability to know who God is through the analogic use of language, an analogy of faith. Any *ontological* talk about an analogy of being, and more specifically analogies between God's triune life and the created world, are epistemologically rooted in this analogy of faith.

[4] Latin American liberation theology was decisively shaped by the events of Vatican II. See the classic, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988 [1971]). Asian-American and Latino/a theologies in the United States, as well as a whole host of postcolonial theologies, have, from their very inception, been shaped by these developments. African theology, for example, was shaped by Latin American liberation theology (as well as North American Black Theology), paving the way for its own emphasis on liberation combined with a greater ecclesial emphasis on the church and reconciliation from the 1990s forward. See H. Russell Botman, "African Theology," in The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology, 5-8.

fortress mentality towards modernity.[5] The challenge before the Council, by contrast, was to articulate a vision of the Church's role in the world that took seriously its own particular scriptural witness, dogmatic tradition, and theological reflection in a manner that was both dialogic *and* firmly committed to the universal truth of its proclamation. This was not to renounce pre-Vatican II thought, but to challenge it where it needed reform through transforming, but not expunging, crucial insights and articulating them in more theologically robust terms (e.g. natural law as part of a scripturally-grounded doctrine of creation).

Mindful of this history, this study seeks to develop a Christian theological and social-ethical critique of capitalism organized around the framework of "possessive individualism," a phrase developed by political theorist C.B. Macpherson, who critiqued the modern liberal tradition for being inextricably linked to the capitalist system and its associated philosophical anthropology.[6] Whatever, the merits of Macpherson's specific analysis, his use of the phrase "possessive individualism" to describe this anthropology, provides a useful point of entry into, and hermeneutic guide for, understanding contemporary capitalism. For the purposes of this study, I will define "possessive individualism" as a proprietary and acquisitive orientation towards self, world, and the divine.

The key question I seek to address is whether Christian theology and Christian communities can contribute to a vision of human flourishing in light of globalizing capitalism's possessive individualist vision of the human good, which reduces human life to a morally and spiritually flattened, as well as for many, exclusionary, status quo.[7] While I believe they can,

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[5] Thus, while Ernst Troeltsch could characterize the Catholic church as the paradigmatic instantiation of his "church" type, it was a church type that was in many ways oriented to a premodern world, functionally pushing the pre-Vatican I church towards a highly sophisticated *sectarian* society.

[6] See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[7] Strictly speaking, globalization has been occurring for thousands of years. What has changed, and here I agree with David Held and his associates, is the extent of globalization, its intensity, its speed, and its impact. It

this project is not a *carte blanche* dismissal of the liberal tradition or North Atlantic late modernity (sometimes called "postmodernity"). It is rather a critique of what I am identifying as hegemonic, globalizing capitalism and its role in shaping North Atlantic (especially American), and increasingly, non-Western, societies. Furthermore, the spread of a homogenizing capitalist logic both from the North Atlantic world outwards, and (especially) from urban nodes around the world into their respective hinterlands, creates significant points of overlap between my situated analysis and those coming from other parts of the globe. There is a dialectical relationship between the global and the local, each contributing to the other side of the dialectic, insuring both difference and convergence between perspectives. My analysis might thus be described as a form of "glocalism" (Roland Robertson).[8] In this I recognize the reality of historical pluralism, and the fact that the Christian witness, while universal, is inculturated in particular ways in different contexts, thus calling for a proliferation of voices from different social settings to articulate the meaning of the gospel, and the mission of the church, in light of globalizing capitalism.

My core contention is that human beings are called to live in faithful relationship to the triune God, with human flourishing specifically characterized 1) by dispossession and recentering "in Christ," and 2) by sharing, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the love that is given and received between Christ and the Father and poured out in our hearts in service towards the neighbor. It is my further contention that this theological emphasis both interrupts

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should also be said that I do not believe that globalization can be reduced to a single cause, like relations of production, economic exchange, or technology. All of these factors shape globalization, as well as a host of other ones. But I do believe that the economic dimension of globalization is immensely important, perhaps, we might say, a first amongst causal equals? See David Held, et. al., *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

[8] As Douglas John Hall puts it in *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 47-48, "If, with the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Christians delve deeply enough into the crust of their own society and culture, they will discover, sooner or later, that it will be necessary also to widen their horizons to include the greater world of which their own is a small part. For--today especially, in this 'global village' (Marshall McCluhan)--no one worldly context is ultimately isolatable."

the moral and social imaginary of globalizing capitalism and provides the basis for developing a

Christian social ethic indexed to the challenges that a society marked by possessive

individualism poses.

What do I mean by a moral and social imaginary on the one hand, and by interruption on

the other? Let me explain the former first. Capitalist societies are marked by practices of private

property ownership, the expansion of the exercise of instrumental-rationality in service of profit,

industrial and post-industrial production, complex financial instruments and instantaneous

financial flows, market exchange, and market consumption. These practices all share a

"background common understanding that makes possible common practices, and widely shared

sense of legitimacy."[9] Charles Taylor also speaks of this background in terms of images and

norms.[10] The particular background image that I am foregrounding in this study is that of the

possessive individual, and it is this picture of the person that these practices "seek" (if one speaks

anthropomorphically) to create. In turn this image both 1) legitimates the actual shape these

practices take, because this picture of the human being carries with it a notion of the good, in the

sense of an image of dignified flourishing based on the power to control and acquire; and 2) is

assumed to be natural because the practices of capitalism inform the notion of the good and

human identity in a manner that makes that image plausible. What I would add to this approach,

shaped as it is by hermeneutical developments within philosophy and interpretive sociology, is

what Kathryn Tanner calls the constructivist dimension of cultural interpretation which comes

from a recognition of the interpreter's own situated, limited perspective and of the character of

cultures as ongoing processes rather than static wholes.[11] My employment of the notion

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[9] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 171.

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

"possessive individualism" is not arbitrary, yet it is also not beyond contestation. It is the result of "making meaning" rather than merely "finding it," a constrained decision based on identifying a moral and social imaginative concept and image that captures both a fundamental dimension of capitalism while illuminating a dynamic that I see at the heart of the gospel: human dis-possession and recentering in Christ.[12]

This brings me to the topic of interruption. The life of Christian communities is marked by practices of reading scripture, as well as preaching, ritual practices of baptism and the partaking of the Eucharist, prayer to God, and hospitality directed towards the neighbor. All of these are attempts to faithfully respond to the triune God who Christians believe has been revealed in Jesus the Christ, and who lives in ongoing relationship to the community, sustaining it in being, shaping both its identity and that of the wider world. The theological interpreter, in turn, seeks (as we mentioned before) to "constructively interpret" the texts and practices of the Christian community. These practices of interpretation, which may take the form of discursive narration, explication, and argumentation can also be used to explicate and to challenge what the theologian sees as the relationship between the culture of the Christian community and the larger culture or cultures in which that community finds itself embedded.

For my project, I want to articulate a boundary between the capitalist imaginary, on the one hand, and Christian understandings of the good and human flourishing, on the other. These understandings of the good emerge out of the interpretation of Christian texts and practices, and the attempt to faithfully witness to who God is, how God relates to the world, and what the implications this relationship has to the identity of the world, Christian community, and

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[12] I say constrained, because the "text" exerts a pull on the interpreter, precluding, in my estimation, any and every interpretation. Furthermore, the revised cultural-linguistic model of religion developed by Tanner is only a tool for theology; it cannot be used, from a Christian perspective, to endorse a full-blown secular, historicist ontology (i.e. an ontology that presumes that Christian faith is just a set of historical cultural-linguistic practices that do not, at the end of the day, have any referential truth-value).

individual.[13] By drawing this boundary, I want to argue, we can see how Christian

understandings of God, God's relationship to the world, and human beings' lived responses to

God can challenge – and thereby *interrupt* – the background image of the possessive individual

and the wider vision of the good and human flourishing it licenses and normalizes. By engaging

in this task of interruption, I seek to participate in the larger practice of theological meaning-

making as an activity that aids the Christian community in the interpretation of its common life

founded by, and oriented to, Jesus Christ. In Christian theological terms, it is a prayerful waiting

on the Spirit to shape the life of the church--those called out by God--to sanctify it in its journey

into the life of the triune God.

An important resource for this interruptive task is the voices of the faithful of earlier

generations. For Christians, to listen to voices from the past is to widen the scope of the church's

discernment of Christ's identity as well as Christian identity lived out in following after Christ—

discipleship--in the present. As Rowan Williams writes, "without this encounter with Jesus in

the days of his flesh and in his life in his corporate Body in history, the believing self remains

untouched by transforming grace."[14] This present and *future* interest (we are, after all, creatures

in time forever moving into the future) should preclude this engagement with the past from

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[13] As Kathryn Tanner writes, "Boundaries are determined, in sum, by how a Christian way of life is situated within a whole field of alternatives. The boundaries distinguishing a Christian way of life from others will shift with shifts in the practices of the other ways of life making up the field" (Tanner, 111). Later she writes, "the distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not so much formed *by* the boundary as *at* it; Christian distinctiveness is something that emerges in the very cultural process occurring at the boundary, processes that construct a distinctive identity for Christian social practices through the distinctive use of cultural materials shared with others" (Tanner, 115). I am engaged in that *process* through the *articulation* of a boundary.

[14] Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 91. Postmodern, postsecular developments have led Christian thinkers to link a growing understanding of the centrality of robust theological themes in the work of premodern thinkers like Augustine (Christology, the Trinity, and the church) to social and political theological proposals. The political dimension of this Augustinian revival seeks to move beyond Niebuhrian Realism that has dominated Augustine-inspired Christian social ethical and political theological reflection. See, amongst others, Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*; Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love* and "Augustinians and the New Liberalism;" and Rowan Williams, *On Augustine*. For a project that explores the political implications of Orthodox thinkers, including the Eastern patristic tradition, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

turning into romantic repristination, or nostalgia for a lost Golden Age. So called "neo-orthodox" thought in Protestantism, the revival of patristic thought in Orthodoxy, and the renewed interest in a contextualized Aquinas and the church fathers within Catholicism all challenged modernity as they experienced it, while also bending modern thought forms to proclaim what they took to be the Christian message. With the emergence of postmodernity and the even greater challenge to the grand narratives of modernity, including that of capitalist progress, there is arguably even more space to draw upon the premodern – not in an effort to repristinate it out of nostalgia but rather to work through the challenges of the present in light of the wisdom of the past.

For this reason, I draw on a broad ecumenical range of voices to develop my positive vision of the Christian life over against the claims of possessive individualism. These voices, when brought into conversation with contemporary globalizing capitalist practice and culture, help draw out both problematic dimensions of that social configuration, as well as demonstrate how questions of possession and capitalism are not just economic questions in the narrow sense, but touch on the fundamental character of the Christian kerygma.

In carrying out these tasks, I will employ robust Christian theological language. This is not to say that I eschew the insights of the social sciences and religious studies to examine topics discoursed theologically. However, I follow Eugene Rogers, Jr. when he speaks of his own work on Christian pneumatology:

> From a Religious Studies point of view, you might regard the book as a reflection on indigenous (or naturalized) Christian accounts of matters very important to our discipline: community, experience, identity formation, ritual practice, economic activity, material culture. But it seeks to remain adequate to those naturalized Christian accounts; it does not allow modern Western patterns of analysis to set the structure. Rather it uses them heuristically, transgressively, and ad hoc.[15]

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[15] Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 3. Rogers, Jr.'s comments echo the debate in anthropology, religious studies, and comparative theology regarding the relationship between insider and outsider knowledge.

Many of those same religious studies topics mentioned by Rogers could be used to describe my project. What I want to emphasize is that to make a wholesale shift into the vocabularies of the social sciences or religious studies is to lose something very important; it fails, as Rogers says, to adequately get at what is going on.[16] Something is lost, a sense of the thickness of the beliefs and practices that will be articulated.[17] For this reason, this project follows what might be called a post-liberal, postmodern, or postsecular trajectory.

My use of theological language thus should be seen as an invitation to those who are not Christian to "listen in" on what Christians are saying and doing. Indeed, in opening the faith up to listening in by people who are not Christians, I am engaging in a task that is apologetic insofar as I seek (to play with the words of Douglas John Hall) to constructively interpret the faith, to correct wrong opinion that the faith has nothing to say to capitalism or is neatly compatible with it, and thus to commend the faith as something that people can think with, and dwell in, in a manner that pushes back against what many feel are the problematic dimensions of contemporary globalizing capitalism.[18] And this apologetic dimension is not just for "those who are not part of the community of faith, or who are on its edges" but for Christians too, since Christians are in via, shaped by a myriad of forces, and plagued by the same uncertainties, doubts, and even alienation promoted by the wider culture. In essence, Christians themselves are always being called, again and again, to conversion to Christ. My task is thus a prayerful attempt to shape "rightful praise" (orthodoxy) of God lived out in faith in God and love of neighbor, as

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[16] For Christians, and perhaps believers of other faiths, the connotations carried by the term "adequacy" capture a sense, borne of humility, that human language ostensibly points to a reality that can never be fully possessed and exhaustively described by human beings, but instead must be followed.

[17] L. Gregory Jones criticizes J. Philip Wogaman for arguing that "theological beliefs may affect the 'ultimate meaning' of an action, but they are little more than the motivating source of actions; they do not decisively affect the description of actions, persons, and world." See L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Pres, 1990), 22.

[18] Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, 61.

well as continue to engage in the task of all disciples to discern what "right praise" is in light of the living tradition and the Christian community's engagement with the world today.

The overall structure of this study reflects these commitments. Chapter One lays out the basic contours of modern and postmodern economic practices and then shifts into an exploration of how those modern practices have been characterized by a possessive individualist social imaginary. I will begin by looking at the basic contours of capitalism in its historical development, including its disciplinary dimension. I will then shift into exploring the moral and social imaginary of capitalism and the ambiguous counter-reaction to that imaginary in the form of authenticity or expressive individualism. From there, I will turn to recent twentieth- and twenty-first century history within North Atlantic societies in order to examine capitalism in the years after WWII, using the appellations "Fordism" for the generation immediately after WWII and "post-Fordist finance capitalism" for globalizing North Atlantic market societies after the 1970s. Finally, I will look at how the emergence of the possessive individualist anthropology that I have tracked in the previous sections results in exclusion and retreat from engagement with the neighbor.

In Chapter Two, I turn to an account of human flourishing rooted in, and oriented to, the triune God. My claim is that human flourishing, the *telos* of human, created life, consists in communion with the triune God, who graciously gives without any need of recompense born out of lack. I will begin by articulating a vision of the triune God that is marked by loving giving and receiving that is attentive to particularity. Next, I will explore the relationship that God has with creation, one that is both consistent with who God is and, in its implications for human life, interruptive of the hegemony of absolute self-possession in autonomous individuality. From there, I will reflect upon God's creation of a world of embodied human beings in accord with

God's triune life, and how human flourishing consists in responding to the call of the triune God in Christ. Finally, I will explore how Jesus is 1) both the one who perfectly enacts his particular vocation to human flourishing by taking on the sin of the world 2) while revealing himself to be the incarnate God whose death breaks through the hegemony of *quid pro quo*, in utter faithfulness to who God is as creator, discussed above.

If Chapter Two was more focused on the Christian doctrine of God, God's relationship to the world, and the general contours of theological anthropology, Chapter Three develops out of that theological account an interruptive vision of Christian discipleship. In other words, the last chapter sought to outline a basic ontology of human being (Christian anthropology), whereas this chapter seeks a general examination of the main steps in redemption, namely repentance and dispossession, on the one hand, and moral learning and transformation, on the other, understood as two aspects of the operation of the Spirit in the Christian life. More specifically, I argue that the gospel dispossesses and recenters the believer in a full-bodied life orientation of faith in which one is conformed to one's true, embodied, and particular vocation in Christ involving love of God and love of neighbor enacted by the transforming power of the Spirit. By engaging in this discussion, I believe that we gain a more dynamic understanding of how human flourishing is realized in light of sin and redemption and that this thus furthers the interruption of possessive individualism in the contemporary context.

I begin this more dynamic account of human redemption by first examining repentance, dispossession, and faith. I then link this discussion of repentance, dispossession, and faith to transformation in community and love of God and love of neighbor via an engagement with the work of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. From there, I shift into an examination of the implications this discussion has for interrupting the consumer spirituality mentioned in

Chapter One, where faith is disconnected from dispossession-in-repentance and the self is affirmed as it is and as "possessing" God as an object to be used for its own self-determined ends. Finally, I explore how my discussion of transformation towards love of God and neighbor discussed in the preceding section by authors living outside of a capitalist context interrupts problematic understandings of love and human relationality shaped by a contemporary globalizing capitalist imaginary.

In Chapter Four, I turn to New Monasticism, since I believe that it illustrates with particular depth Christian discipleship and flourishing in communion with God in a manner that is consistent with the re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ, the social, embodied dimension of the Spirit, and the ongoing transformation of the human person's life towards love of God and love of neighbor. I will begin by discussing Rod Dreher's *Benedict Option* and then turn to Wes Markofski's study of what he terms, following others in the movement, "New Monasticism." I argue that the Benedict Option--while not inconsistent with the dispossession and re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ; the embodied dimension of the Spirit; and the ongoing transformation of the human person's life towards love of God and love of neighbor-- attenuates these resonances by making both the identity of the neighbor, as well as of God, a "possession" of the community, mitigating proper love towards the neighbor and faith in a God who can never be owned but instead is always drawing us forward. In turn, I argue that the New Monasticism, particularly in its urban manifestation in "dead zones" within the global economy, is more consistent with the dispossession and re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ; the embodied dimension of the Spirit; and the ongoing transformation of the human person's life in Christ by the power of that Spirit towards love of God and love of neighbor in a manner that

avoids making both the identity of the neighbor, as well as God, a "possession" of the community.

Taking into account the discussion of the New Monasticism in Chapter Four and the broader discussion about human flourishing in Chapters Two and Three, in Chapter Five I turn to the contentious question of human rights as part of a culminating reflection on theo-political responses to possessive individualism. That is to say, how does the vision of human flourishing articulated in Chapters Two and Three and the common life exemplified by the New Monasticism discussed in Chapter Four shape political-ethical responses to possessive individualism in a manner that simultaneously keeps faith with the language of human rights? This question is important because human rights are seen by some as one of the great ethical and political achievements of modernity, and by others as a negative development promoting possessive individualism.[19] In attempting to answer it, I will begin with a basic definition of rights and give a brief synopsis of the history of the rights debate. I will then explore in some detail how Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in particular understand rights, since they have exerted the greatest influence on modern, secular accounts of this topic. From there, I will develop my own contrasting account of rights that is non-proprietary, linking this claim to my discussions in the previous chapters regarding the Christian community's witness to human flourishing in Christ and in communion with the triune God. Finally, in light of this discussion concerning the grounding of rights and the *telos* to which rights are meant to serve, I will turn to the pursuit and enactment of rights by returning to the kind of common life exemplified by the New Monasticism, specifically its *koinōnic* nature, by which I mean its commitment to mutual

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[19] Indeed, in light of globalization, a post-secular, post-Cold War politicization of religion, and an international economic order fostering both greater interconnectedness and reactionary Balkanization, experts on human rights like John Witte, Jr. have argued that religion and human rights need to be brought into closer symbiosis. John Witte, Jr., "Introduction," in *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.

sharing, communication, and ongoing discernment through engagement with the marginalized. Specifically, I will examine participation by Christian communities in community organizing as a form of collective action that seeks to pursue and enact rights in a manner consistent with those communities' own *koinōnic* nature grounded in God's triune life that is the source and *telos* of human flourishing.[20]

By following this path this study seeks to accomplish three main goals. First, I seek to draw out the importance that attentiveness to "possession" has for articulating the Christian kerygma in the contemporary situation. Second, I hope to show that Christianity has something to say to the contemporary capitalist, globalizing world, especially through the development of multidimensional notion of human flourishing centered on love of God and love of neighbor, a move that pushes beyond purely secular discussions of this critical topic. Finally, by interrupting capitalist practice and its moral and social imaginary, Christian thought and practice also has the potential to renew modern commitments, such as human rights, within a postmodern, postsecular, and postcolonial world in a manner consistent with its own Christian witness.

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[20] Interest in the relationship between ecclesial communities and a larger civil society can be traced to resistance movements against Communist rule in the 1980s in nations like Poland; liberation theology, ecclesial base communities, and the struggle against national security states; the movement for democracy in the Philippines during the Marcos regime; and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, in which the churches played an immensely important role. Since that period, there has been an ecclesial turn in social ethics and political theology which emphasizes the church as *polis* and seeks to link ethical formation with the church's mission in the world; the realization that the nation-state can no longer be the privileged site of political struggle in light of globalization, especially developments within capitalism that relativize national boundaries; and a postmodern, postsecular, and postcolonial search for public, political alternatives to the dominant liberal, capitalist order marked by a North Atlantic moral and social imaginary promoting a unitary teleology of modernization and development by which both the individual and collective find fulfillment in representative democracies dominated by elites as well as privatizing, consumer capitalist practices.

<u>Chapter One: Possessive Individualism and Human Flourishing in Globalizing Capitalism</u>

In this chapter I seek to explore the notion of possessive individualism in relationship to capitalism. I will begin by looking at the basic contours of capitalism in its historical development, including what might be called (following Charles Taylor) its "disciplinary dimension". I will then shift to explore the moral and social imaginary of capitalism and the ambiguous counter-reaction to that imaginary that emerged in the form of "authenticity" or expressive individualism. From there, I will turn to recent twentieth- and twenty-first century history within North Atlantic societies in order to examine in greater detail the structure of capitalism in the years after WWII, using the appellations "Fordism" for the years immediately after WWII and "post-Fordist finance capitalism" for globalizing North Atlantic market societies after the 1970s. Finally, I will look at how the possessive individualism that I have tracked over the course of the chapter results in exclusion and retreat from engagement with the neighbor, including in public life.

What is Capitalism?

To understand possessive individualism, we must begin with the basic contours of capitalism. While elements ingredient to capitalism existed in societies outside of Europe before the modern period, capitalism is inextricably linked to developments in Europe and Europe's relationship with the rest of the world, which, though having roots in the Middle Ages, took definite form only in the early modern period beginning around the year 1600.[21] In the late Middle Ages there was a gradual shift in the economic center of Europe from the Mediterranean basin to the northwestern regions of the Netherlands and Great Britain. Contrary to popular belief, and despite major demographic and climatic hardships (the Black Death and the

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[21] For a comprehensive historical survey of capitalism see Larry Neal and Jeffrey G. Williamson, eds., *The Cambridge History of Capitalism*: *Volume One, The Rise of Capitalism: From Ancient Origins to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

beginning of the "Little Ice Age"), there was an increase in complexity as well as scope of

market practices during this period. Indeed, the Spanish and Portuguese Empires had arguably

already established the first truly global economy via the shipment of American silver to Europe,

on the one hand, and to China, on the other.[22] These developments would pave the way for the

European Industrial Revolution by flooding Europe with immense financial resources, as well as

more deeply tying China and other Asian kingdoms into the global economy. In addition, sub-

Saharan Africa was integrated into this emergent trade nexus primarily by the Portuguese, who

captured and traded slaves who were brought to the Americas as labor for mines and plantations

in light of the decimation of the indigenous populations due to epidemics, slavery, and violence.

The term "capital" (from the Latin for "head") began to be used to indicate funds, stocks of

merchandise, sums of money, and money carrying interest.[23] This contrasted with the Middle

Ages where such capitalist activity had been rare and had existed alongside a feudal economy.[24]

In addition, various other developments in the late European Middle Ages would have a decisive

impact on subsequent history, with the lifting of usury prohibitions and the enclosure of common

land being two of the most decisive.

By the eighteenth century, the use of "capital" to refer to productive wealth (including,

but not limited to, money) had become well established, and capitalism became identified with a

social process whereby surplus wealth generated in a market society was used not as an end in

itself, but as a means for gaining more wealth. The emergence of capitalist markets, coupled to

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[22] Islamic traders in North Africa, and West and Central Asia already facilitated trade from the European peninsula to East Asia, and to a lesser extent sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries reduced the ability of European traders, primarily Venetian and Genoan, to reach the kingdoms of East Asia.

[23] Peter L. Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 10.

[24] As Fernand Braudel details, even by the early 20th century other patterns of economic life remained relatively unchanged, even as more complex market relationships emerged from a myriad number of sites, transforming and extending pre-existing practices. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Century, Vol. I: The Structure of Everyday Life,* trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

industrial developments like the steam engine, would prove decisive, as the intertwined processes of capitalism and industrialization in North Atlantic societies led to the emergence of specialized production and increasing productivity. While the Industrial Revolution was an extension of earlier periods of industrial activity and thus not a discontinuous break, the increased scope and technological advances that marked it were notably different.

The growth of industrialization fostered efficiency by organizing production around workers mastering a limited number of strictly defined tasks, setting the groundwork for management and production methods that created a larger volume of goods within a set period of time. In turn, increased scale fostered (and was fostered by) the development of larger markets. For while industrialization owed much to technological developments, it also required the expansion of markets to coordinate the spread of mass-produced products.[25] In fact, an increase in global interconnectedness after about 1870 was undoubtedly spurred on by the unprecedented growth in markets and the rising productivity of the capitalist-industrial order—an order that was also, incidentally, linked to the exploitation and colonization of non-North Atlantic lands in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Caribbean.[26] The convergence of these different trends meant that many early modern business owners turned profits back into their enterprises rather than simply consuming them, constantly updating their durable goods (e.g., machines) in order to maintain a competitive edge over rival entrepreneurs in the hope of securing profits far into the future.[27] Productive *growth* became of paramount importance in the emerging capitalist order — an

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[25] Slater and Tonkiss, *Market Society: Markets and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 19.

[26] Fran Tonkiss, *Contemporary Economic Sociology: Globalisation, Production, Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 30.

[27] The ability to forgo consumption and instead reinvest in the enterprise is a key focus of Weber's attempt to link the fields of religion and culture (the realm of meaning production), to the material development of modernity. Calvinists, shaped by an ascetic emphasizing frugality and simplicity, eschewed the lavish consumption traditionally associated with wealth. And yet, theological unease regarding the status of their souls, led them to generate wealth as a mark of God's election. The mechanism of this generation was what we would now call capital investment. See Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

essential point to grasp in understanding the contemporary economy.

To understand this capitalist market system, let us briefly look at its core building

blocks.[28] These building blocks should be seen as idealizations that often show considerable

variation in the real world. Nevertheless, by isolating them, we will begin to grasp some of the

material factors undergirding possessive individualism.

A critical piece of a modern capitalist market society is the ability to control *oneself*, such

that "custom and law grant broad (but not equal) control to participants over the disposition of

their own time and energy—in other words, legal liberty—in the pursuit of aspirations or claims

of any kind. You are free, for example, to build a house."[29] To understand the importance of

controlling one's own time and energy, contrast such a model with the medieval European feudal

system. Embedded in a hierarchical social structure, the feudal peasant and lord had reciprocal,

albeit asymmetrical duties towards each other. The peasant was tied to the land and, by

extension to the lord who owned it, and for this reason owed homage and labor or military duties

(*corvée*) to his social superior. The lord, in turn, was expected to provide protection, land, and

general oversight to his social inferior. The peasant's time and movement was thus highly

circumscribed, curtailing when and where he could build. In fact, building a home might even

require permission from the lord. The lord, by contrast, was free to build a home at any time,

utilizing the labor that he could obtain from the obligatory work duties of the peasant. And for

the vast majority of medieval Europeans, the privileges attendant upon the occupation of the

lordly role was not attainable.

With time, this system began to break apart. First, the rise of a wealthy merchant class--

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[28] For the core building blocks of market capitalism see Charles Lindblom's discussion in Charles E. Lindblom, *The Market System: What It Is, How It Works, and What to Make of It* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 52-58. For a position that views different modes of production belonging not to stages but a unified world capitalist process, a world "system," see Immanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
[29] Lindblom, *The Market System,* 52.

who from the 16th century were often able to exploit the riches of the Americas--diminished the power of the aristocratic strata. Second, the enclosure movement in emerging nations like England displaced agricultural workers from the land and thus contributed to the creation of a class of people who had to sell their labor on a (newly emerging) labor market in order to obtain the goods necessary for sustenance. Because common land for grazing or hunting became fenced ("enclosed") and privatized, and was linked to a whole legal system of private property rights developing around this new order, new areas of work had to be found. For example, a peasant who had obtained the rights of use to a piece of land might hire his former fellows and pay them to "freely" give up their time and labor in order to tend sheep on the land and receive a wage. By helping to break the link between land and labor, enclosure contributed to the creation of people who were "free" to do with their time and labor as they wished. But, in one of modernity's great ironies, if one wanted to survive, one's freedom was quickly curtailed by the need to engage in wage labor under conditions controlled by one's employer.

A second building block of the modern capitalist system is the ability to control *useful things* in the form of property. This system of property consists of norms and laws that permit or prohibit one from using as one's own, as well as offering or denying to others, objects, including land, for a whole host of purposes.[30] After all "to build a house, you possess—specifically, exercise control over—a piece of land, some building materials, a hammer and saw."[31] While these rights of control need not be private, there does need to be some system delineating who is in control of a particular sundry set of "whats."

An additional building block of market systems is the facilitation and expansion of *quid pro quo* social relationships. If you want to build a house, you need to have the free use of your

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[30] *Ibid,* 53.
[31] *Ibid.*

time and energy, and you need to have control over land and tools. But you need help building

the house. In a market, *quid pro quo* means that you exchange something somebody else wants

for something you want, in this case money for others' labor. The relationship lasts for the

duration of the transaction and is instrumental to that transaction. Giving allows me to receive

something from my neighbor, but the relationship between us is only meant, strictly speaking, to

facilitate our private, individual goals.

The facilitation and expansion of *quid pro quo* relationships also promotes the expansion

of occupational specialization.[32] To build a house you want to find someone who is skilled in

that particular trade. You cannot simply enlist any person off the street for your project, at least

when it comes to the subset of house-building activity that requires skill. Second, even if you

find a person who has the skill, it is not certain that they will join your project unless they want

what you offer, and there is a chance that what you offer might be the wrong thing.[33] Currency,

which pre-existed the rise of capitalism and market societies, takes on greater significance in

such societies since it allows payment for the expansion of a "free" labor force as well as a

widening variety of goods. With money, you offer a "universally desired object."[34] If you can

find someone who builds houses for a living, she will exchange her labor for that universally

desired object – assuming you have the money.

All of this then contributes to the expansion of production for sale and the promotion of

the limited-duration contract, in which people enter into temporary economic relationships

marked by reciprocal yet limited duties and obligations.[35] Again, as a point of comparison with

this socio-economic transformation, let us return to the example of the feudal system. In a feudal

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[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.* 55.
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] Slater and Tonkiss, *Market Society: Markets and Modern Social Theory*, 26.

system, for example, where a lord and peasant were related by duties and obligations, there was a strong personal dimension to economic relationships. Every peasant (Peasant A) who worked the land of his lord (Lord A) was, in a sense, the lord's peasant. A peasant (Peasant B) from a neighboring estate (of Lord B) was not bound to Lord A, but instead owed fealty and service to Lord B. In addition, the relationship of Peasants A and B to their respective lords was ongoing. After the lord received some of the harvest that the peasant produced, the peasant could not simply go his merry way. Instead, he began the process again, tilling the land of his social superior until the next harvest came and he delivered the surplus fruit of his labor to the lord. But as money made it easier to find someone who was willing to exchange the good or service that one desired, impersonal contracts became the norm. Those who entered into these contracts were theoretically free, consenting individuals (though, again, need usually made this freedom more formal than real), and the relationship between these parties was terminable after the contractual obligations had been met. If the feudal system were to dissolve and the four parties above were to enter into contractual agreements, then one could match up Peasant A and Lord B or Peasant B and Peasant A together to Lord A, and so on. The basis of the contractual relationship was fundamentally determined by desire, not custom, and theoretically (as classical economic liberalism has emphasized) conceived as the product of self-directed individuals.[36] Economic coordination appeared to no longer be embedded within a prior set of relationships, as the marketization of labor and commodities became integral, perhaps for the first time in human history, to the emerging processes of production.[37]

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[36] Here we see Ferdinand Tönnies famous distinction between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. The first signifies a more organic community and the personal relationships by which that community is characterized, while the latter refers to *society*, an order characterized by the dominance of impersonal social relationships.

[37] Karl Polanyi famously argued that the modern market economy had become disembedded from larger social relationships, leading to a callous survival of the fittest mentality. One might assume that the embedded nature of the feudal system, where economic coordination was circumscribed by a set of prior, noneconomic relationships, would make him nostalgic for a bygone era. But Polanyi rejected this full-hearted romanticization of

As this capitalist market system grew more complex, intermediary sellers, and eventually

entrepreneurs, begin to enter the economic field.[38] These intermediaries sell their wares or

performances not directly to a buyer—which modern economic thought has labeled "a

consumer"—but to other sellers. Eventually some intermediaries or direct sellers acquire enough

land, labor, and equipment to create large-scale enterprises that sell goods to individual

consumers, but also, if the entrepreneur is an intermediary, to other entrepreneurs. With the

onset of the industrial age, entrepreneurs turned profits back into their enterprises (rather than

simply consuming them), constantly updating their "capital" (including durable goods, like

machines, used for production) in order to maintain a competitive edge over rival entrepreneurs

and thereby secure profits into the future. Over time, the task of entrepreneurial survival grew so

complicated, that enterprises began to take the form of large, collectively owned entities called

"corporations." Not only did the corporation sell products, but the money of others (i.e. their

savings) was used to invest in the kind of capital upgrades just mentioned, giving the investor a

share in the company, as a part owner thereby entitled to a dividend (or share in the profits).

These enterprises came to be legally regarded as unitary entities, with their own powers and

liabilities that were separate from those of individual shareholders or managers.[39]

A further building block for modern capitalism is the modern nation-state, since the

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the past (as well as Marxism), arguing instead for a reembedding of economic practices within larger, but still modern, non-economic societal constraints. The key for society was to gain the upper hand over the economy, rather than *vice versa.* For more see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1956). Of course, the notion that modern economies are disembedded has been challenged by economic sociologists. See Stanford sociologist Mark Granovetter's important article, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness" in Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, *The Sociology of Economic Life* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011), 22-45. What has changed is the form that embedding takes: it is not a story of subtraction—embedding to disembedding—but one of the emergence of the individualization of the human being, an individualized embedding.

[38] For the following discussion on intermediaries, entrepreneurs, and corporations, see Lindblom, *The Market System,* 56-58.

[39] Andrew Crane, et. al., *Corporations and Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2-3. Indeed, in the US context, in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company* the Supreme Court ruled in 1886 that corporations were covered under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the constitution, insuring their status as legal "persons" under the law

nation-state was central to instituting private property, which is important for growth. After all,

insecure property rights make investment and economic exchange more difficult. The

establishment of parliaments--which were far from truly democratic and historically represented

the interests of property owners ("the bourgeoisie")-- meant increased spending on projects (e.g.,

public roads, canals, and railways) favorable to economic growth, to the benefit of moneyed and

propertied elites.[40] In addition, national governments in the early modern period eliminated

internal tariffs, chartered banks, improved infrastructure, and eventually promoted mass

education as a means to support economic growth. All of this occurred as the feudal order of

competing power centers with overlapping corporate rights and obligations declined, and the

power of the landed aristocracy was broken by centralizing proto-states that gained the exclusive

right to exercise violence, as well as appropriating the rights and obligations between individuals

in favor of rights and obligations between the state and individuals (or collective "persons" like

joint-stock corporations).

Along with these developments, the Industrial Revolution began to converge with a

Consumer Revolution that dates back to the sixteenth century in Europe.[41] Before the modern

period, certain goods, like land, did not have a monetary price; hence they were not circulating

commodities. By extension, these goods could not be sold ("alienated") since they changed

hands following familial ties, not commercial transactions. Furthermore, in societies where the

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[40] Robert C. Allen, *Global Economic History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

[41] There is growing body of literature revising the "productivist bias," which sees the Consumer Revolution as a mere outgrowth of the more fundamental Industrial Revolution. Revisionists pose the Keynesian question: how could industrialism survive if there was not an already pre-existing demand for its products? Supply responded and expanded a prior set of consumer markets. The existence of these markets, and their cultivation, required not only demographic and material shifts (e.g. urbanization and rising incomes), but also psychological ones since people were not the natural consumers that much popular opinion, as well as economic theory, assumed them to be. For a discussion of these debates, as well as background on the discussion that follows, see Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 17-24. Slater endorses a dialectical position, with the Industrial and Consumer Revolutions mutually arising as part of a larger Commercial Revolution. I agree with this assessment. Also see Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1987).

market played neither a strong role in the processes of daily life nor in the ongoing social reproduction of its members, consumption was often limited to one's location within what intellectual historian Arthur Lovejoy famously called the "great chain of being."[42] As a member of a certain trade, for example, I might only be allowed to wear specific articles of clothing and pursue delineated forms of entertainment (for example, I might not be allowed to hunt on certain lands). The development of a *widespread* consumer society was impossible in cultures marked by such sumptuary laws and norms, as well as by the institutional and technological differences that we have already mentioned above.

With the advent of early modern market societies, and their increasingly large-scale practices of coordination and exchange, this picture began to change. The products of international trade, associated with urban elites, steadily penetrated the hinterlands of North Atlantic societies, as well as reaching people of different classes, regardless of geographic location. Furthermore, the new dynamics of production also promoted the spread of commodified goods, by which I mean objects, ideas, experiences, and even disciplined bodies that were produced for exchange and consumption on and through markets in search of profit. Indeed, for the capitalist system to reproduce itself, increased quantities of such goods had to be

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[42] In a deep sense, this sometimes meant that those persons belonging to lower social strata were seen as possessing less being or were farther from God because of a purported limitation to their rationality. One example is the late-medieval and early modern debate regarding the humanity of non-European peoples encountered by explorers and conquerors. Nevertheless, periodic carnivalesque festivals in which the social order seemed to be almost suspended provided resources for the recognition of equality.

produced.[43] By the late nineteenth century, with the firm establishment of industrial capitalism in

many countries of Western Europe and North America, the proliferation of needs was apparent

in the commodification of a wide swath of human life, especially in the realm of leisure,

including new sporting events, theaters, and other forms of mass entertainment.[44]

The emergence of a consumer society, as well as industrial production, coincided with

the rise of what Charles Taylor calls the "disciplinary society."[45] For our purposes, what is

important is how previously marginalized populations were inducted into new forms of

discipline. In England, poor laws were passed, partly because "a rise in population coupled with

more difficult economic conditions in the sixteenth century, meant that the number of indigent

increased; and their mobility did as well, as they gravitated to larger cities in search of the aid

and sustenance they could no longer find at home."[46] This fearfulness, moreover, was connected

with a growing positive concern. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century nation states, as they came

to dominate the political geography of the modern world, took on a greater responsibility in

forming economic agents so as to expand the economic production of society in service of

military power. The increased scope and intensity of market relations, described above, were

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[43]Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 29. As John Kenneth Galbraith, as well as Marx and his intellectual progeny V.I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg have argued, markets represent a massive source of anxiety for the entrepreneur. To sell one's goods on the market is, in a sense, to take a massive gamble. Imagine, for example, a businesswoman who establishes a factory to produce steel plates for lawn mower bodies. She invests a large amount of money into machines and equipment, the sum of that money plus the value of the equipment constituting capital value (capital being the total value of productive goods invested to produce more value rather than to be consumed). If the lawn mower parts take hold in the market and find a sufficient number of buyers, then the business woman's investment pays off: the capital invested generates even more wealth, which is reinvested to promote more expansion, innovation, or both. But if the product does not take hold, the machines are not automated, and the workforce in the factories producing the parts are not flexible with regards to their job skills, then the investment is a failure. The anxiety of an uncertain future often leads, as Galbraith argues, to monopoly capitalism. In monopoly capitalism, there is an attempt to avoid the perils of the market, complicating the rhetorical adherence to the ideology of free markets preached by pundits and business interests alike. For more, see Don Slater and Fran Tonkiss, *Market Society: Markets and Modern Social Theory*, 21-22.

[44] *Ibid*.

[45] Taylor is here following Weberian accounts of small "r" reforms dating back to the High Middle Ages and the centralization of what Foucault would call "pastoral power" in the Western Church under Pope Gregory VII. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 43ff.

[46] *Ibid*., 102.

part of an attempt to make a "numerous and productive people."[47] "Dealings were assessed instrumental-rationally" writes Taylor, with great attention paid to getting the most bang for the buck (or florin or ducat or *livre tournois*)." [48]

The Possessive Individualist Moral and Social Imaginary of Capitalist Practice

These historical and material developments within early modern capitalist societies were accompanied by shifts in the moral and social imaginary. But what do I mean by an imaginary? As already noted, capitalist societies are marked by practices of property ownership, the expansion of instrumental-rationality in service of profit, industrial and post-industrial production, market exchange, and market consumption. These practices all share a "background common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."[49] Taylor also speaks of this background, or imaginary, in terms of images and norms.[50]

This imaginary is not reducible to the subjective values people might convey to someone engaged in empirical research regarding a supposedly "factual or "value neutral" objective reality, although what is articulated will contain within it a variety of submerged assumptions that will need the kind of constructive interpretation mentioned in the Introduction. Articulating a plausible and heuristically useful imaginary involves careful attention to the ongoing flux of what philosophers call "the background," the ultimately undelimitable imagistic and narrative horizons informing conscious theoretical and practical activity by human beings. It is a claim, going back to Heidegger and Wittgenstein, that the world—ourselves, other people, and the

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[47] *Ibid.*, 103.
[48] *Ibid.*, 109.
[49] *Ibid.*, 171.
[50] *Ibid.*

larger universe--show up before our eyes or mind already schematized by unspoken intersubjective meaning, even before conscious or explicit articulation.

