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The Eucharist and planetary wellbeing: Norman Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist for a sacramental ecotheology

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Dissertation

**THE EUCHARIST AND PLANETARY WELLBEING:
NORMAN PITTENGER'S PROCESS THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST FOR
A SACRAMENTAL ECOTHEOLOGY**

by

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Dedicated to the Reverends Dorothy Ann and Fred Webster, Jr.,
the first theologians I ever knew.

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Boston University School of Theology, 2022

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores relationships between Christian communities, ecological theology, food and meal patterns, and planetary wellbeing amid changing climates in the Plantationocene. The thesis is that a process theology of the Eucharist provides a framework for Christian sacramental theology to respond to the dynamic conditions of food amid changing climates on Earth by prioritizing processes of restoring and sustaining communion with God and all our creaturely kindred in ecological wellbeing. This dissertation presents and develops the process theology of Norman Pittenger, a Christian process theologian and theological interpreter of Alfred North Whitehead. By critically retrieving Norman Pittenger's process ecclesiology, I aim to encourage Christian process theology to develop theological perspectives of sacramentality as celebrated through the church and Christian life for the wellbeing of the planet.

In addition to developing a process theology of the Eucharist, this dissertation also lays foundations for a broader process theology of meals that seeks to respond to the dynamic conditions of food in changing climates in modernity. Weaving together the

work of Theodore Walker, Jr., William T. Cavanaugh, Catherine Keller, Nick Estes, S. Yael Dennis, Filipe Maia, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, and William Cronon, I critique modernity as a paradigm of commodifying relationships that depend on isolating people from one another and dismembering ecosystems for capital profit. I identify modernity's meals as products of and contributors to anthropogenic climate change in the Plantationocene that depend upon processes of commodification and dismemberment of ecological bodies.

How humans eat matters for the wellbeing of the world. For many Christians, the Eucharist meal is central to relationship with God and other people. The particularities of local eucharistic communities influence how the church experiences eucharistic relationships with God. Likewise, experiences of the Eucharist influence the particularities that characterize any local church. This dissertation contends that encountering cosmic Love in the Eucharist meal transforms the church to reveal and enact love in all our meals, promoting planetary wellbeing through food justice and ecological health.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THESIS	2
SIGNIFICANCE	2
CONCEPTUAL FLOW OF THE DISSERTATION	9
Chapter I	9
Chapter II	10
Chapter III	10
Chapter IV	11
Chapter V	11
CHAPTER I – A THEOLOGY OF ORGANISM: NORMAN PITTENGER’S DEVELOPMENT OF PROCESS THOUGHT AND ITS EMPHASES FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY	13
GOD AND THE ENTANGLING COSMOS	15
DYNAMIC CREATION	17
Actual Entities	19
Feeling Actualities and Possibilities	22
Relationality and Power	25
DYNAMIC GOD	31
Freedom, Evil, and God’s Relationship with the World	31
Living God, Actual Entity	46
THE DIVINE TRIUNITY AND JESUS CHRIST IN NORMAN PITTENGER’S PROCESS THEOLOGY	48
The Divine Triunity	52

Jesus Christ _____	60
An Initial Implication and Critique of Pittenger’s Process Theology _____	68
CONCLUSION _____	73
CHAPTER II - THE SOCIETY OF EN-CHRISTED LIVING: TOWARD AN ECCLESIOLOGY	
OF ORGANISM _____	75
PROCESS ECCLESIOLOGY IN BERNARD LEE AND MARJORIE SUCHOCKI _____	77
Bernard Lee _____	78
Marjorie Suchocki _____	99
PROCESS ECCLESIOLOGY IN NORMAN PITTENGER _____	118
Church as Social Process _____	124
Sacramental Discipleship _____	135
CHAPTER III - ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL: NORMAN PITTENGER’S	
SACRAMENTAL ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY _____	142
INTRODUCTION _____	143
REVEALING AND ENACTING LOVE _____	145
Sacramental _____	146
Ecotheology _____	155
INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND BIOPHILIA _____	160
Interconnectedness _____	160
Biophilia _____	171
JUSTICE AS PLANETARY WELLBEING _____	185
A Symposium for Planetary Wellbeing _____	191
TABLE TALK _____	215

CHAPTER IV - OUR DAILY BREAD: MEALS AND SOCIAL IMAGINATIONS FOR	
PLANETARY WELLBEING	216
WHAT ARE MEALS?	216
Introduction	220
MEMORY	222
The Memory of One Meal	222
Memories of Many Meals	228
The Consequences of Memories	233
HOPE	240
Hoping for Oneself	244
Hoping for Different Worlds	252
Hoping for Community	264
RELATIONSHIP	279
Relationships Hoarded in Futures	280
Breaking, Hiding, and Hoarding Relationships	285
Relatives at the Table	290
CHAPTER V – A PROCESS THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST FOR PLANETARY DINING:	
THINKING WITH PITTENGER FOR TODAY	293
The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist	296
Eucharistic Worship Characterizes Church	302
EUCHARISTIC LIFE AND CHRISTIAN ACTION	305
Love and Justice in Norman Pittenger’s Process Theology of the Eucharist	
	307

Attentive Eating as Practicing Solidarity	313
THE EUCHARIST AND CHRISTIAN ADAPTIVE RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE	318
Open Ending: Questions that Remain	321
CONCLUSION	332
BIBLIOGRAPHY	335
CURRICULUM VITAE	344

INTRODUCTION

In *The Lure of Divine Love: Human Experience and Christian Faith in a Process Perspective*, Norman Pittenger writes that “sacramentalism in the right sense is both natural to human beings and natural to the world, and it is also the way in which God effectively works in the creation.”¹ This dissertation identifies and develops a sacramental ecological theology for the present age from Pittenger’s process ecclesiology, particularly his process theology of the Eucharist. Pittenger’s attention to questions of ecclesiology opened process theology to broader Christian theological considerations of the church following Vatican II.² Pittenger’s ecclesiological work, however, has been largely set to the side by subsequent Christian process theologians.³ I want to encourage Christian process theologians to recognize and develop our theological insights for the wellbeing of the planet through life in Christ together as church.

¹ Norman Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love: Human Experience and Christian Faith in a Process Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 167-168.

² Bryan P. Stone gives a helpful introduction to this twentieth century “turn to ecclesiology” in his *Reader*. Stone writes that, “as the church found itself needing to radically renegotiate its relationship to nations, cultures, and empires in an increasingly post-Christendom world, ecclesiology took on new urgency and importance.” For Pittenger, working out a theology of the church that was adequate for new sociocultural realities necessitated a reconceptualization of the church through theology in another mode – namely, one rooted in process thought – than had been relied upon since medieval Christendom. Bryan P. Stone, *A Reader in Ecclesiology* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 145-146.

³ John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin do note the importance of Pittenger’s interpretation of Whitehead for Christian theology, and his considerations of human sexuality, christology, and the Trinity have marked his legacy within the process-relational community and in Anglican/Episcopal theology. John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1976), 180-181.

By attending to Pittenger's ecclesiology, particularly his sacramental theology, I aim to emphasize the rich implications of Christian process theology for how church can become a holy participant in God's Love-in-action for planetary wellbeing through our meals together. The complex connections of global climate change and global food systems confront Christian communities and theology at just this point. How humans eat matters for global climate change. In this dissertation, I focus on the process theology of the Eucharist that Pittenger develops within his broader process ecclesiology. A critical consideration of Pittenger's sacramental theology in conversation with ecological concerns about food is significant for how churches can both think theologically about eating and actually eat with attention toward holiness.

THESIS

In this dissertation, I argue that *a process theological perspective on the Eucharist provides a framework for Christian sacramental theology to respond to the dynamic conditions of food amid changing climates on Earth that prioritize creating, restoring, and sustaining communion with God and all our creaturely kindred in ecological wellbeing.*

SIGNIFICANCE

Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist provides a significant connection between his ecclesiology and the ecological crises that emerged through modernity and currently ravage our planet. Drawing on Theodore Walker, Jr., William T. Cavanaugh, Catherine Keller, Nick Estes, S. Yael Dennis, Filipe Maia, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, and William Cronon, I argue that modernity is principally characterized by the rise of the so-

called isolated human person who interacts with the world through contractual and commodifying patterns of relationships.⁴ Over the last six centuries, these relationships have had profound impacts on the ways that many humans relate to meals, including the development of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, colonial plantations, settler-colonial monoculture, transnational corporate agribusiness, supermarket and fast food chains, nutritionism, and obscene food waste. I expand upon Pittenger’s descriptions of memory, relationship, and aim in social processes to talk about meal memories, meal hopes, and meal relationships to explore many of these modern meal patterns and their impacts on planetary wellbeing.