While a moral and social imaginary is not reducible to ideological expressions of the material interests of a dominant class, as a (perhaps simplistic) Marxist analysis would have it, Taylor himself recognizes the influence that prominent figures in intellectual history have had on the images and narratives that make up moral and social imaginaries, something that other thinkers like Foucault have explored in their subversive narratives of modern knowledge production by the academic disciplines. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that people are differentially located in relationship to a moral and social imaginary. In a spatial field of differing power relations (in part shaped by the material relationships discussed above), some people will be formed by, and more deeply appropriate, the whole background conveyed by the dominant institutions of contemporary capitalism. These would include members of the professions like the law, the scientific and social-scientific disciplines, educational institutions, entrepreneurs, and state actors. Despite increasing homogeneity within a society (and between societies in a globalizing world), dominant moral and social imaginaries, like those characterizing North Atlantic capitalism, will be more alive, more in play, in some people's lives than others', opening up a reality that admits of some degree of plurality in what is seen, felt, and, indeed, lived. In fact, this nod to cultural heterogeneity, the ongoing negotiation (and, often struggle) between dominant and non-hegemonic moral and social imaginaries exists within individual lives as much as it does between classes or nations.

As I stated in the Introduction, for the purposes of this study, I will define "possessive individualism" as a proprietary and acquisitive orientation towards self, world, and the divine. To understand more deeply the degree to which this possessive individualist moral and social

imaginary characterizes globalizing capitalism, let us begin with the background understanding

of the person embedded within capitalist practices. In the modern moral and social imaginary

that has become hegemonic in North Atlantic societies, and increasingly shapes non-Western

nations, *individualism* signifies the moral *exaltation* of the singular human being. The individual

is understood to be in *opposition* to the collective, often at war with it, struggling against it, like

the peasant who was constrained by feudal obligations.[51] This individualism corresponds to a

particular construal of freedom or liberty, which can take two forms. First, and most

fundamental, freedom is negative: freedom is liberty *from* social restraints limiting the action of

the individual. Second, and derivative, freedom is positive, signifying the freedom *to* act upon

one's will. Negative liberty involves the removal of restraints; positive freedom involves the

capability to act, which presupposes that removal. These notions of freedom also valorize the

will as socially unrestrained choice between options. In a more nuanced form, negative liberty

and freedom of choice are viewed as compatible with socially antecedent causes for action, as

long as those causes do not result in compulsion.

Undergirding individualism and modern understandings of freedom is the idea of

ownership of one's body, which echoes control of the self associated with the emergence of

capitalism discussed above. Ownership of the body (or, alternatively, of one's capacities) is a

major assumption of the moral and social imaginary in North Atlantic capitalism. This concept

of ownership includes an implicit separation of mind or soul from the body, or relatedly, the

distinction between the inalienable body and the capacities one can freely "sell" on the market.

One's body is treated as a piece of property of one's own, entailing (negatively) the legal

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[51] This notion of individualism is *one* redaction of earlier attention to the individual brought on by the transformations of the "axial age" (Karl Jaspers), as well as the twelfth-century transformations of medieval society often referred to as the "twelfth-century renaissance." See Robert Bellah's magisterial *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011). Also see Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

permission to exclude others from its use as well as (positively) the right to use it as one sees fit. For this reason, ownership of one's body fits nicely with a notion of freedom as choice between options. To commit oneself to a course of action requires that one have command of one's embodied capacities. Ownership of the self thus undergirds freedom. In turn, this freedom or liberty in modern capitalist development is the freedom to enter into contracts and other forms of relationship, as one so desires. Negative freedom is key here, both to protect the body-as-property from interference, as well as to ensure that the property external to, yet procured by, the body and its capacities is counted as my own.

To further understand the implications of this exaltation of choice (which is often determined by calculations of what gives me the most pleasure), I want to highlight a historical shift in the moral sources of the "self" (admittedly an anachronistic term when engaging the premodern and perhaps the non-Western). In premodern forms of thought, moral sources (e.g. the Christian God) were conceived as external to and ontologically distinct from the self. In fact, a moral order irreducible to the self or human determinations of utility was linked to the more general idea of an objective natural order. Within such a framework, to grasp the truth of human beings and to act rightly, one had to understand the objective *telos* that defined who human beings were and where they were going.[52] So, for example, certain Christian thinkers could speak about human creatures, and even the non-human creation, as created by God so as to enjoy blessed communion with the divine as their eternally predetermined end. Strictly speaking, one could not know the world, other people, or oneself adequately, nor could one act appropriately, without taking into account this overarching normative, teleological context.

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[52] Modern theology has attempted to reconcile this notion of teleology with historicism. This can be seen in Hegel, who can be read as historicizing Aristotle's notion of form, or as Oliver O'Donovan points out with regards to Pannenberg, "historicizing the Platonic notion of form, insofar as it synthesizes Parmenidean *archē* with Socratic *aretē*, the latter involving a striving for excellence through time." See Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 59.

In a capitalist, possessive individualist imaginary, by contrast, the freedom to engage in market relationships in order to acquire what I choose to be good fosters a breakdown in the sorts of well-defined ties to the external world (including nature, other people, community, tradition, and the divine) characteristic of the older teleological vision. Not all of this is necessarily bad; community and tradition can be immensely dehumanizing, especially for those on the margins of society or at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Such destabilization may even be helpful for traditions and communities themselves insofar as a stultifying cultural form that is well entrenched may distort, say, the biblical narrative of God in ways that are oppressive and demeaning to countless members of society. Nevertheless, even though the breakdown of structured orders may produce occurrences that are often genuinely liberating, it also often erodes any sense of relationship with the divine or with something larger than the self – and I want to argue that such erosion is problematic, as the baby is thrown out with the bathwater, so to speak. For what often steps into the place of a sclerotic and stultifying tradition are truncated ends largely determined by the market and the media, pictures of the good life identified with acquisition and shallow visions of comfort, security, and the (transitory) pleasure that they promise. The pursuit of what I want, of what I determine to be my good and my flourishing, far from being a true display of freedom, becomes disciplined by various internalized forces.[53]

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[53] With the shift to modernity, knowledge, conceived following the pattern of the new science, was increasingly conceived as mechanistic. It was not embedded within a receptive contemplation of formal or final causes. Rather, the new science sought to understand efficient causality within the intramundane realm. This, of course, was not necessarily connected to the pursuit of economic interests (let alone deism or atheism), but the new science did promote a disengaged stance. When ontologized, this could lead to a background understanding of knowing consisting of an inside/outside, mind/body dualism. In fact, the whole preoccupation with epistemological skepticism in modern philosophy, with Descartes the notorious whipping boy, comes out of, and is reinforced, by the idea of a mind that is disengaged, at a distance from bodies, other people, and the whole world of matter. After all, how does one get a secure, epistemic grip on these things if the mind stands at a distance from the world? The much-maligned foundationalist quest, whether of a rationalist like Descartes or of an empiricist like Locke, is an attempt to forge epistemic security by means of a procedure brought to bear on reality by the disengaged mind.

Even as foundationalism was challenged from the time of Kant forward, the power to control reality yielded by the sciences that the foundationalist enterprise was meant to secure continued, and continues, unabated. Thomas McCarthy alludes to this desire for control when he states, "given a description of the relevant initial

With this normative anthropology comes a new understanding of *society* imagined in a fashion conducive to possessive individualism. Charles Taylor argues that in the eighteenth-century, this anthropology became part of a larger notion of society conceived as an economy, as seen in the works of Adam Smith and other early political economists.[54] As Taylor puts it:

> the order here is that of a good engineering design, in which efficient causation plays the central role. In this it differs from earlier notions of order, where the harmony comes from the consonance between the Ideas or Forms manifested in the different levels of being or ranks in society. The crucial thing in the new conception is that our purposes mesh, however divergent they may be in the conscious awareness. They involve us in an exchange of advantages...otherwise put, humans are engaged in an exchange of services. The fundamental model seems to be what we have come to call an economy.[55]

Society is *derived* from the ontologically prior individual, and the contrast between person and collective remains. Ensuring the economic prosperity of the individual, or in practice the nuclear family, becomes the highest collective good of society. As Taylor himself notes, security and economic prosperity become the two main goals of society.[56] And even these two goals are not equal, in that security is largely subordinate to economic prosperity: it is a penultimate goal and means to the end of economic prosperity.

Adam Smith is surely the most famous proponent of this notion of society, although perhaps Smith did not quite have the totalizing aspiration to make the developing anthropology and burgeoning capitalist economy the model for all aspects of life, since in his account virtue presupposes non-economic forms of sociality that are necessary for the functioning of the

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conditions, scientific laws can be used (within certain limits) to predict future states of a system. Providing that the relevant factors are manipulable, these laws can also be used to produce a desired state of affairs." Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978), 3. These desired states of affairs have often been noble--innumerable technological advances including in medicine have undoubtedly led to the promotion of human flourishing. The control this stance brings can be immensely beneficial. Nor does it necessitate the preclusion of religion or a contemplative attitude as part of the scientific enterprise. But when science is made into a totalistic ideology, when it is transformed into scientism, then it can crowd out a richer, more capacious *theoria* or notion of reason, that may (for example) contribute to the relegation of religion and art to a private, subjective sphere.

[54] In classic form, of course in Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes and Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

[55] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 177.

[56] *Ibid*.

economic realm.[57] But later proponents of the capitalist system were (and are) less modest; the

individual pursuit of self-interest, narrowly and materialistically defined, operates as an invisible

hand, fulfilling the natural *telos* of liberal, capitalistic 'man.'

For Friedrich von Hayek, for example, this dynamic market mechanism serves to unite

private and public goods, just as Adam Smith had believed.[58] However, Hayek, rather differently

from Smith, argued that markets are not just integral to a free society; they are *the* central

institution of a free society. Hayek combines an epistemological argument for markets (they

better handle information, and, through the messy but dynamic price mechanism, better allocate

productive resources, labor, and commodities than a centralized authority), with a liberal, moral

one: human beings have a plurality of ends, which cannot be determined by a centralized

authority. The market thus allows people to pursue those plural ends through the acquisition of

wealth, which instrumentally fosters their life plans. The danger here is twofold. First, a

possessive individualist form of relationality, namely a self-interested pursuit of narrow self-

interest through *quid pro quo* relationships, ends up being imagined as ontologically

fundamental, especially as other visions and traditions of the good break down. And second, the

plurality of ends that people can choose to pursue (itself a recognition of fact) can quickly

become an ideological prop for the normative notion that there is no objective good other than

the acquisitive, self-interested pursuit of market-determined ends.

While the predictive ability of the economic and managerial social sciences is spotty at

best (the 2008 global financial crisis being a case in point), the claims of those disciplines to

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[57] See Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
Also see Patricia H. Werhane, *Adam Smith and His Legacy for Modern Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
        [58] For the relation between markets and a free society, see F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). For the relationship between markets and information see F.A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Chapters II and IV.

scientific status and their often scientistic attitudes towards reality have been influential in promoting a possessive individualist moral and social imaginary.[59] That is to say, a *normative* approach to the world as a quest for efficiency, ultimately in the name of profit and growth and epitomized by the logic of cost/benefit analysis is legitimated by a supposedly scientific, value-neutral social science that extols these practices and imbues a sense of power and dignity to the possessive individualist anthropology that accompanies them. By doing so, wider reflection on what human beings are for and to what greater ends they are called, becomes more difficult. When the discipline of economics, including the Law and Economics movement pioneered by Richard Posner, promotes an approach to policy that seeks to solve problems by cost-benefit analyses focused on economic efficiency, with little attention to other ends, like the equitable distribution of wealth rooted in a vision of God's relationship to the world, means-end thinking in terms of efficiency and the attainment of profit, growth, and wealth can lead to the justification of the sacrifice of some (or the majority), for the many (or the few), all in the name, usually, of the good of "society" or the liberty of the (possessive) individual.

The Dark Side of Possessive Individualist Society: Weber's Iron Cage

At the beginning of the 20th century, one of the most influential students of modernity, Max Weber, looked at these aforementioned developments with a sense of ironic melancholy. Modernity had freed human beings from earlier social relationships, only to lock them into a new set of practices complete with its own social imaginary whereby a higher calling or depth dimension to life was eroded. To understand the nature of this stance, we must turn to Weber's celebrated work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

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[59] See Deirdre McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics*, Second Edition (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

In that work, Weber argues that the realm of culture (that is to say, the realm in which human meaning is produced), especially the emergence of new religious practices, including conceptual practices of doctrinal articulation and subjective inhabitation of those doctrines by religious practitioners, had shaped *material* components central to the emergence of capitalism. In more contemporary terminology, for capitalism to take off, people had to be disciplined by religion--Weber specifically identified the role played by Calvinism--into becoming meaningful selves whose lives were marked by a specific morphology.

While Weber's thesis about the unique role Calvinism played in the development of capitalism has been widely challenged, his final comments in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* have proved remarkably prophetic. What Weber saw with unflinching clarity was that the liberation brought about by North Atlantic capitalist modernity--and we must not forget it was in many respects a genuinely freeing transformation in relation to the feudal order--was not a liberation into absolute freedom in which all norms disappeared. In the pages of *The Protestant Ethic* preceding his famous conclusion, Weber had argued that the discipline of the monastery had been taken on by the Reformation, and in Calvinism that adoption was vital to the development of capitalism. Calvinists, in taking monastic discipline into the world, linked the notion of a personal, divine calling with the pursuit of worldly economic success as a sign of one's soteriological status, one's election, before God. Even as the power of this explicit belief system faded, Weber argued, the modern disciplinary society lived on. In fact, not only did it survive, it became more entrenched, and gradually more stultifying with regards to human possibility. As Weber famously writes at the end of *The Protestant Ethic*:

> The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production

which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last tone of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.[60]

Weber's haunting final lines about the iron cage [*stahlhartes Gehäuse*] suggested that capitalist practices create a world in which the very tools of liberation become the instruments of restrictive control. Harry Redner puts it well,

The story is well known how we Europeans launched ourselves on an unparalleled drive for power...All the natural and human resources were put at our disposal to be transformed in accordance with our sovereign will...And yet the more power that Deed unleashes, the harder it becomes for men to control it and the more it begins impersonally to control them.[61]

What began as an attempt to respond to God's calling and live out one's unique vocation, ironically ended in a world in which both the particularity of vocation and the God who undergirds it are dead. In Weber's disenchanted world, we are doomed to live as "hollow men" (T.S. Eliot), part of a mass society marked by disciplinary forces that turn us into self-owning, acquisitive individuals with little room for the dignity and higher purpose that accrues to the human being in light of a transcendent *telos*.[62] Furthermore – and this only makes the irony more painful – negative freedom and freedom as choice only go so far, since the iron cage of capitalist practices is not freely chosen by those born into it. A society marked by a possessive individualist moral and social imaginary is no longer seen as liberating, but instead as constraining: disciplining human beings into truncated ends of acquisition and the pursuit of a narrowly defined, stultifying self-interest.

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[60] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 96.

[61] Harry Redner, *In the Beginning was the Deed: Reflections on the Passage of Faust* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 5, 23, 15.

[62] For moderns who arguably reject the notion of a transcendent good (even if they see religious traditions preserving genuine hope), and accept Weber's analysis, as can be seen in Adorno, the dignity that comes form modern freedom is lost, or is proven to be an unrealizable option in the present, always deferred to a historicist, messianic future.

Possessive Individualism and the Culture of Authenticity

Those dimensions of a possessive individualist capitalist modernity that have been seen as a stultifying iron cage have elicited a fierce reaction, with the tumult of the 1960s and early 1970s youth revolts only the most recent example. When reality is seen as something that can be redesigned by the human will to fit the *de facto* ends of the "happiness and well-being of individuals" (which in the capitalist world has been linked to society understood as an economy in the manner described above), then there lurks the fear that everything, including other humans beings, are "open to being treated as raw materials or instruments for our projects."[63] "Things that ought to be determined by other criteria will be decided in terms of efficiency or 'cost-benefit' analysis," Charles Taylor argues, and "independent ends that ought to be guiding our lives will be eclipsed by the demand to maximize output."[64] "Maximizing output" for our purposes comes down to one thing: the drive for profit, growth, and material acquisition whether defended in terms of the interests of market elites (and, via them, in the interests of everyone else), or simply assumed to be a self-evident end in itself.

The contours of a counter-stance to the iron cage of possessive individualism can already be seen in the Romantic Movement's reaction to the Enlightenment. As Taylor notes, for the Romantics "the focus of objection was against a view of man as the subject of egoistic desires, for which nature and society provided merely the means to fulfillment…. a philosophy which was utilitarian in its ethical outlook, atomistic in its social philosophy, analytic in its science of man, and which looked to a scientific social engineering to reorganize man and society and bring men happiness through perfect mutual adjustment."[65] In other words, what the Romantics

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[63] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 5.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1.

opposed greatly resembled the North Atlantic capitalist imaginary above. In reaction, figures

like Herder

> developed an alternative notion of the human being as an expressive, integrated
> whole. Human life was seen as having a unity rather analogous to that of a work of
> art, where every part or aspect only found its proper meaning in relation to all the
> others. Human life unfolded from some central core--a guiding theme or inspiration-
> -or should do so, if it were not so often blocked and distorted.[66]

I would argue that this expressive unity can be seen as an attempt to recover in modern

philosophical and aesthetic terms something that was lost when the older ideas of human

teleology (and, more specifically, vocation) faded away, forging a new synthesis that would

overcome the iron cage of possessive individualist society. This expressivism can be understood

as taking the Aristotelian notion of form, individualizing it, and then placing that now personal

form in a process of historical development. Rather than each person (or property-owning male

in the *polis*) being disciplined or "in-formed" by an Aristotelian universal form of possessive

individual man, each individual "has her own 'form' to realize, that no one can replace, or

substitute, or discover the thread which guides it."[67]

How might this play out in ordinary life? As Taylor writes, "there is a certain way of

being human that is my way. I am called to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of

anyone else's. But this gives new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the

point of my life, I miss what being human is for me."[68] Through contact with a voice that is

conceived as within and my own, I am able to chart a course that is "authentic" to who I am or

that "expresses" my true "individually" unique identity. Conformity to external roles and the

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[66] *Ibid.*, 2.

[67] *Ibid.*, 3. Expressivism can be seen in the Marxist critique of alienation (a species of objectification) whereby workers' labor and the products of that labor are no longer expressions of the collective self. They come to stand over the self (like religion) in a manner that deceives and enslaves the worker, rather than being an objectification of the world that is freely expressive of the collective self—the totality of human workers--and its labor. Religion, while a false expression, represents a genuine need and truth of human beings as expressive beings seeking to come to full consciousness and flourishing

[68] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 29.

discipline of the iron cage fails to provide authenticity because, for our purposes, they are shallow, controlling, and alienating. I am not merely a calculating mind relating to the self or body as a thing to serve possessive individualist ends, but an integral creature who is seeking communion with something that can only be intuitively received: the 'inner' truth of myself.

This counter to possessive individualism, however, belies a more fundamental affinity that at least one highly influential version of expressive authenticity shares with the possessive individualist imaginary it critiques. Authenticity is closely related to choice, which gains its power from a notion of the will and its self-determination of freedom, going back to Rousseau and Kant, then redacted by Hegel and Marx.[69] Even if this is not at the level of explicit theory, the thought of these men reflects the power and depth this ideal has had on modernity. Since capitalism extols the virtue of choice, selection through consumer markets and a consumer mentality in general are able to utilize the ideal of authenticity. Thus, insofar as discipline does not repress desire, but forms and channels it, the "authentic" stance is susceptible to colonization by the market via all the unrecognized ways in which consumer desire works on human bodies.[70] The culture of authenticity thus becomes one of *consumer* authenticity. For example, advertising is a capitalist practice that seeks to discipline desire such that what one purchases and consumes will express the self's unique identity. In this consumer version of authenticity, there is no background horizon of the good, in which certain choices are better than others. For this reason, even when authenticity seeks to forge a counter stance to the disciplinary power of capitalism, it too often fails to recognize how it feeds into the dynamics it was meant to counter. Thus, the hallmarks of possessive individualism can be seen *both* in the mainstream practices of capitalist

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[69] *Ibid.*, 38.

[70] In a Foucauldian line of thought, not only are we not free to choose the system (as I mentioned above with Weber), *within* the system, freedom understood as choice, is undermined and human identity becomes a pure social construction. Of course, we may not want to follow this rather extreme position and instead view the social formation of desire as compatible with at least a psychologically real freedom of choice (as long as there is no compulsion).

society (the iron cage) and in the *protest* against those very practices in the name of authenticity, insofar as these latter are colonized by capitalism. In that sense, the ever-expanding logic and power of the market economy is at work, even in places where it is least expected.

Possessive Individualism in Fordism and Post-Fordist Finance Capitalism

Thus far I have discussed the rise of possessive individualism with regards to a North Atlantic modernizing capitalist project broadly conceived, focusing on its relationship to the iron cage of disciplinary society, and the subsequent reaction against that iron cage by Romantic expressive individualism and the ideal of the authentic self. Having described the basic features of capitalism and the possessive individualist social imaginary, we will now look concretely at how it has evolved in North Atlantic cultures since the end of World War II. This evolution falls into two periods: from 1945 to around 1975 ("Fordism") and the period since the mid 1970s ("post-Fordist finance capitalism.)

Possessive Individualism and Fordism

After WWII, the various strands of possessive individualism discussed above came together in a North Atlantic societal configuration known as "Fordism." In a Fordist society, social theorist Daniel Bell writes:

> The techno-economic order is concerned with the organization of production and the allocation of goods and services. It frames the occupation and stratification system of the society and involves the use of technology for instrumental-ends. In modern society, the axial principle is functional rationality, and the regulative mode is economizing. Essentially, economizing means efficiency, least cost, greatest return, maximization, optimization, and similar measures of judgment about employment and mix of resources. The contrast is one of costs and benefits, and these are usually expressed in monetary terms...there is a simple measure of value, namely utility. And there is a simple principle of change, namely the ability to substitute products or processes because they are more efficient and yield higher return at lesser cost, the principle of productivity.[71]

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[71] *Ibid.*, 11.

In Fordism, efficiency, maximization, and optimization were the governing principles of economic life, all of which supported the growth of the national economy. Large multinational corporations played a major role in determining the commanding heights of the economy, as companies like GM in the USA became the largest in the world. Within these large corporations, a bureaucratic logic predominated. As Bell writes:

> Social structure was a structure of roles, not persons and authority inheres in the position, not in the individual, and social exchange...is a relation between roles. A person becomes an object or a 'thing,' not because the enterprise is inhumane, but the performance of a task is subordinated to the organization's ends. Since the tasks are functional and instrumental, the management of enterprise is primarily technocratic in character.[72]

In contrast to this disciplinary power of the corporation, geared towards the impersonal benefits of profit and growth, the single-family home was to be the source of humane, relational contact. Yet the home was also the site of its own possessive individualist logic, associated with a particular form of the ideal of authenticity encapsulated by the culture of the fast-growing suburban developments that emerged after the Second World War.[73] Through the consumption of mass-produced products in the new suburban homes that began to dot the American landscape, one was able to express the uniqueness that lay "within." Unending consumer desire plus the promise of pleasure, comfort, and security were, for more people than ever before, a real possibility. In these years:

> People concentrated more on their own lives, and that of their nuclear families. They moved to new towns or suburbs, lived more on their own, tried to make a life out of the ever-growing gamut of goods and services on offer…and the freer individual life-styles they facilitated. The 'pursuit of happiness' took on new, more immediate meaning, with

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[72] *Ibid*.

[73] As Vincent Miller writes in *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003), "in the United States, the single-family home builds upon an earlier potent ideology: the independent hardworking farmer of rural republicanism. The emphasis on order and good stewardship of the land that marked the mores of farming communities is translated into responsible homeownership. The quality of the home and the appearance of its landscaping become expressions of the homeowner's good character. As they are translated into the nonproductive locus of the single-family home, however, they lose their concrete references and become primarily symbolic. It is indeed important for a farmer to prevent brush from encroaching upon a pasture or crop field. The same cannot be said for lawn edging and broadleaf weed control" (47).

a growing range of easily available means. And in this newly individuated space, the customer was encouraged more and more to express her taste, furnishing her space according to her own needs and affinities.[74]

Perhaps no consumer product was as necessary for social and economic participation as the automobile for someone living in the newly built landscape of the post-WWII years. The personal car epitomized freedom, liberty, and self-ownership, and in some sense this was true, since the automobile became increasingly essential to participation in North Atlantic, especially American, society. And with the burgeoning medium of television, replete with commercial interruptions, no product was better able than the car to inculcate an ethos of self-expressive meaning. Just as technology and technical, instrumental-rational ways of thinking in pursuit of profitable growth dominated the state, firm, and workplace, so too did the private world of the home become dominated by a 'device paradigm' (Albert Borgmann) oriented to self-expression facilitated by mass-market consumption.

Flourishing in North Atlantic capitalist society was thus inextricably connected to the acquisition of goods, services, and with time, experiences (via the tourism industry). For this reason, the private, single-family home, especially in the United States after WWII, but also (albeit a little later) in nations like the UK, became essential for the development of identity in Fordist society. This was not without its tensions. Vincent Miller puts it well: "as clan, family, profession, and other sources of ascribed identity have faded in significance, consumption has become the major means by which people establish, maintain, and communicate their personal and social identities." Yet, "the social consumer faces an unavoidable inflationary economy, such that "keeping up with the Joneses" (John Kenneth Galbraith) becomes an endless task in which "to stand still is to fall behind."[75] Possessive individualism could thus induce great

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[74] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 474.
[75] Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 50.

psychic stress, even as disciplinary powers pulling on desire and identity made it hard to forge, let alone imagine, an alternative.

Both the public realm of work and the private, home-based world of consumption were sites of possessive individualism. The consuming individual of the home and the working man of the corporation were thus two sides of the same coin in service to a system in which consumption drove production and vice versa. The work world disciplined workers in service of a collective possessive will centered on the corporation.[76] The nature of this collective possessive will in the realm of production, including as it did the demands of instrumental-rational discipline in the work setting, meant that a kind of Protestant work ethic was in play during these years. The realm of consumption, by contrast, was more amenable to the individualization of expressive authenticity, which after the 1960s would become an even more prominent force in shaping North Atlantic capitalist societies.

Alongside the world of work and home, stood the realm of governance and the institution of the nation-state. Like the economy, the *raison d'etre* of the nation-state during the Fordist years was inextricably tied to a possessive individualist moral and social imaginary, inasmuch as the state acted as a facilitator of economic activity. State actors forged close relationships with corporations, while the state also acted, especially in Western European nations, as an arbiter in negotiations between labor and capital. Economic activity was multinational, with most industrial production located within the sovereign territory of affluent nation-states, while raw materials were often imported from the so-called "Third World" in exchange for industrial,

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[76] The discipline of economics played a major legitimating role here. Within the American context, but globally influential during the post-WWII years, was the work of Paul Samuelson, especially his *Principles of Economics*. Government, guided by politicians and technocrats who had internalized social-scientific thought like Samuelson's, would seek to preserve society as a capitalist economy. In light of the worldwide financial crisis and Great Depression, Keynesian intervention on the demand side of the economy was standard orthodoxy, and this form of macro-economic intervention formed a central tenet of Samuelson's synthesis of neoclassical, microeconomic assumptions and Keynesian, macroeconomic ones.

finished products.[77] Insofar as human flourishing was conceived in terms of a possessive

individualist anthropology and notion of the good that was distinctively marked by consumer

choice, and because modern choice was linked to participation in the market, the state also acted

to insure the welfare of the population within its borders, at least of the working men and their

families who belonged to the dominant group in whose image "the nation" was conceived. Since

the economy was marked by practices that instantiated a notion of human beings as individuals

whose pursuit of their private material interests would redound to benefit the whole, it made

sense for the government to provide a safety net to undergird the human person as producer and

consumer. A social safety net, beyond genuine moral considerations, strengthened the health,

productivity, and mental state of economic agents, which would insure that the economy

functioned in a smooth, efficient, and mutually beneficial manner.

Alongside this social safety net, religion also worked to ensure that the system functioned

smoothly by legitimizing the dominant moral and social imaginary and its concomitant practices

and institutions. Of course, in light of the promotion of a secularized this-worldly salvation by

economists and the theories of societal differentiation and secularization popular amongst

sociologists, many intellectuals would come to associate modern capitalist society with the

privatization, even demise, of religion.[78] And while religion did not necessarily decline in terms

of number of adherents in mid-20th century North Atlantic societies, its consignment to a space

outside of public life did seem to render it an essentially private force within society, with little

connection to the realm of an economy and nation-state governed by a possessive moral and

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[77] This created a core-periphery dynamic, leading to calls by economists in developing nations for import-substitution industrialization, a state-centric cause famously taken up by Latin American liberation theologians in the 1970's.

[78] José Casanova has challenged this association in light of evidence surfacing since the 1960's and the 1970's. See his *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1994) for a critique of the notion that differentiation necessarily implies secularization-as-the-decline-of-religion. There does seem to be a strong association, however, between differentiation and disenchantment, since the rationalization of various spheres in society by definition disenchants those realms.

social imaginary. Where there was a more visible, public expression of faith, like in the United

States, religion (especially Christianity) often worked to legitimize a possessive individualist

status quo in the economy, as well as the ancillary realms of politics and national culture. [79]   In

other words, what was able to escape the private realm was put in service of undergirding the

dominant social imaginary.

According to Will Herberg in the American context Protestantism, Catholicism, and

Judaism were to be seen not as theologically distinct religious expressions, but rather as social

divisions amongst a larger, unified 'American Way of Life.'[80] This American civil religion

underemphasized transcendence, sin, and judgment and instead emphasized hard work,

responsible stewardship of economic resources, individual freedom and the free market, and

American Constitutional democracy. Churches "came to fill the role of social clubs and

communal gatherings" for the mobile, middle classes and "at the national level, Christianity

could play an important part in the American stance against atheist communism in the Cold

War."[81] Of course, this did not mean that all houses of worship became servants of what was

seen by many as the American way. Herberg's thesis, and those like it, elicited strong counter-

arguments. During the 1950s and 1960s, dissenting voices like Robert Bellah's, argued that the

American civil religion was more open to prophetic judgment and repentance, both personal and

communal, of sin in its multiple dimensions, including the structural, and that American

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[79] Pertinent here is the critique by so-called "neo-orthodox" theology and liberation theologies, influenced by what Paul Ricouer termed "the masters of suspicion" (i.e. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), of *religion* as ideology, rather than liberating and transformative *gospel*. This is a temptation especially in Christendom, the-post Constantinian era marked, for good and for ill (and I think there is some of both), by the forces of empire, and lasting into the present, although taking a more "liquid" (Zygmunt Bauman) form through prosperity gospels and consumer spiritualities in the ever-expanding marketplace of religion. We will see the negative side of this transformation in the religious landscape when we turn to consumer Christian spirituality later in this chapter.

[80] Bryan Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularization and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54. Taylor writes, "the religious dimension also figures in what we might call the 'civilizational' identity, the sense people have of the basic order by which they live, even imperfectly, as good, and (usually) as superior to the ways of life of outsiders, be they 'barbarians,' or 'savages,' or (in the more polite contemporary language 'less developed peoples' " (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 455).

[81] *Ibid*.

Christianity might exist in a productive, politically progressive relationship with this national creed, as the history of African American churches involved in the American civil rights movement demonstrated.[82] Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Herberg's account highlights how religion during this era *often* played a key role in legitimating aspects of possessive individualism.

Possessive Individualism in Post-Fordist, Finance Dominated Capitalism

While many of the previous possessive individualist dynamics continued in more or less the same form, the overall shape of North Atlantic capitalist societies began to change in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fordism, as the *dominant* societal configuration, would not last. By the early 1970s a variety of shifts in the global economy were being felt, from the oil crisis to the saturation of markets for consumer durables in North Atlantic nations. One of the most important changes, however, was a shift towards financial speculation. This was caused in part by the very dynamics of 20th-century capitalism: as the productive sectors in North Atlantic economies became less productive beginning in the 1970s, there was a turn towards financial capitalism. Unlike in the past, when finance largely, although, not exclusively, served production, in this period it became an end in itself. In fact, within areas of the economy focused on production, finance-dominated profit has become more important as companies traditionally focusing in those areas have shifted more and more towards financial services.[83]

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[82] Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularization and the State*, 56. For an account of religion in American public life of which one of the strands deeply influencing it is Robert Bellah's work on a Christian-influenced, prophetic American civil religion, see Ronald Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

[83] Saskia Sassen in *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) writes, "Finance in itself is not new—it has been part of our history for millennia. What is new and characteristic of our current era is the capacity of finance to develop enormously complex instruments that allow it to securitize the broadest-ever, historically speaking, range of entities and processes; further, continuous advances in electronic networks and tools make for seemingly unlimited multiplier effects" (9).

The potential for higher profits in financial capitalism versus traditional productive activities, combined with the rapidity with which finance capital can flow into economic enterprises due to its increasingly fluid nature (facilitated by advances in computer technology), contribute to the compression of the time of profit-seeking to the instantaneous present. Rather than trying to develop a product with a cultivated, cared-for workforce, which was more prevalent during the Fordist era, corporations increasingly promote that component of their business linked to finance: shareholder value. Add to this the fact that regulations, at least in nations like the US, prioritize the legal responsibility corporate executives have to shareholders, and there emerges a perfect confluence of factors coming together to make the dominant goal of finance-dominated capitalism the increase in value of shares on the stock market. Thus, when the good of workers diverges from what is good for raising the stock price of the company, executives resort to downsizing, outsourcing, and other actions that drive up the stock of the company without benefiting employees. In fact, the long-term viability of the enterprise, at least with regards to its original productive or service-orientation, may be imperiled by this "presentism." From the perspective of shareholders, this may not be a problem, since they can cash in right before a crisis, earning a profit on their shares even as the company sinks, harming workers and their families.

While the nation-state is sometimes said to be in decline due to the effects of globalization and financial capitalism, in reality the nation-state continues to play a key role in contemporary global society. Corporations continue to have a close relationship with the state, while labor's influence has diminished, both because of the structural changes in the economy towards a more flexible, individualized, and seemingly less easily unionized workforce, but also because of neoliberal ideology. If Fordism was marked by a secular notion of salvation

inextricably linked to prudent social engineering by the state, neoliberalism, influenced by the thought of economists like Friedrich von Hayek mentioned above, exhibits greater skepticism towards the role of the state in producing socially desirable economic outcomes.[84]

The attacks on the welfare state also relate to the increasing mobility and importance of finance capital in an increasingly interconnected, globalizing order, which took off after the collapse of the communist "Second World" in the early 1990s. Governments began to engage in a "race to the bottom" with regards to corporate tax rates to attract corporate investment. Increased flexibility in the production process or provision of services have also made it easier to be transnational, with production, corporate governance, marketing, and distribution located on different continents and easily moveable to facilitate the acquisition of profit, rather than being merely national (firmly located in a nation-state and oriented to domestic markets) or multinational (firmly located in a nation-state though oriented to international as well as domestic markets). All of this has meant that national governments have had to turn to private investors, or other governments, in order to fund the welfare state through the issuance of government bonds, which, in turn, creates debt that must be financed. This cycle easily sets off a spiral of austerity in which government services for education, medical needs, and unemployment decrease. This has especially been the case in non-Western nations that have come under the influence of international organizations like the World Bank and the IMF, which are dominated by the world's wealthiest nations and the various interests putting pressure on them.

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[84] The notion that modern North Atlantic social practices and thought forms are secularized or heretical versions of Christian practices and themes has a long history. Recently, theologians in dialogue with postcolonial theory have spoken of modernity as "haunted" by the specter of its "dead God." See the essays in Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theolog*y (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

Ultimately, the effect of all of this is that the individual must assume the costs of this shift, which brings us back to the theme of possessive individualism. To increase stock values in enterprises that often need fewer and fewer workers because of changes in technology, workers are pushed to be ever more efficient. And while a push for increases in efficiency have always been part of capitalism, changes in management techniques and means of collecting information have led to the constant evaluation of each worker vis-a-vis every other individual worker by management. Furthermore, to lower the cost of human management, each individual is expected to manage him- or herself like an enterprise so as to remain competitive in relationship to one's peers in an environment marked by tight labor markets disciplined by insatiable finance capital and technological redundancy. One is individualized into making oneself *human* capital, becoming a creature of a certain desire, in part mimetically learned through others. That is to say, one must be a person of self-achievement, to desire self-achievement as the source of one's worth and the grounding of identity. In taking on that framework, identity becomes bound up with competition and merit. Whatever dynamic of human identity-formation-in-competition that preexists is now colonized by the dynamics of this specific social imaginary and increasingly given a historically particular morphology. In service of this desire, a utilitarian and instrumental-rational logic develops in order "to attract investors through constant attention to my actual or figurative credit rating, and to do this across every sphere of its existence."[85] One is engaged in a never-ending cost-benefit analysis with regards to one's interests, which are not chosen, but imposed in such a way as to be internalized as commonsensical. One comes to see oneself as "naturally" an individual of command and control, moving through time building up one's value, so as to make oneself more attractive in a competitive marketplace. One is

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[85] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 33.

disciplined to experience oneself as the possessor of an enterprise for which oneself, as a lone

individual, is ultimately responsible. In this way, the possessive individualist moral and social

imaginary is heightened, since now one no longer becomes *part* of a capital enterprise (the

"company man"), but is rather expected to manage oneself *as* a capital enterprise (the "man as

company").

Because one's worth is only as good as one's ability to maximize value to buyers, if one

is an unattractive investment, then it is one's own fault. Each person becomes an enterprise

disciplined to make oneself attractive in a social world founded on a logic of zero-sum

competition. Through the forces of discipline shaping the self, this stance towards oneself and

the world is lived out as "an inarticulate feel for what makes the best sense for oneself, given the

state of play of the game and one's accumulated capital."[86] Crucially for the argument to be

made in this study, in this particular perspective the self has no permanent source of flourishing

that transcends accumulated merit in a social field conceived in terms of a multiplicity of

competitive markets ruled by the pursuit of narrow self-interest in *quid pro quo* transactions.

These structural shifts in the nature of capitalism and the continuance of possessive

individualist dynamics also extend to the realm of religion. Against what was often experienced

as a stultifying rigidity and pressure towards a collective conformity, sometimes interwoven with

a cultural civil religion, both of which were often seen as compatible with the status quo of

existing economic practices with their moral and social imaginary, religion in the contemporary

era is increasingly subject to the effects of increased and faster-paced mobility, pluralization

greatly increased by globalization, and the pull of expressive-individualism. In certain ways

these have been positive developments, opening up religious traditions to new voices and

expressions. But there has also been a darker, possessive individualist dimension to these

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[86] Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 19.

changes. The intensification of individuation, a self-serving instrumental attitude towards the world, and the expansion of shallow and solipsistic versions of expressive authenticity via the consumer culture have challenged the ability of religious traditions to dispossess and re-center the self in radically new and transformed ways. Hence the tendency towards a sociological emotivism in which moral evaluations of life and action are increasingly understood as simply expressions of emotional attitudes. In a society that places such emphasis on the individual exercising his choice amongst a myriad of consumer products and experiences, it is no coincidence moral statements become reduced to expressions of "how one feels."

Contemporary religion in globalizing capitalist societies also increasingly involves individuals who, in the words of Robert Bellah reflecting on his study *Habits of the Heart*, "are alone together" in that they "focus on themselves in the presence of others."[87] Modernity's question, "How do I find my own self-fulfillment?", becomes democratized and intensified, but also "commodified," such that cultural traditions and relationships become consumer products that instrumentally serve ones own *seemingly* self-determined meanings.[88] Even more than the Calvinists of yesteryear with their covenants, the religious community is imagined in terms of an "associational model" much like the social contract understanding of political society: a self-selected group of atomistic individuals, or the collectivized unified will of interest groups pursuing their self-interest. Individuals come together to form a community of reciprocal exchange, except here people do not link up to exchange material goods to satisfy each party's private interest, but rather to 'support' each other in order "to meet each other's needs and

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[87] Robert Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Third Edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), xxiii.

[88] Figures like Philip J. Lee and Harold Bloom have characterized American religion as "Gnostic," by which is meant a syncretistic approach to religious traditions carried out in service of the self's project of personal fulfillment and spiritual Enlightenment. For more, see L. Gregory Jones' discussion in "A Thirst for God or Consumer Spirituality? Cultivating Disciplined Practices of Being Engaged by God," *Modern Theology* 13 (1997): 18-20.

validate each other."[89] I am not undone but 'validated' as I am, and I come to validate others so that I too may be validated. This *quid pro quo* logic renders communities fragile, since it includes the threat of exit and a return to a marketplace of religion if the pre-existing needs of the self are not met.

Exclusion in the Midst of Contemporary Possessive Individualism

Thus far we have trod the tortuous path of possessive individualism, paying attention to both historical continuity and change. In doing so, our concern has been with issues of character and the good--in Aristotelian terms, with "doing well." But this is not to forget that "doing well" is related to issues of "faring well."[90] As Ulrich Duchrow and Franz Hinkelammert write,

> [T]oday the first world is a great archipelago found everywhere on our planet, but surrounded by zones that cannot be integrated either socially or economically. Although this archipelago still lies particularly in the North, the relationship can no longer be understood as a North-South relationship. It can be designated, however, in terms of exclusion.[91]

This point can be illustrated by way of the above discussion of finance capitalism, in which the exertion of immense disciplinary pressure turns the individual's body and life into the object of instrumental-entrepreneurial activity. Those people who are successfully individualized as entrepreneurial possessive individualists form the included 'in-group' within society. It is they who shape the economic and political spheres, as well as education and the media. And it is this in-group, more often than not, who are implicitly lifted up in advertising, television and film. They are the successful possessive individualists of our time.   In this society, "the prevailing assumption that we should form culture and a political economy in such a way that each person gets recognized and compensated according to her or his 'output'—no more and no less" is,

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[89] *Ibid.*, 134.

[90] Thomas Piketty has demonstrated with great erudition how global capitalism moves towards greater inequality over the *longue durée*. See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

[91] Ulrich Duchrow and Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Property for People, Not for Profit: Alternatives to the Global Tyranny of Capital* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2004), 146.

indexed to a commitment to formal equality and impartiality, viewed as superior by many to the

principles governing hierarchical societies of both the past and the present. Nonetheless, it has

been suggested, "meritocratic cultures necessarily develop economies that maximize

opportunities for the talented at the expense of devaluing and exploiting those seemingly stuck in

the place the upwardly mobile so readily abandon."[92] For this reason, those who are improperly

or incompletely disciplined are excluded from social participation.[93] Class and status become

structured around education and money, and hence these dynamics shaping identity intersect to

an even greater degree than ever before. Furthermore, there is a greater recognition that race,

gender, and sexuality--to name three immensely important identity markers in the postmodern,

postcolonial world--intersect with class in ways that differentially shape the experience of

individuals, belying any claim that pernicious inequalities are a thing of the past.

With the increased extension and intensity of globalization – in no small part made

possible by the expansion of capitalist markets into more areas of life – the temptation is to

retreat behind gated walls, apathy, and new tribalisms, which, in different combinations, all seek

to protect the possessive individualist self, while simultaneously keeping now visible "others"

away from that self and "its" goods. This retreat into possessive individualist behavior is both an

activist strategy in pursuit of self-interest and a defensive stance to protect the self from excluded

and undesirable "others." The other is attacked; marginalized and made invisible; or is turned

into what the self wants to see. All of these preclude *recognition*. As Miroslav Volf puts it:

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[92] Jason Mahn, *Becoming a Christian in Christendom: Radical Discipleship and the Way of the Cross in America's "Christian" Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 166

[93] As I mentioned above, people differentially inhabit and transform the hegemonic moral and social imaginary based on their social location and their relationship to the dominant practices of society. According to Saskia Sassen, what might appear to be very different situations of exclusion--like the "sharp increase of displaced people in sub-Saharan Africa and the "sharp growth of the permanently unemployed and frequently incarcerated in the United States"—are signs of "subterranean trends that cut across geopolitical lines." See Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 8.

First, exclusion entails cutting of the bonds that connect, taking oneself out of the pattern of interdependence and placing oneself in a position of sovereign independence. The other then emerges either as an enemy that must be pushed away from the self and driven out of its space or as a nonentity--a superfluous being--that can be disregarded and abandoned. Second, exclusion can entail erasure of separation, not recognizing the other as someone who is in his or her otherness belongs to the pattern of interdependence. The other then emerges as an inferior being who must either be assimilated by being made like the self or be subjugated to the self. Exclusion takes place when the violence of expulsion, assimilation, or subjugation and the indifference of abandonment replace the dynamics of taking in and keeping out as well as the mutuality of giving and receiving.[94]

Feeling the pressures of individualization in a society where one's economic prospects look weaker than ever, "individual survival threatens to replace social solidarity."[95] The exclusion resulting from poverty in rural and core urban areas also fosters lack of trust, a rugged ethos of self-reliance and sometimes even a zero-sum attitude regarding the relationship between the proprietary self and the rest of "those people out there," especially out-group "others" perceived to be threats to the "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson) of tribe and nation.

The dynamics of retreat and exclusion, in coordination with the self-owning, acquisitive attitude towards reality characteristic of possessive individualism, are paralleled by a predatory attitude towards seemingly distant "others." Today, a class of engineers, managers, consultants, bankers, economists, and lawyers has risen to prominence who "take the ends as they are given; the focus is on the effectiveness of the means."[96] These "symbolic analysts" (Robert Reich) "know how to use the new technologies and information systems that are transforming the global economy" in a way that produces pernicious political effects.[97] What are these effects? First is the "predatory attitude" toward society, in which the pursuit of profit trumps any other civic commitment, as spectacularly illustrated by the role of the financial industry in the 2008 global

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[94] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 67.

[95] Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart*: *Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 75.

[96] *Ibid.*, 47.

[97] *Ibid.*, xviii.

economic recession. Second, symbolic analysts and other skilled professionals are more

segregated from their fellow denizens than ever before, largely as a result of the education and

socialization of these persons in elite universities and graduate schools, which then become

feeders into the hyper-individualistic, proprietary, and competitive world of the cutting-edge

sectors of the global economy. These institutions, especially in the programs and disciplines

from which these professionals are drawn, often unselfconsciously promote a possessive

individualism whereby the world becomes one's oyster waiting for the will to bend it towards the

'chosen' ends of profit and private gain. As creativity is channeled into aesthetic design of

consumer products and developing complicated financial instruments, and technical skills are

honed to maximize profit, intellectual wisdom beyond these narrow confines is stifled. And with

financial success comes retreat into utopic suburban and urban enclaves, compounding inequality

and self-segregation conducive to a lack of social concern and empathy for the common good of

the larger society. A professional-managerial class of meritocratic elites (overlapping with

inherited privilege) starts to drift away from the rest of the population, giving rise to the

archipelago of privilege Duchrow and Hinkelammert identify above.

Conclusion

The rise of capitalism has coincided with the greatest material prosperity the world has

ever seen. Writing in 1985, Charles Taylor noted:

> For millions of people, whose forbears were the factory fodder of the industrial
> revolution, who may have been packed in over-crowded, insanitary, hastily-built
> workers' housing, sweated twelve hours and more a day, without privacy or a decent
> family life in the other twelve, barely able to scrape a living, with an appalling rate of
> desertion of women by their men, with children growing up stunted physically and
> emotionally; for these millions there now is the chance for a home, decently furnished,
> the creative use of leisure, the building of a private space in which they can bring up a

family, practice hobbies, see friends, as well as being plugged into a world-wide network of communications (admittedly only one way).[98]

Today, a variation of this statement could apply to countless human beings outside of North Atlantic society, especially in parts of Latin America, and, most dramatically, in East Asia, notably China. At the same time, the question remains why these genuine goods must find their fulfillment in a society marked by possessive individualism. Part of the allure may be that there has perhaps always been a human desire to escape to a realm of infantile peace and tranquility, a desire that can easily work hand-in-glove with a desire for unlimited proprietary power, with the former becoming the Valhallic reward for the latter. In this mythic vision, return to the peaceful state of the mother's womb, like the Gnostic desire to return to a primordial realm of heavenly bliss, is made possible by the Promethean effort of the sovereign, possessive agent, who is only too happy to retreat to untruthful realities that deny the facts of suffering and death, and the possibilities of judgment, transformed selves, and renewed community. For the prosperous, the exclusions and oppressions are all too often invisible, almost as if they were not real; the flow of time, the possibility of being undone, repentance, and being transformed, is never an option, since life is lived in mechanical stasis, never changing, always prosperous, where death is but a hazy rumor.

Of course, as a reaction to a world of possessive individualist disciplinary power, the quest for authenticity has often pushed for new imaginaries and new ways of being in the world. At their best, Romanticism and then aesthetic modernism tried to recover the receptive, the enchanted, the organic, and the communal against the totalizing closure and narrowed concerns of the regnant capitalist order. The spread of a consumer ethos reliant upon expressive individual authenticity and seemingly able to foster difference and transformation through time

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[98] Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Social Sciences: Philosophical Papers II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 252.

would seem to be the very example of a dynamic ethic opposed to closure, control, and possessive individualism. But all too often in the consumer form of this ethic, the sovereign self-owning individual is never really effectively challenged. The rebranding of the self is not a real transformation of the sort envisioned by the Romantics, but skates along the rails of consumer choice, substituting one consumer character for another without questioning the possessive logic and degraded vision of authenticity that feeds the society of acquisitive growth in the first place.

In fact, is not this possessive vision of the human being a *spiritual* ideal for both critics and supporters of the regnant order, the shared vision of human flourishing being bound up with the ends beyond what we think we need or desire? As Robert Bellah and his collaborators observe in the case of one of the Americans they interviewed,

> His passionate commitment to economic and political democracy turns out strangely to be without content. He can envision freedom from what sees as current forms of economic exploitation but that freedom is, for him, a virtual end in itself. The legacy of freedom is still *the right of each person to feel powerful, to be free to strive after whatever he or she happens to want.*[99]

Cut off from a deeper vision of the human person and human flourishing whose source and end is transcendent, able to dis-*possess* us of our self-enclosed lives, resistance to possessive individualism all too often simply reinscribes the essential features of possessive individualism. In Chapter Two, we will look to a challenge to the vision of the good promoted by capitalism practices by turning to a vision of the triune God and that God's relationship with human beings that is the overarching context for a different, *interruptive* notion of human flourishing in the midst of globalizing capitalism.

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[99] Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart*, 25.

Chapter Two: Interrupting Possessive Individualism: The Triune God, the World, and Human Flourishing

In the previous chapter, we saw how capitalism is a system that fosters material growth and profit. This has resulted in immense material comfort and security for a significant minority of humanity, while simultaneously often fostering moral, political, and "spiritual" impoverishment (Robert Bellah) as well as dynamics of exclusion. Liberated from a (feudal) past putatively marked by collectivism, hierarchy and ignorance that restricted the flourishing of the individual, the new world is morally and socially imagined in terms of a concatenation of self-owning, free individuals, forging their own path forward in voluntary transactions epitomized by the market.

Ironically, as we saw, the development of this "imaginary of possessive individualism" is inextricably bound up with new forms of discipline whereby one is "produced" as a person of self-ownership, negative freedom, and choice. The closure that this discipline imposes on the "lifeworld" (Habermas) might appear to be interrupted by the ethos of authenticity, which is taken up into the consumer market by individuals who are able to express their true, undisciplined selves through the pursuit of new objects, experiences, even identities in the marketplace. But the apparent dynamism of this ethos belies underlying similarities between degraded, consumer versions of authenticity and possessive individualism. As I argued in the last chapter, consumer authenticity does not operate against a background horizon of the good, in which certain choices are better than others. Thus, even when authenticity seeks to forge a counter stance to the disciplinary power of capitalism with its productive and transactional practices and consumer mindset, it fails to recognize how it too often falls into triviality, lacking a horizon in which choosing "a" over "b" is justifiable by more than "it makes me feel good" or "I am being true to my self."

This enclosed self, or enclosed collectivity of contractual selves, becomes both its own moral source and *telos*, with society structured to promote this anthropology. Flourishing is reduced to the pursuit of private interest and infantile pleasures, which too often obscures or marginalizes the possibility of being transformed through engagement with an other, be it created or divine. If there is a secularized calling that issues forth from contemporary market societies, it is the call to forge a this-worldly utopia (literally a 'no-place'), by which desire is channeled into the creation of "the good life."[100]

Is there room for a vision of flourishing that goes beyond possessive individualist desire? The answer for Christians is 'yes.' My claim is that human flourishing, the *telos* of human, created life, consists in communion with the triune God who graciously gives without any need of recompense born out of lack. I will begin by articulating a vision of the triune God that is marked by loving giving and receiving that is attentive to particularity. Next, I will explore the relationship that God has with creation, one that is both consistent with who God is and, in its implications for human life, interruptive of the hegemony of absolute self-possession in autonomous individuality and a meritocratic determination of human worth based on what human beings have or do, including what they do for God. From there, I will reflect upon God's creation of a world of embodied human beings in accord with God's triune life and whose human flourishing consists in responding to the call of the triune God in Christ. Finally, I will explore how Jesus is 1) both the one who perfectly enacts his particular vocation to human flourishing by taking on the sin of the world 2) while revealed to be the incarnate God whose death breaks through the hegemony of *quid pro quo*, in utter faithfulness to who God is as creator, discussed

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[100] As Benedict XVI puts it in *Caritas in Veritate*, "without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in the world is denied breathing-space. Enclosed within history, it runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth; humanity thus loses the courage to be at the service of higher goods, at the service of the great and disinterested initiatives called forth by universal charity." See *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage,* Expanded Edition, eds. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 532.

above. All of these moves are consistent with the notion of "interruption" discussed in the Introduction.

The Trinity: Ground of Interruption

In the Introduction we saw how Christianity, insofar as it is conceived as a culture, involves a dynamic negotiation with the larger context in which it is embedded. The church in its embodied witness thus has the potential to interrupt and challenge those moral and social imaginaries to which it finds itself in contact, and, in turn, this ongoing interaction of the church with the larger social context challenges it to articulate its message in a manner that is both faithful to who God is and that is heard as Good News within that particular context. To meet this continuous challenge, ongoing attentiveness to the itineraries of those individuals and communities who have sought to walk the path of discipleship throughout history is needed. With attention to the past, we see that from its earliest days the church, as it has sought to make its way within the larger cultural contexts in which it is embedded, has reflexively asked the questions, "Who are we?" and, "Who is the one with whom we have to do?" For Christians throughout the ages the answers to these questions begin with Jesus of Nazareth, the one whose life, death, and resurrection was the "generative event," in Rowan Williams words, that transformed the lives of his followers and brought the church, as the community witnessing to that transformation, into being.[101] Importantly, this encounter was and is not *merely* with a founder in the past, a world-historical figure whose memory is generative for new lives of discipleship; it is rather with Jesus as the resurrected one, who, by virtue of his resurrection from the dead lives as "head and partner in dialogue."[102]

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[101] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 136.
[102] *Ibid.* The encounter with Jesus as the living Christ is central to grasping what Christians mean when they talk about his resurrection.

As the one who lives now, who chooses to be present to the community in its life and worship and whose identity and presence is transformational for the existence of its members, Jesus, who in his lifetime addressed God as "Father," invites the church in the present to do the same in the power of the Spirit (see Gal. 4:8). This practice raised a host of questions for the early church regarding the identity of Jesus, not to mention the Spirit, and the one he addressed as "Father." After all, who but God could so decisively transform existence such that the church could speak of a new creation? And how could a human being, a finite creature, address God in the intimate, familial language of *Father*, since the name of the divine agency in Exodus 3:14 is cryptically given as "YHWH"—"I will be who I will be.

To engage in an in-depth exploration of the subsequent confessional and doctrinal debates raised by these questions would take us too far afield from our current task, which is articulating the overarching context in which the human being moves that breaks through a society ordered to a self-enclosed, possessive individualism discussed in Chapter One. Suffice it to say, the early church--and subsequent theologians contemplating how what the church says and does in scripture, worship, and discipleship, "stands together"--have spoken of God as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By exploring the language of God and God's relationship to the world articulated in these terms, we will see how the one with whom the Christian community has to do opens a theological exploration of human life lived out in relationship to the divine that challenges many of the assumptions of the dominant moral and social imaginary.

To grasp what I think is important about the Trinity for our discussion, I want to begin with Ian McFarland's discussion of the doctrine in his recent work, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*.[103] Early in his own meditation, McFarland writes that while "God is *one* (and thus

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[103] Ian McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

neither divisible into parts nor capable of increase), God is not *alone*."[104] In the famous opening

words of John 1:1, "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

was God," we see that "God's own life includes another, a Word who is 'with' or 'facing' (*pros*)

God and yet is not other than God."[105] And lest we think that God's inner life is binitarian,

McFarland draws our attention to "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17), who proceeds from the

Father (John 15:26 RSV) and who "searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10)

in a way that is impossible for any creature (1 Cor. 2:11)."[106] God's life, in short, is not

constituted by atomistic individuality, but by relationality.

One can see the depth of this relationality in the notion of *perichoresis*, or mutual

coinherence. What this suggests, Miroslav Volf writes,

> is the divine persons are not simply interdependent and influence one another from
> outside, but *are personally* interior to one another. The Johannine Jesus speaks
> repeatedly of such personal interiority: 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father' (John
> 10:38; see John 14:10ff; 17:21). Every divine person is indwelled by other divine
> persons; all the persons interpenetrate one another.[107]

Clearly, the Triune God to whom Christians witness cannot be characterized in terms of

possessive *individualism*, because the divine persons are "not simply interdependent and

influence one another from outside, but *are personally* interior to one another."

If God's life is inherently relational, it is also inherently one of love. Again, we must not

project what we understand love to be, or what we want love to be, on to God so as to legitimate

ourselves and projects. McFarland is right: we often reduce God's love to " 'tough' or

sentimental forms."[108] So much of the consumer culture promotes a vision of sentimental love,

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[104] *Ibid.*, 39.
[105] *Ibid.*
[106] *Ibid.* It is important to note that the relational dynamic of the intra-Trinitarian life is not based on an ontology, say Hegelian, of what is logically required for relationship. It is rather an ostensive description. As McFarland writes, "God lives as the One who exists in *this* way--as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (39-40).
[107] Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 409.
[108] McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation,* 41.

and so much of contemporary political life celebrates a callousness masquerading as "tough love." Allowing ourselves to listen to the biblical witness opens us up to an undoing of our seemingly secure understandings of what love is. In those beautiful passages written by St. John and to which McFarland draws our attention, "the Father's love for the Son is described in terms of giving (John 3:35) and showing (5:20), and the Son's love for the Father as a matter of keeping and abiding (15:20)."[109] This can also be seen when we speak about the divine freedom, which is simply the Father's bestowal of the divine nature to the Son and the Spirit. The Son in turn freely gives himself back to the Father, an expression of the divinity that he receives. And just as it is incomprehensible to speak of a receiving of the divine nature by the Son that is "hoarded," so the Spirit who receives the divine nature does not turn "inwards," so to speak, but rather "witnesses to the mutual love of the Father and the Son."[110] God's freedom is not a freedom defined in relationship to a constraint, as is the negative freedom of creatures (freedom from something or someone). Rather, God's freedom is the freedom to share divinity without loss or diminishment – which is a manifestation of God's gifting love, returning full circle.

Relationship and loving giving and receiving draw attention to an original and eternal particularity in the Triune life. In Christian scripture, McFarland argues, the Father who sends the Son and the Spirit prevents the reduction of one of the persons (*hypostases*) to another.[111] Beginning noetically with the economy of God's actions, warrants the characterization of the eternal or immanent Triune life as one in which the persons are irreducible to each other. The giving and receiving that is love between inner-Trinitarian hypostases does not erase particularity; it maintains it. As McFarland puts it, "if the living God, though one, is not alone, the further claim that this God is love clarifies that the plurality of the divine life is no formulaic

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[109] *Ibid.*
[110] *Ibid.*, 47.
[111] *Ibid.*, 41.

repetition of abstract perfections (as in summing of infinities that only reproduces infinity), but a diversity that can only be named and never explained."[112] And reversing the "noetic" move (to use Barthian language) that moves from the economic Trinity to the immanent Trinity, we can say that the immanent life of love grounds the particular movement of giving and being sent that distinguishes the three persons in the world.[113] This understanding of the Trinity is clearly not about separate individuals coming together to form a community or agreement, as a contractual, possessive individualist understanding of human relationships might imply. Nor is the intra-Trinitarian life possessive, since the father *eternally shares* the divine nature in begetting the Son and breathing the Spirit, the Son *eternally receives and abides* in what the Father gives him, and the Spirit who receives *eternally witnesses* to the link between them. Quite simply, the Triune God is not marked by a primal individualism ontically prior to difference and communion.[114] While the limitations of human language, and indeed of human finitude in time and space constrained by causal notions of before and after, can make it difficult *not* to think of the Father, in bestowing the divine nature, as a lone individual who has temporal and ontological precedence over the other two hypostases, it is important to remember that human language about God is analogical. Thus, we must not be fooled by the inability of our minds to imagine a begetting and breathing by the Father that is co-eternal with the receiving and witnessing of the Son and Spirit respectively, nor with the co-eternal, perichoretic penetration of each hypostasis by the other.

The limitations of human beings as finite creatures whose very language is shaped by their embodied nature brings us to an important feature of our relationship to God with regards to religion: the human reluctance to accept finitude when thinking and talking about God. As

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[112] *Ibid.*
[113] The ontic precedes the noetic in Barthian language.
[114] Nor is there a primordial unity of inparticipable essence that *precedes* the persons, as found in neo-Platonic thought, as well as in, arguably, Pseudo-Dionysius and theology under the influence of, and including, Gregory Palamas. There is not a "hidden God" (Luther), *if* that means a God behind God, leading to modalism, and ultimately, a God who is *neither generative of difference* nor able to be *trusted* as the one with which we have to do.

human beings, we want the divine to legitimate both our background imaginary and our desires, and so we seek to forge an image of God that meets our self-defined needs. In other words, God becomes a possession. "The most powerful and seductive images of God," Miroslav Volf argues, "are the ones that seep into our minds as we watch TV, read books, go shopping at the mall, or socialize with our neighbors. Slowly and imperceptibly, the one true God begins acquiring the features of the gods of this world."[115]

But the triune God is simply not assimilable to any creaturely reality of human choosing. God cannot be made into a human possession.[116] As we saw above, God is the one who in Exodus states, "I will be who I will be." Across the ecumenical spectrum, from Augustine to Maximus the Confessor, from Thomas Aquinas to Karl Barth, God's nature is understood to be ungraspable. The divine essence is not another "thing" in the world that human beings can control, making it an instrument for whatever ends they choose or give. The triune God is not even assimilable to a spiritual realm drawn in contrast to the natural, material one. The essence of the triune God is beyond all the binaries that human beings, as linguistic creatures who employ metaphors in order to think, necessarily construct in the course of navigating the world.[117] Karl Barth, in the second edition of his *Römerbrief*, famously made this point on the 'playground of the theologians.' In Romantic-expressionistic language so appropriate to a post-WWI European culture in crisis, Barth speaks of a "God" that too often

> Is always only a something in contrast to another something, a pole in opposition to a counter pole, a magnitude next to other magnitudes, a yes in relation to a no; not, however, the Either which has already overcome the Or, not the Yes which lies beyond

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[115] Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 22.

[116] My concern here about "possessing" God does not mean that I necessarily am committed to a metaphysical notion of language based on "essence-like containers" that ensnare the divine. For a critique of such metaphysical notions of language see Kevin Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[117] For more on the metaphorical nature of human thinking and the relation of those metaphors to the contours of human embodiment, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

> yes and no, not the power of the reversal from death to life. . .. For the God who is a something in contrast to something else, a pole over against a counter pole, yes against no, the God who is not the completely free, unique, superior, victorious God, is the no God, the God of this world.[118]

God is "wholly otherwise" since God is not able to be arranged in a series of finite objects or placed in any type of class.[119] God is uncreated, unlike everything else including spiritual beings (angels), language, ideas, and even heaven. While a robust account of the triune God who is not assimilable to the world's realities, yet is intimately present to and involved in them, is not a major theme for Barth at this juncture in his thought, for our purposes, the "no God, the God of this world" – that is, a God made to fit human untransformed needs – is definitely not the triune God of loving giving and receiving. In fact, God's transcendence of all worldly categories (a transcendence that includes God's triunity), should make us pause when thinking about conscripting the divine into grounding any this-worldly, hegemonic order or, indeed, any social configuration – especially one that appears to operate according to a logic quite distinct from God's own life of mutual self-giving love.

In light of this brief discussion, can we now say that God's life provides a model, despite its analogical difference from human understandings of love, relationship, personhood, etc., for understanding human beings and human sociality? Not quite. Since God's triune life is wholly otherwise, it only *indirectly* interrupts possessive individualism, especially when a discussion of

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[118] Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (Zürich: TVZ, 2008). English translation, Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans* Sixth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press), 213. Strictly speaking, Barth here is concerned with the Kantian limitations to knowledge of the divine. But this historicist-philosophical concern about the limitations of the knowing subject feed into a properly theological concern about knowing a God who is wholly otherwise, whose nature is ungraspable, including as Barth's later work would attempt to demonstrate, in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Ontic concerns about God come to encompass and ground noetic concerns about the human knowing subject.

[119] One is reminded here of Nicholas of Cusa's notion of God as *non-aliud*, "not-other." God is not an "other" the way every created reality is an other to every other created thing. Rather, God is other to *all* creaturely realities, including all binaries such as the humanly derived "spiritual/natural" divide, yet, precisely because of this radical alterity, is free to be intimately present to the world in and through creaturely realities since God does not compete with the created world for space. God is not an other in the usual sense. See Jasper Hopkins, ed., *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other: A Translation and Appraisal*, Third Edition (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1987), 27-155.

that life is *taken in isolation*. Yes, the analogic use of language allows us to ostensively point to the picture of God witnessed to in scripture, a God who is neither individualistic nor possessive based on the human use of these terms.[120] But to move from, say, a discussion of the persons of the Trinity *directly* to relationships between human persons is to assume that the triune life of a God who is wholly otherwise and thus not assimilable to any worldly reality, licenses a particular human sociality. Not only is this problematic when we seek to make God undergird the hegemonic order, as I have just mentioned; it also is problematic when we move from a discussion of God's Trinitarian life to a more humane *finite* order that seeks to directly imitate the loving relationality in giving and receiving that is simultaneously attentive to particularity within God's decidedly non-finite life. Without having said anything about how God relates to a reality that is not God—the reality that includes human beings—we cannot state that the God who is *non aliud* interrupts anything. Rather, we will have to discuss how the triune God relates to the world, especially how God relates to the world in and through Jesus Christ in order to see how possessive individualism is challenged.

Creation as Interruption of Human Dignity Based on Self-Generated Merit

To begin a more direct interruption of the dominant moral and social imaginary of North Atlantic capitalism, I want to start by focusing on God's relationship to the world as creator, and turning first to what the Christian tradition calls "*Logos*" which may be translated "Reason" or "Word." It is through this reason intrinsic to God that all that is not God comes into being. In fact, the reason that marks God's intra-Trinitarian life and through which God creates is simply the second person of the Trinity, the Son. Furthermore, this reason that is the Son and through which the world is created is not higher than God in a manner that would constrain God and

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[120] The "analogic use of language" is made possible by faithful attention to God in Christ. It allows us to give "proper praise" (to speak in an "orthodox" fashion) to the one we have to do, even as God's essence, (what God is rather than who God is), remains beyond human comprehension.

impose an *external* demand or determination on what God brings into being. For this reason, while creation is a fitting act (in that God's own life is characterized by the loving generation of difference), it is also a gracious act.[121] Indeed, the eternal, free graciousness of God in God's intra-Trinitarian life makes creation *both* a free act, *and* one that is fitting. For this reason, God is not normed by some external rule or requirement, as though God needed to create a world, much less one that actively responds to God, in order for God to be God. As one who is not another thing in the world that can be possessed, God is free to bring something out of nothing. And the "nothing" from which God creates is not a mysterious "thing," a negative "something" (like, for example, Barth's nothing*ness*), but just nothing – an utter absence of being.[122] In answer to the timeless question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Christians answer, "because of the Triune God."

Crucial to the themes of this study, a God normed by some external rule or requirement would be assimilated to the logic of "I give in order to receive." God, however, is simply not working according to that logic, whereby God "needs" to create in order to "get something back" in order to address an internal, constitutive lack. Just as it is fitting but not necessary that the Father begets the Son and breathes out the Spirit who comes to rest on the Son, so it is fitting, but not necessary that the Father creates through the Son in the power of the Spirit a world that is not God.[123] The sometimes postulated ontological requirement that for something to be itself it needs an other—identity needs alterity—is simply not the case with God, who, to follow Anselm, is not the greatest being that can be conceived, but rather is greater than any being that

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[121] The language of "fittingness" also nicely navigates the twin horns of voluntarism and an ultimately arbitrary choice between possibilities that leaves possibility that is not actualized still hazily hovering in external fashion to God's immanent life, on the one hand, and a determinism, which threatens God's graciousness, on the other.

[122] See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).

[123] Or, alternatively, the Father who breathes out the Spirit *through* the Son.

can be conceived, greater than any being, no matter how powerful or infinite, that can be classed together with other beings. God simply desires, out of a freedom that is simultaneously fitting to who God is as love, to share with human beings the gift of life itself.

If God does not create because God needs something returned in order to address a constitutive lack within the Godhead, then the creation of human beings, and the dignity that is bestowed on them, is also not the result of prior human merit. God graciously bestows life that has dignity without condition or "payment," rather than reacting to what human beings first exchange with God, as if God "needed" or "desired" some "possession" or "currency" to fulfill a lack in God's abundant life.

Because God's action is not arbitrary, the creation of dignified human life regardless of prior merit can be trusted by human beings. There is no reason to doubt God on this point. Creation is consistent with God's very life—a gracious and loving generation of difference and relationality that is the triune God who is one yet not alone. In turn, God creates through the Son, or more precisely, the *Father* creates through the Son, something that is not of the same nature as God, that is ontologically discontinuous with God (and thus unlike the difference that is the Son and the Spirit within the Trinitarian life). Nevertheless, the difference that is the created world (i.e. all that is not God but which is made by God) is consistent with who God is. God's life is an eternal communion of loving giving and receiving not based on merit or a quantifiable lack that must be filled through accumulation.

Creation as Interruption of Absolute, Ontological Independence

The fact that God creates the world from nothing, without any conditions for its existence, means that human beings are, quite simply, not self-originating creatures, despite what possessive individualism might make us *feel*. The liberation from premodern relationships, like

those marking feudalism, can give us a heady sense of our independence and seemingly

unbounded power and independence. And yet, as *created,* human beings are always related to by

a divine other; we are always *dependent*. Furthermore, if human beings and the rest of reality

that is not God *come into* being because of God, then they also *persist* because of God's ongoing

relationship. Without God giving to human beings through no action or merit of their own, they

would fall back into the nothing – the non-existence – from which they came. Creation is not a

one-time act for each person that, once completed, permits her to subsist independently, but

rather, an ongoing relationship in which existence is continually bestowed.

This understanding of created existence contradicts a way of thinking that has become

second nature in capitalism. Take the notion of contractual relationships. As we saw in Chapter

One, contractual relationships are voluntary arrangements socially imagined in terms of two or

more independent parties coming together to form an agreement based on mutual self-interest.

The relationship *proceeds* from the prior activity of contracting individual parties; there is no

prior bond uniting them together. Of course, this whole shift in social relations was rightly

experienced by many as a liberation from previous forms of hierarchy, involving mutual rights

and duties, but also marked by inegalitarianism and potential exploitation. At the same time,

market alliances and contractual agreements, when conceived as the ontologically *primary* form

of relationship, can foster a notion of human being that is atomistic and voluntaristic:

relationship, in other words, is something that emerges from the decision of creatures who are

fundamentally atomistic individuals.

But God is closer to us than our own jugular (or so a Qu'ranic Surah 50:16, convergent

with Christian commitments, states) because God is always already in relationship to us.

Incidentally, this brings us to the work of the Spirit with regards to creation. God creates the

world through the Son in the power *of the Spirit*. As the Nicene Creed states, the Spirit in

relation to all that is not God "is the Lord and giver of life."[124] In light of this characterization,

David Kelsey writes, "it is appropriate, then, to characterize 'the power of the Spirit,' in which

the Father creates, as the divine triune love's vitalizing, enlivening, and empowering life-giving

power."[125]

The Triune God's life-giving power thus holds us in existence at all times during our

lives. We are never "free" from God in the absolute sense. This bestowal of existence extends

to the sustenance of human agency itself, or *concursus* in the language of Protestant

scholasticism. As McFarland writes, "sustaining creatures in being is not limited to maintaining

their physical integrity: it also includes giving them movement. In short, that creatures *act* is

every bit as much a product of God's direct and immediate willing as the fact that they *are*."[126]

For we moderns, this notion appears especially troubling, since it would appear that there is no

pure agency independent from God, no space of freedom that exists before we voluntarily enter

into relationship with God or anybody else. In fact, it even seems to imply determinism

imperiling the integrity of creaturely integrity.

We can avoid misunderstandings of *concursus* as determinism if we remember that God's

nature is not competitive with creatures' because God is not another being in the world. God is

divine, and thus cannot be assimilated to any creaturely reality (after all, as both ancient Israel

and the early church recognized, how could a creaturely reality exercise the kind of salvific

power marking God's acts of deliverance?) God as *non aliud* is free to be maximally present to

human beings without competing with them for temporal and physical place. When I kick a ball,

my leg, and more specifically, the various physical forces of the universe, propel the ball towards

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[124] Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 124.

[125] *Ibid*.

[126] McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*, 143.

the net. For that reason, we can properly speak of my leg or, if we are physicists, the

fundamental forces of the universe, causing the ball to fly through the air and hit the net. At the

same time, and without contradiction, we can also state that God is the cause of the ball flying

through the air and hitting the net. Viewed from within creation, we do not need to refer to God

to complete the explanation of what happened.[127] This explanation is not in competition with

one that refers to God since God, specifically the Spirit, is not another creaturely reality.

McFarland compares action like this to a piece of fictional drama. "If asked, 'Why did Duncan

die?,' it would be equally correct to answer, "because Shakespeare so willed it' or 'because

Macbeth murdered him.' Neither response is in competition with the other, and each is entirely

sufficient within its sphere."[128] In the analogy being drawn, the author is God, while the

character 'Macbeth' is the creaturely agent. God is the primary cause, because God ultimately

brings everything into being. But human beings as 'secondary causes' exercise genuine agency

that is not deterministic because they are not in competition with God whose nature is wholly

otherwise to created reality.[129]

We will begin to complicate, without refuting, this account when we turn to discuss the

will and its conformity to God in a life open to dispossession. In doing so, we will rub against

the moral and social imaginary of contemporary capitalism. But while this account of *concursus*,

on its own, may not directly critique modern accounts of agency, since God can become the

passive, "silent" agent in the play of active consumer choice, it does disabuse us of the notion

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[127] *Ibid.*, 145.

[128] *Ibid.*

[129] Technically, while determinism in relation to God does not exist here, a determinism caused by creaturely realities might still be in play. One could give various reasons pertaining to the created order regarding why Macbeth acted the way he did and why he could not do otherwise. Beyond that, everything in the universe is shaped by physical forces (although at the quantum level there does appear to be true random flux). Modern philosophers including Kant, Hegel, pragmatists, post-structuralists, analytic philosophers, and philosophers of science, have wrestled with how to think about responsibility, agency and the way our lives are shaped by social or physical forces.

that there is a form of "pure" agency preceding God's providential relationship to us, as if God were just another contractual agent by which we might decide to forge a deal. As Volf puts it in *Free of Charge*, "we believe that we can stand on our own two feet, independent of God, and still affirm that God is the creator of everything. But that doesn't make sense. We can be both dependent on God and free; dependence on God is the source of our being, and therefore our freedom ...God sustains creatures in being and in freedom."[130]

To sum up thus far, in its very being, all of creation, including human life and the material world, is characterized by God's gracious act of loving giving. God's very life is wholly committed to creation, since, as we have seen, God as creator does not relate to human beings in a manner that is tangential to who God is. Human beings' ultimate context is marked by a prior relationship to a living, personal power who gives without conditions. This extends even to the non-human world, since nothing would exist without God's creative activity. Furthermore, God does not need anything that is not God in order to be God. God is not "aggrandized" by the created world as if it were an acquisition that increased the value of God's "portfolio." God creates out of God's free beneficence, which simply is in accord with who God eternally is.

In turn, we have seen that human beings are not the self-creating, independent creatures that possessive individualism promotes. Against what Rowan Williams calls, the "myth of self-creation and isolated self-regulation," so pervasive in capitalist modernity's background self-understanding, there is a God who "is at the center of the whole world's being."[131] I want to further fill in the lines of this picture of God's creative work by emphasizing the embodied,

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[130] Volf, *Free of Charge*, 35.
[131] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 76.

communal nature of created, human life and identity and how this contributes to a critique of possessive individualism.

Human Beings: Created to Flourish through Communion with the Triune God

By emphasizing that God relates to human beings as their creator, we challenged the notion that dignity is based on merit—what we have to give God--and that we are ontologically independent individuals who only subsequently are related to by an other—in this case the divine other. I want to now explore more deeply the creation of human beings 1) through the *Logos* 2) as embodied creatures in relationship to other finite, embodied creatures, specifically other human beings. By focusing on the created context of human beings, I want to emphasize two points. First, as creatures created through the *Logos*, we are called into communion with the triune God. As I have mentioned before, there is the question of whether capitalism flattens our lives, makes them nothing more than about the pursuit of possessive individualist ends in a possessive individualist manner. The highest goal of life becomes what I can get for me and my own in the market to secure as my private property (fueled by technology and the supply/demand circle of entrepreneur and consumer). Without the objective good of God, what is *strongest* is good. Our ends are disciplined, our desires shaped, we deliberate about means to satisfy the ends we have chosen or have been disciplined to love. This is how the good and human flourishing appears to shake out.

Second, to emphasize our creation through the *Logos* as bodies in community reminds us of our shared vulnerability and dependence. As we saw in Chapter One, we tend to think of our bodies as something we own, disengaged from our mind or will. Bodiliness thus comes to play a minor role in reflection on human existence. The disembodied mind or will is given priority, which, in turn, takes attention away from the mutual vulnerability and dependence of our

identities as inextricably tied to our environmentally and socially embedded corporeality.

Instead, we must speak of enfleshed, material knowing and enfleshed desire rather than a

disembodied mind or will in possession of an inert object outside of itself, "the body," that can

be directed to possessive individualist ends through possessive individualist means. Instead, in

our enfleshed desiring we are subject to environmental harms and environmental formation, both

problematic and proper, in light of the fact that we are creatures who are to commune with the

triune God.

To develop this in a manner that continues my task of interruption, I want to look to

Maximus the Confessor to develop a notion of vulnerable, embodied creatures who in their

enfleshed desire are created for communion with the Triune God. Just as they are created

through the *Logos*, so the Father seeks to bring them through the Incarnate *Logos* by the power

of the Spirit into alignment with the will of the triune God.

In *Ambiguum* 7, the Byzantine theologian Maximus the Confessor begins by defending a

passage by the Cappadocian thinker, Gregory of Nazianzus, from the claim that it undergirds the

scourge of Origenism. For our purposes, what is of note is how the position Maximus seeks to

refute serves as a point of contrast to his own theological position regarding creation. The

Confessor characterizes his opponents' claims in the following manner:

> According to the opinion of these people, there once existed a unity of rational beings, by
> virtue of which we were connatural with God, in whom we had our remaining and abode.
> In addition to this they speak of a 'movement' that came about, as a result of which the
> rational beings were variously dispersed, prompting God to look toward the creation of
> this corporeal world, so that He could bring them in bodies as punishment for their
> former sins.[132]

In this account, embodiment is the result of a primeval fall away from unity with God. That is to

say, the body for Maximus' opponents is problematic. Indeed, for them, the material creation is

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[132] Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua Volume I*, edited and
translated Nicholas Constas (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 77.

marked by profound ambiguity, since it can be traced back to this primeval fall from a purely

spiritual ("rational") existence. In addition, the unity that characterized this original participation

in the divine was broken into multiplicity after the fall. Thus the created diversity of embodied

beings is the result of a departure from an original bliss.

What these arguments serve as a foil for, of course, is Maximus's counter-claim. As we

have seen, the triune God's inner life is marked by others who simultaneously are the same: the

Son and the Spirit who share in the divine nature even as they "repeat" that nature in different

persons. In creating the world God extends this giving in difference to a form appropriate to

human beings and everything else that is not God.

Maximus follows this line of thought, but adds the notion of *logoi*. In a passage

following Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the Confessor writes,

> From all eternity, He [God, the Creator] contained within Himself the pre-existing *logoi*
> of created beings. When, in His goodwill, He formed out of nothing the substance of the
> visible and invisible worlds, He did so on the basis of these *logoi*. By his *word* (*logos*)
> *and His wisdom He created* and continues to create *all things*--universals as well as
> particulars--at the appropriate time.[133]

Taken together, this network of realities defines the space and time of human everyday life and

provides human beings with fellow creatures sharing those spaces and times.[134] Furthermore, this

created, socially shaped world comes into being in a manner that is *intrinsically* bodily and

marked by multiplicity. More specifically, this created context consists of

> The interactions of a multitude of energy systems: inorganic energy systems that can be
> analyzed molecularly, atomically, and subatomically; organic energy systems of varying
> complexity that appear to be emergent from inorganic energy systems; social systems that
> organize communal life with political and economic structures and arrangements of
> power; cultures whose repertoires of language, symbol, and practice systematically shape
> human affective, intellectual, and volitional energies. Further, each quotidian society
> with its culture constitutes a tradition handed over from generation to generation. These
> traditions are themselves internally fractured and conflictual. Nonetheless, traditions as

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[133] Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 97.
[134] Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 190.

processes of handing on themselves appears to be a type of energy nudging the social quotidian toward certain future states of affairs. Insofar as it is partly made up of human societies' cultural traditioning, the quotidian is socially constructed. Because it is always historical and because histories are diverse, the quotidian manifests remarkable diversity. All of these are factors of every given quotidian's concreteness.[135]

Simply put, God graciously brings into being a multiplicity of material bodies that make up human beings' created context. Each creature in the universe has its own *logos*, which is the principle not only of its creation, but its end, its *telos*, its eschatological fulfillment. In this way, in speaking of a meaningful creation in terms of *logoi*, we have already crossed into a discussion of God's eschatological purposes for God's creatures. For Maximus, this is inextricably linked to "the whole mystery of Christ," the *incarnate Logos* in whom "all the ages of time and the beings within those ages have received their beginning and end ... For the union between a limit of the ages and limitlessness, between measure and immeasurability, between finitude and infinity, between creator and creation, between rest and motion, was conceived before the ages. This union has been manifested in Christ at the end of time."[136]

Several important points relevant to our negotiation and interruption of the possessive individualist moral imaginary follow from this. First, as creatures who are embodied, who are finite and not God and yet whose end is communion with God, human beings are in motion, that is to say, we are creatures of desire, constituted by a fundamental lack.[137] This is not an evil, but simply part of what it means to be "not God," to be *enfleshed creatures*. Insofar as identity is inextricably bodily, desire and its orientation are essential to who we. Of course, to satisfy this lack, we often seek to possess and control the world, drawing things to the self, building

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[135] *Ibid.*, 192.