Especially in the last sixty years, particular patterns of human food consumption have contributed significantly to anthropogenic climate change.⁵ The technological efforts to produce food to fit these modern industrial patterns of consumption have further contributed to the decline of planetary wellbeing through increased deforestation

⁴ Theodore Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections: A Black Atlantic Synthesis of Neoclassical Metaphysics and Black Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T & T Clark, 2002); Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*; Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future*; S. Yael Dennis, *Edible Entanglements: On a Political Theology of Food* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019); Filipe Maia, “Trading Futures: Future-Talk, Finance, and Christian Eschatology” (ThD diss., Harvard University, 2017), Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014); William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

⁵ Cheikh Mbow et al., “Food Security,” in *IPCC Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse gas fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems*, (August 7, 2019), 5—5-5—8.

and the degradation of soil and fresh water.⁶ Such technologies have emerged through the modern complex of human social relationships.

Healing the planet and restoring relationships of wellbeing will demand a complex resistance to modernity's prioritization of contracts and commodities. Dependence upon technological fixes to problems caused by other technological advances has done little and will continue to do little to fully address the destructive consequences of anthropogenic climate change. Furthermore, theologies that center dominant modes of discreet human individualization will be inadequate to meet the present need for integrating complexity. The planet and our creaturely relatives need humans to reorient our relationships to and through meals as events of planetary community.⁷

⁶ Various food technologies are intended here. As human population has continued to grow, monoculture farming as an agrotechnology has increased crop yield to meet the growing demand of global markets while depleting biomass in soil through a complex of factors, including antibiotic, pesticide, and artificial fertilizer usage. The designation of land for this particular manner of agriculture has contributed to deforestation – often through mass burning of forests, emitting sequestered greenhouse gasses on top of the destruction of the sequestering organisms, the trees – as well as downstream nitrogen pollution and its resulting algal blooms. The increased ease of access to centuries-old global trade routes has contributed fossil fuel consumption in transportation. Depletion of aquifers has occurred as a result of a whole host of food-related technologies, whether from the production of bottled water or the continued practices of irrigation via inundation.

⁷ I think that Cobb gestures towards such a reorientation when he talks about *realistic hope* and *belief in Spirit* as live options for answering why it might not be too late for the church to positively respond to the pressing ecological issues of the day. Such realism must result in a hope from the depths of crisis. Consequential hope cannot be a pithy statement but must draw on the collective energy and efforts in solidarity among creatures. Cobb, *Is it Too Late?: A Theology of Ecology*, Revised edition (Denton, TX:

A process theology of the Eucharist can reorient Christian relationships to meals by cultivating attentive eating of all common meals as a habit that seeks and enacts holy food justice for the life of the world. First, a process theology of the Eucharist centers the Eucharist as a meal that reveals and enacts our communal faith, hope, and love within the life of God who is the God of all creation and the God of the oppressed. Second, it recognizes that the memories, relationships, and aims that are offered and received in the Eucharist meal weave all meals in divine love. A process theology of the Eucharist recognizes that the Eucharist meal is not radically disparate from other meals, nor does it cultivate a vision of the human as a “separate, individualistic, selfish, pretentious self who refuses to acknowledge its radical relativity.”⁸ Neither the human person nor the church are separated out from the natural systems of the world. We are rooted in particular earthy contexts and are capable of offering new events that can profoundly and creatively transform the cosmic community through our participation in the life of God.⁹

Environmental Ethics Books, 1995), 78-82; Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 115.

⁸ Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 31.

⁹ McFague characterizes the interplay between the universal potential of the relative action well when she writes, “There is no one universal solution to the planet’s ills; there are only millions of people working at millions of different tasks to make things better... The project, the well-being of our planet, may be universal, but its success depends on the passions, knowledge, work, and care of every human being on the earth.” McFague, *Life Abundant*, 31; Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 17-18; Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice: A Study of the Eucharist in the Life of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 22.

The process theology of the Eucharist that I develop in this dissertation emerges from a nascent sacramental ecotheology that I identify in Norman Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist. My effort to develop from Pittenger in this way stems from Pittenger's own treatment of the God-world relationship in his theological, and especially ecclesiological, writings. Pittenger offers a vision that stresses a societal view of reality in which planetary wellbeing becomes an aim for church's faithful participation in the life of God, who is the cosmic Lover.¹⁰ Pittenger's ecclesiology is ecologically significant as it positions church as an emerging organism within the world.¹¹ The church-as-organism occurs as a participant and member of Earth's planetary matrix of relations rather than a supernatural observer with an otherworldly destination. As I develop his ecclesiology, I demonstrate that Pittenger provides a foundation for developing a sacramental ecological theology that critically reflects upon Christian communities as concerned participants in "the indivisible salvation of the whole world."¹²

¹⁰ Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 48.

¹¹ As I will discuss in the first and second chapters, Pittenger's ecclesiology makes use of the term *organism* in two ways that develop Whiteheadian process thought for Christian theology. The first follows from the Pauline imagery of the Body of Christ, emphasizing the living and dynamic character of the *body*. In the second, *organism* is meant to name the coordinated unity of related events in an enduring and identifiable pattern. This latter understanding is a development of the notion of the term in Whiteheadian process thought. Norman Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 15.

¹² In *Process Theology as Political Theology*, John B. Cobb, Jr. attends to the ecological significance of this phrase as he develops the arguments of Sölle and Moltmann. The *whole world* must, for Cobb, be more than just the *human* world. He argues that Sölle's understanding of the *whole world* in her phrase is dangerously

To this point, however, neither Pittenger's ecclesiology nor his theology of the Eucharist have featured as influential in Christian process theological responses to climate change. He offers a critical reconceptualization of church as a social organism that remembers, that loves, that hopes as it emerges with and in response to God's love of the world. From Pittenger's ecclesiology and theology of the Eucharist, I develop a sacramental ecological theology that emphasizes Christian discipleship as faithful participation in divine love-in-action for planetary wellbeing.¹³ For Pittenger, the Eucharist is a "divine action in human action" that exemplifies the dynamic relationship between God, who is the cosmic Lover, and the beloved creation.¹⁴ In the liturgical

anthropocentric. The turn to the ecological in Moltmann is, then, a critical move for understanding the scope of salvation in political theology. "The claim, therefore, is that ecological theology is the appropriate fulfilment of the intentions of political theology," Cobb writes. Dorothee Sölle, *Political Theology*, translated by John Shelley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 60; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 332-335; John B. Cobb Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 15, 111-112, 117.

¹³ He argues in *The Lure of Divine Love* that, through creation's dynamic relationship with God, "God is self-expressed through the whole creation in just such a sacramental or 'incarnational' manner, making that creation 'God's body.'" Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 167. Other discussions of sacramental ecotheology can be found in John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, "Through Creation to the Creator," in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 86-105; Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant*; and Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004); Norman Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 111; Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 135-136.

¹⁴ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 22.

rhythm of offering and receiving in the ritual meal, Pittenger recognizes “a deeply penetrating affirmation of the essential goodness of life and creation, redeemed by God as well as created by” God.¹⁵ Furthermore, he argues that eucharistic worship is “the characteristic action of the Church” because of how it orients the imbricating relationships of reality towards and incorporates these relationships in fellowship within the loving life of God.¹⁶ For Pittenger, this holy fellowship is “for love in mutuality, participation with others, and the awareness that in our loving we are tied up with and tied in with the loving which is deepest in the whole cosmic enterprise.”¹⁷ Within his organismic ecclesiology, the Eucharist reveals and enacts the interconnectedness of all creation in divine love. This is a statement of mystical and spiritual significance for Pittenger, and I argue that it is also a statement about the sacrament’s capacity to permeate human experience and influence the daily meals of Christians for the healing of the world.¹⁸

¹⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 87.

¹⁶ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 22-25.

¹⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 60.

¹⁸ This notion of permeation echoes Bieler and Schottroff’s description of *sacramental permeability*. I agree that the Eucharist is a gift of God which heightens the awareness “to the presence of God among us and in the world” and to the “sacramentality of life.” A process theology of the Eucharist from Pittenger, however, furthers the argument to recognize that the Eucharist meal is a creative event of God and the world – humans, grains, grapes, soil, water, fire, and air included – that shapes the imagination of Christians to both seek the divine presence and become participants in revealing and enacting the creating, transforming, and restoring love that is experienced in God and the commonwealth of God. Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, & Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 5.

CONCEPTUAL FLOW OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is comprised of five chapters. The first two chapters attend to Pittenger within broader movements of Whiteheadian process thought and Christian process theology. The third chapter identifies and develops the nascent sacramental ecotheology in Pittenger's work. The fourth chapter expands Pittenger's treatment of memories, hopes, and relationships in process theology to consider the ways that meals influence the identities and priorities of human societies within our broader world. The fifth chapter advances a process theology of the Eucharist that emerges from Pittenger's work to respond to concerns about the dynamic conditions of food amid our planet's changing climates.

Chapter I

In the first chapter, I construct a conceptual framework for the focus on Norman Pittenger's process ecclesiology, nascent ecological theology, and process theology of the Eucharist in later chapters. Process ecclesiology is particularly concerned with three loci of process theology: God, Creation, and Christ. I present Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy and Norman Pittenger and Monica A. Coleman's theological interpretations of Whiteheadian process thought with attention to these three loci. Finally, in my discussion, I introduce Theodore Walker, Jr., as an important interlocutor for developing a process theology of the Eucharist from Pittenger's ecclesiology and theology of the Eucharist.

Chapter II

In the second chapter, I review the process ecclesiologies of Bernard Lee, Marjorie Suchocki, and Norman Pittenger. Through my review, I claim that process ecclesiology frames church as a christocentric, dynamic, and interrelated organism within the world. Lee, Suchocki, and Pittenger emphasize dynamism and relationality to different degrees in their respective ecclesiologies, and Pittenger especially relies on the Whiteheadian language of “organism” as he articulates his understandings of church. Finally, I explore and develop Pittenger’s concept of Christian discipleship as revealing and enacting the love of God through sharing life in Christ through the church and for the world. As I advance this notion of discipling, I gesture toward a nascent ecological theology in Pittenger’s ecclesiology.

Chapter III

In the third chapter, I identify and cultivate this budding ecological theology in Pittenger’s ecclesiology. Though process theology has advanced theological perspectives that incorporate and promote ecological wellbeing for decades, robust process ecclesiologies have not existed to address the climate crises on our planet, nor have they funded the emergence of Christian churches for planetary wellbeing. This chapter critically retrieves and expands Norman Pittenger’s ecclesiology for current process and sacramental ecological theologies, developing themes of interconnectedness, biophilia, and justice as planetary wellbeing. Finally, I propose a symposium for planetary wellbeing to strengthen Christian ecological solidarity through the Eucharist meal.

Chapter IV

In the fourth chapter, I attend to meals. I argue that meals are the imagination of the societies who eat them. Meals are significant moments of encounter and revelation. Meals reveal and enact a society's emerging identity in the eating moment by disclosing the eating society's memories of itself in the world, relationships that constitute it in the world, and hopes for what kind of society it wants to become in possible worlds. In meals, eaters encounter the complexity and consequences of the interweaving relationships of the world that include the eater and the eaten. Meals can reveal how eaters and eating societies are entangled in questions of food security, provision, health, and future amid profound shifts in our planet's climate that have been caused by human actions. How humans eat matters. This chapter focuses on our common meals and how we eat them so that the fifth chapter can focus on the Christian meal, the Eucharist.

Chapter V

In the fifth chapter, I propose a process theology of the Eucharist that incorporates, critiques, and moves beyond Norman Pittenger's work. I present Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist and construct a critique of his work from the insights of Theodore Walker, Jr., Karen Baker-Fletcher, Patrick T. McCormick, M. Shawn Copeland, and Monika K. Hellwig. I argue that the Eucharist meal cultivates Christian participation in the creating, restoring, and sustaining communion with God and all our creaturely kindred as an alternative to the ecologically extractive meals of the Plantationocene. Churches must adapt to the climatic changes that face our local communities and our interconnected planetary home. The "Christian adaptive responses"

that are necessary to changing climates will include adaptations in how we eat and relate to our world through our meals. For Christians who seek to reveal and enact the gospel for the wellbeing of the whole world, this process theology of the Eucharist centers our meals as opportunities to practice solidarity for planetary wellbeing in communion with the whole cosmos in Love.

**CHAPTER I – A THEOLOGY OF ORGANISM: NORMAN PITTENGER’S
DEVELOPMENT OF PROCESS THOUGHT AND ITS EMPHASES FOR
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY**

The present dissertation is a Christian theology in the mode of process and relational thinking as it has been developed by Monica Coleman, Theodore Walker, Jr., Norman Pittenger, and others.¹⁹ These three represent important strands of process theology as it has developed over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. This first chapter will lay conceptual foundations for understanding process ecclesiology as it is presented and developed in the second chapter. Pittenger will be an important interlocutor for both chapters as his work was the earliest to extend the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead through a systematic notion of Christian doctrines. Walker, Jr., and Coleman’s emphases upon liberation, communality, justice, quality of life, and struggle are particularly important for understanding, as this dissertation does, the Eucharist as a principal influencing event for Christian adaptive responses to dynamic conditions of food in global climate change.

Process ecclesiology is developed from three important loci of process theology: God, Creation, and Christ. In order for the community of Christians known as *church* to be understood in process – both *process* theology and *in process* – this chapter will address understandings of God, Creation, and Christ as they have been developed in the process and relational theologies of Pittenger, Coleman, Walker, Jr., and others. Though this dissertation will narrow its focus upon the Eucharist, this first chapter follows the

¹⁹ Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 28.

lead of Theodore Walker, Jr., and works to “explicate a doctrine of God as the God of all creation” before turning to Norman Pittenger’s process christology.²⁰ Doing so is “required to connect theology with reality as such” and grounds both process christology and chapter two’s ecclesiological program within the web of relationships that constitute the cosmos.²¹

I assert that God and creation are intimately related, and this relationship is natural to how the universe occurs. God is no sovereign exception to metaphysical claims about reality but their exemplification. The intimacy of relationship between God and creation characterizes what Coleman identifies as a *postmodern* theology, what Walker, Jr., identifies as *neoclassical* theology, and what Pittenger identifies as theology *in another mode*.²² Fundamental to Pittenger’s theological project is the relationality of God. God *is* Love *because* God Loves. “Centrally, essentially,” Pittenger writes, “God is nothing other than ‘pure, unbounded love.’ ‘His nature and his name is Love.’ That *is* the great deliverance of specifically Christian faith. If not, the faith is a fraud.”²³ Divine

²⁰ Theodore Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections: A Black Atlantic Synthesis of Neoclassical Metaphysics and Black Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 25.

²¹ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 25.

²² Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 51; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 25-35; Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 28-43.

²³ The phrasing here, that God is “pure, unbounded love” and that God’s “nature and name is Love,” Pittenger notes in *Life as Eucharist*, originate in the theological poetry of Charles Wesley. Pittenger returns to Charles Wesley throughout his ecclesiological works, often quoting “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” and “Wrestling

relationality is the beginning point for any adequate Christian theology, and relationality further entails thinking about the God-world relationship through a metaphysics of activity. “We must say that for God to be *is* to love, to love *is* to be,” Pittenger writes.²⁴ There is not a substance named “God” of which “loving” is properly adjectival and predicate. Rather, “God” is the activity of “loving” itself.

Though Pittenger’s theological assertion is grounded scripturally and in the Anglican-Wesleyan theological tradition, he is developing theologically Whitehead’s own philosophical vision of reality.²⁵ The Whiteheadian move argues that “all reality consists of actual occasions experiencing inheritances from the past in partly self-chosen ways, thereby making somewhat novel-creative contributions to future occasions of experience.”²⁶ God, then, is the God of an entangled and entangling process of creation through which reality itself emerges in great complexity. Furthermore, God’s own life is woven within the very constitution of this emerging and entangled cosmos.

GOD AND THE ENTANGLING COSMOS

The central claim of process thought is that the whole cosmos, “the world, and those who live in it” in the language of the psalmist, is chiefly characterized by a creative

Jacob.” Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 49. (*emphasis original*); Norman Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 15.

²⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 50.

²⁵ Norman Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead. Makers of Contemporary Theology* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), 17.

²⁶ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 27-28.

process of advance in time.²⁷ Advocates of process cosmologies have argued that Western philosophers have erred mightily in their assertions “that ‘being’ is more real than ‘becoming’.”²⁸ This error has especially contributed to centuries of idolization of stasis, impassability, and aseity in Christian theology. Furthermore, commitment to these theological values has spurred the construction of complex political, economic, and social systems in the name of Christian faith, distorting human relationships with one another and other-than-human creation to this day.