[136] Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 125.

[137] "Motion" may be a more helpful term than the anthropocentric "desire" when thinking about the non-human, especially non-sentient and non-organic creation, in relation to its end in the *Logos*. This also counters Origen's notion of an original motionlessness, as well as any theology that follow this line of thinking.

identities of our own making, forging meaningful collectives that we hope will secure ourselves and our world, bringing us to our final, collective rest. Maximus is completely against such activity. Instead, according to him:

> Nothing that has come into being is its own proper end, insofar as it is not self-caused, for if it were, it would be uncreated, without beginning and without motion, having no way of being moved toward something else. For that which is self-caused transcends the nature of beings, since it exists for the sake of nothing else. Hence the definition of it is true, even though it was expressed by a man [Aristotle] who was an outsider to the faith: 'The end is that for the sake of which all things exist; it, however, is for the sake of nothing.' And nothing that has come into being is perfect in itself, for if it were, it would be devoid of activity, having no want or need of anything, since it owes its origin to nothing outside itself. Hence that which is perfect in itself is, in some manner, uncaused. In the same way, nothing that has come into being is impassible, for this belongs only to what is unique, infinite, and uncircumscribed. That which is impassible is in no way subject to the movement of the passions, for there is nothing it desires, neither can it be moved by desire toward something else. Therefore no created being which is in motion has yet come to rest, either because it has not yet attained its first and sole cause, to which it owes its existence, or because it does not yet find itself within its ultimate desired end.[138]

Human beings as created simply cannot find their rest in anything finite, whether a created thing distinct from themselves, their own self-enclosed behavior, or an autonomous possessive world promising security and human flourishing. Only God is secure because God, as wholly otherwise, is not subject to the limitations, including the struggles and competition, of creation. Only God does not change, always eternally giving and receiving within God's triune life, and thus always faithfully committed to sharing that life with human beings. Moreover this sharing is utterly unselfish, since God, as we have seen, does not lack anything; God is eternally perfect in who God is.

Second, as creatures who are finite and marked by a created lack, a space is opened up whereby our lives become vulnerable to harm. Insofar as we are in webs of interaction with other human beings, a community of creatures created through the *Logos*, we are shaped by our

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[138] Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 83.

social context in a manner that contributes to our bodily well-being, but also in ways that hurt us. Our mutual dependence on other people, in fact, is critical to living through the distortions of desire that arise from the vulnerability that occurs as created beings who are finite and enmeshed in bodily webs of sociality that form us in myriad ways. Interdependence rather than atomistic, proprietary individuality is our natural state. Nevertheless, within that interdependence, distorted forms of sociality emerge, including a problematic, historically contingent form of discipline whereby we are formed, and form ourselves, into being creatures of possessive individuality. But even here, existing side-by-side with this distorted form of sociality, positive webs of mutual dependence allow us to navigate our vulnerabilities. We will take up this theme in later chapters.

The tight link between creation and eschatology in the notion of the *logoi* captures God's unswerving commitment to not only bring that which is not God into being, but to bring human beings into alignment with God's will. God does not have to glorify creation, but, once again, we can say that it is fitting to who God is that God does so. Not only does the Spirit hold creation in being, preserving human agency, but human beings are directed towards a purpose, which is simply to love God and participate in that love as creatures with others creatures. In this way, the notion of human *logoi* implies that there is no purpose to be enacted by human beings independent of God's unremitting purpose. While the notion of a "world of embodied human beings" is informed by recognition of the socially formed dimension of human identity (already seen in Chapter One with regards to my appropriation of Weber's image of the iron cage as well as the power of practices to discipline human beings), here I link this dimension of created human life to a notion of the good—flourishing in communion with the Triune God—that is

missing from even those theorists like Weber and Foucault, who challenge the notions of absolute liberation, autonomy, negative freedom, and choice.[139]

This created, embodied, and socially formed existence is a life whose end, unmerited and freely given, is not assimilable to what human beings can imagine or "give" to themselves. "The end of motion of things that are moved," Maximus writes, "is to rest within eternal well-being itself, just as their beginning was being itself, which is God, who is the giver of being and the bestower of the grace of well-being for He is the *beginning and the end*."[140] Furthermore, according to Maximus, human beings are to live out this journey through embodied willing in accord with their unique *logos*. More specifically, during their worldly sojourn human beings enact their agency by *gnomically* willing. To will gnomically is to will through deliberation and choice. While not intrinsic to human existence as such, *gnomic* willing is nevertheless "deep seated," becoming a resource for the creature as it moves through time.[141] More specifically, the ultimate good, to which human agency enacted through gnomic willing should conform, is God's will. In the full manifestation of the *eschaton*, human beings will no longer will *gnomically* since the goal of our lives, participation in the Incarnate *Logos*, will be perfectly clear to us. That is to say, human beings will no longer need to deliberate, since they will in accord with God's will, which is the fulfillment of their respective *logos*, their living into their true, particular identity, their true particular vocations. As Maximus writes:

> From the same source whence we received our being, we should also long to receive being moved, like an image that has ascended to its archetype, corresponding to it completely, in the way that an impression corresponds to its stamp, so that henceforth it

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[139] Although these two men had their own non-theological visions of the good, or at least certain ethical and political dispositions oriented towards an inchoate horizon of meaning whereby their actions made sense and could be judged, at least by them, as better than the alternatives.

[140] Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 87.

[141] Blowers states that "*endiathetos* can mean 'innate' but probably only implies 'deep-seated'" (Blowers, 123).

has neither the inclination nor the ability to be carried elsewhere, or to put it more clearly and accurately, it no longer is able to desire such a thing.[142]

And it is through participation in the embodied Son--the embodied *Logos*, in which their particular *logoi* are diffuse reflections--that this state of "deification" comes about.

All of this differs from a notion of willing often associated with consumerism. One divide lies in their different understandings of ultimate ends. For the consumer utilitarian account, when it is ontologized and made totalizing, there is no objective good for the human being. The end of maximum pleasure, profit, or generic utility, is either a subjective projection or, if claimed to be "objective," then it does not result from transformative grace but from inner-worldly calculation of relative benefit. In lived reality, the *de facto* ultimate ends of consumer society are produced by disciplinary forces shaping desire for status through competitive display or pleasure, security, and comfort for "me and my own." Deliberation regarding means serves this disciplined and truncated vision of the human person such that what gives us the most pleasure, comfort, or security is the overarching good to which our actions are directed. For Maximus, on the other hand, there is an objective good proper to our natures that we are called to enact, namely the alignment of our wills with that of God. Because human beings are created in accord with the *logos* to which they are called to live into (a cohesion between protology and eschatology), there is a "deeply insinuated *vocation* in the human essence, or nature."[143] In fact, through Christ we are able to order our willing in this life so as to grow into alignment with God's purposes and look forward to the final judgment and the full manifestation of God's already inaugurated eschatological consummation of creation.

Human Sinfulness and God's Unbending Commitment to Human Flourishing

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[142] Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 91.
[143] Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, 203.

Implicitly shaping everything that I have said thus far in this study has been a notion of

sin. For Christians, to turn away from God's will for human beings is to sin. In the language of

Maximus, willing *gnomically*, that is to say deliberating and choosing, is "not inherently sinful,"

but "it is intimately connected with the *possibility* of sin for it is understood in terms of the

capacity to choose between options--including especially good and evil."[144] As human beings

come to desire that which is not in accord with who they are created to be, they end up turning

away from God's will, God's very desire, to graciously bring the human creature into

communion with God. Insofar as this distorted desire turns us away from God and we fall into

sin, a society marked by possessive individualism is no different from any other.[145] Some of

these sins involve active rebellion against God, some culpable ignorance, others unintentional

harms, and still others will appear as an almost external power. And yet, they take on a specific

shape in relation to the particular morphology of globalizing capitalism. In a society marked by

possessive individualism, many of our desires are marked by a solipsistic possessiveness. Insofar

as my will follows desire, and desire is distorted, I engage in sinful practices that we can

characterize as consistent with possessive individualism. Our visions of the good and human

flourishing are distorted. We are formed to be creatures of a certain desire, through the practices

that embed, as well as are legitimized by, the image of the possessive individual. We are in webs

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[144] Ian McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 95.

[145] Furthermore, "inasmuch as the doctrine of original sin implies that *every* human act and attitude is sinful, there is simply no basis for singling out any one particular subset of human behaviors…as more indicative of humanity's congenital sinfulness than any other." (McFarland, *In Adam's Fall*, 196). For this reason, possessive individualism cannot be singled out as more indicative of humanity's congenital sinfulness than any other. Nevertheless, the possessive individualist dimension of capitalist practices is a particularly prevalent and insidious manifestation of human sinfulness within the particular context of globalizing capitalism. This should also not be taken to imply that differences of social location, gender, race, etc. are irrelevant when discussing this sin. I believe forces promoting it shape most people in globalizing societies, and definitely virtually all members of North Atlantic and other post-industrial economies, even as it intersects with race and gender, for example, to be more acute amongst white men than, than say women or minoritized populations. Insofar as women or people of color are also shaped by possessive individualist forces, they collude, often unbeknownst to them, in structural dynamics of racism and male patriarchy.

of control and *possession* of the other through both treating her as a necessary means to prosperity and security, or by discarding her, when she is no longer important to the narrative of growth, profit, comfort, security, and worldly pleasure. Disciplined to desire in a narrow way, to take on the narrow set of roles that feed the dominant moral and social imaginary, I become the possessive individualist necessary to flourish materially and socially. While no one disciplinary regime can be identified as the source of disordered desire, the dynamics of North Atlantic capitalism "exploit that disordered desire, harnessing its productive energy by means of the enchantments of the market."[146]

In Jesus Christ, however, Christians believe that God relates *in a new mode* to human beings in their self-enclosed world of wrongly ordered desire and sinful, possessive individualist behaviors.[147] Just as God always relates to human beings, creating and sustaining them in being, so God does not cease to relate to human beings in their sinfulness, but instead relates to them in a new mode, that of a specific creature, Jesus of Nazareth, to overcome their estrangement from God. Through no merit of our own, through nothing we are or do for God or each other, through no logic of *quid pro quo*, the *Logos* through whom we are created becomes incarnate, to both inaugurate God's eschatological reign in which we enjoy communion with God, as mentioned above with Maximus, and more directly relevant to our immediate discussion, to overcome estrangement from God and unbelief. God's gracious faithfulness to human flourishing, which has been a theme since we began this chapter, is unbroken.

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[146] Daniel Bell, Jr., *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 185.

[147] As McFarland reminds us, "In taking flesh God is not 'doing' anything to creation other or more than God is always doing in sustaining creation. What changes…is the *mode* in which God relates to creatures" (McFarland, *From Nothing*, 101). What is this new mode? It is "just that God identifies this particular human life as God's own" (McFarland, *From Nothing*, 103).

What did this new mode of gracious relationship, this continued faithfulness of God to God's purposes, look like then in Jesus' earthly ministry? Rowan Williams, in *Tokens of Trust*, writes,

> What Jesus was remembered as having stressed was that the kingdom of God was about to arrive and break into the human world. We were about to learn what it was for God to be king, what it was to live under his rule and no one else's. And Jesus' bold proposal was that living in a world and community in which God was king was something very simple. To live in this world was what happened when you said 'yes' to what Jesus himself was saying and offering: to live under the kingship of God was deciding to live in the company of Jesus and trusting what he said about God and about you.[148]

Of course, to live under this rule did not mean that other powers would give up their claims to rule. God's rule meant however, "that you will have become free of those powers, free to co-operate or not, depending on how far they allow you to be ruled by God."[149] One receives the gift of God's rule, by living in company with Jesus and trusting what he says about God and oneself. In turn, as a receiver, one becomes a giver. One "becomes a sign" of God's Kingdom, such that "your life will give a foretaste of God's rule; and it will be directed to inviting as many as possible to come under the same rule, and to resisting the powers (natural and supernatural) that work against God and seek to keep people in slavery."[150]

Jesus then was offering a gift that could only come from God, and that was given not as a response to merit, but out of grace. "The Jewish Scriptures, " Williams reminds us, "stress that the people of Israel only exist because of God's call or invitation."[151] This hearkens back to Deuteronomy, where "Israel exists as a community simply because God has chosen that it should--because of God's promise and invitation."[152] What is so startling then is that here is a *human being* offering the promise and invitation to belong to God's community without

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[148] Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 58.
[149] *Ibid.*
[150] *Ibid*.
[151] *Ibid.*, 60.
[152] *Ibid*.

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conditions. Furthermore, Jesus' proclamation of the imminent arrival of the Kingdom was also a

judgment on all the sinful, unfaithful ways of human beings, including the very "least of these"

to whom Jesus especially directed his message. In offering the gift of belonging to God's

kingdom by living in relation to Jesus and his message, by calling people who were excluded

from the shared life of Israel, Jesus' ministry summoned people to repentance in the midst of

trust in his proclamation that God's promise to Israel had been fulfilled and the Kingdom was

drawing near.

Jesus' embodied mission in obedience to the one he called "Father" would evoke a

counter-response culminating in his death on the cross. In turn, this death has been spoken about

as a sacrifice, which might appear to lend itself to *legitimizing the prioritization* of *quid pro quo*

and the hegemony of a market logic in all realms of life. That is to say, one of the images by

which Christians have come to understand Jesus' cross is that of a sacrifice whereby God

reconciles a sinful world to God's self. When we look at the Old Testament we see that a

sacrifice "is something given over into the hands of God," and that this occurs "most

dramatically when it is a life given over with the shedding of blood." [153] Not only does "that gift

of life or blood somehow cast a veil over the sin or sickness or disorder of an individual or of a

whole people," but, the language of "sacrifice," when read through a contemporary lens,

suggests "it turns away the anger and displeasure of God. In the jargon of theology it

'propitiates' God, it makes things right with God again."[154] This notion of a propitiatory sacrifice

can lend itself easily to the logic of *quid pro quo*. That is to say, God, out of loving gratuity,

gives to human beings their very existence and thus bestows dignity, which should elicit a

faithful response. But with the surd of sin, human beings fail to render to God what God should

[153] Rowan Williams, *The Sign and the Sacrifice: The Meaning of the Cross and Resurrection* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 24-25.
[154] *Ibid*.

"rightfully" receive in "payment" so as to remain committed to human beings. Hence, a debt is accrued, which must be paid off, and God's wrath is stirred, which must be assuaged. According to this logic, through the cross, this debt is paid off and God's anger is assuaged, when the Son is sacrificed by the Father.

Given what we have said about the utter gratuity of God's relationship to creatures, this contemporary understanding of sacrifice appears to be unacceptably transactional, not to mention problematically violent. It is as if God, who is not assimilable to the world, nevertheless operates--at least when it comes to the cross and atonement, --according to a violent and transactional logic that is very much consistent with a sin-ridden creation. How can this be? Does Jesus' death on the cross let us down with regards to the interruptive logic of God's relationship to creatures that is the *desideratum* of this chapter?

Again, we have to remember that talk about God works within language that shapes, and is shaped by, finite, creaturely existence and by the lived human context. This language is straining to talk about the mystery at the heart of the one who breaks open the logics of debt and violence, something that only God who is wholly other to the world could do, while showing that the new understandings of God in light of Jesus is also consistent with Israel's accounts of sacrifice, ensuring the enduring unity, faithfulness, and trustworthiness of God across history in differing contexts.

If we think about sacrifice in terms of obedience, as Rowan Williams has suggested, I think we can address these multifaceted concerns, including the claim that the cross appears to undergird, rather than interrupt, a vision of God relating to human beings in terms of *quid pro quo* and debt. First, already in the intertestamental period between the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible, there was an implicit recognition that the language of a sacrifice was a

metaphor pointing to the wholehearted obedience to which God was calling Israel, and this was warranted by passages in the Old Testament itself, like 1 Samuel 15:22, where it is stated, "to obey is better than sacrifice."[155]   Jesus "gives his heart to God" so wholeheartedly and so in tune with the inner spirit of Jewish law, that, in Jewish terms, "he was offering a sacrifice...in such a way that God is pleased with the gift."[156] The language of sacrifice addresses concerns about whether the depiction of God's dealings with humanity in the Old Testament are consistent with God's relationship to human beings in the New. If Jesus is the definitive fulfillment of God's relationship to Israel in the Old Testament, we, following Paul and others in the early church, can say that there is an inner unity between God's actions across the testaments, captured through an *evolving* understanding of a *constant* metaphor, namely sacrifice.

Second, and more directly related to our immediate concerns, the obedience understood in terms of sacrifice is so "single-mindedly" given to God yet so challenges the worldly powers, that it *leads* to violent death. It is not that God *needs* a debt repaid or violent bloodshed in-and-of-itself to make things right; rather "the obedience to God in this world of sin, oppression and violence puts you lethally at risk."[157] Jesus' alignment of his will with the one he calls Father, Jesus living out who he is called to be as a creature who receives and gives in this particular way that is his flourishing and is a *visible projection* of the life of the triune God in the world, is dangerous because human beings live lives that are in contradiction to their true nature and prone to violent self-protection against the divine life, not because God operates according to the logic of the distorted world in which a sacrifice understood in contemporary transactional terms is needed.

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[155] *Ibid.*, 29.
[156] *Ibid.*, 31.
[157] *Ibid.*

And yet, does it not appear that the language of "pleased with the gift" indicates that Jesus obedience *is* a kind of debt repaid (and one paid on behalf of others, hence it is a gift *payment* or sacrifice understood according to a contemporary logic of exchange)? In reply, I would emphasize that it is important to remember that Jesus is the Word Incarnate and thus it is fitting that the Son freely return everything to the Father that he receives in accordance with who God eternally is.[158] To this fitting, yet free action--this "gift" that is not about a logic of *quid pro quo*--the Father is pleased. In turn, since the *Logos* binds humanity to itself in the incarnation, this free return to God also consumes and destroys sin (even death itself on the cross as shown in the resurrection in which death is defeated and destroyed) taking all that opposes God and pronouncing on it a definitive "no." This is what "sacrifice" means: a sharing of benefits, rather than a modern relationship of *do ut des*, where Jesus gives something to the Father which appeases God and only then prompts the Father to forgive humans for their sinfulness. Finally, as fully human, the Incarnate Logos opens up the divine life for human beings through union with him in his bodily, socially formed, and desirous humanity, whereby humanity's desire can be healed (or more technically, whereby human beings can live into the healing that has already been achieved as the temporal, bodily creatures that they are). Through an alignment of human beings with the human will of Jesus, receiving from the *Logos* itself, human beings are enabled to give back to the Father in the power of the Spirit, an activity that simply is constitutive of human flourishing. Through this return, human life becomes a sacrifice, not according to a logic of *quid pro quo*, but instead as a sharing of God's goodness with the world received from the Spirit as we are conformed to the Incarnate *Logos*. Thus, not only is there no disjunction between God in the Old and New Testaments, linked by the language of "sacrifice," there is no

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[158] For what follows in the following paragraph, see Kathryn Tanner's "Death and Sacrifice" in *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 247-273.

disjunction between God's non-transactional activity as *creator*, bringing into being a world intended for blessed communion with the Trinity, and God's non-transactional overcoming of sin. The language of "sacrifice" unites various themes that are polyphonically held together in human language, but that attest to the remarkable consistency of God, from creation through the *Logos* to Incarnation of that same *Logos* in the journey of embodied, temporal, and desirous willing, reconciling the creation to God and bringing that creation to eschatological fulfillment: a logic of unmerited giving action, one that is irreducible to *quid pro quo*, and the logic of debt. For these reasons, a discussion of God's relationship with the world as reconciler continues to interrupt any claim that human dignity and flourishing, in their most fundamental, ontological sense, depend at some point on a self-originating payment or independent meritorious action performed by human beings. To the contrary, God remains committed to the human dignity that God bestows, and the only "payment" God receives to continue God's commitment to the human creature despite sin is from the incarnate God, which is no payment at all, but rather a return to the Father of who God eternally is and a return that opens God's life to participation by human beings in the divine giving and receiving that God unceasingly wills for them in the first place.

Conclusion

"*Ein Bild hielt uns gefangen*," Wittgenstein famously writes in paragraph 115 of *Philosophical Investigations*.[159] In the present context, that picture is a possessive individualist notion of flourishing embedded within capitalist practices, an imaginary that increasingly pressures societies around the globe. In this chapter I have sought to offer an *interruptive* picture, or better put, narrative, of the place of the human being in the world. To that end, I have focused on the Christian community's witness to the triune God whose own intra-Trinitarian life

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[159] "A picture held us captive" in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 48.

is marked by giving and receiving and who creates humanity so that it might flourish by sharing in communion with God and each other.

The triune God brings into being creatures who are created to flourish, and makes possible this ultimate good in a manner that is unflinchingly gracious. God lacks nothing and does not need any recompense, but rather is wholly committed to our flourishing. More specifically, in the midst of the practices promoting a possessive individualist vision of human flourishing, God continues to share God's very life in a manner that is faithful to embodied, desirous, and temporally bound human creatures. God is committed to the human creature even when that creature turns away from God into a private self. God is still there holding her in being, offering the gift of communion with God and other creatures so that she might live into the identity to which she has been called from the beginning of her existence. And all of this is grounded in God's own triune life as one who is living and loving, giving us both assurance of who God is, and allowing our lives, words, and actions to be created analogies to God's through our flourishing "in Christ."

Unlike the truncated visions of human life described by figures from Augustine and Luther to Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Oscar Romero, and which are intimately linked to practices of North Atlantic, globalizing capitalism, the Christian witness (and here there is convergence with other religious traditions) proclaims that there is a greater good than what an increasingly expansive capitalism promotes. In Chapter Three, we will examine the Christian life in relation to this contemporary context as well as build upon our discussion of God and God's relationship to the world.

<u>Chapter Three: Possessive Individualism, Human Flourishing, and Christian Redemption</u>

In Chapter One we examined the rise of one dimension of globalizing postmodernity, capitalism, and its relationship to contemporary society. Embedded within the central practices of market exchange--contractual relationality, private property, industrial and postindustrial technology, etc.--is a whole set of meanings that constitute a particular moral and social imaginary. This imaginary, I argued, is defined by an anthropology of possessive individualism. While this anthropology is especially influential amongst (as well as influenced by) elites closely linked to the management of the market society (e.g., members of the state, professions, business, and universities), the logic of the market increasingly characterizes social spheres outside of the economic. After examining the historical rise of capitalism and the possessive individualist moral and social imaginary it instantiates, I traced the path of possessive individualism in post-World War II North Atlantic societies, including the particular shape consumer expressive authenticity and social exclusion have taken, as well as noting how the realm of "religion" has been produced and shaped by these developments.

In Chapter Two, I shifted to an "interruptive narrative" of capitalist modernity centered on a non-possessive anthropology rooted in a vision of God who freely and graciously creates human beings so that they might enter into communion with God's own life – a life constituted by loving giving and receiving. As embodied, particular, and socially formed creatures, human beings are called by God to live into, and discern with others, their vocations in Christ by the power of the Spirit. The point of developing this narrative was to articulate a vision of flourishing centered not on possessive individualism, but rather on communion with the triune God. Against what Robert Bellah has called "the spiritual impoverishment" of our time, I articulated a vision of human life that is "ec-centric," which pushes the *ultimate* vision and

purpose of life away from truncated ends that have developed, in no small part, from the

pulsating course of globalizing capitalist practices and its moral and social imaginary.[160]

Building on Chapters One and Two, this chapter seeks to develop a vision of human

discipleship that goes beyond possessive individualism. If Chapter Two was more focused on

the Christian doctrine of God, God's relationship to the world, and the general contours of

theological anthropology, this chapter develops out of that theological account an interruptive

vision of Christian discipleship. In other words, the last chapter sought to outline a basic

ontology of human being (Christian anthropology), whereas this chapter seeks a general

examination of the main steps in redemption, namely repentance and dispossession, on the one

hand, and moral learning and transformation, on the other, understood as two aspects of the

operation of the Spirit in the Christian life. More specifically, I argue that the gospel

dispossesses and recenters the believer in a full-bodied life orientation of faith in which one is

conformed to one's true, embodied, and particular vocation in Christ involving love of God and

love of neighbor enacted by the transforming power of the Spirit. By engaging in this discussion,

I believe that we gain a more dynamic understanding of how human flourishing is realized in

light of sin and redemption and that this furthers the interruption of possessive individualism in

the contemporary context.

I begin this more dynamic account of human redemption by first examining repentance,

dispossession, and faith. I then link this discussion of repentance, dispossession, and faith to

transformation in community and love of God and love of neighbor via an engagement with the

work of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. From there, I shift into an examination

of the implications this discussion has for interrupting the consumer spirituality mentioned in

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[160] Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Third
Edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

Chapter One, where faith is disconnected from dispossession-in-repentance and the self is affirmed as it is and as "possessing" God as an object to be used for its own self-determined ends. Finally, I explore how my discussion of transformation towards love of God and neighbor discussed in the preceding section by authors living outside of a capitalist context interrupts problematic understandings of love and human relationality shaped by a contemporary globalizing capitalist imaginary.

The Contours of Redemption

I want to begin this discussion of Christian repentance, dispossession, and Christian faith by saying a little more about what the gospel--the good news--is. In Christ, we receive God's unswerving "yes" to human beings as creatures whose end is communion with God, despite the sinful misalignment of our wills in relation to the will of God. In Christ, we are offered, through word and sacrament, "tokens of grace" directed to rectifying our specific embodied journey in time and the particular manner in which we have strayed from our authentic eschatological identities, the unique vocation in Christ to which we have been called.[161] At the same time, to hear and receive this gracious "yes" is to be simultaneously confronted with a "no" to everything that stands opposed to God's will and the revelation of who God is in Jesus the Christ. This "no" is not generic but directed to each particular person, eliciting from them repentance for the particular ways in which each person's will is misaligned with the will of God, including through the particular manifestations of possessive individualism. God remains committed to drawing each particular person into communion with God's very life, in accordance with that person's vocation in Christ. In remaining committed to the ultimate *telos* of creation, God relates to the world in accord with who God is as the one who lovingly gives and receives in particularity

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[161] Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

within the triune life. God's 'yes' to human beings, God's forgiveness of their sins that is God's word to humanity in the particular embodied life of Jesus, testifies to God's faithfulfulness and commitment to the flourishing of human beings. To enter into communion with the divine life, to be conformed to God's will as a member of Christ's body and to live in union with Christ's humanity receiving the gifts of God that that humanity receives from the *Logos* through the power of the Spirit, is simply what it means to flourish. God's "no" is thus not only a rejection of all that opposes God, but, precisely as such, also a rejection of all that opposes the flourishing of human beings that is the object of God's creative will. In fact, to receive assurance of God's commitment to my particular life and my flourishing as a participant in the kingdom of God, is to hear and receive a word of forgiveness, God's love of me in spite of my turning away from God's desire for my flourishing. It is to trust that the God who creates and sustains me, remains committed to bringing me into personal relationship with the triune life. And it is to trust that in Jesus, God comes to me in a personal mode of relationship, speaking a word of commitment and acceptance that is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the vindication of his mission to inaugurate God's promised kingdom, into which we are called to live.

To hear and trust this good news is a gift of the Spirit. It is to live one's life in a posture of faithful obedience, empowered to align one's will with that of the Father just as Jesus did. For this reason, it is to live one's life "in Christ." It is to trust that the Father in the word spoken to us in Jesus seeks to bring us to the eschatological fulfillment that is our flourishing, that God accepts us without conditions, even when we turn against God's will. Consistent with a God who does not relate to the world according to a logic of *quid pro quo*, faith as *gift* of the Spirit is not obedience performed to "buy" God's acceptance, commitment, or favor. It is rather a response given *by* God that allows us to respond *to* God, as creatures of embodied minds and

wills, through participation in the gracious giving and receiving of the triune life. To have faith

is thus to be "caught up" in that life as creatures who possess embodied lives of will and thought,

being brought through the power of the Spirit--the witness to the Son's reception of the Father's

giving, and the Son's return to the Father—into life in Christ. Through the Spirit, we stand "in

Christ", receiving all that we are from God, and, in turn, through that same Spirit, aligning our

wills with that of the Father, in accord with the particular vocation, the particular embodied

identity, to which we are called, just as Jesus perfectly lived into his.

Repentance, dispossession, and faith, however, do not exhaust the work of the Spirit.

While, in the words of Oliver O'Donovan, "the Holy Spirit brings God's act in Christ into

critical opposition to the falsely structured reality in which we live… At the same time and

through the same act, the Spirit calls into existence a new and truer structure for existence." For

this reason, "we speak of two *aspects* of the Spirit's work, not of two works. It is perilous to

draw too sharp a line in particular items of experience between repentance and moral learning."

After all, "when did we ever not have to repent while we learn?"[162] Repentance thus involves a

putting to death of sin in the power of the Spirit, thereby opening the way through the same

Spirit to a transformation of the self and a renewal of desire. To link the two sides of

redemption—repentance, dispossession, and faith on the one hand and transformation of desire

towards love of God and neighbor, on the other--I want to turn our attention towards the

reflections of two thinkers writing within the first millennium of the common era, Gregory of

Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. By engaging their writings, we gain greater insight into

what the Christian life entails, which will aid us as we reflect later in this chapter upon the

interruptive possibilities of that life with regards to possessive individualism.

Gregory of Nyssa's The Life of Moses

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[162] *Ibid.*

Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses* provides an allegorical interpretation of Moses'

life as a model for Christian discipleship. The treatise begins by recognizing that human beings

are "placed in a world of change."[163] The reference to the restlessness of human life echoes our

discussion of Maximus the Confessor in Chapter Two, where we spoke about created bodies

whose lives are marked by a fundamental lack. As finite bodies, human beings are created with

a constitutive restlessness stemming from their incomplete state. Indeed, as embodied persons

whose identities are unveiled in halting stops and turns in their ongoing conversion to God's will

as revealed in Jesus Christ, human beings are creatures whose lives unfold over time and

therefore have a history. In this study, I have focused on how this created lack, which is not in

itself sinful, becomes colonized and disciplined by possessive individualism and thus leads

human beings to live at variance to who they are called by God to be.

Above we spoke about the practice of proclaiming the gospel as an invitation and act of

forgiveness by God, a "yes," in which we are called into true freedom, freedom to follow God's

will and live into the hypostases, the identities, we are called to be. In *The Life of Moses*

Gregory reminds us that when Moses announces deliverance to the Hebrews who are still in

captivity, the people's desire for freedom is strengthened. But he also tells his readers that when

the gospel was proclaimed and heard by its listeners (just as Moses spoke to the Hebrew people),

"the enemy was provoked and increased the suffering of those who hearkened to this speech."[164]

This fact, he reminds his audience, "is not unlike what happens now. For many of those who

have accepted the word as a liberator from tyranny and have identified themselves with the

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[163] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Everett Ferguson and Abraham J. Malhere (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 56. I follow, at a distance, Rowan Williams' discussion of Gregory of Nyssa in *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, Second Revised Edition (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990 [1979]), 54-64.
[164] *Ibid.*, 67.

Gospel are today still threatened by the adversary with onslaughts of temptations."[165] These

temptations push those who hear the message of freedom to claim, "that it would have been more

useful for them not to have heard the message of freedom than to endure these things for

freedom's sake."[166]

In light of this discussion regarding the difficulties brought on by temptation, Gregory

turns to the Holy Spirit. He interprets the cloud which guides the Israelites in the wilderness as

the grace of the Holy Spirit, "who guides towards the good those who are worthy."[167] The good

that is God himself becomes incarnate, and, as Gregory's interpretation of the burning bush

reminds us, the incarnation is a "radiance which shines upon us through this thorny flesh."[168]

The Spirit lures us to Christ, "softening" the "resistance" of the "free will" which is "inclined to

evil."[169] Thus, life in the Spirit involves the ongoing struggle to overcome the sin to which we

are tempted in the midst of environments pulling our protean nature in different directions.

That being said, the work of the Spirit in the midst of repentance for and the struggle

against sin is not something that bypasses human agency. As we saw in Chapter Two, God, as

wholly otherwise, is free to be present to creation, without competing with finite beings for

space. Not only does God uphold creaturely agency in *concursus*, so that the power by which

human beings act is both ours *and* a gift of God's through the power of the Spirit, but God also

works through created bodies in socially formed human practices to train the passions such that

the reformation of desire involves our agential struggle against sin (even though the overcoming

of sin remains fully a gift of God's grace). The Spirit conforms us to our place in Christ's body

in a way that respects our status as creatures that live in time, who are marked by lack, and who

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[165] *Ibid.*
[166] *Ibid.*
[167] *Ibid.*, 82.
[168] *Ibid.*, 60.
[169] *Ibid.*, 72.

are characterized by wills that are shaped by the environments in which they are embedded. This does not occur through some kind of magic that either bypasses the material world or that makes the Holy Spirit an instrument of human control, but rather through hope-filled practices of education and counter-discipline. In other words, the Spirit works through created, human practices in which our active struggle in prayerful attentiveness is simultaneously a *passive* reception of God's grace that is part of hearing God's "yes" and repenting. As Oliver O'Donovan puts it, "even man's 'response' is still God's initiative."[170] Moses's parents, in Gregory's interpretation, are the "sober and rational thoughts" and the "ark" in which Moses is placed" as a baby are the disciplines that educate desire.[171] There is a receptive attentiveness in our human acting, a hearing in our doing, our educational discipline, that is the voice and enabling power of Christ through the Spirit directing us to our true identities through rightly formed desire, that we cannot give to ourselves in an act of Promethean striving.[172]

In accord with this understanding of the bodily, temporally extended and socially mediated work of the Spirit, it is no surprise that conformity of the human being to Christ by the power of the Spirit is understood by Gregory to be inevitably painful.[173] As we are dis-possessed of our solipsistic selves and distorted desires, we find that these selves and desires, deeply ingrained in our bodies and the products of habituation and discipline through time, are painful to give up – so painful, in fact, that the transformed self that emerges, the new creation, is

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[170] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 102.

[171] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 56.

[172] As O'Donovan notes, Paul speaks of *hypakoē* (Rom. 1:5, 6:16), which is difficult to translate. It means "obedience" and yet is derived from *akoē*, which means "hearing." O'Donovan writes, "perhaps the best we can manage is 'attentiveness.' Paul speaks of the 'attentiveness of faith,' and in that phrase is contained the whole of our response to God, from hearing, understanding, and assenting, to willing and acting." (O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 110).

[173] There is also evil, like in natural disasters, to which human beings (and the rest of the creation) are subjected. It should be noted, though, how much evil is enmeshed with human sin, such that the devastation of so-called "natural" disasters is inseparable from human activity. The human deprivation characteristic of droughts and famines, for example, is deeply shaped by human relationships of power, and, indeed, is often causally linked to human activity.

compared by Gregory to the birth of a child delivered amidst great pain.[174] This is not because God is a sadist, but because the sin in which we are enmeshed, and which we reproduce through our willing, is a turning away from the gift of communion with God. Thus, due to human resistance, this new creation, this transformation away from radical opposition to God towards fulfilling who God is calling us to be, is marked by pain and suffering, as if our willed natures were scraping against the rocky hand-holds of delusion to which we cling. To be dispossessed is a struggle against temptation and all the insidious ways we try to protect ourselves from being undone. To live into our true calling, our unique "kingdom selves" is a pilgrimage of desire that is truly a second birth through the power of the Spirit who conforms us to our place in the body of Christ.

Through this purgation of distorted passion and growth in the radiance that is God incarnate, Gregory teaches, the disciple arrives at Mt. Sinai. Here Gregory interprets Moses's ascent up the mountain as a journey into what is variously described as "the ineffable knowledge of God," "the darkness where God is," and "the invisible and incomprehensible."[175] The journey into goodness that is restorative and delightful begins with the radiant light. "But as the mind progresses and, through an ever greater and more perfect diligence, comes to apprehend reality, as it approaches more nearly to contemplation, it sees more clearly what of the divine nature is

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[174] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 56. If we turn to Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), we see that he speaks of medicine overcoming a hostile agent who makes us sick. He writes, "just as a cure is the way to health, so also this Cure received sinners to heal and strengthen them...thus the Wisdom of God, setting out to cure men, applied Himself to cure them, being at once the Physician and the Medicine." (14-15). But the life of discipleship involves more than healing; or, differently put, this healing is not without discipline that is often painful. Augustine speaks of "certain death of the soul in the abandonment of former life and habits which is made through penance" and "dying to this world" that is a "conforming of oneself to truth" (17). We are not to hate the body, but rather we are to "subjugate and prepare" human desire not so "that we may not have bodies" but so "our bodies may be prepared for necessary work." (21).

[175] *Ibid.*, 91-95

uncontemplated."[176] The journey of the disciple thus leads into darkness. The sensible and

observable is left behind, but so is the intelligible.[177]

The metaphor of "ascent" is deeply influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition transmitted to

Gregory via earlier Jewish and Christian thinkers like Philo, Clement, and Origen. With the

emphasis on movement from the sensible to the intellectual and finally into unknowing, one

certainly could read Gregory's account of Christian discipleship and life in the Spirit as a journey

away from the bodily, the mundane, and the exterior, to the immaterial, the other-worldly and the

interior. But I want to complicate this reading by turning to the final scene of Moses's journey,

in which the leader of the Israelites sees God's backside, after being promised that he would see

God. As Gregory writes,

> God says there is a *place with himself* where there is a *rock with a hole in it* into which he
> commands Moses to enter. Then God placed his hand over the mouth of the hole and
> called out to Moses as he passed by. When Moses was summoned, he came out of the
> hole and saw the back of the One who called him. In this way he thought he saw what he
> was seeking, and the promise of the divine voice did not prove false.[178]

The problem with seeing God face-to-face (Exod. 33:20) is not so much that it results in the

annihilation of the human being because of the overwhelming divine radiance (as Christian

tradition has often argued); rather, face-to-face encounter is improper since it connotes the

satisfaction of human desire. But to truly come in contact with God's infinite "munificence" is

precisely to encounter a presence that is "without cessation or satiety of desire."[179] In other

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[176] *Ibid.*, 95.

[177] Denys Turner's critique of Bernard McGinn is helpful for understanding what Nyssa is getting at here.
Turner writes, "the apophatic is not to be described as the 'consciousness of the absence of God,' not, at any rate, as
if such consciousness were an awareness of *what* is absent. For if we do not know what God is, and if we cannot be
conscious of God's presence, then we do not know, and cannot be conscious of, what it is that is absent: *eadem est
scientia oppositorum*. Is it not better to say, as expressive of the apophatic, simply that God is what is on the other
side of anything at all we can be conscious of, whether of its presence or of its absence?... we can be conscious of
the *failure* of our knowledge, not knowing what it is that our knowledge fails to reach." See Denys Turner, *The
Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 264-265.

[178] *Ibid.*, 112.

[179] *Ibid.*, 115.

words, for Gregory literal face-to-face encounter is too undialectical; it collapses a presence

encountered in unknowing and the unceasing pull of desire into the final closure of secure

possession. But God, as we saw in Chapter Two, cannot be possessed. For Gregory, the rock

mentioned above is Christ, and thus to *stand* in Christ who is "absolute virtue" is to *move* deeper

into God, following, at a distance, the one whose back appears before us, who kindles desire that

never ends.[180] Growth in virtue--the life of the Spirit in discipleship--is thus a journey into the

satisfying but never possessed one who is goodness, love, and beauty itself. God is not so much

grasped, possessed, or known in the delimitable sense, but followed in faith. *Be-holding God is

a dispossessive journey of following*—"to follow God wherever he might lead is to behold

God."[181] The meaning of who God in Christ is—and who we are as those who are in Christ--

cannot be exhausted, since Christ is followed in faith, but only from behind.[182] As Gregory

writes, "for truly he who has *run the race*, as the Apostle says, in that wide and roomy stadium,

which the divine voice calls 'place,' and has *kept the faith* and, as the figurative expression says,

has planted his feet on the rock; such a person will be adorned with the *crown of righteousness*

from the hand of the contest's judge."[183] To be crowned with righteousness is not to

conceptually possess God, but to be conformed to our true identity, lured by the power of the

Spirit in a journey of resisting sinful desire and putting on virtue.

> In sum, in my reading of Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* life in the Spirit involves,
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> the proper stance of reason when it attends to an object that it cannot transcend or contain. It is a form of cognition, though unique in form as its object is unique. And as the knowledge of good, whether created or uncreated, cannot be had without commitment, it is a form of cognition which depends in its turn upon the reorientation of the will."[184]

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[180] Luther, of course, would later be fond of this notion found in Gregory.
[181] *Ibid.*, 119.
[182] See McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*.
[183] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 118.
[184] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 113.

Life in the Spirit is an embodied following, in which one's whole life is bent towards the one

who is inexhaustible and loving plenitude, the living triune God. Dispossession, repentance, and

faith are accompanied by the transforming of desire.

Maximus the Confessor's "On Love"

Written in 626, two and half centuries after the death of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the

Confessor's letter "On Love" displays a mind equally comfortable weaving philosophical and

theological insights into a spiritually edifying vision of the Christian life. In Chapter Two, we

saw that the relationship between the persons of the immanent Trinity is one of love, and that the

loving life of the triune God is both the source and *telos* of all human creatures. But this

immanent loving life, shared with human beings in the mode of personal presence in the

incarnate Son becomes the means by which God brings human beings and the rest of creation

into communion with God's self. It is this theme of love's "work" within living, breathing,

suffering Christian life that Maximus focuses on in this letter.

Maximus begins as follows: "when I was present with you I had learnt, and now I am

absent it is no less true, that you suffer those things that are, and are said, to belong to divine

love, in order to possess this divine thing, which in its power is beyond circumscription or

definition."[185] There is no way to circumscribe God's divine nature and make God a

"possession" within our framework of carving up reality in language and concepts. In order to

"possess" divine love, one must paradoxically engage in a journey of *dispossession* whereby we

are *possessed* by God *in Christ*, formed bodily in love towards God and neighbor that is our

authentic identity in that body. The Christian journey is not one of be-*holding* God, but a

following of God that yields participatory knowledge. It is thus an intimate acquaintance with

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[185] Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Andrew Louth (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 85.

who God is as love rather that *what* God is. The body is conformed to our place in the one who was sent, rather than the eye capturing what cannot be envisioned.

Love, harkening back to Chapter Two, "persuades the inclination [the *gnome*] to follow nature and not in any way to be at variance with the *logos* of nature."[186] We are called to live into who we truly are in alignment with God's will, rather than being at odds with ourselves and God. But, just as Gregory reminds his readers about the power of sin and its ongoing temptations, so Maximus draws us to the struggle against temptation, describing it in quite dramatic terms. He writes, "for the deceitful devil at the beginning contrived by guile to attack humankind through his self-love, deceiving him through pleasure, he has separated us in our inclinations from God and from one another, and turned us away from rectitude. He has divided nature at the level of mode of existence [*tropos hyparxeos*], fragmenting it."[187] Rather than align our everyday mode of being with our true calling, our true *telos*, human beings fall into a pit of distorted desires that leads to "three primordial evils:" ignorance, self-love, and tyranny. The ignorance to which Maximus refers is ignorance of God. More than just an epistemic condition, it is unbelief, an active *ignoring* of and turning away from the God who is the source and end of life. This can lead to various types of sin, including self-love, by which Maximus means not the proper regard for the self as a beloved creature of God, but a distorted regard that arises out of transforming the self into the source and measure of all things, the alpha and omega of reality. And this finally leads to tyranny towards the neighbor. The substitution of the self for God leads *not* to a false, albeit benign, sociality, but rather to a distortion of self that is at the heart of social worlds marred by enmity and hatred, in which a common good focused on the flourishing of one's neighbor is sacrificed for death-promoting practices of strife.

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[186] *Ibid.*, 87.
[187] *Ibid.*

In response to this predicament, Maximus assures his readers that the incarnation "healed" the "sickness" afflicting human nature.[188] At various points above, I have argued that in the incarnation God comes to human beings in a personal mode within a world soiled by sin. As Maximus writes, the *Logos* "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and without change united to this [nature] hypostatically."[189] Because God has taken on human flesh in Christ, we who are in Christ's body share in the healing of desire. This healing of desire, intimately woven together with repentance, dispossession, and faith, involves love of God and love of neighbor.

The Role of the Community in Gregory and Maximus

Before we proceed to examine how the previous account of the Christian life might interrupt dimensions of possessive individualism, I want to say a little more about the relationship that the community plays in the transformation of the self and desire by the Holy Spirit, in part because this anticipates my turn to concrete practices lived out in community in Chapter Four. For both of these men, the content *within* the text describing formation of the self in Christian community is mirrored *externally* by the relationship that these two men have to their respective readers. Thus, Maximus in "Letter Two" assumes the role of spiritual guide for a reader or group of readers seeking counsel as they engage in the journey of Christian discipleship.[190] The epistle therefore echoes the monastic life, in which encountering and responding to the gospel is connected to life in a community guided by the Spirit, in which the witness, support, and counsel of others is essential to the struggle against sin, as well as to formation in love towards God and neighbor.

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[188] *Ibid.*

[189] *Ibid.*

[190] The letter's explicit addressee is John the Cubicularius, a courtier in Constantinople; but in his introduction to the letter, Andrew Louth notes that it is written in the second personal plural, which, he speculates might indicate that it was written to a group of courtiers who had known Maximus since his days in the imperial court and perhaps even before when he was a monk in a community across the Bosporus from Constantinople. Andrew Louth, Editor's Comments in Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Andrew Louth (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 84.

It is in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*, however, in which this congruence between the world within the text and the world occupied by the reader who stands "in front of the text" is most richly developed. The Cappadocian father draws on Philippians 3:14 in which Paul writes, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."[191] Linked together with his readers by common adherence to the biblical witness, Gregory rhetorically "performs" the community of shared participation in the Spirit, marked by mutual giving and receiving. What he has received, he passes on, without diminishment to himself. Like spectators urging on contestants in a race, Gregory (and the community of those "who have been appointed to the position of fathers over so many souls") offers encouragement and exhortation.[192]

This explains why after recalling the *historia*, or factual summary of Moses's life, Gregory then offers a spiritual interpretation, or *theoria*, of that life. In doing so, he responds to a very practical concern: how to link the narrated lives recounted in scripture, lives that were marked by very different historical circumstances, with those lives in the present seeking to remain faithful to God and walk the Christian path.[193] After all, the community to which Gregory writes, like that of contemporary readers, is not "nourished by the daughter of the Egyptian as scripture teaches about Moses, which prompts the question, 'How shall I place myself in the same rank with one of them, when I do not know how to imitate anyone so far removed from me by the circumstances of his life?'"[194] The answer is, of course, the spiritual interpretation, or *theoria* that comprises the majority of the text Gregory writes. While it may appear fanciful to the contemporary reader, this mode of reading scripture is inextricably linked

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[191] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 29.

[192] *Ibid*.

[193] With regards to Maximus, and drawing on Francis Young's *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Paul Blowers writes, "Patristic interpreters had developed sophisticated ways of 'intertextuality' weaving the stories of extraordinary saints with the unfolding story of Christians in the recent past and even in present circumstances." See Paul Blowers, "Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self: Maximus the Confessor's Virtue Ethics" Studies in Christian Ethics, 26(2013): 334.

[194] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 32.

to the everyday life of embodied, fleshly struggle, in which both the writers and readers are involved. It is not a flight from reality, but a guide to the life of earthly discipleship.

This is not to say that Gregory possesses power that is self-generated, able to transform, guide, and support his audience as they run the race of Christian life lived out in virtue. After all, we are reminded, the spectators attending a race by "their actions themselves do not contribute anything to victory."[195] And again, "it is beyond my power to encompass perfection in my treatise or to show in my life the insights of the treatise. And perhaps I am not alone in this. Many great men, even those who excel in virtue, will admit that for them such an accomplishment is unattainable."[196] Gregory, and all human guides to the life in the Spirit, assume the role of Paul: they are "occasions" for truth to become manifest in the lives of their audience, instruments for the upbuilding of community; they become givers so that others may be strengthened in the gift from God in which they mutually share, struggling against the temptation to sin.[197]

Both texts thus exemplify a practice of self-awareness learned and modeled in community. What both Gregory and Maximus are saying is, "think about the Christian life in these terms." By looking to scripture, we see those who have followed Christ, never holding back their identities from the journey of dispossession and thus being re-centered in the body of Christ by the power of the Spirit. But the models we are given are not only found in scripture; there are also living examples of *imitatio Christi* amongst those whom the Spirit has called out in living Christian communities. Both Gregory and Maximus offer themselves as teachers and exemplars of the Christian life, although neither sees himself as having achieved the

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[195] *Ibid.*, 30.
[196] *Ibid*.
[197] Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments,* edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.

manifestation of the "not yet" – the final state of blessedness or *theosis* whereby their lives fully display an alignment with God's will in the communion that is the triune God. In L. Gregory Jones words, "the virtuous—those whose lives become ever greater reflections of the grace and friendship of God—experience their own sin and need for transformation in ways of which others are unaware."[198] Gregory and Maximus are themselves pilgrims *in via*. What they offer, however, is akin to what is found in the relationship between Paul and the communities who received his epistles: a relationship of support, exhortation, admonition, and exemplary modeling of trust, love, and struggle in the power of the Spirit against sin. Just as the Spirit has been at work in their lives, deepening their knowledge of God and God's ways with the world, but also conforming their whole embodied existence to Christ, so the Spirit works through figures like Maximus and Gregory as they provide a living hermeneutics of the self and the world that is attentive to the role the passions and desire play in shaping the enactment of their natures through their wills (to put it in Maximus' terms). Community in Christ, as it is manifested at once in the text, "in front of" the text between reader and writer, and "behind" the text in what we know about the historical context of these writers, is a mutual sharing in the Spirit, marked by giving and receiving. Through Christian community, practices of self-reflection and attentiveness to models of discipleship become key components of hearing God's gracious "yes" and learning to identify and repent of sin, as well as to recognize the power that external forces have on one's desire.

Implications for Possessive Individualism

Repentance, Discipleship, and Faith in Reference to Consumer Spirituality

In practices of proclaiming the gospel in and through the community called into being by God to testify to this gospel, God's "yes" takes form as a challenge to a consumer spirituality

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[198] L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment*, 116.

uneasy with repentance.[199] In communities gripped by a consumerist mindset, God's yes to human beings is no longer simultaneously God's "no" to all that stands in opposition to God's will, which is simply the flourishing of human creatures. Although the promotion of a *de facto* consumer spirituality in many Christian communities is in part a genuine reaction to the manner in which talk of "sin" and "repentance" has been used to control and hurt other people, it easily ends up dovetailing with a desire not to offend potential "consumers" of the commodity of "grace" that is exchanged in the marketplace of religion. The grace to which these communities seek to witness thereby becomes a contemporary version of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace."[200] Of course, the risk of cheap grace and other distortions of the gospel message is inevitable when a Christian community that is *simul justus et peccator* seeks to respond to the Gospel faithfully. However, this does not mean that the particular challenges a consumer culture poses to faithful witness to the gospel should not be addressed.

Without repenting of the ways in which possessive individualism (and the power of sin that builds upon it) distorts our lives, God's "yes" to the human being as received through the transmission of the gospel (i.e., God's commitment to calling each person into her particular vocation in spite of sin) can be understood as God also saying "yes" to the sin that impedes our flourishing. In this consumerist line of thinking, God not only affirms God's commitment to us despite our distorted desires which lead our wills to live crosswise to who we truly are "in Christ," God essentially says that those distorted desires are no problem *as they are*. To trust this

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[199] This has been a major critique of so-called "seeker-friendly churches," many of whom work out of a mega-church model that purposely seeks to appeal to populations, especially within the United States, deeply formed by suburban, consumer culture. At the same time, to be fair, these churches seek to faithfully inculturate the Gospel in a particular host culture, breaking down the barriers between secular and sacred through the incorporation of various suburban elements into their witness. The problem is not with this inculturation *per se*, but on how, at least with some of those suburban practices and mentalities, heavily shaped by consumer culture, the identity of the one to whom the community seeks to witness is distorted. Inculturation becomes assimilation, losing its *metanoic* edge.

[200] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005).

"God" is to trust a God who does not care how we live, and who is therefore indifferent as to whether or not we follow God's will for our flourishing. Faith becomes other than trust in a God who adopts us as God's children despite our sin; it becomes faith in a God that affirms, or is indifferent to, our sinful state as sinners – resulting in a state that is the *opposite* of our flourishing. The God who is the object of such faith does less than the God whose gracious "yes" is simultaneously a "no" that in faith also involves repentance. God no longer is consistent with who God is, the one whose life is loving relationship and who will even go to the cross overcoming sin and all that alienates human beings from God out of an unbreakable commitment to human flourishing that is communion with God. And there is no space for conversion to God's will as part of the ongoing life of faith, one marked by trust and obedient orientation of one's whole existence to God.[201]

This consumer God is, however, attractive precisely because such a God undergirds the selves we already *possess,* shaped in the contemporary age by practices that discipline us towards leading the possessive individualist lives discussed in Chapter One.[202] In globalizing capitalist practices, *the possessive power over my body and my world is what it means to be a flourishing human being.* Human language and imagery of God is sanded down to conform to some of the problematic aspects of the world postmodern societies seek to build. Thus, to repent not only dispossesses us of who we seek to be outside of God's will, it dispossesses us of a disciplined notion of the self and the source of our identities that is at the heart of the modern and

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[201] As Oliver O'Donovan reminds us, "when the opposition of death and resurrection is collapsed, neither death nor resurrection remains. A moral authority which does not both judge and recreate is not the authority of Christ, but a purely natural authority, to follow which is to be conformed to the world." See *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 105.

[202] Alternatively, one could refer to this God as the god of therapy. Not that therapy is bad; far from it. What is problematic is the notion of a God who is instrumental to our self-defined need for healthy adjustment to the expectations of our social contexts. For a Christian theological response to contemporary popular spirituality and the therapeutic culture see, L. Gregory Jones, "A Thirst for God or Consumer Spirituality? Cultivating Disciplined Practices of Being Engaged by God," *Modern Theology* 13 (1997): 3-28.

now postmodern capitalist project. It becomes the death of a powerful, but often unrecognized vision of secular human flourishing consisting of the heroization of the acquisitive self's journey of self-ownership, pursuit of narrow self-interest, and self-determination. In light of historical disciplinary forces, in our case those belonging to the dominant practices of a globalizing capitalism, unbelief manifests itself in a solipsistic closing in on oneself, a possessive attitude towards the self, as one's own "thing" to do with as one sees fit. I have argued that within globalizing capitalism, this takes the form of powerful pressures towards possessive individualism. [203]

A critic might respond here that even if it is indeed problematic to preach a gospel that ends up offering cheap grace, my insistence on repentance introduces a notion of economic exchange into human beings' relationship with God – and that this is just the kind of relationality that is colonizing more and more areas of life through global capitalist practices. To this I would respond with a forceful "no." Both repentance and faith are gifts of the Spirit. Or, perhaps better put, faith is a gift of the Spirit that involves repentance. To trust in God's "yes", a "yes" that is also a "no" in spite of sin, is to receive forgiveness, and this necessarily involves repentance. This "necessarily" is not about God needing repentance as payment for the gift of God's grace. Rather, "to receive forgiveness for a sin is impossible without knowing that sin for which one is being forgiven; and to know something one has done as a sin is to reject it as incompatible with

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[203] Resonant with this critique of consumer religion is the work of the "masters of suspicion" e.g. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) and their posterity. For all of these thinkers, the affirmation of the human being despite her brokenness (however conceived) is simultaneously a "no" to all that stands in the way of that flourishing and a call to carefully investigate the insidious ways in which religion often legitimates false visions of what it means to be a human being. These religious visions are not only false because they promote a deceitful vision of the human condition, but also because they involve a distorted practice, one that avoids "repentance" and the ongoing "conversion" or *metanoia*, to truthful human flourishing. What this looks like, both in terms of vision and sources, for figures like Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud is very different than what Christians such as Luther proclaimed. However, the visions of the former are, in many ways, secular redactions of the Christian story, complete with a fall, sin and evil, guiding agents of history, together with the possibility of a wholehearted moral and intellectual conversion best captured by the term "spiritual."

one's identity as a child of God by repenting of it."[204] To be forgiven *necessarily* involves

"knowing the sin for which one is forgiven, which, in turn, *necessarily* involves rejecting it as

one's identity as a child of God by repenting of it."[205] This is simply part of what it means to

receive the *gift* of faith.

Failure to proclaim the good news as an "in spite of sin," and failure to recognize that

God's "yes" is also God's "no" to all that opposes God's will--all the forces that conspired

against the one in whom that will is known, Jesus, and which culminate in his crucifixion--is to

lose forgiveness, and thus to lose the ability to reject and repent of that for which one is being

forgiven. In turn, it is also a failure to identify Jesus as the Christ since he is the one whose life,

death, and resurrection is God's "yes" and God's "no" in spite of human sinfulness.

The risk of failing to identify Jesus as the Christ can be seen in the emphasis in a

consumer culture on faith-in-and-of-itself, often conceived in terms of a positive emotional state,

rather than on the one to whom faith is directed, the one in whom we have faith and from whom

we receive faith. Properly speaking, faith is defined by its object. As N.T. Wright puts it:

> The word 'faith' functions like the word 'view' in the sentence 'Do you have a view from
> your room?': it is defined in relation to its object. The 'view' from the room is not
> something you possess. It consists precisely in being able to see the distant scene. The
> 'faith' in Paul's sense is not valued for a 'quality' it possesses in itself. It is defined
> entirely by, and in terms of, its object. It is what it is because it looks away from itself,
> and looks towards, and leans all its weight upon, the single act of the one God in the
> Messiah.[206]

Focus on faith in-and-of-itself, as a manifestation of a solipsism in consumer religion

leads Christian communities to shift their focus away from the one with which they have to do,

and in whom and from whom they receives their very identity as *church*. While the ability to

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[204] Ian McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 196.

[205] *Ibid.*

[206] N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 952.

identify Jesus as the Christ, to identify his hypostasis as the *Logos*, is a gift of grace, and, furthermore, while the identity of the Christ is not reducible to an account of his acts (since "the Gospels close with a (double!) recognition that all such accounts of his identity are inherently incomplete"), what Jesus says and does are still "marks of his status" for his disciples.[207] For the church, to fail to more than superficially identify Jesus as the one who was killed because of our sinful rejection, to fail to sit with that cosmic fact, and instead to focus on the act of faith, as if that act were itself the object of faith is to fail to encounter the one who calls us to repentance so that we might flourish.

An inattention to the object of faith in place of faith-in-and-for-itself easily leads to a focus on faith as private, something associated with inner feelings or discrete experiences of emotional ecstasy. This results when there is a failure to identify Jesus as one who lived out his identity *publicly*, his will turned towards the Father in his embodied, active life. Of course, the language of "inner" is not intrinsically problematic, nor need discrete experiences of emotional ecstasy or positive feelings that accompany faith be disparaged. But when the object of faith is reduced to these experiences rather than seen as a full-bodied trust in what God has done in Jesus--the one whose faith was lived out in full obedience to the Father and who is the risen Christ living in ongoing relationship to the community --*then* the Christian community's understanding of faith becomes distorted. Faith involves an ongoing life lived in trust, which, in the terms of this study, involves being dispossessed and repenting of our possessive individualistic orientations, as we encounter in Word and sacrament God's unyielding commitment to our particular calling in Christ's body that is our flourishing. The life of faith, of

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[207] Ian McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 104). Also see McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). For a classic statement regarding Jesus' identity as his enacted life see Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

course, involves *experience*, all experience in fact; but its object, its focus, cannot be reduced to special *experiences*. Trust in God is directed to God's gracious forgiveness and acceptance in Jesus Christ, and this is an orientation that is to pervade all of one's life, in all the realms that we inhabit and in all times of life, including in the economic and political: it is not reducible to "inner" feelings of the heart elicited by the "presence" of Jesus.

Faith as an inner experience of the heart also dovetails with a reduction of the Spirit to interior experiences. While, as David Kelsey reminds us, "the Spirit is regularly characterized both as persons' environing context always already there and enveloping them, and as intimately interior to them, the images of intimate interiority have had," he goes on to state, "perhaps, the most powerful impact on the language of popular piety and on the more formal language of liturgy."[208] This does not mean, of course, that the language of interiority is inherently problematic. In fact, the metaphor of "inner" or "inside" often serves as a means to highlight the thoroughgoing and transformative work of the Spirit, which reaches to the *deepest* dimensions of the human person in aligning her will in Christ with that of the Father. As O'Donovan puts it, "human willing and working are made possible by the divine work 'within,' which brings the free human agency to expression."[209] It is when the language of inwardness becomes absorbed into modern subjectivism that it becomes problematic. It can then lead to the belief that the Spirit is not about public, bodily transformation, but works merely on some purportedly "inner belief" or a "disembodied soul" rather than the dispositions, affections, and desires of the embodied identities of human persons, embedded in mutual dependency and vulnerability.[210] Alternatively, the Spirit "becomes an unexamined blanket-word to cover a whole range of rich

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[208] David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 444.
[209] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 106.
[210] Kathryn Tanner points out how the emphasis on the Spirit's work as operating "upon the interior depths of human persons, apart from the operation of their own faculties" is also a strategy to "ensure moral probity and infallible certainty of religious insight." See Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 274.

but too-fleeting experiences which may or may not be real (that is true)," rather than transforming publicly lived, embodied life that is not restricted to special experiences but includes the quotidian.[211]

Such a truncated picture of the Spirit combined with a focus on faith-in-and-of-itself, isolated from the Jesus who calls a person, time and again, can lead the individual to barricade herself against the unexpected, and thereby to ignore the newness of life that is lived out in repentance, that takes the form of ongoing listening and discernment of the object of faith, and in an obedience that shapes all aspects of bodily desire as one lives in the world with others. Without an ongoing life of hearing the gospel, the good news that calls us to repentance and renewed life in the Spirit, "Jesus" becomes the name of a static "presence" who satisfies one's desires, a projection that affirms one's projects as they are, or endorses pride in faith or piety. "Jesus," in short, becomes a possession owned by the self.

In sum, in this section I have sought to introduce an account of faith defined by repentance that interrupts a consumer spirituality that is bereft of repentance, and in which God is made a "possession" due to a human desire for legitimation or authorization of the self's untransformed needs and the heroization of the acquisitive self's journey of self-ownership,

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[211] David Tracy in *God, Jesus, Spirit*, ed. D. Callahan in *On Christian Theology*. Williams himself goes on to write, "if the role of Spirit is *communication*, in a narrowly 'linear' sense, whether by ecstatic vision or noetic purity, an impoverished and abstract concept of the actual texture of Christian life and experience is likely to result." See Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 116. There are tendencies in both Gregory and Maximus toward this noetic purity, but as I argued, shaped by William's own reading of Gregory, the work of the Spirit and the Christian life is also about embodied transformation in the ongoing, everyday life of discipleship.

The notion of special, private experiences between the person and God has led to the problematic modern notion of mysticism. Mysticism can lead to a blurring of God and human creature in a moment of union, problematic in-and-of-itself from a Christian perspective, but also worrying because it opens the purported mystic to the critique that the divine has been fitted or cut down to size to fulfill human needs, raising the specter of projectionism, discussed above with regards to Luther and the modern masters of suspicion. Denys Turner draws a distinction between these contemporary consumer spiritualities and the premodern apophatic tradition, in which apophaticism regarding God resulted in a denial of special spiritual experiences, and thus, paradoxically, was a strategy whereby God as wholly otherwise might "be found." Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 8.

pursuit of narrow self-interest, and self-determination. By contrast, repentance and faith are elicited as a gift of the Spirit in response to God's "yes", rather than being deployed by the individual to "buy" God's favor in a *quid pro quo* exchange. Finally, I have emphasized the intentionality of faith (i.e., its being directed towards an object who is none other than Christ) in order to interrupt consumer spirituality's focus on faith as an occasional inner emotional experience.

Love and Possessive Individualism

As we saw above, in repentance, dispossession, and faith, human beings are also opened up to love of neighbor and love of God.[212] Indexed to the themes of this study, the dual love command given by Jesus (Matt 22:36), serves, to quote Kierkegaard, as a 'pick which opens the lock' of possessive individualist desire.[213] Seen in this context, love is properly understood as willing the flourishing of the other rather than a solipsistic and exclusive obsession with the self.

As discussed above with regards to Maximus the Confessor, in practices of love, the journey through time of each human being is no longer a retreat into one's solipsistic self, but rather a vocation that includes attentiveness to the neighbor and her world. This attention to the other involves seeing the neighbor as created for communion with Christ, as the one in whom we flourish, while inviting the neighbor to respond with her own gracious attentiveness. But this is by no means a *quid quo pro* relationship. Response from the neighbor is not necessary for love to be love. Love simply (as if this is simple!) involves a movement of attentiveness to the neighbor as one who is created for eschatological communion with the triune God, as well as the openness to, but not the demand for, attentiveness from the other.

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[212] "Jesus' command of love as the Synoptic Gospels report it, is a twofold command, combining the rule of worship from Deuteronomy 6:5, that 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,' with the rule of social life from Leviticus 19:18, that 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" See Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 226.

[213] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* in Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 239.

The engaged attentiveness of love does not exhaust embodied giving and receiving in Christ, but it is a key component in a context where the reigning social imaginary supplies a powerful pull towards disengagement from others, especially those who appear to threaten the security of ourselves and our "tribe" in the precarious economic times of the present. I might appear then to be developing a notion of *recognition* as part of a larger human vocation of giving and receiving that is grounded in who God is and how God relates to the world. Insofar as recognition involves attention to the particularity of the other, I agree. Nevertheless, recognition can sometimes be reduced to valorizing a *static* identity. For Christian communities, attentiveness to the neighbor recognizes that the identity of the other person is *in via*, just as those who have received Christ must recognize that their own identities are eschatologically found in him. This means that both the fullness of who one is and who the neighbor is are still unfolding and marked by the mystery of journeying deeper into God with the passage of time, as we saw with Gregory of Nyssa.[214] In other words, Christians must be attentive to the neighbor as a person who is in the process of becoming, whose final identity is only known eschatologically in Christ, even as we "recognize" the particularities that mark her now as one created for that communion. This ensures a proper openness to the protean dimension of human nature and the identity of the neighbor as one created for a unique vocation in communion with the triune God.

Based on what I have just said, loving attentiveness to the particularity of the other can be contrasted with another relationship to the neighbor: the display of "authentic" identity either through the adornment of our bodies, or with the purchases of post-Fordist commodities including material goods, as well as commodified experiences such as those associated with travel and tourism. Such display is at least partially competitive; the authenticity it seeks to

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[214] One's identity is held together in Christ, uniting the often fragmented pieces of human life that arise from the traumatic evils that befall us, as well as the ongoing conversion to Christ in light of God's gift of forgiveness.

express links up with no deeper vision; and it does not seek the good of one's neighbor. As

Charles Taylor writes in *A Secular Age*:

> I wear my own kind of hat, but in doing so I am displaying my style to all of you, and in this, I am responding to your self-display, even as you will respond to mine. The space of fashion is one in which we sustain a language together of signs and meanings, which is constantly changing, but which at any moment is the background needed to give our gestures the sense they have.[215]

While display is by no means modern (indeed it is presumably as old as linguistic

animals have walked the Earth), spaces of mutual display in "which people grasp themselves and

great numbers of others existing and acting simultaneously" and hover between "solipsism and

communication" are distinct products of capitalist modernity and postmodernity. The problem,

as I just mentioned, is that through consumption I become a giver of meanings that supposedly

express who I "authentically" am, and this, in turn, reflects a competitive attempt to provoke

desirous envy in others. I too often display merely to receive, *quid pro quo*, without attention to

the other whose identity is both particular and open in Christ, and with whom I am called to seek

a relationship in a loving receiving and giving that goes beyond mere *quid pro quo*. Of course,

mutual display is not necessarily problematic. The meanings I display to you and you to me may

link us to a higher cause or good, something genuinely beautiful and worthy of shared belonging.

This type of display is bridging rather than competitive. But too often the only mutual links in

display are commodities that tie us to "the Logo-centric language generated by transnational

corporations" and "prestigious centres of style-creation, usually in rich and powerful nations and

milieu."[216] The higher good that we are related to is thus, in Taylor's opinion, largely "a

construct of fantasy."[217]

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[215] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 481
[216] *Ibid.*, 483.
[217] *Ibid.*

The understanding of love I am discussing, indexed to one's neighbor, is also intimately linked to equality. As O'Donovan puts it,

> We are to love the neighbor because the neighbor is ordered to the love of God. Self and neighbor are equal partners within a universe, which has its origin and end in God. Neither is origin or end to the other. He (or she) is my ontological equal… if human equality lays claims on me with the authority of reality, and is not merely an abstraction of thought, it is because one human being shares with another a common end. It gains its compelling power only as I see the neighbor as a secondary reality like myself, ordered alongside myself in common dependence upon the primary reality for being and significance.[218]

Equality, like dignity, is bestowed on all regardless of what one possesses or is able to do. It is an equality-in-dignity given in God's ongoing relationship to human beings. At the same time, equality does not mean identity, since our common vocation to love takes different forms. Nor is equality compatible with love understood in paternalistic or instrumental terms, on the one hand, or in the promotion of the self-made man or celebrity as the proper end of human beings, on the other. In the context of globalizing capitalism, the language of development has too often supported large-scale projects based on abstract notions of people's needs, with little attention paid to the actual particularities of the people affected.[219] The motivations might have been

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[218] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 229.

[219] "One of the many changes that occurred in the early post-World War II period," writes postcolonial anthropologist Arturo Escobar, was the 'discovery' of mass poverty in Asia, Africa, and Latin America...The discourse of war was displaced onto the social domain and to a new geographical terrain: the Third World. Left behind was the struggle against fascism. In the rapid globalization of U.S. domination as a world power, the 'war on poverty' in the Third world began to occupy a prominent place (21). All of the structures of modern capitalism were brought to bear on these societies: private property, commodity and labor markets, social individualization, instrumental-rational scientism, etc. In theory, many of these practices were not inherently problematic. Instrumental-reason, for example, has always been employed by people around the world to carry out specific tasks of daily life. Markets pre-existed capitalism in Europe as well as being extensively deployed in societies outside of the North Atlantic region. Too often, however, the logic of development, implicit in the very term itself, operated with a homogenizing, Eurocentric view of history, "first in the West, then in the rest." There was a denial of coevalness, the notion that other forms of life outside of North Atlantic society might offer alternative ways of imagining the present that could not be assigned to the dustbin of history. The viewpoint that postcolonial theorists have attacked is based on a unitary temporal (diachronic) narrative, with Europe reaching modernity first, and everyone else *inevitably* having to follow the path that Europe took. A spatial (synchronic) model of intersecting, yet irreducible narrative paths (the diachronic) corresponding to different civilizations suggest multiple modernities or postmodernities lined up side-by-side, or better, woven together. However, in contradistinction to this position, the assumptions of developmentalism ended up promoting a project, in spite of the good-intentions of actual development experts, that often was detrimental to the people that it was supposed to help. It was a giving that was

genuinely "loving" but the inability of developmentalism to take seriously the equality of the people it was purportedly intending to benefit meant that alternative modes of being in the world—modes of being involving a notion of flourishing outside of a moral and social imaginary promoting possessive individualism—were, and are, ignored.[220] In fact, they often remain unknown and unseen by experts viewing the world through the lens of models derived from dominant forms of knowledge production.

An instrumental use of people as disposable also accompanies paternalism. This can be seen in notions of economic "shock therapy," in which a dramatic regime of austerity is imposed upon a nation, often operating with an implicit recognition that a significant minority (or even majority in the short term) must suffer in order to benefit the majority (whether now or in the long term). This can also be seen in the very valorization of economic growth as a worthy goal in and of itself, as long as the majority (or, as too often is the case, a well-positioned minority) benefits, regardless of the material situation of the rest of the population. And these concerns do not even touch on the formation of character that is taking place, which is a different question than whether "growth" is materially beneficial to oneself, one's family, or one's class.

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1) non-reciprocal and paternalistic, 2) destructive of indigenous forms of knowledge and culture that might contribute to at least a dialogue regarding alternative visions of human flourishing, and, finally, 3) sometimes materially harmful. In a line that could have been written about North Atlantic societies in the 17th and 18th centuries, Escobar writes, "the poor increasingly appeared as a social problem requiring new ways of intervention in society. It was, indeed, in relation to poverty that the modern ways of thinking about the meaning of life, the economy, rights, and social management came into place" (22). Developmentalist discourse sought to make societies over in the image of North Atlantic modernity to insure international stability, protect the geopolitical and economic interests of the "developed" nations who needed raw materials for their industrial appetite, and to create new markets for multinational, and later, transnational corporations. Indeed, elites in Latin America and the postcolonial nations often supported modernization, even if they did not always agree with the vision of development promoted by the United States and Western Europe. A significant counter-movement existed in those nations who sought to inculturate Western models of socialism in non-Western contexts. These developing nations, emerging out of anti-colonial struggles, sought to forge their own paths of modernization, epitomized by the Bandung Conference in 1955, and the non-aligned movement, which included nations like my father's Guyana and India under Jawaharlal Nehru, who sought to develop a democratic socialism appropriate to one of the world's most diverse societies. See Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[220] Similar complaints relate to paternalistic treatments of the disabled, as described in Sharon V. Betcher's *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

The equality presupposed in love of neighbor also contrasts with the elevation within capitalism of certain people's identities or roles. The self-made man described in the Horatio Alger stories and the celebrity become important characters within contemporary capitalism, heroized as the ultimate embodiment of humanity and thus worthy of love.[221] O'Donovan characterizes this type of love (or better put, distortion of love) as "erotic subordination" in which the "beautiful and the strong" become models for the "weak and impressionable."[222] This is a possessive love that seeks a share in the valorized trait identified in the other and is contingent upon that exemplar's continuing possession of that characteristic. For our purposes, such love signifies an attraction to the beauty of power (or what capitalist societies deem as such), replacing a proper understanding of all people as equally neighbors called by God to share in a communion of love that includes other human beings along with the rest of creation.

Many thinkers have also worried that love of neighbor becomes simply a means to enjoy God or go to heaven. Augustine's language of *uti*, often translated into English as "use," would seem to support this position. The neighbor is instrumentalized such that genuine love towards one's fellow, finite, human creature is actually precluded. Furthermore (and here we touch on the nub of the issue from the point of view of this study), an economic logic of *quid pro quo* appears to creep into the God-human relationship insofar as a *self-generated* love of neighbor is a means to get something from God, namely salvation and communion. Accepting the premise that a self-generating love of neighbor indeed merits salvation from God, but uneasy with the instrumentalization of the neighbor that comes with a selfish motivation for one's own

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[221] The notion of societal roles or characters echoes MacIntyre's discussion of the manager, the aesthete, and the therapist in Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Third Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 23-35.

[222] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 229. This possessive love is often identified with *eros* and opposed to *agape*, a move famously made by Anders Nygren in the 20th-century. However, as Paul Blowers points out, there is a positive notion of *eros* in the Christian tradition, dating to the Patristic transformation of neo-Platonic sources whereby *eros* is harnessed and transformed by *agape*. See his "The Dialectics and Therapeutics of Desire in Maximus the Confessor" *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011): 438-439.

beatification, the solution that is proposed is to self-generate a love of the neighbor completely sundered from any motivations of "getting into heaven" even if, indeed, getting into heaven or receiving beatitude are what one receives from loving the neighbor.[223]

Despite their differences, these positions assume that communion with God or getting into heaven is something we merit from God on the basis of the quality or motivations of a *self-generated love*. But to love one's neighbor out of a *quid pro quo* logic whereby the quality of what we generate *by our own autonomous power* merits a corresponding response by God is already problematic because it operates with a false understanding of human salvation, even before we consider the question of whether an instrumental love of neighbor compromises her particularity. As we saw in Chapter Two, God does not operate according to an economic logic of *quid pro quo*, by which I mean a reward or payment based on the quality of human acts *generated by autonomous human power*. Of course, insofar as love of neighbor is part of life in the Spirit, the life of sanctification, it is part of what Christians mean when they speak of "salvation." Salvation, in other words, cannot be reduced to a notion of justification cut off from sanctification, or the life of obedience in the Spirit that culminates in deification.[224] But the life of obedience, along with faith in God's gracious, unflinching, and unmerited "yes" to the human being in forgiveness, is itself a gift from God. Loving one's neighbor *as a self-originating act* motivated by a desire to receive something for oneself from God does not make sense in the first place, since the love that is given to the neighbor itself is a gift from God, not a self-generated currency. It is part of the Spirit's ongoing work conforming human desires, and hence the

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[223] Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 111.

[224] For an influential, contemporary version of this argument, see N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Book II (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), Parts III and IV.

human will as the enactment of human nature itself, to God's will in the human man Jesus Christ. Once again, God does not work through this economic logic of *quid pro quo*.[225]

A similar point can be made with regards to human love of God. To protect love of God from a *quid pro quo* logic, whereby I love God so as to "get something," namely beatitude, critics of this position embrace a notion of loving God only for the sake of God.[226] But again we simply cannot love God in order to receive the beatific vision, in the first place, at least if we speak of this love as something that, motivation and all, is something that is unilaterally ours, which we then give to God in order to receive something back. This is because the triune God approaches us in Jesus Christ, calling us to trust and obey his word of faithfulness to the creation. For Christians, the God who cannot be grasped by human powers is the same God who makes God's self known as God-for-us. For this reason, we simply cannot love the triune God by our own power – that is, outside of this existentially involving relationship initiated by God. This invalidates talk of needing to love God only for the sake of God apart from what God does for us. Indeed, there is something attractive, even beautiful, in God relating to us in this personal way—a beauty whereby God draws us into communion with God's very life. In this way God

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[225] If the quality of love does matter for salvation, this quality is a gift from God, not something self-generated. If we keep the language of merit, debt and payment we might put it as follows: if the quality of love merits salvation this is because the capacity for the quality of love stems from an original gift of God and thus the "merit" human beings accrue is itself preveniently provided by God and ordained to be meritorious by God, making the language of debt in response to that merit a matter of God being indebted to God based on God's own prevenient activity and ordination. Such acts are meritorious precisely because they display God's glory, God's gracious love as the source and end of those acts, indeed that those acts are not meritorious in the sense of human, self-generated action eliciting something from God. This undoing of a human-fueled notion of merit can be further strengthened by a notion of the Holy Spirit empowering those capacities that are the brought into being by a gift of an original token of grace. One can see this logic and the playing with the language of debt, payment, and merit in a manner that at least goes *some way* to subtly deconstructing them in Aquinas' discussion questions 113 and 114 of *ST* 1.2.

[226] For an engagement with such positions, see Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship,* 241-363.

desires (and thus calls) us to be those who in love give back what we have received as a gift of grace. It is this love that is constitutive of human flourishing.[227]

All of that being said, what about the concern over instrumentalization – that the human person is not really loved in her particularity, because it is God who is the true object of love? Even if love of the neighbor does not operate according to a human economic logic of exchange within God's economy, is it not the case that the human being is occluded in her particularity, and instead loved as one who has a meaning imposed on her? In other words, in this loving of the neighbor in Christ do we now presume to *possess* the true identity of the neighbor, thus justifying her coercion into alignment with the true identity that we "see" by looking through her to Christ? The answer is "no". As Rowan Williams writes,

> to 'use' the love of neighbor or the love we have for our own bodies (a favorite example of Augustine's) is simply to allow the capacity for gratuitous or self-forgetful *dilectio* opened up in these and other such loves to be opened still further. The language of *uti* is designed to warn against an attitude towards any finite person or object that terminates their meaning in their capacity to satisfy my desire, that treats them as the end of desire, conceiving my meaning in terms of them and theirs in terms of me. 'If you settle down in that delight and remain in it, making it the end and sum of your joy, then you can be said to be enjoying it in a true and strict sense' (xxxiii); and no such cessation of desire is legitimate in relation to finite objects of love. It is painfully absurd, as well as destructive of self and others, to conclude our exploration when we are in reality still *in via*, still being formed and transformed by what we receive (xxxiii).[228]

To love the human being as one created in the *Logos* for communion with the triune God, and whose ultimate identity is only known in Christ's final judgment and rule, means that we must have epistemic and ethical humility in our encounters with the neighbor. This does not mean to dispense with Christian mission, but it does mean that we cannot terminate our knowing or our loving in a provisional identity that we deem to be definitive or final.

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[227] O'Donovan speaks of the problematic notion of salvation involving the elimination of desire as finding an anticipation in the Quietist controversy in the 17th century between Bossuet and Fénélon. See *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 245.

[228] Rowan Williams, *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 44.