Theologically crucial for this dissertation’s constructive theology of the Eucharist, Christian theological developments of process thought challenge centuries of debate in theologies of the Eucharist that have emerged from the Roman traditions of Christianity. If being is not more real than becoming, then Christian theological obsession with the substance of the sacrament and what the substance does from within itself is opened for a new mode of theological inquiry and challenge. In a process theology of the Eucharist, soteriological paradigms of mechanistic, high-input salvation could fall to the side as questions of community and more transformative possibilities rise to the fore. Before the Eucharist in a process mode could be more fully developed, however, it is important to present and treat the major themes of process theology as critiques of and alternatives to philosophies of substance that have dominated philosophy and theology in Western

²⁷ Psalm 24:1, NRSV.

²⁸ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 20.

Europe and North America and have had lasting and damaging consequences for the world far beyond these regions.

The present section is concerned with both God and the entangling cosmos. Considering the two together is important, for they are intimately connected even though they are not identical. For process theology, the refocusing of philosophical enquiry upon becoming does not exempt God. Simply put, it is as true to say that God becomes and is related to the world in its own becoming as it is to say that the world becomes and is related to God in God's own becoming. Emphases upon staticity and substance as foundational for the world in philosophical and theological systems of modernity and before have also mischaracterized God by insisting upon "utter aseity as God's 'root-attribute'."²⁹ By considering God together with the entangling cosmos, process theology refuses the logic of exceptionalism that cuts God off from the cosmos as the great metaphysical exception. Doing so also begins to unravel political theologies of sovereignty and domination that have rested upon the assumptions of power that spring from aseity's font.³⁰

DYNAMIC CREATION

Creation happens. Unfolding over millions of moments, the cosmos becomes into its present form and perishes into the past. Each moment of existence happens as "a

²⁹ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 21.

³⁰ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*, *Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 39.

product of the past, what's possible, and what we do with those things," Coleman writes.³¹ Reality happens through the "continual process of sorting through these three inputs: what you inherit from the world, what's possible in your context, and what you do about it."³² The universe is constructed through the relationships between moments of reality, the drops of experience that are the creative synthesis of these inputs. Ontological inquiry in this mode shifts from *being* to *becoming*, recognizing the importance of temporality within reality itself.³³

A process metaphysic of creation is concerned to address the present as "a transitional moment partly determined by past experiences and partly determinative of future experiences."³⁴ Events of experience are related to one another because of how experiences extend over one another through time, and the cosmos emerges afresh through each new expression of these relationships. "Whitehead was convinced that proper interpretation of experience and the result of correct observation of the world will show that *process* is absolutely basic," Pittenger writes.³⁵ Recognizing that the world happens through ongoing process does not deny the reality of patterns of relationship that are relatively settled or consistent, nor does it mean that such patterns can't be identified

³¹ Monica Coleman, "Introduction to Process Theology," in *Creating Women's Theology: A Movement Engaging Process Thought*, ed., Monica A. Coleman, Nancy R. Howell, and Helene Tallon Russell (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 14.

³² Coleman, "Introduction to Process Theology," 14.

³³ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 20.

³⁴ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 62.

³⁵ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 21.

by the massiveness of the order that routes them in consistent ways.³⁶ Rather, it means that no thing exists in a fixed and determined state, its future foreclosed and confined to what already is. “If we wish to describe what is going on at any level in the whole creative order,” Pittenger reminds, “we must do so by talking of where things are getting, what they are doing, how they are realizing whatever potentialities they may have been given.”³⁷ As such, even the very comfortable referent to “thing” gets exposed as an inadequate recognition of another. A shift from *thing* to *event* must occur within the lexicon of theologies of creation.

Actual Entities

The events that constitute the process of becoming and are fundamentally constitutive of reality are complex and interdependent themselves.³⁸ Whitehead calls these basic units of reality *actual entities* or *actual occasions*. They are diverse among themselves – everything from God to “the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space” is an actual entity.³⁹ Actual entities, he writes, are “drops of experience” inasmuch as the actual entity is a subject that has experiences of others and creates experience through its own subjective becoming in response to the experiences given it by other

³⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected Edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1979), 107.

³⁷ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 21-22.

³⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

³⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

actual entities.⁴⁰ Simultaneously evident in this description is the interdependence of actual entities and the freedom of each particular actual entity to exercise power.⁴¹ As each actual entity is partly determined by those entities that have happened before it, there is a relational dependence.

The entity-in-becoming feels the influence of the past upon its present, enriching the present moment's own happening because of how past moments have happened. "This allows for much of the continuity in the world."⁴² Yet no present occasion can be entirely limited by the past. "There are always possibilities available to us that do not emerge from our past alone."⁴³ The present experience is only *partly* determined by another. As such, self-determination must happen. The presently becoming actual entity is self-determinant in response to the influences of the past and the possibilities on offer for the future. The becoming actual entity is said to have a *subjective aim* when it takes an attitude of purposeful concrescence toward a possibility.⁴⁴ That is, the subjective aim is the actual entity's own response to the inputs of the past, its present context, and the future possibilities for its becoming. The subjective aim defines the becoming subject through its process of self-creation. The cosmic process is not, then, the aggregate of only

⁴⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

⁴¹ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 73-74.

⁴² Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 74.

⁴³ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 74.

⁴⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 25.

chance. “There is a ‘getting-somewhere.’”⁴⁵ The actual entity is, in becoming itself, *causa sui*.⁴⁶ As it becomes in the present, the subjective aim *prehends* the many data on offer from the past facts, the present contextualities, and the future possibilities. Every actual entity is rich with complexity because of the interactions between these many data. The movement of reality is a rhythm of contractions of the many into one moment that then joins the many that are contracted for future moments. The individuality of the subject is an achievement, then, that emerges through the manifold influences of others upon the self.

Each actual entity experiences the rich complexity of data through the creative process of prehension. For Whitehead, there are three factors in the process of prehension: the “‘subject’ which is prehending; the ‘datum’ which is prehended; the ‘subjective form’ which is *how* that subject prehends that datum.”⁴⁷ The becoming actual entity prehends the data available to it, absorbing or rejecting their influences upon itself. The actual entity’s creative process of self-determination is the absorbing or rejecting of data’s influences for the becoming moment.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 22.

⁴⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 150.

⁴⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23; In *Adventures of Ideas*, he lists the three factors of a prehension as “the occasion of experience,” “the datum,” and “the subjective form,” emphasizing the experiential quality of the becoming subject. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 227.

⁴⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 150.

Feeling Actualities and Possibilities

Every actual entity has corresponding poles of feelings for prehending actualities and possibilities. Each actual entity is dipolar. The actual entities that have already happened were, at one time, becoming subjects themselves. Now, having perished into the past, they have become objects that are available as informants for the presently becoming actual entity.⁴⁹ “Real facts of the past lie at the base of our immediate experience in the present.”⁵⁰ *Physical prehension* is accepting or rejecting the influence of the real facts that have already happened and become objects, actualities of the past. This involves an interpretation of the value of a previous moment for the present. Yet, “there is no mere unfolding of what has always been the case,” as Pittenger reminds.⁵¹

When the entity becomes itself, a creative synthesis between actualities and possibilities emerges. Creativity characterizes reality’s process of becoming and is experienced in “the novelties which give both the world and our experience an equal ‘freshness.’”⁵² The possibilities that are available for presently becoming actual entities are made available through God’s creative love and are experienced by the entity through its conceptual or mental pole.⁵³ “God offers the world possibilities that are relevant for

⁴⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 45.

⁵⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 361.

⁵¹ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 22.

⁵² Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 15.

⁵³ An ingredient of the possibilities that the conceptual, or mental, pole of an actual entity prehends are conceptual entities that Whitehead terms “eternal objects.” Eternal objects are “any entity whose conceptual recognition does not involve a necessary

our current context,” Coleman notes.⁵⁴ These possibilities arise from the divine response to the world’s own happening. As an actual entity, God prehends the world. “God,” Coleman continues, “actually incorporates the events of the world into God’s own nature. The world has an effect on and changes who God is.”⁵⁵ The possibilities on offer from God are syntheses of how the world has happened and how the world can become more fully into God’s vision for the wellbeing.

God offers an initial aim for each becoming entity in the world to participate in “the widest sharing of good. For each occasion in the creation, the sharing of good means participation in the ongoing movement of love-in-action.”⁵⁶ The divine initial aim – the relevant possibility on offer from God, to an entity-in-becoming, for the life of the world – is one of the data that conditions the creative process of becoming by communicating God’s desires for the common good. The divine aim is offered to the becoming actual entity as a lure towards participation in God’s creative love-in-action. Process theologians have talked about the luring divine aim as God calling out to the world, to particular

reference to any definite actual entities of the temporal world.” “Eternal objects, such as colours, sounds, scents, geometrical characters...are required for nature and are not emergent from it,” he writes elsewhere. Eternal objects are always known in relation to other eternal objects, in the mind of God. When synthesized with other eternal objects, possibilities of value emerge that can become ingredient in the actual matters of fact that happen through an entity’s process of becoming. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 44; *Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures 1925* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 103, 105.