Finally, let me take up the Derridean concern that in this mortal life a gift cannot be given that is truly unreciprocated and thus truly a gift. All gifts, according to this critique, are marked by the logic of economic exchange, *quid pro quo*. According to the Derridean logic, to love one's neighbor always results in some kind of benefit redounding to me, even if that transaction does not involve any explicit *quid pro quo*.[229] The problem with Derrida's logic when applied to finite, human creatures is that this is not how gift-giving works according to the Christian understanding. A love that is attentive to the particularity of the other, that seeks their flourishing, but also communion and fellowship, is a good that redounds to me. Mutuality between human beings in and through Christ is a good for the giver too. It is part of their flourishing, and it is good that in loving the neighbor they "receive" the good of knowing that they are living into their own flourishing by doing so. There are of course all kinds of sinful desires that motivate human beings to relate lovingly to their neighbor, so that they receive something back. The desire to make others beholden to me, the need to feel needed, or to assuage guilt might all be part of my desire to relate lovingly to my neighbors. Ongoing struggle against sin in the life of the Spirit would involve the struggle against these motivations that likely also distort the enactment of neighbor love. But the Spirit does not purge all "benefits" that human beings receive in loving their neighbors. As finite creatures whose lives are marked by lack, it is good that human beings genuinely seek to love their neighbors and promote their flourishing, and to receive the "knowledge" back that doing so is part of what it means for them to flourish. Loving one's neighbor simply out of a desire to flourish oneself would of course be problematic (although it is debatable whether such love could be counted as love in the first place). Thus, human love of neighbor is relatively unconditional, but not purely so. In its

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[229] For what follows, see Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 134-136.

relative unconditionality, human love is an analogy of God's love for human beings, made

possible by God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is only *relatively*

unconditional, partly because of sin, but also partly because this is what it means to be a finite

creature marked by lack, who has needs that are not bad – specifically, to know what its

flourishing consists in, to seek that flourishing in loving others, and then to "receive" the

knowledge that one is living into one's flourishing. The notion of a purely altruistic giving,

complexly devoid of self-reference, even proper self-reference, is not part of human flourishing.

As David Kelsey writes,

> Perhaps this reflects the depth grammar of Jesus' injunction, "You shall love your
> neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). In any case, I suggest, it
> shows theological irrelevance of debates about the nature and, indeed, very possibility of
> purely altruistic human relations with fellow creatures. It is theologically misleading to
> construe the love of neighbor that is appropriate human response to God's *agape* in terms
> of altruistic relations and behaviors in the first place. "Altruism" does not define the love
> as neighbor enjoined by New Testament texts. Consequently, the outcome of debates
> about the concept of altruistic behavior cannot be decisive for the theological notion of
> human love as neighbor love.[230]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to develop a dynamic account of human redemption by first

examining repentance, dispossession, and faith. I then linked this discussion of repentance,

dispossession, and faith to transformation in community and love of God and love of neighbor

via an engagement with the work of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. From there,

I shifted into examining the implications of this discussion for interrupting the consumer

spirituality mentioned in Chapter One, where faith is disconnected from dispossession-in-

repentance and the self is affirmed as it is and as "possessing" God as an object to be used for its

own self-determined ends. Finally, I explored how transformation towards love of God and

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[230] David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 712. This point has also been made by feminist, womanist, and *Mujerista* theologians.

neighbor interrupts problematic understandings of love and human relationality shaped by a contemporary, globalizing capitalist imaginary.

Human redemption is, in sum, a dying of the sinful self and living into a new creation. This new creation is receptive and attentive, lovingly giving and putting to death, in the patience of the Spirit, distorted desires. Against the human being in retreat, holding on to what he can grab (whether it be a God of his own making, a vision of desire that reinforces his consumer, proprietary self and lifestyle, or a neighbor who is used, discarded and finally excluded) comes the Spirit of the kingdom who conforms us to a new center, a new leader, that is not ours to control or make, that grafts us into Christ's own fleshly body, receiving from the Father, opened to give and receive through others in the particular identities that we are called to be.

Chapter Four: Possessive Individualism, Human Flourishing, and the New Monasticism

In Chapter Three, I discussed a life-encompassing orientation of trust towards the triune God who forgives and re-centers our identities in Jesus Christ; the socially mediated, embodied dimension of the Spirit; and the ongoing transformation of the human person's life in Christ by the power of that Spirit towards love of God and love of neighbor. In doing so, I have argued that communion with the triune God is the ultimate good--the source and end of human flourishing--towards which human beings are to orient themselves. I want to now concretize this discussion of discipleship and human flourishing by turning to the renewed interest in Christian monasticism by lay people in the present ("neo-monasticism"). In other words, I want to move towards maximum concreteness, proceeding from my more general reflections on the form of discipleship (i.e., its basic praxiological criteria) in Chapter Three to a set of concrete proposals in line with those reflections as well as with the underlying theological anthropology developed in Chapter Two. While monasticism may seem like a strange movement to turn to in the 21st century because of the concern that its invocation might be little more than nostalgia for a mythical European Middle Ages, I believe that a critical analysis of monasticism in the present can draw out with particular depth Christian discipleship and flourishing in communion with God in a manner that is consistent with the re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ, and the ongoing transformation of the human person's life in Christ by the power of the Spirit towards love of God and love of neighbor. I will begin by discussing Rod Dreher's *Benedict Option* and then turn to Wes Markofski's study of what he terms, following others, "New Monasticism." I argue that the Benedict Option--while not inconsistent with the re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ and the transformation of the human person's life by the power of the Spirit -- attenuates these resonances by making both the identity of the neighbor and of God, a

"possession" of the community. In so doing, it mitigates proper love towards the neighbor and

faith in a God who can never be owned but who instead gives to us even while drawing us

forward in discernment. By contrast, I argue that the New Monasticism, particularly in its urban

manifestation in "dead zones" within the global economy, is more consistent with the

dispossession and re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ and the ongoing transformation of

human life in Christ by the power of that Spirit in a manner that avoids making either the identity

of the neighbor or of God a "possession" of the community.

The Benedict Option

Russian Orthodox writer Rod Dreher situates his proposal against the background of the

post-1960s culture wars in North Atlantic, particularly American, democracies and the failure of

what he variously labels as Christian "traditionalists," "values voters," and "conservatives" to

effectively counter the changes in attitudes towards family, gender, and sexuality.[231] He argues

that Christian traditionalists have made unfortunate compromises with capitalism, consumerism,

and suburbia, and that the American religious right has shown itself to be morally exhausted, not

least in its endorsement of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential race. Furthermore, in light of

the decline of American civil religion, and the larger project of American Christendom, in which

the Christian churches have often legitimated the nation-state, as well as the capitalist economy,

Christians find themselves for the first time a minority in American life – a status that Dreher,

following Stanley Hauerwas, terms "resident aliens."[232]

Dreher's analysis of the American situation extends into a larger discussion of global

transformations affecting American life. Post-Cold War developments in the economy,

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[231] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), 78. For a helpful survey of the literature of the culture wars in the United States, their relationship to economics and class as well as religion and postmaterial concerns about identity (racial, gender, sexual, etc.), see David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[232] *Ibid.*, 86.

including globalization, automation, and digitalization, have given rise to new populist-nationalist politics that promote racism and the idolatry of a secular, national community. These new populist-nationalist movements are, Dreher argues, the ironic expressions of a larger turn towards a politics centered on identity and recognition, rather than a unified politics – let alone a unified Christian politics.

Finally, Dreher speaks of the decline of Western civilization and its Christian underpinnings. He displays in his work a warm attitude towards Judaism, but there is no recognition of the influence of Islam on the development of what has come to be called "Western Civilization," or any other influences, for that matter, beyond the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman one. In fact, Dreher speaks of Islam in negative terms, always focusing on the threat to North Atlantic societies posed by what he sees as a religion innately prone to extremism.

In response to these problems, Dreher draws on a wide variety of prominent thinkers including Ephraim Radner, Charles Taylor, C.S. Lewis, David Bentley Hart, Zygmunt Bauman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christian Smith, Wendell Berry, Robert Nisbet, Stanley Hauerwas, and Phillip Rieff. While the title of his work, *The Benedict Option*, draws on Benedict of Nursia's *Rule*, and while Dreher examines that rule in the opening chapters of his book, his point of departure for this title and project is deeply indebted to Alisdair MacIntyre's closing comments in *After Virtue*, as well as Pope Benedict XVI's statements about why he assumed the name "Benedict" upon assuming the papacy. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre argues that the lack of a coherent moral vocabulary and shared narrative for adjudicating ethical disputes, the failure of a universal Enlightenment morality, and managerial and therapeutic attitudes towards self and society, all contribute to the fragmentation of postmodern, North Atlantic capitalist societies. Rather than opt for a Nietzschean triumph of the will, with its nihilistic attitude towards truth,

MacIntyre instead proposes that we turn to communities of shared practices, extended through time and space, fostering coherent traditions that narratively embed the self in an ethically meaningful universe.

Drawing on these thinkers, Dreher proposes that what must be built in postmodern North Atlantic societies is a monastic culture that is both in the world, yet not of it. Rather than focus on a unified national community forged through the imposition of (what are held to be) Christian ethical commitments on the whole population, Dreher, following Yuval Levin, speaks of "communities of like-minded citizens."[233] The plural is key here. Instead of one national community, there must be many communities of close-knit "like-minded citizens" witnessing to the larger culture in which these communities find themselves embedded. For Dreher, these communities constitute the church and should imitate the spirit of the monastery with its 1) emphasis on an integral faith touching on all aspects of a person's life and orienting that person to Jesus Christ in whatever they do, and 2) mutual commitment to Christ (the *telos* of these communities). While firm boundaries are needed to distinguish this Benedictine church from the outside world, these borders are not so much material as cultural. Dreher contrasts Christian communities with gated communities, widespread in the global South amongst the middle and upper classes, and increasingly common within both urban and suburban locales in the USA. One problem with these communities is that they are "lifestyle enclaves," not committed to common goods that transcend the self, but rather fostering private goods for the self and one's primary "tribalized" reference group. Dreher suggests that borders should instead foster common practices and common institutions in contradistinction to a fragmented society.[234]

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[233] *Ibid.*, 83-84.

[234] *Ibid.*, 94. On this point, see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

Life in the Benedictine church must therefore be characterized by both catechetical and ascetical practices. Following L. Gregory Jones, catechesis involves learning to describe God, the self, and the world in distinctively Christian terms. So, for example, Luther's catechism becomes more than a resource for memorizing propositions; within the life of the Christian community, it helps focus and channel the mind, forming the lens by which the catechumen reads scripture, learning how to descriptively identify the one with whom she has to do in faith and worship. In turn, through catechetical formation, the narrative of her own self and the world is formed, and better informed, with regards to God and God's relationship to the world and to the self. Catechesis opens up the mind, which is never disjoined from the body, to deeper knowledge of the good.

Along with catechesis, Dreher points to the importance of ascesis. Ascesis is a training of desire, bringing the desires under control and harnessing them to serve higher purposes. Important here is the eschewing of various material pleasures so as to properly relate to the creation, rather than endorsing the view that desire is innately problematic in itself in a way that might seem to call into question the goodness of those creatures that are the object of our desires.

Both catechesis and ascesis take place in and through the home as well as through the church's liturgy.[235] For Dreher, the home is best understood as a domestic monastery, with parents assuming a role analogous to the abbot in a Benedictine monastery. Children are to obey their parents, just as the monks are to obey their abbot. Obedience is complemented by dialogue between children and parents, preventing an authoritarian dynamic from developing. Children learn to refine their thoughts and to deliberate regarding their desires, so as to align their wills

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[235] Alasdair MacIntyre writes, "part of what we need to learn as children and adolescents is how to distinguish between those of our desires that are desires for genuine goods from those that are not. Failures in making this distinction both distort our character formation and lead to the frustration of those desires that are most important for our human flourishing (MacIntyre, 13). See Alasdair MacIntyre, "How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary," in *Virtue and Politics: Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism*, eds. Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2011), 11-19.

with God's. Furthermore, repentance and forgiveness are to characterize the relationship

between parents and children, since the monastery is for the formation of the abbot too. Just as

Benedictines structure all of life around prayer, while engaging in acts of hospitality directed

towards the larger world, so should the life of the family be structured around love of God and

love of neighbor. Rather than idolizing an instrumental-rational stance towards life that seeks to

manipulate science, law, money, images, and words for profit, glory, and status, Christian

communities of formation should seek to re-form these endeavors to serve God and neighbor.[236]

This dovetails with Dreher's emphasis on the liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, which is held up

as a material means to feed our whole body, not just some interior "spiritual" realm.

Furthermore, Dreher follows Hans Boersma in identifying "sacramentality" as "participation" in

the eternal, with creation itself.[237] This sacramental understanding of creation, Dreher argues.

overcomes the atomism of created objects in liquid modernity by relating them to a common

ontological grounding in God's activity and teleological orientation to fulfillment in God's own

life.[238]

  Dreher's *Benedict Option* has multiple strengths that correspond with the general themes

regarding a Christian vision of human flourishing that I laid out in the previous chapter. He

seeks to foster a life of trust towards the triune God who forgives and re-centers our identities in

Jesus Christ; he is attentive to the socially mediated, embodied character of the Spirit's activity;

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[236] Dreher, 149.
[237] Dreher, 108.
[238] James K.A. Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Publishing, 2009), (to engage another work that Dreher follows), speaks of the sacramental in terms of a more intensified presence of God, a move with which I disagree (149). To understand the problem with this perspective, we must refer to the Incarnation. In the Incarnation, the life of a particular man—Jesus of Nazareth—is revelatory of who God is. God identifies God's self with this man's life. However, God does not relate to Jesus' humanity in a greater, quantitative degree. Such a claim would be inappropriate to describe the Incarnation, since God, as *non aliud*, is able to be fully Incarnate without falling under the creaturely predicate of quantity. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true of the sacraments by which the Incarnate God comes to us again and again, not in terms of a quantitative increase in God's presence, but in a new mode, that of created matter which already manifests its eschatological consummation.

and his views are consistent with the idea that the aim of this activity is the transformation of a person's life towards love of God and love of neighbor. He sees faith as trust shaping all aspects of life, making it clear that this faith is given both to the community and to the individual believer. Although Dreher does not speak explicitly about the work of the Spirit, his account is compatible with a notion of the Spirit working in and through embodied, socially-mediated contexts to draw human beings into practices of love of God and love of neighbor. His understanding of catechesis provides an account of how, where, and by whom induction into the narrative of the Christian community centered in Christ takes place, especially for children. In light of the corrosive effects of capitalist practice on traditions, and the difficulties that ensue for narrating a meaningful, coherent identity, this is essential. While the full contours of each person's identity in Christ are known only at the eschaton, induction into the Christian story provides a working unity in Christ for each person's identity.[239] Furthermore, the possibility of a provisional unity of identity provided by the Christian narrative, is able to incorporate the Christian practice of repentance and forgiveness, whereby what is thought to be the self is undone and re-centered in Christ, a dynamic Dreher sees as critical to life in the Christian community, including between parents and children.[240] As L. Gregory Jones argues, unlike Alasdair MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue*, the narrative unity of life in Christ does not "entail a linear conception for the narrative."[241] In light of sin and the fact "that self-deception has such a powerful hold on people's lives… the presence of other persons, texts, and God" will challenge the agent to repent, and thus "to tell the narrative of her life less untruthfully."[242] In Christ we

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[239] Similarly, the unity of the Christian tradition belongs to God and is only revealed eschatologically.
[240] Dreher, 128-129.
[241] Jones, *Transformed Judgment*, 40.
[242] *Ibid.*

need not fear the sort of dispossession of our presumed securities that inevitably comes with repentance, because Christ himself bestows the unity and goodness of our identities.

Despite these important points in Dreher's analysis, I want to also draw attention to a troubling dimension of Dreher's formulation of the Benedict Option. The issue to which I want to focus on emerges when Dreher calls on Christians to avoid idolizing the family and the community. While this is welcome point, the ongoing discernment of the good being sought is underdeveloped and thus incomplete since he does not attend to those on the margins of the Benedictine community or to those who are outside of it (like Muslims, whose religion Dreher caricatures as violent). Even though he affirms the importance of a church that recognizes people of color, there is no notion that they might challenge the Christian community to ponder anew who Jesus Christ and who they are in light of that reflection.[243] Nor is there awareness that "inclusion" often involves dynamics of homogenization that erase difference to bring the other under "the same," which becomes its own "possessive" dynamic. Finally (as I have already noted) Dreher's vision does not pay any attention to the potential significance of LGBTQI persons and Islam, both of which function for him as part of the "outside" against which the Benedictine church defines itself.[244]

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[243] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 80-81.
[244] Dreher lacks an adequate understanding of *privilege* and *intersectional dynamics* in the formation of identity within a field of power relations, in this case contemporary, globalizing American society. He is not attentive, in other words, to how a subordinate status—being a committed Christian in a consumer society—simultaneously involves the inhabiting of a superordinate one: being a Christian church identified clearly in his mind with white heterosexual American Christians *vis a vis* American Muslims and LGBTQI persons, as well as persons of color.

This is a problem that extends beyond Dreher, especially affecting those authors who turn to an ecclesial ethics and politics in opposition to the nation-state and contemporary capitalism. One of the doctrinal weaknesses of these thinkers is that they lack a robust emphasis on the Trinity. By focusing on discipleship in relationship to *Jesus*, they fail to see how identifying God occurs in *Christ* in the power of the *Spirit*, which means that while Jesus' story is central to discerning his presence to the community, his identity includes taking account of the wider creation. For a careful argued account along these lines, see McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005).

At the same time, Christian communities on the margins, in promoting a strategic essentialism as a means to valorize and resignify an ascribed and performed marginalized identity like "black," to take one example, must be

Dreher's proposal thus risks making the identity of Jesus Christ a possession of the community, in the sense that Jesus is conceived as a presence internal to the community, and thus captive to its established practices and socio-cultural location. As I have stated in Chapter Three with regards to Gregory of Nyssa as well as in the discussion of Chapter Two, God is wholly otherwise, freely revealing God's self to human beings. While the community is called to discern who God is in Jesus Christ, as witnessed to by scripture, the community can never behave as if the question of Christ's presence is settled, cutting off ongoing discernment, making Christ their possession such that his name and life close off attention to the dynamic nature of their own identities in Christ; the sin that marks the practices they enact to faithfully respond to Christ; and the inevitable exclusions that come with human life in community.[245] Rather, as I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Two, Christ as resurrected freely makes himself available to the Christian community through practices of discernment in scripture and tradition, even as the inherent freedom of the risen one means that the community can never stop the conversation of discernment. Nor should the members of the community turn their gaze away from attention to those voices from the margins (both within and outside the church) that might open new

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attentive to their own blindnesses and occlusions. The womanist critique of black theology draws this out powerfully.

[245] Dreher speaks of the vocation of the human as being "joined to Christ" in which we "live in harmony with the divine will" and participate in the "Triune God, in Whom we live and move and have our being" (149). In accordance with this vocation human beings are to be imbued with a sense of order, meaning, and continuity. Concretely, Dreher affirms the position of educator Martin Cochran, "a national leader in the classical Christian school movement" whereby education is about the "passing on of one culture in particular: the culture of the West, and for most of the time, the Christian West" (149). For Dreher, all things cohere in Christ, and the harmonious order that results is best articulated by the culture of the "Christian West," which is to be passed on through education. The danger here is that Christ becomes the legitimizer of a creation order that is too concretely identified with one particular cultural tradition. This occludes the need for ongoing discernment of what such an order might be in the first place, carried out through encounter with people and traditions outside the boundaries of what Dreher identifies as the "Christian West." In turn, the ongoing *process* of discernment of the one in whom the order coheres and is present to the Christian Community, namely Jesus Christ, risks begin forgotten, instead promoting a picture of Christ bent towards the legitimization of the very particular understanding of "the Christian West" that Dreher and Cochran promote.

horizons for understanding who Jesus Christ is, and thereby how those once forgotten or

excluded are related to the Christian community. As Rowan Williams writes,

> [the Church] will have found out *what it is itself saying*, in absorbing this
> scriptural exegesis from its own margins. And part of my thesis is that the
> interpretation of the world 'within the scriptural framework' is intrinsic to the
> *Church's* critical self-discovery. In judging the world, by its confrontation of
> the world with its own dramatic script, the Church also judges itself.[246]

Here Williams is saying that engagement with the marginalized constantly turns attention to a

God who is portrayed in scripture as identifying with those on the margins. More specifically,

Jesus as the Christ identifies first and foremost with those who are excluded and on the periphery

of the Christian community and society.[247] Engagement with the world and its marginalized

persons pushes Christian communities to constantly examine their own authoritative renderings

of who God is as revealed in Jesus Christ. In turn, by listening to the world and its marginalized

persons, Christian communities can speak a word of judgment to that dimension of worldly

reality that ignores and degrades the marginalized.

To be fair, Dreher critiques Christians for being sinfully misguided, lousy believers,

hypocrites etc. Through a renewed turn to Jesus Christ lived out in the intentional manner

Dreher calls the Benedict Option, Christians will show the world the truth through the goodness

and beauty of their lives. As he puts it, "the example of service, to the poor, the weak, and the

hungry, will serve as a conveyance of beauty and goodness in witness to the secular world."[248]

Without, however, attention to communal discernment through listening to voices on the

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[246] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 31.

[247] See Ian A. McFarland, *Listening to the Least: Doing Theology from the Outside In* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1998).

[248] Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 119. This missional emphasis is vital to remember for any theology or community calling itself Christian. A receptivity to transformation by the neighbor, including the non-Christian neighbor, cannot preclude commitment to truth, and the ability to challenge, in a spirit of "humble firmness" the beliefs and practices of others. See Gavin D'Costa's critique of comparative theology on this score, despite his largely supportive comments in Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 40.

margins, and hearing a word of judgment against a settled understanding of Christ's presence

within the community as well as the identity of the community and its members that follows

from that understanding, Dreher fails to see that "in attempting to show the world a critical truth,

[the church] shows itself to itself as Church also…an activity in which the Christian community

is itself enlarged in understanding and even in some sense evangelized."[249] Dreher's proposal,

for all of its positive elements, is finally at risk of falling into what Douglas John Halls terms

"unreality." He explains this by stating,

> A kind of unreality clings to the churches (with – fortunately – some notable exceptions),
> and no amount of theological or sociological apologetics can seem to remove it. It has
> been my experience that this unreality is removed--or at least countered--only where the
> aforementioned distance between church and world, faith and life, gospel and context is
> in some real measure overcome, or, speaking positively, only where the church lives
> unprotectedly in the midst of the world, where faith is a dialogue with itself (not only an
> internal dialogue of the community of faith itself), where gospel engages and is engaged
> by context. [250]

Dreher's Benedict Option, without this dimension of ongoing discernment, judgment,

communal repentance, and openness to being evangelized in the course of its own mission, all of

which require it to look beyond its established boundaries, risks falling into Christian

triumphalism and eschatological closure. The church fails to cultivate a robust sense that it never

possesses God-in-Christ, and that the power of the Spirit only conforms human beings to Christ

by drawing them into ongoing discernment of who Jesus as the Christ is. For this reason, the

shape of the full manifestation of the Kingdom of God remains far more unknown and open than

Dreher seems to suggest, since, while it is inextricably linked to the identity of the Son who is

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[249] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 31. Also see Ian A. McFarland, *Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropolo*gy (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 83-102.

[250] Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 177.

given all things by the Father, his full identity remains beyond human beings' ultimate ability to possess it.

This failure to come to terms with dynamics of exclusion within Christian communities, and its implications for discerning the presence of Christ in the church weakens the Benedict Option's ability to interrupt and challenge capitalist practices that work against a Christian vision of human flourishing. While possessive individualist dynamics, in one sense, find a vigorous opponent in Dreher's proposal, in a different sense, his proposal fails to grasp the complexity of the task of challenging an individualist anthropology. The types of homes we create are important, to take one example, but so are decisions about where we live such that children learn to reach across social divides to extend neighbor love and forge partnerships that potentially expand the imagination of what discipleship entails in a contemporary capitalist setting. In short, not only is the transformation of desire within Christian community essential, but such transformation is only possible through engagement in relationships with those who are excluded and marginalized in the contemporary economy (through attention to intersectional forces of race, national origins, citizenship status, and gender), because it is with them that the one with whom Christian communities have to do, namely Jesus Christ, is made present.

Urban Monasticism

In light of my concerns about Dreher's proposal for a Benedict Option, I want to turn to the different paradigm of the new monasticism, particularly sociologist Wes Markofski's study of the urban monastery movement in his recent *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*. While Dreher's proposal risks being insular and triumphalistic, Markofski draws attention to communities of Christian formation who live on the margins of society, fostering greater attention to non-Christian neighbors and dynamics of social exclusion

in globalizing capitalism.[251] This makes it a helpful corrective to proposals like Dreher's, while

still being consistent with the basic dynamic of dispossession and the re-centering of our

identities in Jesus Chris on the one hand, and the embodied transformation of the human person's

life in Christ by the power of the Spirit that I identified in the previous chapter.

Markofski's work is a study of an urban monastic community in a large Midwestern

American city from 2006-2011. Markofski is especially interested in new monasticism and

American evangelicalism, in part because the majority of practitioners of new monasticism come

from evangelical Christian backgrounds. As he writes,

> The number of new monastic communities has more than tripled in size since 2010,
> which now includes over 200 communities in 34 US states and 12 foreign nations. The
> actual number of communities that identify with the new monasticism is likely much
> larger, and, similar to the 'Emerging Church' movement, the high national profile of
> several new monastic movement leaders in the evangelical world means that a significant
> majority of American evangelicals have been exposed to the movement. New monastic
> leaders have captured national media attention from a wide range of secular and religious
> outlets, including CNN, *The Boston Globe*, SPIN, Esquire, Fox News, Al Jazeera, and
> NPR; and have inspired lead articles in evangelicalism's flagship periodical *Christianity
> Today* about how new monastic leaders are 'dominating the Christian best-seller lists'
> with their 'radical' critique of evangelical politics and religious culture.[252]

Increased attention by lay people to monastic practices and discipleship can also be seen in

Catholic, Orthodox, and mainline Protestant churches, and parallels to monastic practice can be

found in the Catholic Worker movement and in Mennonite communities.[253] By definition, the

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[251] Wes Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[252] Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism,* 15-16. Markofski posits a five-fold typology of American evangelicalism: The Christian Right associated with figures like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson; the mega-church movement, associated with ministers like Rick Warren; the Christian Left associated with Jim Wallis and *Sojourners*; the Emergent Church movement; and the New Monasticism. Markofski argues that the New Monasticism shares much in common with the Christian Left and the Emergent Church movement, while consciously distinguishing itself from the Christian Right and the megachurch streams. One of his principle arguments as a sociologist of religion is that the identity of the New Monasticism is formed in a Bourdieuian field of struggle. Incidentally, Kathryn Tanner draws heavily on Bourdieu to make similar points within a discussion of theological method and the postmodern, cultural dimensions of religious communities in Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997).

[253] To take one example, renewed attention to the rule and example of St. Francis of Assisi amongst both religious and lay Catholics (including Pope Francis I himself), as well as Lutherans (the Order of Lutheran

new monasticism is a movement of *resourcement*, seeking a renewal of the whole church and its mission of witness to the world through the retrieval of premodern sources within the Christian tradition. This should come as no surprise, since the foundational texts of monasticism in Christianity go back to the early church and its own navigation of empire in the early centuries of the Common Era. Markofski notes how the communities he studied referred to the dessert fathers (and mothers), medieval Western monasticism, 18th century German Brethren communities, and 20th century Catholic socialism.[254] Furthermore, many urban monastics reveal an eagerness to integrate theological reflection into their spirituality, often embracing a robust social Trinitarianism. Markofski observes that "urban monastery participants unanimously agree that the message of the Bible, the 'God Story,' is that God is a relational, communal being overflowing with love, and that God's intention for people is their lives would likewise be characterized by loving relationship with God and others, thereby reflecting and participating in the divine 'community of love' modeled in the Trinity."[255] This dialogue with premodern sources, as well as scripture, links urban monastics to traditional cenobitic communities.

As in traditional cenobitic communities, urban monastics hold much of what they have in common, following the social ethic described in the Book of Acts (2:42-47). Implicit in this practice is also an understanding of how wealth is a potentially dangerous temptation, a view long-attested to in the Christian tradition. Gregory of Nyssa and his brother Basil, for example, knew from firsthand experience as members of the upper class in fourth-century Cappadocia the dangers that wealth posed to the life of discipleship, with the understanding of the "good life" in

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Franciscans) and Anglicans (Anglican Franciscans) around the globe. Quite simply, the understanding of new monasticism must not be cut off from the broader catholic church.

[254] Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*, 68.

[255] *Ibid*., 188. It should be noted that I do not follow this notion of modeling, if by that is meant an attempt to base human community on the relationships that the triune persons have with each other rather than Christ's relationship to other people. See Tanner's discussion in *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207-246.

their social milieu centered on self-absorbed leisure in the form of hunting, public baths, and horse-back riding.[256] They knew how one's class and status position—one's place in the structure of relations of production to use Marxist terminology—shaped a whole mode of being in the world, down to dress, bodily comportment and mannerisms. For Gregory and Basil, a life focused on wealth and its accumulation detracts from service to the neighbor while actively turning the human person away from love of God in favor of pursuing the myth that human flourishing consists in the attainment of wealth, status, and leisured entertainment. Thus, in following the example of figures like Basil and Gregory, urban monasticism engages in a "rejection of the American Dream" insofar as that dream consists in the pursuit of money, wealth, and success" for its own sake.[257] *Pleonexia*, the desire for more too often promoted as a virtue in contemporary globalizing capitalism, is curbed.

Urban monastics also engage in a daily rhythm set by prayer, corporate rule, and discernment in community regarding God's will. All of these practices become sites of prayerful receptivity to the work of the Holy Spirit, expanding the moral universe and transforming desires to the good that is God and the neighbor. Prayer itself becomes a de-centering and dispossessive act, whereby the Holy Spirit aligns the will of the human agent with the will of Christ, re-centering and re-directing desire towards God's inbreaking Kingdom, attentive to the unique vocation to which each practitioner is called. In essence, prayer becomes a journey of listening and discerning, aided by life in community, how one's desires are to be related to the desire for God, and how penultimate goods are to be imagined, and transformed, by the ultimate good, who has become incarnate in Christ.

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[256] Basil the Great, *On Social Justice*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 2009).

[257] *Ibid.*, 171.

Through prayer, urban monasticism challenges the notion that what Sarah Coakley calls "submission and silence" before God makes one unfree.[258] If freedom is conceived as absolute negative freedom, in which one is free to do as one pleases, with no constraints or guiding will, then this notion of freedom as submission to God is indeed a manifestation of unfreedom. But this is to fall into the trap of dominant understandings of freedom perpetuated by capitalist practice, as well as to the moral and social imaginary of possessive individualism that is attached to those practices. Because Christians believe that true human flourishing involves love of God and neighbor—the true *telos* of human life—to choose willy-nilly is not freedom at all. Rather, freedom is alignment of one's will with God's own so that one may live into being the person that one is created and called to be. Submission to God, specifically submission to the Father as the Spirit conforms us to our specific place in Christ's body liberates us from sin, albeit in a process that (as discussed in the previous chapter) is neither linear nor bereft of pain. This negative freedom from sin and anxiety—wrongly ordered and distorted desire pulling the will--is instrumental to a positive freedom *for* God and the neighbor. Far from promoting a withdrawal from the neighbor or an overly solipsistic obsession with one's desire in a capitalist society disconnected from desire directed towards the marginalized, the practice of submission that is prayer becomes a site where God's prevenient agency in the power of the Spirit opens up urban monastic practitioners to engage in work on behalf of, and in dialogue with, excluded and marginalized neighbors. Of course, Dreher's model would not be opposed to this pattern of submission either. The crucial difference, however, is that the urban monastic communities

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[258] See Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002). For a comparative religious perspective, see Saba Mahmood's study of the Islamic piety movement in contemporary Egypt, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), and how it challenges both liberal, Western feminism and the modern capitalist notion of the citizen central to the imaginary of the nation-state.

discussed by Markofski bring this pattern of submission explicitly into the abandoned places of empire.

Dispossession and recentering, and transformation and renewal of desire in the prayerful waiting upon the Spirit—two of the themes that have occupied us in the last two chapters open out into a third theme--love towards the neighbor, particularly the neighbor living on the margins. Not only does this love seek to create relationships that transcend *quid pro quo*, it seeks to break the self-enclosed "possession" of the other's identity. And this is linked to an implicit critique of a shallow consumer religious expression. As Markofski writes,

> New monasticism is marked by the movement of Christians into disadvantaged urban neighborhoods to establish intentional communities across race and class lines in the 'abandoned places of Empire.' Unlike gentrification, however, their explicit or implicit goals is not to remake communities. They meet in pubs, paint nudes, and perform hip-hop in urban bars and schools to build interracial community networks and empower racially marginalized youth. They establish decentralized churches and spiritual communities that divert resources from church buildings and professional ministers to food pantries and social justice projects. They mobilize private and public resources to protect immigrant rights, support education, and fund the arts in diverse low-income neighborhoods. In each of these activities, neo-monastic evangelicals see themselves as embodying the 'true' Christian gospel while offering a prophetic critique of dominant expressions of religion and politics in America." [259]

Just as North Atlantic, especially American, fundamentalist and conservative evangelical Christianity was forged partly in reaction to the progressive, evangelical Social Gospel movement, and to the perceived threats posed by modern, urbanizing and secularizing capitalist

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[259] *Ibid.*, 15. This is in contrast to prevailing patterns of either gentrification or suburbanization within the United States. David Hollenbach, following Anthony Downs, notes how "Americans appear to believe, first, that every household has the right to live in a neighborhood populated largely by other households approximately like itself. Second, they hold that each neighborhood has the right to protect the quality of its life, its environment, and its property values by excluding groups of people that would significantly diminish these…there can be little doubt that other criteria for the desired form of homogeneity have the obvious effect of economic and class stratification and indirect racial consequences as well." See David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 53

Where there are relationships between suburban Christians and inner-city residents, there is a 'drop-in, drop-off, and drop-out cycle…outside of long-term, in-depth relational involvement. In such cases hospitality is replaced by a patron-client relational involvement that reinforces the distance between giver and receiver and so militates against genuinely listening. Instead, listening requires active involvement and commitment to a particular place and the formation of relationships in that place because building trusting and stable relationships take time and personal presence." See Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 215.

societies, so urban monasticism seeks to distance itself from fundamentalism, the American

Christian Right, and megachurch spirituality. In doing so, there are similarities with aspects of

the Social Gospel movement and the Progressive Era in late 19th- and early 20th-century

American life.[260] In particular, there are intriguing parallels to Jane Addams and the settlement

house movement that took root in 19th-century industrial cities.[261] In the contemporary age,

urban monasticism has emerged in post-industrial cities and the "dead zones" of inner cities. [262]

Like the settlement house movement, urban monastics work outside of the 'bureaucratic

economism' of 'professional charity' workers and organizations, with an emphasis on 'reciprocal

relationships' of mutual empowerment marked by giving and receiving on both sides.

　　　While urban monastics recognize the power of sin to shape desire, they also regard

dynamics of inequality and exclusion as forms of social sin. Implicit in the practices of

hospitality is recognition of how sin-talk is often used to blame the victim, thus excusing the self

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[260] The leading theologian of the American Social Gospel movement was undoubtedly Walter Rauschenbusch. See his *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Fourth Edition, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990) and *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century*, ed. Paul Rauschenbusch (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).

[261] Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*, 67.

[262] See Saskia J. Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, Fourth Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012) and William Julius Wilson**,** *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage, 1997). Both of these authors focus on the intersectional dynamics of how class, race, and gender intersect in contemporary urban landscapes.

　　　Sassen argues that global cities form transnational networks that go beyond mere competition. An emphasis on competition alone implicitly remains wedded to a state-centric analysis where countries are in competition with each other. The notion of a transnational network shows that cities like New York, London, and Tokyo often have more in common with each other (especially in terms of organizational power and a coordinated division of labor amongst themselves) than they do with their national hinterlands (e.g. the decline in importance of the Rust Belt to New York). In that sense, Sassen's argument reflects the growing importance of network theories to understand how different sociological units actually interact.

　　　Wilson, a Harvard scholar and the leading American sociologist of the inner city, attempts to move beyond a liberal emphasis on structures as the source of poverty (including asscriptive social positions and prejudiced institutions of the dominant society), at the expense of emphasizing culture, and conservative attempts to reverse the argument, by emphasizing culture (such as the values and norms of the marginalized community) at the expense of structure. Instead, Wilson argues that structural factors, namely the decline of middle class work in the post-Fordist era, have contributed to the exodus of middle class and working class African Americans from the urban core, leading to a situation of poverty where there are strong structural *and* cultural factors maintaining the underclass ghetto. These include a lack of commitment to full employment by political and economic elites, structural racism, social psychological factors like poor nutrition and limited domestic vocabulary, as well as the absence of role modeling provided by middle and working class citizens. The sources of the ghetto are thus overdetermined, and cannot be reduced to the simplistic binaries of contemporary American political discourse.

from responsibility for the neighbor. Stephen Ray, Jr. has drawn attention to how sin-talk, understood in terms of personal irresponsibility, functions to justify social exclusion.[263] The poor, for example, are seen as poor because of their own irresponsibility, and hence are labeled "takers," "the undeserving," or even "welfare queens." They are made into a "they" or "them" who are outside of the "we" or "us." Sin-talk is thus used to legitimate existing configurations of property and the market that are also legitimated by the contemporary globalizing, capitalist social imaginary. Such sin-talk also perpetuates exclusion through language that does not explicitly mention dynamics of race or class, allowing many to delude themselves into thinking that the language used to talk about the marginalized is race-neutral and thus without prejudice. In establishing relationships of inclusion, dialogue, and service to marginalized others, urban monasticism calls into question the adequacy of notions of sin linked to communal and individual projects of self-justification, exclusion, and escape from the complexity of the world and contemporary globalizing societies.

There is an important difference, however, between urban monasticism and many expressions of the social ethic of the Social Gospel, inasmuch as the latter movement tended to embrace postmillennial notions of progressive movement towards the kingdom of God.[264] That is, the Social Gospel endorsed a narrative of steady historical progress, often understood in terms of gentrification, or the conversion of those outside of the white, Protestant middle class to the norms of the dominant society. By contrast, urban monastics adopt a conscientiously dialogic and self-critical stance to those members of the larger community in which they are embedded, as well as a penitent stance towards their own participation in larger structural dynamics of

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[263] Stephen G. Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 3.

[264] With the decline of the social Gospel movement in light of the two world wars and the worldwide economic depression of the 1930's, the post-millennial ethos would live on in a secularized form in Fordist society with its managerial liberalism.

economic racism and exclusion.[265] This is not to say that they instead opt for a premillennial apocalypticism. Rather, urban monastics tend towards the majority opinion of the Christian tradition throughout history of an already/not yet eschatology. That is to say, God's kingdom has *already* been inaugurated in Christ's resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost; but that creation still awaits the full manifestation of that kingdom at "the end of time."

By not seeking shelter from those excluded by the market system in tribal, lifestyle enclaves implicitly promising protection from being undone and the false myth of a life without the struggle against sinful desire, new monasticism in urban settings displays, in a particularly intense manner, communities exploring what love of God and neighbor means in an integral sense. Indeed, it is this more robust and prioritized engagement with marginalized persons in the abandoned places of Empire that is the source of the differences with Dreher's Benedict Option. Such engagement is a recognition that God in Christ appears to us not only in the mundane flesh of a particular man, Jesus of Nazareth, but also in those ordinary places inhabited by the least of these, in places marked by the cross of suffering due to exclusion and rejection. In seeking to live a life ordered to love of God and neighbor, urban monasticism downgrades preeminent practices of competition, excessive consumption, and entrepreneurial value maximization of the self, in favor of an integral ordering of all areas of life to God in Christ, including the many different roles that characterize the human journey through time.[266] Vision is refocused and

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[265] Jane Addams' writings are more complex, with a probing grasp of the structural dimension of the plight of the poor with whom she worked in Chicago. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, ed., *The Jane Addams Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

[266] In light of the reduction of place to space, whereby the particularities of location and commitment to its people become nearly irrelevant due to the mobility of finance capital and post-Fordist production by transnational corporations, intentional communities become deeply countercultural. As Jason Mahn writes in *Becoming a Christian in Christendom: Radical Discipleship and the Way of the Cross in America's "Christian" Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), "being formed within intentional community makes such mobility less reasonable. In fact, the commitments members make to particular people inhabiting particular places, along with the

transformed and this pilgrimage of identity thus takes Luther's understanding of the various roles each person inhabits in her life and asks "how might these roles open both ourselves and the neighbor to Christ's love?," a question which points to a vocation of human flourishing centered on love of neighbor and God. Discernment of vocation is no longer about expression of a self whose source is oneself and whose end is self-realization based on market choice, but instead is about life in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit discerned in relationship with others and in service to the neighbor as well as God.[267] It is an example, at least in principle, of faith as "freedom from self-concern…to freedom to be concerned with others."[268] And while this may not seem like an effective response to globalizing capitalist practice, as Luke Bretherton writes, urban monasticism "is a concrete way in which hearts and minds may be prepared to pursue such change. In short, it is part of the repertoire by which we reform desire so as to desire first the kingdom of God, an act of both ecclesial and political *ascesis*."[269]

Conclusion

With urban monasticism, we come to a movement with a holistic view of human flourishing focused on love of God and love of neighbor and characterized by dispossession and re-centering in Christ. It is form of Christian community that lives into the "intrusion of reality,

daily practices that further root them there, work to resist the rampant deracination of our upwardly mobile culture" (227-228).

[267] New monasticism also challenges the therapeutic mentality and compartmentalization whereby "our lives are divided between different spheres, each with its own roles and its own set of norms." Compartmentalization obscures and makes difficult questions such as " 'What would it be for my life *as a whole* to be a flourishing life?' and 'What is my good *qua* human being and not just *qua* role-player in this or that type of situation?' " Instead, therapeutic questions become *hegemonic*: "What do I feel about my life?' and "Am I happy or unhappy?'" When these questions dominate, they foster a tendency to therapeutically adjust to the dominant role demands of producer, consumer, entrepreneur of the self, etc. and the larger vision of the good implied in them, a solipsistic possessive individualism (MacIntyre, "How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary, 12). See Alasdair MacIntyre, "How Aristotelianism Can Become Revolutionary," in *Virtue and Politics: Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism*, eds. Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2011), 11-19.

[268] George Lindbeck, "Modernity and Luther's Understanding of The Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther and the Modern Mind: Freedom, Conscience, Toleration, Rights* ed. Manfred Hoffmann (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1985), 11. See also, Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian*"* in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, trans. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 42-85.

[269] Luke Bretherton, Christianity and Contemporary Politics, 184.

the unallowable question, of the data that does not 'fit' the system" rather than claiming to "know in advance what one is going to find in the world" seeking "a refuge from the ambiguous, unsettled, largely undecipherable *fluxus* of the actual."[270] This is all done by bringing the monastery into the world, to echo Martin Luther (as well as the more recent Trappist monk, Thomas Merton) in a manner that seeks to avoid mere Romantic repristination, which Dreher's proposal sometimes risks, or other-worldly escapism. Furthermore, and reminiscent of Harvey Cox in *The Secular City*, I see the contemporary period as an opportunity for Christianity in which Christian communities can move away from being institutions whose *de facto* mission becomes one of undergirding the status quo to being a community of faith, repentance, and love "in Christ."[271] At the same time, Cox's celebration of the secular and post-Christendom leaves Christian communities vulnerable to being swallowed by a consumer culture of expressive authenticity uneasy with institutions and practices of transformation. For this reason, I embrace a notion of Christian community as a more robust, yet humble fellowship of transformation marked by reception of the gospel in Word and sacrament, and faith and love, suffusing all of one's life in ever more urban, post-secular, and globalizing societies.

All of this being said, however, the task of responding in a theologically robust manner to possessive individualism is not yet complete. That is to say, I have not explicitly linked the pattern of ethical formation in community to a broader *political* ethic and politics indexed to the challenges of contemporary possessive individualist practices and social imaginary. Because such a political ethic and politics is so often formulated in the language of "rights," such a task might appear difficult, at least in terms of the regnant vocabulary and practices. This is because

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[270] Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 25.

[271] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, New Introduction by the Author Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

while rights are widely seen as one of the great political achievements of modernity, they are increasingly critiqued for their purported promotion of a proprietary notion of the human person and sociality that the New Monasticism opposes. In light of this situation, in Chapter Five, I will develop a political ethic and politics involving a non-proprietary notion of rights that draws upon my now completed exploration of the New Monasticism and the larger discussions of human flourishing found in Chapters Two and Three.

<u>Chapter Five: Possessive Individualism, Politics, and Human Rights</u>

Taking into account the discussion of the New Monasticism in Chapter Four and the

broader discussion about human flourishing in Chapters Two and Three, I want to now turn to

the contentious question of human rights as part of a culminating reflection on theo-political

responses to possessive individualism. That is to say, how does the vision of human flourishing

articulated in Chapters Two and Three and the common life exemplified by the New

Monasticism discussed in Chapter Four shape political-ethical responses to possessive

individualism in a manner that simultaneously keeps faith with the language of human rights?

This question is important because human rights are seen by some as one of the great ethical and

political achievements of modernity, and by others as a negative development promoting

possessive individualism. In attempting to answer it, I will begin with a basic definition of rights

and give a brief synopsis of the history of the rights debate. I will then explore in some detail

how Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in particular understand rights, since they have exerted the

greatest influence on modern, secular accounts of this topic. From there, I will develop my own

contrasting account of rights that is non-proprietary, linking this claim to my discussions in the

previous chapters regarding the Christian community's witness to human flourishing in Christ

and in communion with the triune God. Finally, in light of this discussion concerning the

grounding of rights and the *telos* to which rights are meant to serve, I will turn to the pursuit and

enactment of rights by returning to the kind of common life exemplified by the New

Monasticism, specifically its *koinōnic* nature, by which I mean its commitment to mutual

sharing, communication, and ongoing discernment through engagement with the marginalized.

Specifically, I will examine participation by Christian communities in community organizing as

a form of collective action that seeks to pursue and enact rights in a manner consistent with those

communities' own *koinōnic* nature grounded in God's triune life that is the source and *telos* of human flourishing.

Basic Definitions and the Historical Critique of Rights[272]

To begin, let me clarify some terminology. By "right," I mean a claim to a good in the life of a person. By "subjective right," I mean a right that "attaches to a subject (whether an individual, group, or entity), such that the subject usually can have that right vindicated before an appropriate authority when that right is threatened or violated.[273]" By contrast, the category of "objective right" is that which "obtains when an action is properly ordered or just when judged against some objective or external standard."[274] It obtains not because it is vested in a person, but because it corresponds to a normative order that lies outside of the person. Thus, for example, we might speak of a subjective right to freedom from bodily harm, while the notion of objective right is found in theories of natural law, with their overarching normative framework. Objective right is often supported by authors critical of subjective rights language, because objective right is 1) associated with premodern European civilization as well as non-North Atlantic and non-Christian cultures, 2) purportedly more favorable towards religion, and 3) supportive of communitarian politics, and, in some cases, fundamental, ontological inequalities within human life.[275] Subjective rights, on the other hand, are seen as promoting a possessive, secular individualism, and are diametrically opposed to objective right.

In response to these claims, it can be argued that subjective and objective rights need not be opposed. A violation of an objective norm (for example, one either directly commanded by

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[272] In this subsection I follow, at a distance, Nicholas Wolterstorff's vocabulary in *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 21-43.

[273] John Witte, *God's Joust, God's Justice: Law and Religion in the Western Tra*dition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 38.

[274] *Ibid.*

[275] Natural law is an example of a framework of objective right that is often seen as more favorable to religion and communitarian politics because it embeds the individual person in a larger cosmic or collective order.

God or indirectly mandated by a divine agent who brings into being a creation marked by a natural law), may also be a violation of a subjective right attached to the person. Defenders of subjective rights would argue that in this scenario the notion of a subjective right draws attention to a violation of the human being in her particularity, while an objective right is more abstract (if no less true), drawing attention to a violation of (to remain with our example) God's direct or indirect will.[276]

One specific type of subjective right is an "inherent right." A subjective right is inherent if it is not only attached to a subject, but also rooted in an *intrinsic permanent characteristic* of the subject's existence; that is, it is inherent to the extent that it is based on a characteristic, capacity, power, or item that a person possesses outside of any relationship to God or a communal order. Based on this definition, the set of subjective rights would be inclusive of inherent rights, but not all subjective rights are inherent rights. This distinction between subjective and inherent rights will be crucial when I lay out my own position later in this chapter.

Finally, there are negative rights and positive rights. Just like negative liberty discussed in Chapter One, a negative right is a claim to freedom from interference. A positive right is a

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[276] Critics of so-called medieval voluntarism tell a now well-known story, associated with names like John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, of a fateful turn in the history of ideas that would encapsulate a momentous shift in North Atlantic civilization. For many proponents of a natural law or creation order, the normative dimension of the creation order, or that which establishes the law of nature, is God's will. However, amongst these proponents, rationalists argue that God's will is determined by God's reason, thus linking natural law or creation order to the rationality of God. For voluntarists, on the other hand, God's will possesses greater authority vis a vis God's reason, although the creation order or natural law that God wills is no less valid. Because the natural law depends only on God's will, through an intellectual sleight-of-hand, beginning with the univocal association of God's being with the being of finite human beings, the foundations of law could be transferred to the will of the earthly sovereign, in the figure of the absolute monarch, and later to the nation-state. In this new secularized "political theology," the foundations of law are now said to rest on the triumph of the will, the strength of the strongest, whereby whoever controls the means to legitimately use violence in society can determine what is right and true. For a critique of the influential position of John Milbank on Duns Scotus (a position that operates in the spirit of Heidegger's attacks on onto-theology, whereby God has been cut down to the size of the human being through the demise of the analogy of being, thus initiating a fateful turn toward the heresy that is the secular), see Marilyn McCord Adams, "What's Wrong with the Ontotheological Error?," *The Journal of Analytic Theology* Vol. XLIV (2014): 1-12.

claim to the provision of a good, not just the absence of interference or impingement on the body or one's liberty.

The Historical Critique of Rights Language

As I stated above, subjective rights have been criticized as rooted in, and facilitative of, possessive individualism.[277] The stories vary, with different authors identifying different historical figures or events with the emergence of a notion of rights that fostered possessive individualist behavior. More specifically, were European medievals responsible for a proprietary and acquisitive notion of *inherent* subjective rights shorn of human embeddedness in a larger creation order, natural law framework, premodern communitarian society, or divine relationship? If so, then which of them is to blame? Oliver O'Donovan links this emergence of a proprietary notion of inherent rights (or what he terms, *original* subjective rights) with developments in the European Middle Ages. He writes,

> The idea of original subjective rights, though especially prominent in the modern era, has an instructive pre-history. It arose from the social conceptions of feudalism, which envisaged the construction of political order from below by the major landholding interests, whose 'right' was coextensive with their 'dominion.' These were by no means all individuals. Not only barons, but monastic secular chapters, city corporations and guilds, all with their estates, asserted their several rights and looked to royal and papal government to uphold them. To the Franciscans and their defenders belongs the doubtful credit of launching the concept of subjective right on a trajectory independent of property, though still parallel to it. Promoting a mendicant ideal of absolute poverty, and needing to explain how mendicants, though owning nothing, could eat and drink and command the necessities of life, they posited a 'right of natural necessity' (Bonaventure) or a 'right of use' (Ockham). Though dissociated from real property, this right still carried proprietary overtones. Gerson invoked the term 'dominion' to describe this right of self-preservation, and, indeed, initiated the tradition of conceiving freedom as a property in one's own body and its powers. All this explains why the concept of rights cannot be invoked without some care. It easily leads our imagination back to a pre-political conception of society composed of private powers rooted in wealth, a conception which the theory of law had to wrestle to overcome."[278]

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[277] See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[278] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 248.

This account has been disputed, or at least given a different and more positive gloss, by historians such as Brian Tierney.[279] Others argue that the rupture with the past occurred later, with early modern thinkers like Hugo Grotius, Francisco Suárez and Samuel Pufendorf. Still others, including C.B. Macpherson, and after him, Ian Shapiro, see the major shift occurring with Hobbes and Locke, or at least coming to fruition in their writings.[280] Moving in a different historical direction, the work of Harvard legal scholar Charles Donahue, Jr. persuasively argues that a proprietary subjective notion of rights, if not a notion of *inherent* rights, was already present in ancient Rome.[281]

While these debates are important, I do not want to fall into the genetic fallacy of assessing the (in)validity of rights-talk based on its historical origins. Regardless of who inaugurated the turn to a proprietary notion of subjective rights, I do not believe that rights-talk, in both its foundations and its real-world usage, necessarily has to follow the trajectory of a purportedly problematic inaugurating event. At the same time, the past is never dead; it is not even past, as William Faulkner has famously reminded us. For this reason, it is important to distinguish my account from contemporary secular positions heavily indebted to problematic past formulations of rights, especially those of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (regardless of whether they initiated 'the fall' of rights-language). For this reason, I will begin with their accounts before articulating my own.

Thomas Hobbes and Rights

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[279] Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law and Church Law 1150-1625* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997). See also Annabel S. Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[280] See Ian Shapiro, *The Evolution of Rights in Liberal Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[281] Charles Donahue, Jr., "*Ius* in Roman Law," in *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, eds. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64-80.

In Chapter XIV of *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes defines a right as the following, "THE RIGHT OF NATURE, which Writers commonly call *Jus Naturale*, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life."[282] *Jus naturale* is a capacity or faculty ultimately used for self-preservation. It is a *subjective* right because it is a right attached to the person and it is also has leanings towards being an *inherent* right because it involves an "intrinsic permanent characteristic," in this case a capacity or power to will.

Hobbes, of course, does speak of a law of nature, but he distinguishes *lex naturalis* from *jus naturale*. He states,

> A LAW OF NATURE, (*Lex Naturalis*,) is a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved. For though they that speak of this subject, use to confound *Jus*, and *Lex, Right* and *Law*; yet they ought to be distinguished; because RIGHT, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbeare; Whereas LAW, determineth, and bindeth to one of them; so that Law, and Right, differ as much, as Obligation, and Liberty; which in one and the same manner are inconsistent" [283]

On the one hand, natural (i.e., subjective) rights and natural law (i.e., objective right) are not reducible to each other: rights cannot be reduced to *right*. On the other hand, while objective right and subjective rights, cannot be reduced one to the other, they are still quite congruent. The objective order to which natural laws correspond is simply that which is natural to human beings as discovered by reason. Ultimately, what is most natural to human beings, discoverable by all, is the human desire for self-preservation. The same rational investigation that discloses objective right thus also yields the precepts that guide the exercise of our natural (i.e., subjective) rights.

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[282] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Volume 2: The English and Latin Texts (i)*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 198.
[283] *Ibid.*

In short, we discover that our natural rights are best exercised towards the end of self-preservation.

For Hobbes natural rights have a logical priority over natural law in a way that is arguably different from the medieval European thinkers preceding him. This results in a truncated vision of the *telos* of human beings, or what constitutes their ultimate flourishing. Earlier North Atlantic, Christian conceptions of natural law were embedded within a larger story of God actively relating to creation, overcoming sin, and drawing human beings into communion with each other and God. Hobbes's later theological views however were quite different and did not lie within orthodox Christianity. He was inclined to deism, adding some theological speculations regarding Christianity and eternal life at the end of *Leviathan* that are poorly integrated with his larger philosophy.[284] While natural law may be in accord with a deistic deity for Hobbes, he does not have a robust notion of creation ultimately directed to the triune God who creates, reconciles, and redeems. The right to self-preservation, guided by natural law, is nothing more than what a properly functioning human being should seek. There is no higher, human vocation other than to serve that end. Self-preservation is, from any practical standpoint, not part of a creation ordered to eschatological communion with God. For Hobbes, institutions and practices, including those of religion, are instrumental to his understanding of an intramundane human *telos*, but they lead no farther. The normative force of Hobbes's political theory is thus rooted in the assertion that human beings seek above all else to preserve their lives, and that reason accords with that aim. Hobbes thus has a relatively truncated notion of human teleology, rooted in a psychological postulate that becomes the point of departure and determining constraint on all his subsequent philosophical moves. In fact, Richard Tuck has

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[284] Richard Tuck, *Hobbes*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 90.

argued that Hobbes is an epistemological skeptic of an empiricist bent.[285] This epistemological

skepticism leads to a moral relativism, and out of this relativism, Hobbes posits that the only

thing people can agree upon is the psychological truth that each seeks to preserve his life against

death. This psychological postulate, in turn, creates a political society that can address

skepticism and relativism through the authoritative dictate of the sovereign.

Hobbes's notion of political society and its relationship to rights is developed within an

account of the state of nature, which he believed to be an actual historical reality. Each person

equally possesses a right to self-preservation, or differently put, a right to self-preservation.

There are no natural inequalities in capability that would give some people a stronger claim to

the satisfaction of their right to life over others. As Hobbes writes,

> Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there
> bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind then
> another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not
> so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himselfe any benefit, to which
> another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has
> strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confedarcy with
> others, that are in the same danger with himselfe.[286]

In the absence of a political authority able to issue legally binding commands concerning human

behavior, each person has the liberty to do whatever he or she can to satisfy the right to self-

preservation. The problem is that every other individual person also has a right to self-

preservation, which warrants, without any other restrictions, his own self-seeking behavior. This

clearly results in a logical tension, which socially plays itself out as violent human conflict.

 "From this equality of ability," Hobbes writes,

> ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men
> desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become
> enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their owne conservation,

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[285] *Ibid.*.
[286] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188.

and sometimes their delectation only,) endeavor to destroy or subdue one an another.[287]

Based on this account, Hobbes state of nature is famously a state of war, "where every man is Enemy to every man."[288] Human beings live without any further security than "what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall."[289] Not only is "there no place of Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain;" there is "continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."[290]

Because of the precarious state of nature and the difficulty of self-preservation, which each person nonetheless has a right to pursue, human beings collectively agree to submit to an overarching sovereign power that will stem the tide of violence. The wills of all are reduced to the will of one. This one is the sovereign, the commonwealth, the "great Leviathan."[291] Historically, this great Leviathan was the emerging, modern nation-state. For Hobbes, this state possesses unlimited power, including the ability to make all laws. Unlike in the state of nature, where "all men had all right to all things; which necessarily causeth Warr," the sovereign, as one vested absolutely with the power of each contracting, individual will, now possesses "the whole power of prescribing the Rules, whereby every man may know, what Goods he may enjoy, and what Action he may doe, without being molested by any of his fellow Subjects."[292]

For our purposes, the relationship between the state and the type of society to be preserved and promoted by law in Hobbes's thought is illustrated by his discussion in "Of the Nutrition, and Procreation of a Common-wealth." Here he discusses economic relationships, including property. According to Hobbes, "the Distribution of the Materials of this

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[287] *Ibid.*, 190.
[288] *Ibid.*, 192.
[289] *Ibid.*
[290] *Ibid.*
[291] *Ibid.*, 260.
[292] *Ibid.*, 274.

Nourishment, is the constitution of *Mine*, and *Thine*, and *His;* that is to say, in one word

Propriety; and belongeth in all kinds of Common-wealth to the Sovereign Power."[293] The

distribution of property is thus the prerogative of the state. The sovereign divides land based on

what he "shall judge agreeable to Equity, and the Common Good."[294] Once distributed,

however, private rights to property are inviolable, with one exception: the state can confiscate

lands at it sees fit. Nevertheless, "the Propriety which a subject hath in his lands, consisteth in a

right to exclude all other subjects from the use of them."[295] Thus, the individual who enters into

the contract in order to preserve his life receives back property over which he is sovereign. Of

course, this sovereignty has an outer limit *vis a vis* the state, but in, the usual run of affairs, each

individual possesses an absolute right *vis a vis* his neighbors to the property that the state has

bequeathed to him.

If we take into account the historical background in which Hobbes was writing, we can

see how the assignment of private property rights by the state was actually conducive to the rise

of North Atlantic capitalism discussed in Chapter One. As Ian Shapiro notes with regards to

Hobbes' context,

> the state had for over a century been taking a powerfully active role in the destruction of
> feudal property relationships and the creation of modern transmissibility in land. Both
> through its own confiscation and sale of church lands after the Reformation and through
> its central role in dismantling feudal land law, the state in late Tudor and early Stuart
> England *was* distributing 'initial' property rights in their modern form of exclusive
> transmissible dominion. This is, in significant part, how 'bourgeois' property relations
> were created in England. In simultaneously adhering to a view of ownership in terms of
> exclusive dominion, and charging the state with responsibility of distributing property in
> accordance with hit, Hobbes was, however unconsciously, sanctioning changes in
> English land law that had been in motion for some time and which were to become
> central to the modern system of private law on which developed capitalism would rest.[296]

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[293] *Ibid.*, 388.
[294] *Ibid.*
[295] *Ibid.*, 390.
[296] Shapiro, *The Evolution of Rights in Liberal The*ory, 32.

Once distributed, the sovereign would have to "appoint in what manner, all kinds of contract between Subjects, (as buying, selling, exchanging, borrowing, lending, letting, and taking to hire) are to bee made; and by what words, and signes they shall be understood for valid."[297] Thus, while land and property cannot be taken away forcefully by one's neighbor (though it can be by the state), it can be voluntarily exchanged contractually with other subjects. Property is, for most purposes, private, with individual owners possessing sovereign ownership powers regarding the use and exchange of that property. The market relationships characterizing capitalism discussed in the first section of Chapter One, are thus undergirded by Hobbes's state. The content of the contracts governing the exchange of property, however, is not determined by the state.

Finally, in order to further enrich the wealth of the commonwealth (of which gold and silver are the circulating "Blood"), as well as to promote its glorification, the governing power promotes the colonization of the world, either peacefully or by war. Acquisition and growth, understood in Hobbes's age in terms of physical occupation of foreign territory, is a key economic role undertaken by the state. Hobbes, in fact, links a discussion of the power of the sovereign, economic relationships, and liberty together in Chapter XXI of *Leviathan*. Despite the absolute authority of the ruler, there are still many activities in human life that are simply beyond the purview of the state's micro-management. As Hobbes writes, "there is no Common-wealth in the world, wherein there be Rules enough set down, for the regulating of all the actions, and words of men (as being a thing impossible)."[298] For this reason, "in all kinds of actions, by the laws praetermitted, men have the Liberty, of doing what their own reasons shall

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[297] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 392.
[298] *Ibid.*, 328.

suggest, for the most profitable to themselves."[299] Just as self-interested willing bequeaths

power to the sovereign, self-interest outside of the laws made by that sovereign is a key

motivational trait for human beings within the Hobbesian commonwealth. And this self-interest

is given an economic cast in Hobbes's text shortly after the afore-quoted passage, "the Liberty of

a Subject, lyeth therefore only in those things, which in regulating their actions, the Soveraign

hath praetermitted: such is the Liberty to buy, and sell, and otherwise contract with one another"

in addition to "choosing their own aboad, their own diet, their own trade of life, and inttiute their

children as they themselves think fit."[300]

Hobbes, of course, was neither a liberal nor an apologist for capitalism. His

understanding of the social contract, for example, is politically authoritarian: when each

individual wills to form Leviathan, they bequeath authority to the state or ruling power to make

laws, and, in doing so, forfeit any ability to challenge the power that their individual wills

brought into being. This is not an ongoing contract of *quid pro quo* whereby those who make the

contract authorize representatives to serve their interests in making positive law. Rather, the

Leviathan assumes a power that is unaccountable to its subjects, such that positive laws and the

correlative civil or political rights do not necessarily represent the interests of the people. This

can be seen, to take one example, in Hobbes's belief that the sovereign must regulate thought,

including that of the churches, which runs counter to the freedom of religious expression in

liberal polities. Finally, while Hobbes lived in an economically transitional age, it would be

inaccurate to characterize it as dominated by North Atlantic capitalism.[301]

There is also a caveat with regard to Hobbes's views on natural (i.e., subjective) rights

and natural law (i.e., objective right). Hobbes' conception of natural law, as we have seen, is

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[299] *Ibid.*
[300] *Ibid.*
[301] Shapiro, *The Evolution of Rights in Liberal The*ory, 30.

largely about the pursuit of self-preservation as not only *a* good, but *the* good. What keeps this from a full-blown libertarian conception, however, is that the acquisition of resources for survival is limited by a natural law principle that everyone must have the basic necessities of life. Unrestrained acquisition leads to conflict, which is a threat to one's life. The right to do whatever is necessary for self-preservation is "limited" by the law of nature concerning acquisition precisely to preserve the end that right serves, namely self-preservation. Later in *Leviathan*, Chapter XX, he states that the commonwealth is responsible for taking caring of the neediest people. This leads to the corollary that "The sovereign must have the right to tax people to the level he thinks fit in order to protect the commonwealth: no 'right of private property' can be pleaded against his actions."[302] This differs from contemporary libertarian and neoliberal positions.

Nevertheless, Hobbes's notion of natural (i.e., subjective) rights have played a significant role within intellectual history and the larger shaping of the moral and social imaginary of globalizing, North Atlantic capitalism. For Hobbes, *jus naturale* veers towards exercise of one's will, which, in seeking self-preservation, becomes an instrument of self-interest. *Lex naturalis* is largely a mandate to engage in that self-preserving and self-interested behavior. In turn, if one brings Hobbes's account into an emergent capitalist world, which has historically been the case, his story of rights dovetails nicely with an atomistic, competitive individual as the root ontological understanding of the human person, such that we are "stand-offish towards one another" although perhaps not "inherently belligerent."[303] This division between myself and everything outside of myself--other human beings and the rest of the natural world--combined with the overarching quest for self-preservation and self-interest, means that the world, including

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[302] *Ibid.*, 72.
[303] Tuck, *Hobbes*, 55.

other people, risk becoming merely instruments to goods whose source and end are myself.

From this standpoint, the world and its goods, as well as other human beings, are not a gift from

the creator who desires communion between human beings, the rest of creation, and the triune

life.

John Locke and Rights

Writing over a generation later, John Locke, like Hobbes, also develops a theory of rights

in the context of an account of the state of nature. By the time he writes his *Two Treatises of*

Government, the state of nature is marked by a law, which is in accord with God's will, and is

equivalent to reason itself. According to Locke,

> the State of Nature has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: And
> reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all
> equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or
> Possessions: for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise
> Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by his order and
> about his business; they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last
> during his, not another's pleasure.[304]

Because each individual person possesses a right to life, health, liberty, and property,

no one is to harm another person's life, health, liberty or possessions. In other words, each

person possesses a negative right to non-interference. Furthermore, in contrast to Hobbes, the

state of nature for Locke is not a war of all against all. The concept of property and the reality of

commercial relationships develop prior to the institution of the state, and the creation of the state

thus serves to facilitate each person's right to life, health, liberty, and property. In fact, Locke

speaks of all of these rights under the general term "property" when he writes "no *Political*

Society can be, nor subsist without having in it self the Power to preserve the Property… for "the

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[304] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 102.

chief end [of civil society]... is the preservation of Property."[305] For this reason, C.B.

Macpherson has argued that Locke's view of the state is that of a "joint-stock company whose

shareholders were the men of property."[306] Unlike Hobbes's position in *Leviathan*, the state does

not dole out property, for which the recipients lack a right against the state if the state seizes their

property or otherwise violates it. Nor, for Locke, can the state enact laws that abrogate or violate

basic civil or political rights of individuals, because to do so would violate those individuals'

bodily liberty, understood as property. At the same time, Locke and Hobbes both promote broad

liberty in the economic sphere and link that to a proprietary understanding of rights – although

Locke does so more directly than the relatively circumspect Hobbes.

Locke's understanding of rights is also intimately linked to the "labour of his body, and

the work of his hands."[307] Liberty--to which we have a right--is understood in terms of

proprietary control over our actions.[308] For this reason, the right to liberty is a right to a

proprietary relationship to the world. In turn, "the freedoms and objects created as a result of

those actions" also become our property, in the more conventional sense. A proprietary

relationship over my actions leads to a proprietary relationship to various objects in the world;

my right to liberty, with its authorization and protection of my ability to do and to make, leads to

a right of external property in the goods that I create or to which I come in contact. While

everyone (or at least all upper crust English adult males) is marked by a formal equality, because

each individual possesses reason and is governed by the law of nature under God, once history

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[305] *Ibid.*, 155.
[306] C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, 195.
[307] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Governme*nt, 111. Locke's epistemology has a distinctively possessive dimension, with the senses receiving passive, atomistic impressions and bringing them into the space of the mind. Locke then imagines the mind *making* a pyramid of knowledge with foundational input justifying other building blocks, atomistically stacked and arranged, to yield indubitable knowledge.
[308] Shapiro, *The Evolution of Rights in Liberal The*ory, 90.

plays out there is room for immense inequality and exclusion in society due to variations in the capacity to do and to make.[309]

Based on what I have just presented, Locke appears to be a straightforward apologist for capitalism. Against this view, James Tully has made an influential argument for interpreting Locke's thought in light of his theological arguments. Tully seeks to give an account of Locke's thought that is more communitarian and in line with earlier natural law theorists like Aquinas. Tully's account thus represents what is perhaps the strongest attempt to read Locke in a manner that opposes both the negative evaluations of Locke in scholarship influenced by either Leo Strauss or Marx (the latter shaping MacPherson's work), as well as by writers (especially libertarians) who read Locke positively as a champion of the market, insofar as both these negative and positive evaluations of Locke ascribe to him a proprietary understanding of subjective rights.

Tully's reading of the history of rights follows Richard Tuck and Quentin Skinner in distinguishing between a "private" conception of rights that derives from a purported "Ockhamist, subjective tradition" (and is taken up by Hobbes, as well as Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf) and a tradition in which subjective rights are embedded within objective right, as in Aquinas.[310] According to Tully, Locke is the product of this second tradition, and the integration of rights within natural law can be seen when we examine Locke's theory of property. For men like Grotius and Pufendorf, while God gave the world to human beings in common, this commonality did not preclude private, exclusive appropriation stemming from the right each individual has to life and liberty. In this vision, what I appropriate is mine and I can

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[309] This argument has historically been influential in the colonial adventures of Europe since the late-medieval and early modern periods. Indigenous peoples in North America could be dispossessed of any claim to land since they did not mix their labor with the "virgin wilderness" and make it productive as God calls humanity to do.

[310] *Ibid*.

exclude others from using it. By contrast, according to Tully, the dominion given to human

beings by God (Gen. 1:28) is interpreted by Locke as a common right, not a private one.[311] This

notion of "dominion" and the notion of "rights" corresponding to it signify a common property

right of using (a *ius ad rem* in contrast to a *ius in re*). It is, in other words, an inclusive property

right. While each person also possesses an individual right to life, liberty, and property that

comes from the mandate of the natural law and reason to preserve ourselves, we are all able to

lay claim to the common property of the world, so as to fulfill the duty to preserve our life and

liberty. But this cannot be done in an exclusive way, such that that the natural duty to preserve

humanity, a mandate of the natural law, is violated.[312] Property comes with binding social

obligations. For Tully, Locke's understanding of natural law is linked to both an individual right

to life, liberty, and property but also a common right of use in accord with scripture. Any overly

individualistic interpretation of Locke's position is thus precluded by the fact that for him,

because of a common right of property use, the natural law does not become conceptually

subordinate to an absolute proprietary right (viz., a *ius in re*).

For Tully, the historical context in which Locke writes is not capitalist, but mercantilist.

Furthermore, Locke was part of a political theoretical tradition marked by a tendency to link

proprietary concerns to moral, political, and military interests, rather than to economic ones.[313]

The notion that Locke is an early utilitarian, promoting unlimited consumption as a means to

maximize one's utility is, Tully believes, a stretch. Labor power, and the acquisition of property

that follows from it, are about preservation, and it is merely preservation, not expansive

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[311] James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 111.

[312] *Ibid.*

[313] *Ibid.*, 82.

consumption, with which both the individual and state are concerned.[314] To argue that Locke promotes possessive individualism in line with an early capitalist economy is thus for Tully to impose a reductive "explanation" on the historical evidence. Tully thus complicates a reading of Locke that makes him the seventeenth-century patron saint of exclusive, private property, and, by extension, of capitalism, because at the time this economic system was simply not yet in full bloom. Thus the meanings associated with the practices of capitalism—its embedded moral and social imaginary—were not available to Locke when he was writing his treatise.

Tully's work on Locke casts him as a hybrid thinker in continuity with many of the streams of thought found in his medieval forbearers. Locke's theological commitments, his integration of objective natural law into his account of subjective rights, and the growing awareness that his thought process could not have been the product of a dominant economic system that was capitalist (even if capitalist practices, or practices later assimilable to capitalism, were in existence) indicate that the meaning of his thought, *within his own context*, cannot be reduced to one of capitalist, possessive individualism.

Tully is right about the historical context of Locke, and he certainly complicates the often received wisdom regarding the background concerns shaping Locke's reflections on rights and property. Furthermore, it is also clear that Locke was shaped by a much older tradition, both Christian and Hellenistic, regarding the original commonality of property. Nevertheless, Locke lived in a transitional age, in which traditional, mercantilist, *and* capitalist practices overlapped and competed. Furthermore, even if Locke cannot be seen as an early apologist for liberal capitalism, his thought contains elements easily assimilable to the ideological legitimation of that system, especially in reflections on rights and property.

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[314] *Ibid.*

Locke's reflections on work offer a helpful segue to grasp this point. As I mentioned above, it is undeniable that Locke speaks of the rights to life, liberty, and property in possessive terms, even if those rights derive from the objective mandate of the natural law known to reason and undergirded by God. The property I have in myself and my actions leads to the acquisition of private, exclusive property in external goods that significantly weakens the common right to use, *ius ad rem*, developed in the older Christian tradition from which Locke draws. Work is the activity by which this happens, and it is ordained (indeed practically demanded) by God. As Locke writes, "God gave [property] to the use of the industrious and rational (and labour was to be his title to it), not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious."[315] By mixing one's labor with the elements of the earth, one acquires a divinely sanctioned, exclusive right to property. This puts the technically more fundamental, prior common right of access to the earth and its resources into practice. While the natural law's qualification of private property rights in service of the common right of use protects those who cannot work productively, leading to their reception of charitable assistance, it sits uneasily with Locke's embrace of putting the able-bodied poor to work. In all but the most extreme cases of deprivation due to physical inability, common right of use essentially entails a right to work that verges on a demand that we do so. For Locke, we cannot be excluded from working, even if that means some degree of coercion; what human beings can be excluded from is the fruit of the work of other people, which becomes the right of the one who labors as an extension of the right she possesses over her capacities (viz., her life and liberties).[316] A right to work becomes the practical force of a *ius ad rem* rooted in God's fundamental ownership of the earth and bestowal of it in common to humanity. In practice, this right to work ends up being consistent with a near-

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[315] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 114.
[316] Although this is lost if one alienates one's capacities in a transactional exchange with another person such that the one who "receives" those capacities has a right to what the capacities produce.

absolute *ius in re* as long as no able-bodied person is excluded from engaging in the

ontologically prior common right to work.

But what about limits on accumulation? Even if most people must work, and what they

acquire from mixing their labor with the elements of the earth is theirs as an exclusive private

property right, is there not a limit on how much they can acquire? After all, would not

accumulation lead to waste, hoarding, or monopolies which would violate the natural law

proviso that there be "as much and as good" available to others in common, and the concomitant

ius ad rem meant to facilitate the provision of goods to all?[317] Locke's response was twofold.

First, through work, almost everyone will have enough to survive. Extreme poverty will be ruled

out, even if, inevitably, inequality, maybe even immense inequality, comes into existence.

 Second, even if there is not enough land to go around through unchecked accumulation, the

invention of money will lead to increases in productivity that will satisfy the natural law proviso

regarding the preservation of each person through there being "as much and as good" available

to others. Locke writes,

> [H]e who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen but increase the
> common stock of mankind. For the provisions serving to the support of humane life,
> produced by one acre of inclosed and cultivated land are (to speak much within
> compasse) ten times more, than those, which are yielded by an acre of Land, of an equal
> richnesses, lyeing wast in common. And therefore he, that incloses Land and has a
> greater plenty of conveniencys of life from ten acres, than he would have an hundred left
> to Nature, may truly be said, to give ninety acres to Mankind.[318]

The problem with this view--a proto-trickle down economic theory--is that historically it has not

been the case that wealth accumulated at the top necessarily benefits those further down the

ladder, especially in a broad, equitable manner that the image of the ninety-acre gift suggests. If

this is true, then Locke's proviso that appropriation of the commons must leave enough for

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[317] *Ibid.*, 112.
[318] *Ibid.*, 116.

everyone else to survive is in jeopardy. In sum, while Tully's revisionist reading of Locke

corrects over-emphases of past interpretations, the consequences of Locke's position for rights

and related topics like property do not radically differ from the dominant liberal interpretation.

In addition to these concerns, Locke's theological context, to which Tully draws our

attention, is itself problematic. For Locke, God is an agent who labors, even if the material he

uses is never independent of his sovereign will. This labor establishes God's right to the world

and everything in it. God is a proprietor such that human beings are both God's property and

also proprietors themselves, both over their lives and labor as well as over the goods they

produce through that labor. The relationship human beings have to the world reflects God's

relationship to them.

Of course, this position if developed no further, would be compatible with a society not

focused on proprietary acquisition through the creation and exchange of private property. God

as proprietor might warrant the creation of private property through the labor of human beings,

yet human beings might only engage in acquisitive, proprietary behavior in limited amounts.

However, Locke's notion that God demands a return or, differently put, that human beings have

a duty to God to be productive, warrants the extensive creation and acquisition of private,

exclusively held property (*ius in re*). And this productive society built upon extensive private

property rights is what satisfies Locke's admittedly watered-down proviso that there be "as much

and as good" for all. A possessive stance towards reality by human beings is warranted because

God does not relate to the world as a giver who demands nothing in return and for whom even

the gifts we return to God, like the gift of gratitude mentioned in Chapter Two, are gifts from

God that constitute what it means to flourish as a human being. Instead, God relates to the world

as a contractual agent engaged in *quid pro quo*, giving to the world with the demand that the

world give God something back if it wants to receive more. It is as if God needs a payment of good works and productive labor so as to be able to give divine blessings and material rewards to human beings. Of course, as Kathryn Tanner points out, Locke recognizes that people cannot satisfy what God wants, so, in light of Christ, God accepts the best one can do.[319] But this is only a weakening, not a rejection, of a works or merit-based *quid pro quo* relationship that human beings have to God.   .

Not only does Locke have a weakened understanding of God's grace, he does not have a strong enough sense of God's being as wholly otherwise (which is itself inextricably bound up with God's unsurpassable graciousness). When God is conceived as wholly otherwise, frameworks in which God's relationship to the world resonates with language of laboring or contracting, is problematic. God is not a creature that can be classed amongst other creatures, which makes talk of "laboring" or "contracting"-- with connotations of needing to expend energy to make something happen or receive something back to "boost" God--less than helpful. The idea of divine labor, for one, would have to be, at best, a way of suggesting, say, that God is so committed to the creation that God is like a worker who is hard at work—laboring—because God is so committed to the task. But even here the associations with creaturely time and energy-expenditure make talk of God laboring probably best avoided. When it is taken in a literal sense to legitimate the acquisition of exclusive rights as the fruits of human labor (i.e. to license private property and the existing social arrangements as ontologically fundamental), then it is downright problematic for Christian theology, especially in light of the character of the God-world relationship presented in Chapter Two. God is simply not a finite creatures who mixes his labor with the material of the creation so as to give rise to a proprietary right in relation to it that further licenses human notions of private, exclusive property rights in the mundane world.

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[319] Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 46.

Locke's perspective is also inconsistent with the idea that in Jesus, God comes to us without needing some debt or duty to be fulfilled. God's intra-Trinitarian life is one of loving giving and receiving, such that's God's will to create the world through the *Logos* is in accord with who God is, the reason internal to God. Our lives, created through the *Logos*, are to be lived in the incarnate *Logos*, in Christ, sharing in his receiving from the Father in the power of the Spirit and, in turn, giving in love to God and our created brothers and sisters. All of this is a gift enabled by God, since to love God and neighbor is central to what it means for human beings to flourish and God is committed to the flourishing of human beings. Human beings are, in an *ontologically fundamental* sense, neither divine property nor in a relationship marked by duties towards God, *if* duty is read, as in Locke, as a matter of reciprocal contractual obligations.

Interrupting a Possessive Individualist Notion of Rights: A Christian Theological Account

In light of my discussion of the positions of Hobbes and Locke, I want to develop a notion of rights that interrupts the possessive individualist tendencies in their thought while also, through an account of the *pursuit* and *enactment* of those rights, contributes to the beginnings of a political ethic consistent with my reflections on the New Monasticism in Chapter Four. I will begin with the former by articulating a non-proprietary understanding of rights. As I have stated above, by a right I mean a claim to a good in the life of a person. What therefore are the "goods" in the "life of the person?" Following Christian Smith, I will identify six goods that human beings pursue as finite, bodily, and socially formed creatures of desire.[320] They are as follows:

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[320] See Christian Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct: A Personalist Theory of Human Goods, Motivations, Failure, and Evil* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016). Smith seeks to articulate a list of basic human goods that all people are motivated to pursue both to 1) develop a descriptively better social science 2) and to aid sociologists and other social scientists make normative judgments about those motivations. Smith's work is an attempt to "better theorize the microfoundations of social life, yet not from the rational-choice perspective that has dominated microfoundations discourse" (2). To do so, he surveys the thought of a wide number of thinkers, including Erich Fromm, Abraham Maslow, Martha Nussbaum, and John Finnis, who have outlined an account of basic human needs, basic human goods, basic motivations which drive human beings, or basic capacities that are necessary for

1. Bodily Survival, Security, and Pleasure;[321]

2. Knowledge of Reality;[322].

3. Identity Coherence and Affirmation;[323]

4. Exercising Purposive Agency;[324]

5. Moral Affirmation;[325]

6. Social Belonging and Love.[326]

While the encompassing and transforming good of human creatures is communion with the

Father through Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit, and while this good is not available to us

in virtue of God's creative activity apart from grace, Smith's six basic goods are still genuine

goods that are part of human flourishing. They constitute the goods to which a claim can be

made either for their direct enactment or provision, or for the conditions that support other

intermediary institutions or relationships by which these goods can be realized. In this way,

these goods make up the substance of rights.

The normative force of a claim for the basic goods listed above is the fact that God has

through the *Logos* created each human being as a finite, embodied creature so as to enjoy

communion with the triune God through living into one's identity in that same *Logos*, made flesh

human flourishing. At the end of his comprehensive survey, Smith proposes that "human persons are ultimately motivated in their actions by six, basic, natural human goods and interests" (179-180).

[321] This includes avoiding bodily death, injury, sickness, disease, and sustained vulnerability to harm; maintaining physical and bodily health and safety; sensual enjoyment, satisfaction, delight, or gratification of appetitive and perceptual desires of the body; and the absence of physical pain and suffering

[322] This encompasses learning about the world and one's place and potential in it; increasing awareness and understanding of material and social realities; developing or embracing believed-in truths about what exists and how it works that provide order, continuity, and practical know-how to life experience

[323] Including developing and maintaining continuity and positive self-regard in one's sense of personal selfhood over time and in different contexts and situations.