⁵⁴ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

⁵⁵ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 61.

⁵⁶ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 59.

events throughout creation. For Coleman, there is a twofold reason for this. First, “the language of ‘call’ resonates with the language of religious communities that understand the ideal spiritual life as one lived in response to a ‘call’ from God.”⁵⁷ Second, “the world *calling* goes beyond the singularity implied in the word *call*.”⁵⁸

Prehension is the actual entity’s response to the particular data that are offered to it and that shape the conditions of its becoming. This includes response to the possibilities offered in the divine calling. As particular data are prehended, the actual entity indicates the importance of possibilities of value relative to its own individuality.⁵⁹ “There is no such thing as bare value. There is always specific value” that arises through the specific ways in which particular possibilities are made actual in the world.⁶⁰ The character of any actual entity is known through how it makes possibilities real for the creative advance of the world. As such, value cannot be separated from the fabric of reality.

Whitehead identifies two species of prehension. I have called them *absorption* or *rejection* above. Whitehead calls them positive prehension and negative prehension.⁶¹ “A positive prehension is the definite inclusion of that item into positive contribution to the

⁵⁷ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 54.

⁵⁸ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 54.

⁵⁹ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making: Lowell Lectures 1926* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 100ff.

⁶⁰ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 103.

⁶¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

subject's own real internal constitution."⁶² From the perspective of the becoming subject, positive prehension "is called its 'feeling'" of the datum-object.⁶³ *Feeling* is the forming of definite linkages between the becoming subject and influential objects.⁶⁴ *Feeling* is the key relational activity of becoming and cannot be separated from the identity of the becoming subject. The data that are felt exert a degree of influence upon the final distinctiveness of the subject. Donne's insight expresses poetically what Whitehead presents in metaphysical language. No actual entity is "an island entire unto itself."⁶⁵ Reality emerges through the complex and dynamic relationships that are determined by the degrees to which objects are felt by subjects. All occasions or occurrences throughout the cosmos "both *grasp and are grasped by* this or that moment of experience" in their own process of becoming.⁶⁶ Relationships "don't just *shape* who we are; these factors *constitute* who we are...[and] weave together our moral, cultural, religious, lived-in, believed-about, hoped-in world."⁶⁷

Relationality and Power

The world is constituted by the relational interdependence of events. As events grasp and are grasped by each other, there is a mutuality of prehension through which

⁶² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 41.

⁶³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23, 41.

⁶⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 150.

⁶⁵ John Donne, quoted in Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 24.

⁶⁶ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 16.

⁶⁷ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 74.

more complex collections of events emerge over time.⁶⁸ Positive mutual prehension is the requisite aspect of any and all societies of actual entities, for it is a reciprocated receiving of another's influence into the becoming self. And this mutuality occurs all around us. "Hence we ought not to think of discrete entities, in the sense of self-contained and insulated particles," Pittenger surmises. "We should see a 'being affected by' as well as an 'affecting' which is characteristic of the process in its every event."⁶⁹ The relational interdependence of reality entails a shift in thinking about power.

In the present process metaphysic of the cosmos, power is understood as a vector of influence that conveys the diversity of the cosmos towards a becoming organism.⁷⁰ Overlapping vectors characterize reality as there are diverse influences upon any singular moment anywhere in the cosmos. This is a reconceptualization of power away from determinative or coercive force that breaks through the particularity and self-sufficiency of another individual self for the powerful subject's gain. This metaphysic of power will be more fully developed later in this chapter but can be succinctly understood here as the enticement and patient influence of one by others over time, sometimes over great amounts of time.⁷¹

The second species of prehension is negative prehension. "A negative prehension is the definite exclusion of that item from positive contribution to the subject's own

⁶⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 230.

⁶⁹ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 24.

⁷⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 151, 237.

⁷¹ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 25; Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

internal constitution.”⁷² For negative prehensions, the influence upon the becoming subject is an influence of inoperability. It is not that the negatively prehended datum is eternally neglected for any potential future uses. The ontological principle affirms the contrary – “every entity is felt by some actual entity” – while the principle of relativity affirms the reality of degrees of relevant import between actual entities throughout the whole cosmos.⁷³ Were I to reject the inclusion of sauerkraut on my hot dog at a baseball game, this definite exclusion of the sauerkraut from my own internal constitution would not mean that sauerkraut is removed from all future possibilities for my life. Nor would my definite exclusion mean that others could not feel the influence of sauerkraut in positive delight. Relative to the particular subject-in-becoming, negatively prehended data do not offer propositions relevant for satisfactory becoming. In determining the relevance of particular data for its own becoming, the subject is self-creative in its development.

The experience of becoming itself is a moment of decision, an immediate cutting-off of the vast relations of the cosmos. “This immediacy is its moment of sheer individuality, bounded on either side by essential relativity. The occasion arises from relevant objects and perishes into the status of an object for other occasions.”⁷⁴ Process philosophy inverts classical substance philosophy most poignantly here. The actual

⁷² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 41.

⁷³ Whitehead writes of the ontological principle: “It is the principle that everything is positively somewhere in actuality, and in potency everywhere.” Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 40-41, 50.

⁷⁴ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 227.

individual is not the origin of activity but the culmination of activity, the unique event that culminates particular decisions in a moment of time. Individual entities are inherently related to others in two ways, hence Whitehead's phrase "bounded on either side by essential relativity."⁷⁵ First, an occasion can only emerge through its feelings of others and their influences. When feeling others and their influences, a subject-in-becoming also prehends the myriad relationships and interdependencies through which those others emerged in their own moments. Second, an occasion becomes an ancestor for future occasions and can be influentially felt by others. When a subject perishes from its immediate emergence, it becomes an object for future prehension and is felt within the complex relationships through which it emerged. Rather than a rigid and singularly focused pattern that begins with the occasion, an occasion's own influence is a culminating integration of its many ancestors. Ancestral influences continue through the integrating moment and are focused into a particular experience of reality that then becomes an ancestor for future moments. Such a vivid complexity of inheritance and emergence reveals the third characteristic of actual entities – interdependence.

Whitehead's theory of actual entities necessitates relativity between, at the very least, the actual-entity-just-satisfied and the actual-entity-in-becoming. As mentioned above, actual entities are related to one another because of the ways in which entities overlap one another temporally. Prehending another is the becoming subject's

⁷⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 227.

appropriating response to an object's temporal extension and reverberating effects.⁷⁶ Because an actual entity must, to some degree, receive data of past actual entities and respond thereunto in its own becoming, no actual entity can stand alone, uninfluenced and uninfluencing. Even the immediacy of individuality at the moment of satisfaction cannot be recognized without referent to the web of relations from which the actual entity happened. The freedom necessary for the fact of self-determination "is rooted in our relationship to our contemporary environment."⁷⁷ There is a raw relationality inherent to the cosmos, and this relationality happens through the becoming of particular actual entities over time.⁷⁸ "Temporal process is a metaphysical necessity" and is demonstrated through the cosmic web of relationships that constitute reality itself.⁷⁹ Relationality and the process of becoming entail one another.

Furthermore, the reconceptualization of power discussed above entails that the relationships that constitute and span the cosmos must be more than a mathematical correlation. The most basic relationship between actual entities is the mutual immanence that is exhibited between a group of actual entities that share some common constraint. Similar contexts of becoming, similar data prehended, or similar possibilities towards which the subject aims may all contribute to constraining multiple occasions in such ways as to form basic groups of actual entities. The term that Whitehead uses for this

⁷⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 219.

⁷⁷ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 251.

⁷⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 48.

⁷⁹ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 63.

foundational level of relational organization is a “nexus.”⁸⁰ A nexus presupposes no special kind of order aside from the mutual immanence of its constituent actual entities.

When the mutual immanence of actual entities is governed by particular social order, the interdependence of actual entities in a nexus gives rise to a *society* of actual entities. Whitehead characterized his philosophy “a philosophy of organism,” and the development of this moniker becomes most apparent in the metaphysical move from a particular actual entity to a society of actual entities. Analogous to molecules and organelles emerging from atoms and towards particular functionalities in a cell, “a society is a nexus which ‘illustrates’ or ‘shares in’, some type of ‘Social Order’.”⁸¹ Social order arises when actual entities share in “a common element of form” that is imposed upon becoming subjects through their prehension of other actual members of the society and reproduced through positive prehensions of experiences that contain the common form.⁸² A society is, in some measure, self-sustaining as its constitutive actual entitiesprehend one another more intensely than other actual entities available for prehension. The interdependence of actual entities, and therefore of that which is ultimately real, is not merely a mechanistic interdependence of data-transfer. Becoming because of and in response to others, actual entities experience a mutuality of feeling in webs of relations that constitute reality itself.