[324] Such as exerting influence or power (broadly understood as transformative capacity) in the social and material worlds, through the application of personal capabilities for perception, reflection, care, evaluation, self-direction, decision, and action, which causes desired (and unanticipated) effects in one's environment.

[325] That is, believing that one is in the right or is living a morally commendable life, by being, doing, serving, thinking and feeling what is good, correct, just, and admirable; avoiding moral fault, blame, guilt, or culpability.

[326] This includes enjoying recognition by, inclusion and membership in, and identification with significant social groups; loving and being loved by others in significant relationships.

in Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit. Insofar as possession of Smith's basic goods are necessary conditions for human beings to realize this end, they have normative force, which is an extension of the dignity that comes from simply being created as the kind of creatures that we are. Human dignity consists in the fact that God creates each particular human being; God does so that each person might live into her true, eschatological identity; and God remains faithful to God's purposes in the creation by overcoming sin in Jesus Christ. Human dignity is thus the result of God's relationship to human beings, conceived as embracing the whole course of human life and is not simply a matter of its origination in creation. For this reason, I argue for a notion of subjective rights that are not inherent nor possessive individualist but instead are rooted in, and facilitative of, human beings' ongoing relationship to God who relates to them in the gracious manner described above.

Contrast this to Locke's position, where God gives with strings attached, based on the goodness of one's actions, or at least the earnestness by which one strives to do the good, which for Locke includes labor and the acquisition of property. So while dignity comes from God, it is a notion of dignity that flows to human creatures only insofar as they behave in an acquisitive, productive, and proprietary manner that both mirrors who God is, as well as fulfills the duties to which God renders to each his due. In a sense, then, for Locke the dignity that comes from God creating human beings, is contingent on one's subsequent performance as a creature. Of course, the starving, disabled person may have a claim to a good, a right, simply based on God's relationship to the world, according to scripture, reason, and natural law. But there appear to be many scenarios where a Lockean sense of dignity is upheld, even though the circumstances seem far from dignified. An example from Locke's own context is the Poor House, where the right to sustenance is compatible with being forced to work, and thus being able to render to God and

society meritorious works in exchange for God's gift of life, dignity and bread.

The Relationship between Subjective and Objective Rights

As I mentioned above, subjective rights are often seen as incompatible with objective right. In relationship to my theological position, I think the concern is valid, if subjective rights gain normative force from a capacity, faculty, or activity that is understood to be inherent to human beings, *considered apart from any reference to God and God's relationship with them*. However, non-inherent subjective rights are, I would argue, compatible with an objective sense of the good and God's relationship to the world. In my position, if rights are claims to a good that gains normative force because of God's relationship to human creatures, then we can say that one can articulate a claim to a good, say freedom from bodily torture, in the language of objective right as well as in the vocabulary of subjective rights. To torture another person, the argument might go, is to violate God's will, God's purpose or "law," if you will. To break this law, whether directly commanded by God or indirectly made through the created order, is to violate the objective good, and thus stands as a violation of objective right. But the other person could also claim that her *rights* would be violated by this action; she has a subjective right not to be tortured. For Christians, this claim is grounded in the fact that this unique person is a creature created for communion with God. Since all people are to share in Christ, creatures are to relate to each other as givers of love, such that caring for the neighbor makes sense because her flourishing is my flourishing, since she contributes to my discernment of who God in Christ is in the first place. Subjective rights thus draw attention to the particularity of the person created in the *Logos* and ordained to live in Christ. And in so doing, subjective rights can be seen to fund a general set of claim to the goods of not being dominated or instrumentalized, not to suffer the 'exclusion' that comes when one is defined so as to serve the definer's 'needs.' From this

perspective, subjective rights and objective right are complementary and need not be seen as at odds.

Against Inherent Rights

The upshot of the foregoing is the rejection of the notion of an *inherent* subjective right. If the normative force of a claim to a specific good is rooted in the dignity that comes from the triune God relating to human beings as creator, reconciler, and eschatological consummator, it does not come from any characteristic, faculty, capacity, or action independent of God's relationship to the human person. In fact, no specific human capacity can be singled out and set apart from the rest of a human being's capacities and elevated to the status of being the marker of dignity *bestowed by God*. This is the case because ontologically no capacity or faculty is closer to God than any other—and thus able serve as the special conduit of a divinely bestowed dignity – since everything in the created world is related to by a God who is wholly otherwise and thus not properly spoken about in quantitative terms of nearness or distance. For this reason, the possession of any capacity or faculty cannot ground the dignity upon which a claim to a specific good, a right, gains normative force.

At first glance, Hobbes and Locke appear not to have a notion of inherent subjective rights since they both link subjective rights to natural law, and natural law in turn comes from God. So the normative force of a rights claim is ultimately grounded in God's relationship to the world, even if, to take Locke's case, the account of who God is and God's relationship to the world is very different from mine. With regards to Hobbes, however, the absence of an inherent subjective right may only be apparent, since a closer look reveals that the possession of a capacity or power is important for grounding rights talk, as well as understanding what purpose rights serve.

While Hobbes has a notion of natural law (*lex naturalis*) that is instituted by God, it is important to remember that his understanding of God is deistic at best, and *lex naturalis* is essentially an external obligation mandating self-preserving, self-seeking behavior (albeit with some caveats). Essentially, *lex naturalis* and the divine agent behind it are subordinated to *jus naturale*, undergirding what is both a right to pursue self-interest and a capacity or power to will that self-interest. If this notion is transferred to an emergent capitalist society based on self-interested acquisition (whatever Hobbes's intentions were and despite his own ambivalence towards the commercial classes in his writings), then a supposedly inherent right to freely pursue a narrow and egoistic self-interest rooted in the natural constitution of human beings as creatures who just are or have this power to will in this manner contributes to a possessive individualist moral and social imaginary that makes capitalist relationships seems natural and inevitable.

While self-preservation may be part of what it means to be human, I have not identified a power or capacity to will self-preserving, self-interested behavior, as the exhaustive *telos* of human behavior. Nor is the ground or normative force of rights rooted in this capacity or power and its almost biological and psychological "demand" to follow its dictates and let it determine the good. In Hobbes's account, we see that such an account is at least compatible with a commercial, possessive individualist society, even if his goals were more political and tied to the particular historical challenges of 17th-century England. Hobbes's identification of the normative force of rights with what is essentially an inherent power differs from Locke's position in that for the latter the normative force of rights comes from the ability to do or make, which is given a more robust (and apparently) genuine Christian theological grounding that keeps it from straying into the territory of an inherent, subjective right. And yet, for all their differences, both men end up licensing self-seeking, acquisitive behavior resonant with a

capitalist society that instantiates a moral and social imaginary centered on possessive individualism. In Locke's case, once the theological underpinnings fall away, the grounding of rights in the ability to labor, and thus acquire, begins to converge with a Hobbesian emphasis on a *ius naturale*, a capacity or power to will in pursuit of self-interest. Essentially, human beings as self-owning creatures have the negative right to be free from interference as they will to use their property in whichever way they choose or desire as long as they do no interfere with the negative rights of others. Within this framework a society of mutual adjustment between self-seeking, self-owning agents is the greatest good that can be achieved.

A Christian Theological Account of Negative Rights

While I reject the notion of an *inherent* subjective right—a right whose normative force and guiding *telos* is a capacity internal to the human being—and, more broadly, any notion that subjective rights are, at the most fundamental level, about the *possession* of a faculty or capacity, I do not reject the notion of negative rights, like freedom from torture. Negative rights, of course, are controversial because of their association with exclusive, private property and the atomistic individualism that so often goes with it. For Locke, the relationship I have to my body and actions is a proprietary one, modeled on the notion of exclusive private property. That is to say, I have negative right *vis a vis* other agencies not to be subject to bodily interference or harm, much like an owner of private property has a right to exclude others from the use of her property. In turn, through the labor of my body, I acquire property external to myself and this is modeled on a notion of private property whereby one has a licit claim against others for the exclusive use of the possession that one has acquired. Combine this with a duty to be productive as well as Locke's reflections on how acquisition and productive exchange fulfill the natural law principle of leaving "as much and as good" for others so that they do not starve, and we have a notion of

negative rights as part of a larger possessive individualist vocation to acquire and exclusively own.

By contrast, my Christian theological account of a negative right begins with reference to the first of the basic good listed above—bodily survival, security, and pleasure – plus the overarching and encompassing good that is communion with the triune God. A claim to the goods of bodily survival and security is, at least partially, a claim to freedom from bodily harm, coercion, violence, etc. These goods, protected in this way by a negative right, are also instrumental to pleasure mentioned under the first of Smith's basic goods, as well as goods 2 through 6 and the encompassing good that is communion with the triune God. In turn, the good of communion with the triune God is facilitated by a right to freedom from religious coercion.[327] From a Christian standpoint, the right to freedom of religion serves the overarching and encompassing good of communion with the triune God.

The normative force of the claim to a negative right comes not from any capacity or faculty, whether inherent or God-given, as mentioned above. It simply comes from God's unflinching commitment to human beings as creator, reconciler, and eschatological consummator. In particular, in the incarnation not only does God demonstrate God's faithfulness to the creation, but in liberating humanity from the powers and principalities that oppress human beings and challenge God's commitment and relationship to humanity, God also relativizes any absolute claim by those powers to have final control over human bodies. Each person has a negative right to freedom from extreme bodily harm, etc., inflicted by any external power.[328] Created by God, redeemed by God, and destined for communion with God, no worldly authority

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[327] The right to religious freedom affirms societal differentiation between spheres understood in strictly legal-juridical terms. But this differentiation should not be conflated with privatization. Theological belief and religious practice should be able to shape the other spheres in a non-coercive manner.

[328] Freedom from extreme bodily harm would include torture, extended solitary confinement, and capital punishment, but it does not rule out all legal sanction and punishment in service of the rehabilitation of a criminal offender and protection of the wider community.

can claim ultimate control over the body of any person, decisively revealed and enacted in Jesus' "loosening the claims of existing authority" under his lordship marked by the paradoxical "un-worldly" power of love.

Just as the nature of the normative force of a claim to the good of freedom from bodily harm and coercion encapsulated in a negative right is different in my account from figures like Hobbes or Locke, the teleological end to which these negative rights are instruments is very different. Human beings are not understood to be creatures whose deepest vocation is to merely pursue egoistic self-interest and preservation, as Hobbes argues. While I too recognize the power of human sinfulness, Hobbes appears to make the surd of sin and its effects on human life the deepest truth about the human condition. The best that human beings can hope for is that the Leviathan maintains order and that the pursuit of individual self-interest can bring about some sort of positive collective good when heavily restrained by the sovereign agency that is the Leviathan. The notion that human beings are called to live into their divinely bestowed dignity as creatures whose overarching context is defined by God relating to them as creator, reconciler, and eschatological consummator appears to be merely a fanciful ideal, out of touch with the first word about reality, namely that it is irreparably out of joint.

The later liberal tradition takes the pursuit of what once was vice—self-interested behavior—and recodes it as a virtue, or at least a minor evil, in service of a larger good. A harmonious society of mutual benefit (as discussed in Chapter One) follows from the interlocking pursuit of self-interest channeled into a society of exchange whose governing social logic is *quid pro quo*. Locke's theology, while containing older elements that complicate the claim that his work is merely a defense of an emergent possessive individualist capitalist order, nevertheless works with a picture of God and God's relationship to the world, on the one hand,

and human labor and duties owed to God, on the other, which, when combined with assumptions about the benefits that productive enterprise and money would have on all, ends up using negative rights talk in the to support a society ordered to proprietary, productive accumulation by individuals.

Against both of these positions, I argue that negative rights for Christians are means to facilitate love of God and love of neighbor, and, more precisely, the enrichment of society by the gift of each person's self-donation, which is to say, the particular vocation of love to which that person is called in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit who works through our created contexts conforming our desire, and thus our wills, to God's purposes. The pursuit of self-interest, channeled into the acquisition of property through one's labor, *quid pro quo* exchange, and the development of productive growth cannot claim to be the *fundamental* shape society must "naturally" take, because the overarching reality of human beings is determined by God and God's call. The exaltation of the economic sphere (conceived in this very particular manner) is relativized, and concomitant anthropological assumptions of the human person, human sociality, and the ultimate human good that are formed by the hegemony of economic life, are challenged.

Koinōnia *and the Political Enactment of Rights*

In light of this discussion, and the larger anthropology in which rights are embedded, rights to basic goods are pursued and enacted in a manner consistent with their grounding in, and teleological ordering towards, the triune God and God's purposes for human beings. We can see how this is the case by paying attention to the role Christian communities play in the pursuit and enactment of rights. The Christian community is *koinōnic*: that is, it is a body of shared

dialogue, bodily presence, and Spirit-filled transformation reflected in the Greek term *koinōnia*.

Oliver O'Donovan explains this notion in the following statement:

> The scope of this word is shown by the English nouns that may be needed to translate it: concrete 'community' on the one hand, dynamic 'communion' or 'communication' on the other. Its active sense is kept alive by the closely associated words *koinōnein*, 'to communicate,' and *koinōnos*, 'one who communicates,' and it continues to be felt in the medieval Latin of the scholastics, who could refer even to a concrete community as a *communicatio,* a 'sphere of communication.'[329]

For Christians, *koinōnia* as communion, mutual sharing, and discernment is grounded in the ostensive descriptions of the life of the triune God. In turn, the pursuit of subjective rights to basic goods by Christian communities is done in a manner that reflects the communities' own *koinōnic* life that participates in the triune God who is the source and end of human flourishing.

The sphere of political action is a primary area where the life of Christian communities has implications for the pursuit and enactment of rights. The community's political action is an outgrowth of a shared life in Christ whereby disciples are called to love of neighbor in the world, a love that mirrors the *koinōnic* life of the Christian community itself insofar as it involves a dialogic attentiveness to the particularity of the neighbor in her history and environment, as discussed in Chapter Three. Against the hegemonic imaginary of public life as an economy of self-interested preference worked out in terms of *quid pro quo*, the Christian demand for engagement with the neighbor involves seeking a common good together, a commitment that is rooted in the common creation of all human beings in the *Logos*, as well as their common vocation to live in that incarnate *Logos* relating to the triune God and serving the neighbor in love. Through such solidarity with the neighbor, the pursuit of basic rights can take place.

To illustrate what this *koinōnic* pursuit of basic rights looks like, I want to turn to engagement by Christian communities with others in civil society through broad-based

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[329] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003,* 242.

community organizing. While broad-based community organizing is associated with the work of

Saul Alinsky in Chicago during the early- to mid-20th century, it is now a global practice.[330]

Unlike in Fordism, where factories were the primary sites of organizing, in a post-Fordist,

finance-dominated capitalism marked by the surge in growth of the service sectors (at least

within the urban hubs of global cities, especially in North Atlantic societies), place-based

organizing becomes the dominant form of community organizing.[331] Thus, instead of solely

honing in on sites of production, broad-based community organizing focuses on institutions like

hospitals, schools, and local governments that are not mobile, as well as corporations that are.

To take one example, Bretherton draws attention to the City of London, in which

economic power exerts a place-based sovereignty "creating for itself freedom from state-level

and democratic accountability while massively limiting the ability of ordinary citizens to act

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[330] For a discussion of its global influence, see Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*: *Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of the Common Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11. The use of parables by seminal figures in broad based organizing like Saul Alinsky points to the importance of non-theoretical forms of reasoning in political life, and his correspondence with Jacques Maritain raises questions about how Christians might assess the work of someone like Alinsky who existed on the "edge" of belief. Ronald Thiemann explores in his posthumously published *The Humble Sublime: Secularity and the Politics of Belief* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013) the life and work of writers who display what we might call, following Barth, secular parables. According to Thiemann the parables that are the life and work of such writers represent, following his own Lutheran tradition, sacramental realism, which draws the reader into a transformed relationship to reality, including the relationship the reader has to the neighbor in public life. The sacramental dimension alludes to a God who comes to human beings in hiddenness, who as Luther following Nyssa stated, can only be seen from behind.

Thiemann's work raises difficult questions about the nature of faith in relation to non-Christian figures. How do we assess a faith-like stance towards a "sacramental beauty" that draws the recipient forward even if they do not explicitly assent to Christ as their savior? This phenomenon is manifest in the lives of the writers he examines, people who hover between belief and unbelief. And these figures, in turn, convey a sense of beauty in their writings in a manner that has eerie similarities to the rendering of God-in-Christ in the Gospels, the one who encounters a reader or hearer as an agent of promise. Is there a "faith" beyond belief but not beyond a kind of trusting orientation to a beautiful reality by which one is nevertheless grasped or pulled along? Perhaps, this "faith" serves as a *preparatio dei*, on the journey towards explicit faith in Jesus Christ and communion with the triune God that is salvation. See Gavin D'Costa's nuanced discussion of what he calls "universal-access exclusivism" in Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 29.

Thiemann, it should also be noted, speaks of a sacramental *realism* but does not embrace a sacramental *ontology*. He instead follows Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* and his reading of the Reformation whereby ordinary creation is affirmed in its *ordinariness*. This is different from Taylor's *A Secular Age* where the Canadian, Catholic thinker is more sympathetic to those who lament the loss of enchantment, which is often linked to a sacramental ontology.

[331] *Ibid.*, 41. Of course, there is a vital need for organizing within factories, which are increasingly built within the global South where labor protections are much more lax.

politically and governments to act juridically, thus eroding the civic and democratic life of political communities."[332] In response, pressure by London citizens--which includes Christian communities--to embed market relationships in larger social relationships, ensures that "companies remember that those they operate among, sell to, and employ are their neighbors."[333] Furthermore, the economic sphere is unmasked as a sphere of rule, bringing into sharp relief the *political* power of corporate entities, which, like the state, are imagined as sovereign persons brought into being by proprietary individuals. The similarity between the state and corporation as proprietary sovereign entities is now foregrounded.[334]

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[332] *Ibid.*, 67.

[333] *Ibid.*, 69.

[334] Luke Bretherton in *Resurrecting Democracy* perceptively identifies the similarities between community organizing and what he calls consociational democracy. He writes, "the term consociation is defined here to mean a mutual fellowship between distinct institutions or groups who are federated together for a common purpose" (6). For our purposes, what is important in Bretherton's comparison of broad-based community organizing and consociationalism is that in both political formations absolute sovereignty is not identified with a singular institution like the state. A consociational notion of democracy, however, decenters sovereign power by recognizing the plurality of social space, composed as it is of economic institutions, governing authorities, and the various traditions and communities of civil society, including the life of Christian communities as well as coalitions involving Christian communities and non-Christian neighbors.

In light of globalization, where national boundaries are increasingly permeable due to the compression of space by technological developments and the unending flow of financial capital, consociational patterns of governance--even in the midst of the proprietary nation-state imagined in terms of a contract enacted between atomistic individuals--may serve not only as an interruptive social-imaginary but as a concrete parable of God's inbreaking kingdom that is "not yet," but also "already."

With regards to the Lutheran tradition, the resonance between Luther's notion of estates and consociational democracy infused with broad-based community organizing is particularly intriguing. Combining church, family (which would include the world of economic relations) and the governing authorities, the estates are to be sites where Christians enact their particular vocations to love God and neighbor since all the estates are under God's rule. Through consociational engagement, of which broad-based organizing, as Bretherton suggestively argues, is a contemporary example, the estates can mutually challenge each other to embody, in analogous fashion, God's love in service of human dignity and a reconceptualized understanding of rights. What separates this updated understanding of estates from earlier organic understandings of society (including within the Lutheran tradition as well as within Catholic social thought, especially in the period before Vatican II) is that governance is recognized as not only belonging to traditional ruling authorities, but also to economic institutions like corporations as well as churches (as well as other members of civil society). The recognition that the corporation is a ruling, sovereign agent unmasks its purportedly non-political status. Unlike in organic functionalism however where each societal sphere and its respective form of sociality and characteristic institutions exist side-by-side in relative independence, in this consociational understanding of political life infused by broad-based organizing, each estate is opened up to judgment, with Christian communities in particular, witnessing, often in solidarity with others, to the particular *koinōnic* reality in which they participate and freely receive from God.

Such coalitions of solidarity with the neighbor that pursue a notion of subjective rights in accordance with a theocentric anthropology of human flourishing are reliant upon practices of listening so important to the New Monasticism. Just as Christian communities listen to God's Word and share in Christ's body through the Eucharist, so in listening to others outside of the their boundaries, they participate in what Bonhoeffer calls "God's ear."[335] This mutual listening between those who have all been created through the *Logos* so as to enjoy communion with the triune God becomes an enactment of *koinōnia*, a sharing in human createdness in Christ, in which attentiveness to the other locates her in a common world of meaning and action ultimately directed to God. This attentiveness is also an act of faith, or better put, an analogy of the faith that is given by God as we receive the gospel, a trust that God bridges positive difference, and overcomes negative estrangement, to create a space of mutuality.[336] For Bernd Wannenwetsch and Luke Bretherton, listening, which leads to trust and is an act of trust, in turn becomes the condition for people "acting together" and "searching for sustainable conditions of social life."

Just as the New Monasticism seeks to foster practices and create spaces in which an integral self can be lived, a self of faith, in which all aspects of one's life are grounded in, and oriented to, communion with the triune God through prayer, worship, reception of Word and sacrament, and service to neighbor, so forms of political and social engagement involving Christians and Christian communities offer a means to unite what is often seen as the "religious, private" self and the "secular, public" self in a manner that is faithful to the full-bodied nature of discipleship, in which one's whole life is lived in Christ, breaking down barriers between public and private and secular and religious constructed by North Atlantic modernity. Furthermore, like the New Monasticism, which is a rather demanding manifestation of vocation intentionally lived

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[335] Dietrich Bonhoeffer quoted in Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010),100.

[336] Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 100.

out in the world, political action forms people, functioning as a kind of craft requiring ongoing reflection and practice.[337]

At the same time, the mutual presence of Christians to Christians and non-Christians, as well as solidarity between Christian communities and other associations within civil society that are not reducible to economic relationships or the bureaucracy of the nation-state, involves the possibility of judgment. Not just judgment as a humble but firm "no" directed to forms of social life that threaten the attainability of basic goods, but also judgment enacted between partners, in which the neighbor becomes a means by which God opens a person or community to a vital word it may not want to hear, whether that word is about itself and its identity, its understanding of the divine or the ultimate good, or the form in which rights should be enacted.

The pursuit of theologically grounded subjective rights to basic goods by Christian communities through broad-based organizing also challenges the anthropology of governance that accompanies rights-talk in Hobbes and Locke as well as that of the contemporary corporation and nation-state imagined as monistic sovereigns formed by contracting, possessive individuals.[338] Above, we saw how in both Hobbes's and Locke's writings, proprietary

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[337] *Ibid.*, 81. MacIntyre has promoted the craft ideal for the formation of virtue in, for example, *Dependent, Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1999), and, from a different perspective, John Milbank, in his explorations of 19th century English socialists steeped in neo-medievalism. For his most recent constructive work in this area, see John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

[338] In challenging aspects of the nation-state I am not against sovereign, governing authorities. The Christian tradition is replete with theological reflection concerning the provisional legitimacy of ruling authorities. Nevertheless, as I mentioned in Chapter One, the dominant form that sovereign governance has taken in modernity is the nation-state, which is a contingent historical development of late medieval and early modern Europe. For most of European history, as well as in the history of non-European lands, the nation-state was not the form that the governing powers took. In the contemporary postmodern, postcolonial period, in light of global financial capitalism and post-Fordism, marked by changes in transportation, digital communication and information processing, transnational financial flows, and the migration of peoples, the nation-state faces significant challenges to its hegemonic sovereignty and unitary control of discrete geographical units. For this reason, it is important to theologically ponder ways to address the enactment of rights that either go beyond, or are not confined solely to, the nation-state. One such example would be theological reflections on the possibility of strong international agencies that possess greater powers than those existing today, even if such reflections do not necessarily imply the creation of a unified world government. Conversely, and the subject of my discussion in this chapter, are glocal forms of organizing that address global forces articulated at place-based, local levels.

individuals confer sovereignty to the state. For Hobbes, this is a complete transfer of

sovereignty, while for Locke it is a contractual relation, whereby the individual citizens, banding

together, bring the state into being as well as disband it if it does not fulfill its "contractual"

obligations. Nevertheless, in both of these figures the state oversees a society that has a

decidedly economic bent, or at least one easily assimilable to a social imaginary that views

human sociality in terms of economic relationships marked by *quid pro quo* and the pursuit of

private self-interest, not to mention the valorization of private, exclusive property. By contrast,

the alternative anthropology that I have developed in this study is not only consistent with

solidaristic practices by which corporations and other monistic ruling powers can be held

accountable, the public foregrounding of the *koinōnic* nature of one partner in political

coalitions, Christian communities, itself interrupts the dominant anthropology and sociality

overseen by monadic, sovereign powers, namely possessive individualism.

In light of this discussion of the *pursuit* of theologically grounded subjective rights to

basic goods through broad-based community organizing, we can also see how the *enactment* of

rights accords with a *koinōnic* notion of human flourishing to which Christian communities

witness. David Harvey's exploration of what he terms "commoning" is particularly suggestive

with regards to this point. According to Harvey, in the contemporary era, we must be attentive

as much to "spaces of living" rather than "spaces of work". Contemporary post-Fordist

dynamics of exclusion and marginalization, he reminds us, mean that many people are confined

to either no work, to sporadic work, or to work in the informal sector of the economy. Such

persons are either members of 1) "left-behind" populations in urban (but also rural) dead zones

within the larger productive economy, including racial minorities in inner-cities, 2) domestic

migrants in the global South who have moved from rural to urban centers, 3) or transnational

immigrants moving from Latin America to the United States; Africa and the Middle East to Western Europe; or South and Southeast Asia to the Gulf States. Attention to the spaces of living is also sensitive to issues of gender, since women disproportionately labor as caregivers (often in addition to more formal work) and thus need support systems that undergird relationships of care.

The move beyond traditional industrial production in many parts of the world has also meant that alternative forms of profit-seeking have become more central, which makes attention to the spaces of living all the more important. The extraction of rents by landlords is a case in point.[339] Within cities, the increased desirability of urban living has meant that greater profit can be made from housing. As Harvey reminds us, in a post-Fordist setting, the "image" of the city itself is a kind of production, tied to visions of the good life. That is to say, the culture and social interactions of cities are themselves "images" that can quickly be appropriated by entrepreneurs seeking to "sell" them, whether through tourism--which ironically often whitewashes and "Disneyfies" the urban landscape—or real estate transactions that seek to make a profit from neighborhoods that express "authenticity." All of these attempts to commodify the lifeworld lead to the kind of exclusions and homogenization associated with suburbs and gated communities—lifestyle enclaves—as more and more people can no longer afford to live in urban environments. In many cities, this only exasperates the difficulties countless people face in finding and maintaining work due to poor public transportation, and ballooning metropolitan sizes that make commuting a time-consuming task. For this reason, Harvey argues, social

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[339] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2013), 129.

movements increasingly center on adequate and affordable shelter, as well as what he calls "the right to the city."[340]

This is where we come to the notion of commoning. According to Harvey, commoning involves "the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified--off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations."[341] Commoning, in other words, goes beyond simply granting people private, exclusive property rights to land and housing. According to Harvey, private property rights do not adequately address problems of poverty and the lack of accessible housing, since "the poor, beset with insecurity of income and frequent financial difficulties, can easily be persuaded to trade in that asset for a cash payment at a relatively low price."[342] Instead commoning bypasses private property rights in favor of rights to basic goods fostered by, as well as ordered to, collective and non-commodified social and institutional relationships. Such relationships mirror the shared participation in Jesus Christ by *koinōnic* communities, as well as the purpose of that communing or sharing as a means to foster the well-being of the neighbor as a creature of dignity who is created by God and called into participation in the triune life. And these practices of commoning, in turn, are pursued by Christian communities in coalitions of shared solidarity and mutual engagement with non-Christian neighbors, especially the marginalized.

Conclusion

Taking into account the discussion of the New Monasticism in Chapter Four and the broader discussion about human flourishing in Chapters Two and Three, in this chapter I have turned to the contentious question of human rights as part of a culminating reflection on theo-

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[340] *Ibid.*
[341] *Ibid.* 73
[342] *Ibid.*

political responses to possessive individualism. That is to say, how does the vision of human flourishing articulated in Chapters Two and Three and the common life exemplified by the New Monasticism discussed in Chapter Four shape political-ethical responses to possessive individualism in a manner that simultaneously keeps faith with the language of human rights? As I have stated before, this question is important because human rights are seen by some as one of the great ethical and political achievements of modernity, and by others as a negative development promoting possessive individualism. In attempting to answer it, I began with a basic definition of rights and give a brief synopsis of the history of the rights debate. I then explored in some detail how Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in particular understand rights, since they have exerted the greatest influence on modern, secular accounts of this topic. From there, I developed my own contrasting account of rights that is non-proprietary, linking this claim to my discussions in the previous chapters regarding the Christian community's witness to human flourishing in Christ and in communion with the triune God. Finally, in light of this discussion concerning the grounding of rights and the *telos* to which rights are meant to serve, I turned to the pursuit and enactment of rights by returning to the kind of common life exemplified by the New Monasticism, specifically its *koinōnic* nature, by which I mean its commitment to mutual sharing, communication, and ongoing discernment through engagement with the marginalized. Specifically, I examined participation by Christian communities in community organizing as a form of collective action that seeks to pursue and enact rights in a manner consistent with those communities' own *koinōnic* nature grounded in God's triune life that is the source and *telos* of human flourishing.

Conclusion

In this study I have sought to develop a Christian theological and social-ethical critique of capitalism organized around the framework of "possessive individualism. For the purposes of this study, I have defined "possessive individualism" as a proprietary and acquisitive orientation towards self, world, and the divine. In turn, the key question I have sought to address was whether Christian theology and Christian communities can contribute to a vision of human flourishing in light of globalizing capitalism's possessive individualist vision of the human good, which reduces human life to a morally and spiritually flattened, as well as for many, exclusionary, status quo.

My core contention has been that human beings are called to live in faithful relationship to the triune God, with human flourishing specifically characterized 1) by dispossession and recentering "in Christ," and 2) by sharing, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the love that is given and received between Christ and the Father and poured out in our hearts in service towards the neighbor. It is my further contention that this theological emphasis both interrupts the moral and social imaginary of globalizing capitalism and provides the basis for developing a Christian social ethic indexed to the challenges that a society marked by possessive individualism poses.

What have I meant by a moral and social imaginary on the one hand, and by interruption on the other? Let me review the former first. Capitalist societies have been marked by practices of private property ownership, the expansion of the exercise of instrumental-rationality in service of profit, industrial and post-industrial production, complex financial instruments and instantaneous financial flows, market exchange, and market consumption. These practices all share a "background common understanding that makes possible common practices, and widely

shared sense of legitimacy."[343] Charles Taylor also speaks of this background in terms of images

and norms. The particular background image that I have emphasized in this study is that of the

possessive individual, and it is this picture of the person that these practices "seek" (if one speaks

anthropomorphically) to create. In turn this image both 1) legitimates the actual shape these

practices take, because this picture of the human being carries with it a notion of the good, in the

sense of an image of dignified flourishing based on the power to control and acquire; and 2) is

assumed to be natural because the practices of capitalism inform the notion of the good and

human identity in a manner that makes that image plausible.

In terms of interruption, the life of Christian communities is marked by practices of

reading scripture, as well as preaching, ritual practices of baptism and the partaking of the

Eucharist, prayer to God, and hospitality directed towards the neighbor. All of these are attempts

to faithfully respond to the triune God whom Christians believe has been revealed in Jesus the

Christ, and who lives in ongoing relationship to the community, sustaining it in being, shaping

both its identity and that of the wider world. The theological interpreter, in turn, seeks to

"constructively interpret" the texts and practices of the Christian community. These practices of

interpretation, which may take the form of discursive narration, explication, and argumentation

can also be used to explicate and to challenge what the theologian sees as the relationship

between the culture of the Christian community and the larger culture or cultures in which that

community finds itself embedded.

For my project, I have sought to articulate a boundary between the capitalist imaginary,

on the one hand, and Christian understandings of the good and human flourishing, on the other.

These understandings of the good emerge out of the interpretation of Christian texts and

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[343] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 171.

practices, and the attempt to faithfully witness to who God is, how God relates to the world, and what the implications this relationship has to the identity of the world, Christian community, and the individual. By drawing this boundary, I have argued, we can see how Christian understandings of God, God's relationship to the world, and human beings' lived responses to God can challenge – and thereby *interrupt* – the background image of the possessive individual and the wider vision of the good and human flourishing it licenses and normalizes.

Chapter One outlined the basic contours of modern and postmodern economic practices and then shifted into an exploration of how those practices have been characterized by a possessive individualist social imaginary. I began by looking at the basic contours of capitalism in its historical development, including its disciplinary dimension. I then shifted into exploring the moral and social imaginary of capitalism and the ambiguous counter-reaction to that imaginary in the form of authenticity or expressive individualism. From there, I turned to recent twentieth- and twenty-first century history within North Atlantic societies in order to examine capitalism in the years after WWII, using the appellations "Fordism" for the generation immediately after WWII and "post-Fordist finance capitalism" for globalizing North Atlantic market societies after the 1970s. Finally, I looked at how the emergence of a possessive individualist anthropology results in exclusion and retreat from engagement with the neighbor.

In Chapter Two, I turned to an account of human flourishing rooted in, and oriented to, the triune God. My claim has been that human flourishing, the *telos* of human, created life, consists in communion with the triune God, who graciously gives without any need of recompense born out of lack. I began by articulating a vision of the triune God that is marked by loving giving and receiving that is attentive to particularity. Next, I explored the relationship that God has with creation, one that is both consistent with who God is and, in its implications for

human life, interruptive of the hegemony of absolute self-possession in autonomous individuality. From there, I reflected upon God's creation of a world of embodied human beings in accord with God's triune life, and how human flourishing consists in responding to the call of the triune God in Christ. Finally, I explored how Jesus is 1) both the one who perfectly enacts his particular vocation to human flourishing by taking on the sin of the world 2) while revealing himself to be the incarnate God whose death breaks through the hegemony of *quid pro quo*, in utter faithfulness to who God is as creator, discussed above.

If Chapter Two was more focused on the Christian doctrine of God, God's relationship to the world, and the general contours of theological anthropology, Chapter Three developed out of that more general theological account an interruptive vision of Christian discipleship. In other words, in light of the outline of a basic ontology of the human being developed in Chapter Two, Chapter Three undertook an examination of the main steps in redemption, namely repentance and dispossession, on the one hand, and moral learning and transformation, on the other, with each of these two steps understood as aspects of the operation of the Spirit in the Christian life. In essence, repentance and dispossession correspond to the Christian notion of justification and moral learning and transformation correspond to sanctification. More specifically, I argued that the gospel dispossesses and recenters the believer in a full-bodied life orientation of faith in which one is conformed to one's true, embodied, and particular vocation in Christ involving love of God and love of neighbor enacted by the transforming power of the Spirit. By engaging in that discussion, I argued that we gain a more dynamic understanding of how human flourishing is realized in light of sin and redemption and that this thus furthers the interruption of possessive individualism in the contemporary context.

I began this more dynamic account of human redemption by first examining repentance, dispossession, and faith. I then linked this discussion of repentance, dispossession, and faith to transformation in community and love of God and love of neighbor via an engagement with the work of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. From there, I shifted into an examination of the implications that this discussion has for interrupting the consumer spirituality described in Chapter One, where faith is disconnected from dispossession-in-repentance and the self is affirmed as it is and as "possessing" God as an object to be used for its own self-determined ends. Finally, I explored how discussion of transformation towards love of God and neighbor interrupted problematic understandings of love and human relationality shaped by a contemporary globalizing capitalist imaginary.

In Chapter Four, I turned to the New Monasticism, contending that it illustrates with particular depth this pattern of Christian discipleship and flourishing in communion with God in a manner that is consistent with the re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ, the social, embodied dimension of the Spirit, and the ongoing transformation of the human person's life towards love of God and love of neighbor. I began by discussing Rod Dreher's *Benedict Option* and then turned to Wes Markofski's study of what he has called, following others in the movement, "New Monasticism." I argued that the Benedict Option, while not inconsistent with the patterns of discipleship outlined in Chapter Three, nevertheless attenuates these resonances by making both the identity of the neighbor, as well as of God, a "possession" of the community, mitigating proper love towards the neighbor and faith in a God who can never be owned but instead is always drawing us forward. By contrast, the New Monasticism, particularly in its urban manifestation in "dead zones" within the global economy, is more consistent with the dispossession and re-centering of our identities in Jesus Christ; the embodied dimension of the

Spirit; and the ongoing transformation of the human person's life in Christ by the power of that Spirit towards love of God and love of neighbor in a manner that avoids making both the identity of the neighbor, as well as God, a "possession" of the community.

Taking into account the discussion of the New Monasticism in Chapter Four and the broader discussion about human flourishing in Chapters Two and Three, in Chapter Five I turned to the contentious question of human rights as part of a culminating reflection on theo-political responses to possessive individualism. That is to say, how might the vision of human flourishing articulated in Chapters Two and Three and the common life exemplified by the New Monasticism discussed in Chapter Four shape political-ethical responses to possessive individualism in a manner that simultaneously keeps faith with the language of human rights? This turn to a discussion of rights may have seemed an extraneous move, since it might have appeared that the New Monasticism provided the necessary template for the interruption of the global capitalist imaginary and its replacement by a pattern of life consistent with Christian convictions about God and God's relationship to the world. In affirming rights, however, I have sought to distinguish my work of interruption from those projects that see the development of modernity as a whole as a regrettable turn. Thus, despite my diagnosis of the possessive individualism present within the modern globalizing project, my project should not be confused with positions like that of Radical Orthodoxy that narrate the modern turn, including the development of rights-talk, as an unfortunate error.[344] In that sense, I have sought to honor a genuine gain of modernity and an advance over the previous culture of Christendom. In line with this nuanced position, Chapter Five explored whether the vision of human flourishing articulated in Chapters Two and Three might contribute to an understanding of human rights that

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[344] See, for example, John Milbank's article "Against Human Rights: Liberty in the Western Tradition," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* (2012): 203-234.

avoids the possessive individualist tendencies found in the writings of its most influential supporters.

To that end, I began with a basic definition of rights and gave a brief synopsis of the history of the rights debate. I then explored in some detail how Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in particular understood rights, since they are the two thinkers who have arguably exerted the greatest influence on modern, secular accounts of this topic. From there, I developed an account of rights that is non-proprietary, linking this claim to my discussions in the previous chapters regarding the Christian community's witness to human flourishing in Christ and in communion with the triune God. Finally, in light of this discussion concerning the grounding of rights and the *telos* to which rights are meant to serve, I turned to the pursuit and enactment of rights by returning to the kind of common life exemplified by the New Monasticism, specifically its *koinōnic* nature, by which I meant its commitment to mutual sharing, communication, and ongoing discernment through engagement with the marginalized. Specifically, I examined participation by Christian communities in community organizing as a form of collective action that seeks to pursue and enact rights in a manner consistent with those communities' own *koinōnic* nature grounded in God's triune life that is the source and *telos* of human flourishing.

By following this path this study sought to accomplish three main goals. First, I have wanted to draw out the importance that attentiveness to "possession" has for articulating the Christian kerygma in the contemporary situation. Second, I have tried to show that Christianity has something to say to the contemporary capitalist, globalizing world, especially through the development of a multidimensional notion of human flourishing centered on love of God and love of neighbor, a move that pushes beyond purely secular discussions of this critical topic. In that sense, my project shares concerns found within liberationist and postcolonial theologies,

Radical Orthodoxy, and works by Stanley Hauerwas and his disciples. Nevertheless, my study

has sought to update the societal analysis pioneered by liberation theologians beginning in the

1970's as well as develop a more robust and explicit account of rights indexed to concerns about

the global. In addition, unlike many postcolonial theologies, the vision of human flourishing I

have foregrounded is linked to a notion of the triune God who is wholly otherwise to creation

and to the human creature.[345] Furthermore, in contrast to Radical Orthodoxy as well as the

positions of Hauerwas and his followers, I have sought to link a vision of human flourishing and

the life of Christian communities with careful attention to the dynamics of "possession" of Christ

and the neighbor within those very same communities, as well as an affirmation of rights as a

genuine good of modernity.

Finally, by interrupting capitalist practice and its moral and social imaginary, I believe

Christian thought and practice has the potential both to recognize the value of and to renew

modern commitments, especially human rights, within a postmodern, postsecular, and

postcolonial world in a manner consistent with its own Christian witness. In accordance with

this belief, I have sought to affirm rights discourse theologically and reclaim it from capitalist

practice and its moral and social imaginary, so that Christian communities may be enriched by

the *saeculum*, even as the *saeculum* might receive a helpful critique from those same

communities. Indeed, attentiveness to theological anthropology opens up a new mode of

imagining the human person in moral and social imaginative space. By beginning with

possessive individualism, then turning to a theological critique and reconstruction of a vision of

the human person and human flourishing, and finally affirming human rights in a *koinōnic*

context, I have implicitly sought to redefine what it means to celebrate the individual in a manner

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[345] See, for example, Mayra Rivera Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster Press, 2007).

that avoids either a wholesale rejection of such a celebration in favor of an atavistic, anti-modern stance, on the one hand, or naïve affirmation of the status quo that fails to grapple with the ambiguities of the moral and social imaginary of contemporary globalizing capitalism, on the other.

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