⁸⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 258.

⁸¹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 260-261.

⁸² In the second chapter, this particular notion of social order will be developed by Bernard Lee’s process ecclesiology. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 34-35, 89-92; *Adventures of Ideas*, 261.

DYNAMIC GOD

In the preceding paragraphs, I have focused on how a Whiteheadian process theology articulates the relationship between God and “all creation” by describing creation.⁸³ Creative process and social relationality entail one another in the emerging cosmos, and this section turns to consider the God of all creation as the actual entity who is supremely related to each creature and creation as a whole. Following this discussion of a doctrine of God in process theology, the chapter will turn to consider the development of the specifically Christian claims of Jesus the Christ as they have been worked out by Norman Pittenger.

Freedom, Evil, and God’s Relationship with the World

God, for Whitehead, is tri-natured, constituted by God’s *primordial nature*, *consequent nature*, and *superjective nature*.⁸⁴ Like other actual entities, God is dipolar, having mental and physical poles, prehending conceptual and physical prehensions. Though to an eminent degree, God emerges through the process of awareness, feeling, and creativity that is characteristic of all actual entities.

God’s Primordial Nature

God’s primordial nature is constituted by God’s conceptual prehensions, and it is from this nature that God experiences and supplies possibilities of value as data for all other becoming actual entities. God’s divine subjective aim brings possibilities of value

⁸³ Theodore Walker, Jr. *Mothership Connections*, 25.

⁸⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 87-89.

together so that these possibilities might be relevant for particular actual entities in particular contexts.⁸⁵ In more traditional Christian theological language, God graciously loves the world through God's primordial nature. God appropriately responds to each and every emergent entity with possibilities that lure emerging entities, societies of entities, and the whole world further into complexity and into richness of experience. The actually real world effervescently emerges through its dynamic relationality. Given this dynamic relationality, it is likely that the possibilities for our world's future becoming change relative to how adequate or inadequate those possibilities may be for the creative advance of the cosmos in any emerging moment.

For Whitehead, God "remains self-consistent in relation to all change...in creative action" by ordering these many possibilities through the primordial nature.⁸⁶ Because creative advance moves toward complexity and richness of experience but not necessarily an increase in goodness, Whitehead argues that divine self-consistency in the primordial nature keeps God from being culpable for evil in the world.⁸⁷ Monica Coleman recognizes themes throughout Whitehead's work that suggest that God's faithfulness in relating to the world reveals consistent patterns of how God orders possibilities within the primordial nature. Coleman furthers Whitehead as she writes, "although the world is constantly changing and becoming, God's vision for the common good and continual

⁸⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

⁸⁶ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 98.

⁸⁷ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 98.

calling to the world do not change.”⁸⁸ How God influences the world to bring forth a common good, then, becomes an important question when considering the primordial nature of God.

The particular actual entities in becoming are “finally responsible for the decision by which any lure for feeling is admitted to efficiency.”⁸⁹ The possibilities to make Love-in-action actual for the cosmos are ordered in and offered from the primordial nature of God, but God cannot force any actual entity to apprehend these possibilities positively let alone maximally. “The freedom inherent in the universe,” Whitehead writes, “is constituted by this element of self-causation.”⁹⁰ The freedom that Whitehead describes has significant implications for how relationships emerge in the universe. Through freedom for self-causation, relationships between God and creatures can reveal and enact love in its most creative, beautiful, and just sense. Yet, freedom for self-causation also makes possible the enacting, perpetuating, and systematic proliferation of sin and evil along with the destructive consequences thereof. The multifarious consequences of freedom are the case because inherent freedom in the creative process of reality highlights the interdependence of all events.

Freedom highlights mutuality. There are possibilities on offer from God’s vision for the reign of Love throughout the cosmos, and these possibilities include the beauty of complexity and interdependence. “When any of us act and live as if our actions and

⁸⁸ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

⁸⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

⁹⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

decisions only affect us, when we deny the interdependence of the world, when we act as if we are not all connected and in need of each other,” Coleman writes, “we produce evil.”⁹¹ This is an active notion of evil with destructive consequences. Coleman argues that the choices “to live, operate, or act apart from the principles of God’s vision means that we have not chosen the most creative and positive option. There is evil in that we have not become what we could have been.”⁹² The God-world relationship on offer from process theologians not only affirms the reality of sin and evil in the world, it also presents it with a stark realism. Sin, “our failures to follow and reach our ideals, are now recognized for what they really are: not harmless peccadilloes, but thoughts and words and deeds that tend to kill the God who is active within us,” Pittenger concluded.⁹³ Sin and evil are the activity of dis-ease against the self and others, the destructive opposition to relationality on its most intimate and grandest scales. Sin can be neither a static nature of antagonism toward the will of God, nor can it be located only beyond the self in a communal failure or series of failures to bring about loving-justice and harmony in the world. Because “the individual is formative of the society and the society is formative of the individual,” process theologians have recognized a destructive and insidious interplay of individuals and societies in perpetuating and magnifying sin and evil through

⁹¹ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 55.

⁹² Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 55.

⁹³ Norman Pittenger, *God in Process* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1967), 36.

prolonged epochs of events mutually incorporating one another's sin.⁹⁴ Yet this active notion of sin and evil is not the only sense in which evil happens in the world.

Whitehead develops a second sense of evil when he addresses of the reality of temporal process. "Time is a perpetual perishing. Objectification involves elimination. The present fact has not the past fact with it in any full immediacy," Whitehead writes.⁹⁵ Reality itself, as it emerges through the happening of particular actual entities, entails loss. As particular actual entities occur, there are other actual entities that are not included in the fresh emergence of reality. Though it may not be entirely lost for all future occasions, there will be actual entities and societies of actual entities that are regarded as unnecessary for becoming, as not influential enough. As "the past fades," so, too, will the intensity of the individual occasions and societies of the past fade. Prehension involves remembering others who have happened; it involves memory. Actualities of the past, objects to be prehended by a future subject, are threatened with death-by-amnesia because of their alterity to the subject. As other, the past fades from the present in its immediacy and its intensity, for only portions of the past are, and probably ever will be, selected by present actual occasions for incorporation in new events.

This second notion of evil observes that, for many actual entities, the process of creative advance includes losing the past. "'The past fades' says, 'we continually lose,'"⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Marjorie Suchocki especially develops this interplay in her theory of intersubjectivity in her books *The Fall to Violence* (1994) and *God, Christ, Church* (1989). Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 87.

⁹⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 340.

⁹⁶ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 56.

Coleman writes. Coleman’s treatment of evil as loss is particularly important for any adequate process theology for planetary wellbeing because she potently addresses what may otherwise “seem like a rather weak way of understanding the radical manifestations of evil in the world.”⁹⁷ Coleman describes loss as more consequential than mere temporal distance from an event. “We lose the things we want to hold on to. We lose the things that are important to us,” she contends.⁹⁸ In process theology, “evil as loss” does not encourage a dissolute nihilism that abandons holding people responsible when acts of evil are committed. Nor does “evil as loss” resign process theology to fatalist dismissals of injustice and calls to overcome evil with transforming and creating love.⁹⁹ After a while, constant loss – loss of “our values...our good sense...our way” – cultivates possibilities for despair and suffering, for fear and anger, for evil to deny abundant life.¹⁰⁰ “We lose our sense of self; we lose our slippery hold on what is right, just, and divine in many situations,” she continues.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, though suffering may be easier to identify when it’s the result of active sin and evil, actual entities and societies of actual entities experience suffering in the compounding experiences of loss and its associated emotions. “Even if we know that we are moving on to something better, it often hurts to lose.”¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 56.

⁹⁸ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 56.

⁹⁹ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 135.

¹⁰⁰ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 56.

¹⁰¹ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 56, 58.

¹⁰² Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 56, 58.

And the experiences of this hurt can compound when the better is lost and the uncertainty of any next moments overwhelms the hopes that the better may be restored.

If God is not culpable for evil in the world because of the self-consistency of the divine primordial nature and God's faithfulness with possibilities for enriching love in the world, what is God's relationship to the active events of sin and evil?¹⁰³ In order to offer new possibilities, possibilities for redemption from these events, possibilities for salvation, possibilities for the restoration of relationships and lives that have been harmed by these events, God must be able to not only experience the events but experience them in the intensity of their sin, evil, and destruction. Furthermore, how could finite creatures within the cosmos experience the possibilities that God offers for saving relationships that address the suffering that is experienced in loss in particular and restorative ways?

God's Consequent Nature

When an actual entity happens, it contracts the influences of many data into an experience of individuality and then passes into the past. It has become itself as a subject and has itself become an object for any future actual entities as they emerge within the process of the creative advance of the cosmos. The past is ever-growing, then, as events happen and extend over one another temporally. Yet how is the past held together? As reality is constantly becoming fresh, does the past merely fade farther and farther into obscurity as the bottom of the stack of papers might when crowded upon a cluttered desk? Even highly aware or particularly long-living organisms could not remember past

¹⁰³ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 98.

actual entities in the integrity of their immediate individuality, hence the experiences of evil and suffering associated with loss. Reality itself must emerge within the awareness of some entity with eminently greater memory and prehensive activity. Reality itself must emerge within the feeling awareness of God.

The consequent nature of God is the whole-and-growing collection of divine physical prehensions of the actually emerging, dynamic, and relational cosmos.¹⁰⁴ God's physical pole feels the physical data of the cosmos. Analogous to every other actual entity, "God feels, or gathers into God's self, the events of the world" that have already happened and that create the conditions for becoming in the cosmos.¹⁰⁵ Developing Whitehead, Pittenger describes God's relationship with the actual world through God's consequent nature as "supreme, unsurpassable by all not [Godself], and worshipful" because God relates to and influences every actual entity at least partially.¹⁰⁶ Above, I noted that the primordial nature of God orders possibilities of value so that becoming actual entities can participate in Love-in-action in contextually adequate and appropriate ways. God is able to discern among, desire, and offer possibilities that are appropriate for each emerging entities because "God knows us and what happens to us...[because] we are a part of who God is" through God's consequent nature.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

¹⁰⁵ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

¹⁰⁶ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

Becoming into God's life does not mean that God is equated with creation. As with every other relationship between actual entities, "it is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God."¹⁰⁸ As with every actual entity becoming itself before being given over to the objective past, God becomes God in a moment that transcends what has previously become into the world. Divine transcendence, in process thought, is not contra-relational but a part of the creative process that characterizes the God-world relationship. Divine transcendence means that "God is not identical to the world, but God is not set apart from the world in opposition to what the world is. God is in us, and we are in God."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, divine relationality entails that, as the world increases in its experiences, so, too, does God's experience of the world increase.¹¹⁰ God "shares with every new creation its actual world; and the concrescent creature is objectified in God as a novel element in God's objectification of that actual world."¹¹¹ To confuse divine becoming with some kind of deficiency of character in God woefully misunderstands the profundity of God's dynamic relationship with every event in the world and risks denying God's actuality in turn. "This prehension into God of each creature is directed with the subjective aim, and clothed with the subjective form, wholly derivative from [God's] all-inclusive primordial valuation."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Whitehead, *Process Reality*, 348.

¹⁰⁹ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

¹¹⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

¹¹¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

¹¹² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

Divine becoming is Love-in-action, sharing in the vibrant and growing cosmos in its actuality, meeting the cosmos with the ideals of the divine vision for the world, and welding God's own life together with the cosmos in creative love.

As the chief exemplification of the principles that account for how reality happens as a social process, God relates to every event, every actual occasion, in an exemplary manner. "The divine self-identity is shown by [God's] exemplification in an eminent fashion of that which constitutes *all* self-identity," including adequate and appropriate relating to the myriad other events that extend over and exert influence upon the self.¹¹³ "Relationship characterizes deity" because relationship characterizes what it means for reality to happen at all.¹¹⁴ Conceptions of divinity that have relied upon aseity, self-sufficiency, simplicity, and absolute immutability are fatally inadequate in their descriptions of reality.¹¹⁵ As such, they fail to provide an adequate context from within which a theology can be developed that regards as important the Hebrew and Christian scriptures for understanding the God-world relationship towards the realization of Love-in-action. Instead, process theology has argued that "God's perfection is not that of abstract being but is to be found in [God's] capacity for, and actualization of, [God's] relationships with that which is not" God.¹¹⁶ Eminently relational, process theology's

¹¹³ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 35.

¹¹⁴ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 34.

¹¹⁵ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 33-34.

¹¹⁶ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 34.

central theological claim has furthered the scriptural confession: “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”¹¹⁷

While the primordial nature of God is described as God’s creative love, the consequent nature is the responsive love of God.¹¹⁸ Love-in-action requires the dynamic interaction of creativity and reception, of acting and feeling.¹¹⁹ Guided by the divine subjective aim, God lovingly responds to the whole world by evaluating “the experiences

¹¹⁷ In his development of what it means for neoclassical theology to argue for God as God of all creation, Theodore Walker, Jr., presents God’s eminent relationality as it has been developed by Charles Hartshorne and Schubert M. Ogden. He writes, “Because the divine relativity is uniquely universal, Hartshorne describes God as ‘surrelative,’ [a term initially proposed by Hartshorne] meaning supremely relative. Surrelativism is also called ‘panentheism’ (*DR*, ix). Hartshorne says that ‘surrelativism and panentheism are logically the same doctrine with only a difference of emphasis’ (*DR*, 90). Surrelativism emphasizes the superiority and unsurpassability of the divine relativity, while panentheism emphasizes the universal scope of the divine relativity...Hartshornean panentheism explicitly affirms the religious conviction that God is a living, socially interactive, personal individual. Logically, there can be nothing to which the all-inclusive one is unrelated. All-inclusiveness entails universal relativity...That the concrete ‘divine relativity’ includes and exceeds the abstract ‘divine absolutes’ is Hartshorne’s main thesis in *The Divine Relativity*.” Turning his attention to Ogden, Walker continues, “According to Ogden, God is unique because God interacts with all others, while nondivine individuals interact with only some others (and God) ...God is eternally and universally interactive. God is the one to whom all things make partial differences, and the one who makes partial differences to all things (here again is dual transcendence [as shown earlier in Hartshorne’s work]). In contrast to God, we are ones to whom some things make partial differences, and ones who make partial differences to some things.” Though he describes God’s relationality as eminent, “supreme, unsurpassable by all not [Godself], and worshipful” in developing Whitehead’s thought, Pittenger does not make use of the Hartshornean term “surrelative” to my knowledge. 1 John 4:8, NRSV; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 31-35; Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 34.

¹¹⁸ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

¹¹⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31.

of the world and relat[ing] them to the vision for the common good.”¹²⁰ In the consequent nature of God, “there is no loss, no obstruction. The world is felt in a unison of immediacy.”¹²¹ God intensely feels the world as actual and immediate. Furthermore, because God is faithful to a vision for participatively sharing good within the cosmos, God becomes through responding to the world with possibilities that advance God’s visions. God’s creative advance is a beautiful meeting of the mutual immediacy of the whole creation and the divinely ordered possibilities for the reign of love in the cosmos.

Whitehead argues that evil is overcome by good in this beautiful meeting within the life of God. “The knowledge of evil, of pain, and of degradation” is within the consequent nature of God, for these experiences are part of the cosmic events taken into God’s own life through divine love-in-action.¹²² Yet, “the kingdom of heaven [that is God] is not the isolation of good from evil. It is the overcoming of evil by good.”¹²³ God does not abide evil, but God also does not annihilate any actual experience of evil, suffering, loss, or the like. God’s responsive love patiently transforms these experiences “by [God’s] vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.”¹²⁴

Divine memory and wisdom are cooperant in God’s responsive love. “The wisdom of the [divine] subjective aim,” Whitehead writes, “prehends every actuality for

¹²⁰ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

¹²¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

¹²² Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 155.

¹²³ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 155.

¹²⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

what it can be in such a perfected system – its sufferings, its sorrows, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy – woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is always immediate, always many, always one, always with novel advance, moving onward and never perishing.”¹²⁵ The consequent nature of God is God’s salvation of the world in tenderness and patience. It is also God’s judgment on the world. “It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage.”¹²⁶ Rather than a singular event in far-off spacetime, divine judgment is part of the ongoing process of creative advance as God patiently saves and wisely transforms the world within God’s own life. “Victory over evil, death, and suffering is a process, an ongoing event, not a static moment in history.”¹²⁷

Coleman notes that the reframed notion of divine judgment in Whiteheadian thought means that “inside God, evil and the immediacy of sorrow and pain are transformed into something of value. Inside God, good is saved in relation to the whole. This is something that only God can do,” for it is only God who knows the entirety of the cosmos in a unison of immediacy.¹²⁸ Because God experiences the cosmos in its fullness, God knows exactly what needs to be done to respond so that suffering, hurting, and destruction can be healed through love; exactly what possibilities there are for new life in

¹²⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

¹²⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

¹²⁷ Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 135.

¹²⁸ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 61.

love; exactly what should happen to overcome evil with love. The consequent nature of God makes possible God's salvation by redeeming and restoring each creature so that they can participate in bringing forth the reign of love in the midst of loss, sin, suffering, destruction, and evil. Through God's redemption and restoration of the world, "the world is also immortal" within God.¹²⁹ God's own process of becoming incorporates the events of the cosmos within "the phase of perfected actuality, in which the many are one everlastingly, without the qualification of any loss either of individual identity or of completeness of unity."¹³⁰ God maintains past events in the integrity of their individuality yet also truly contextualizes them within the web of relations they helped to achieve.

God's Superjective Nature

The third of God's natures is superjective, the divine activity through which "the creative action completes itself."¹³¹ The superjective nature is the persuasive love of God, "the particular providence for particular occasions."¹³² Having achieved God's fullest actuality, God passes back into the world, offering of Godself as "the antecedent ground conditioning every creative act."¹³³ God "is that actual entity from which each temporal concrescence receives that initial aim from which its self-causation starts."¹³⁴ The

¹²⁹ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 62.

¹³⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 350-351.

¹³¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

¹³² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

¹³³ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 154.

¹³⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 244.

superject is the divine activity in the world, relating with becoming actual entities and providing opportunities for the realization of love, justice, truth, and beauty in their particularity. Critically important for process theology, the divine giving of possibilities cannot coerce particular responses from actual entities. The initial aim provided through God's superjective nature is God's influence upon the many becomings throughout the world, and, to the degree that God's influence is felt, "God literally becomes a part of every aspect of creation. In other words, incarnation is universal."¹³⁵ God acts from within creation instead of as an opposing force. "God is *there*, 'in the world or nowhere,' working by enabling things to make themselves."¹³⁶

When an actual entity incorporates the superject of God, feeling the initial aim in their own becoming, the actual entity integrates the restoration of goodness that characterizes the reign of love within the life of God. "What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation," Whitehead writes, "the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands."¹³⁷ The patient, tidal inundation of divine love – creative, responsive, and persuasive – characterizes God who is love-in-action. By receiving and transforming every moment within Godself, love ensures that not even one event is lost. By calling out into creation, luring every new occasion into

¹³⁵ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 60.

¹³⁶ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 37.

¹³⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

life-in-love, love offers a vision for how the world can happen without evil, without oppression, without injustice in adequate and appropriate ways for particular contexts throughout the cosmos. Most importantly, the theistic model on offer contends that the loving mutuality between creatures and God emerges because both are actual entities.

Living God, Actual Entity

Whitehead argues that God is an actual entity, emerging through time, becoming towards divine subjective aims, prehending data, and creating reality through the process of becoming, as with all other actual entities. This argument is important for developing a Christian theology that takes its cues from Whitehead for at least two reasons: God is actually real, and God is an intimate partner in reality.

First, God is actually real. Though *God* may be the title given to the chief exemplification of metaphysical principles, there is a real referent, a particular society of actual entities who is concretely felt in the experience of the world. The abstract concept of deity can still be developed and interrogated by philosophers and theologians. Indeed, the *concept* is needed for the cosmology on hand. But the abstract concept of deity can be neither the only definition of *God* – thus confining *God* to mere abstraction – nor the final source and partner in the religious life. “God is an actual entity,” then, means that God participates in the emerging cosmos, influencing and being influenced by all other actual entities in the world, through the process of creative advance. God is not an enduring substance but an emerging and responsive partner in shaping the world for and into Love.

Second, the God who is attested to in Hebrew and Christian scriptures as the “Living God” is an intimately close partner in the fabric of reality. That is to say that the

Whiteheadian claim that God is an actual entity opens the opportunity for religious experience to seek divine presence and activity throughout the world as part of the regular process of reality, as natural to the cosmos. To say that God is a consistent and co-creative participant in reality doesn't denigrate God. Rather, the claim I am making emphasizes that God's identity is Love-in-action. In order to be genuinely loving, God's life must be part of the unfolding cosmos. God must be actually related to the whole world. Aseity as the 'root-attribute' of God isn't an adequate claim because it isn't an accurate claim.

Critiques of classical arguments for divine aseity may be shared among the broadest collection of process and relational theists, regardless of participation in particular religious traditions. God without relationships is not God at all. Rather, God without relationships is an abstraction of deity that becomes "but an idol or a figment of [people]'s minds," distracting its idolaters from the freshness and intensity of life in dynamic, moving, living, creating Love.¹³⁸ Whitehead and the many theists whose lives and work his own has influenced mean nothing more plainly than this when arguing that "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. [God] is their chief exemplification."¹³⁹ God is on the move. God, like all other actual entities, happens. Yet God is not *merely another* actual entity. "Whatever we learn about the principles required to understand that creation apply (although in an

¹³⁸ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 32.

¹³⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

‘eminent manner’, as scholastic analogy-doctrine would say) to deity.”¹⁴⁰ Process theology promotes a theistic vision that insists that “God is supremely creative and supremely social, sharing creativity with all creation. God is universally and eternally interactive. God is comprehensive.”¹⁴¹ “God is not the sheer contradiction of the world” but its faithful co-creator, loving savior, and enriching life-giver.¹⁴²

THE DIVINE TRIUNITY AND JESUS CHRIST IN NORMAN PITTENGER’S PROCESS THEOLOGY

From the theistic vision of eminent creativity and sociality, a distinctively Christian process theology can emerge.¹⁴³ The argument that God is the chief exemplification of metaphysical principles entails that God will be both chief causative principle and chief recipient of the creation. God’s supreme relationality to the cosmos is expressed through loving persuasion, calling forth creaturely responses to co-create the cosmos. These theistic concepts are congruent with Christianity but not limited to it. They provide a fertile context from within which “the reality of the supremely worshipful reality we call God; the revelatory activity of God in history and nature and in human experience, brought into its focus in Jesus Christ; and the impulse of response in commitment and discipleship, in a fellowship of trusting [persons], about which we speak when we talk of the Holy Spirit” can be experienced and participated in for the life of the

¹⁴⁰ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 34.

¹⁴¹ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 35.

¹⁴² Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 34.

¹⁴³ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 45.

world in this epoch of the cosmic story.¹⁴⁴ Christian experiences of God have attested to a trinitarian activity that has been distinctively revealed and defined in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.¹⁴⁵ For Whitehead, subsequent theological reflection upon Christ's revelation has been most philosophically significant when it has insisted that the nature and activity of God is characterized by multiplicity in mutual immanence.¹⁴⁶ For, when it has developed the richness of Christ's revelation and enactment of God as Love, Christian theology has shown that the cosmos itself is interwoven within the noncoercive, creative, beautiful, just, and holy life of God who is Love.¹⁴⁷

Christian theology in the mode of process thought, then, cannot consider as fully adequate the presentation of deity solely as the metaphysical principle of concretion or limitation or provider of possibilities for the achievement of novelty and the common good through particular events in particular contexts. It is not enough to rely upon the primordially of the divine. The fullness of divine relationality is experienced through the "concrete actuality of God as [God] is related to the creation, known to [God's] creatures in many and various ways, and is always concerned with them in love, the Love which indeed God is."¹⁴⁸ Norman Pittenger contends that the actual relationships of God with

¹⁴⁴ Norman Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1977), 109.

¹⁴⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 216.

¹⁴⁶ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 216.

¹⁴⁷ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 56-57.

¹⁴⁸ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 113.

the creation, with each particular creature in their context within the cosmos, matters for how Christian process theology does its theological work. This means that it is not “possible to take the triunitarian view of deity as nothing other than a restatement of the categories of Whiteheadian, Hartshorne-ian, or any other variety of Process Thought.”¹⁴⁹ The divine triunity is not an easy mapping of “God the Father” onto the primordial nature, “God the Son” onto the consequent nature, and “God the Holy Spirit” onto the superjective nature of God.

Christian experience of life in Christ certainly fits into the process conceptuality of the cosmos, but this claim can only be made from the human experiences of the important events of Christian faith. These experiences are all within the consequent nature of God. Methodologically, Pittenger’s claim is that process thought makes possible a view of the God-world relationship in which it makes metaphysical sense to say that God is “the active, living, related, and loving deity who is both chief causative agency and chief recipient” of the world.¹⁵⁰ Rather than trying to merely translate Christian experience into a process worldview or baptize process thought with Christian language, Pittenger takes up the Whiteheadian task for theology, “to show how the World is founded on something beyond mere transient fact, and how it issues in something beyond the perishing of occasions...[to] understand how life includes a mode of satisfaction deeper than joy or sorrow.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 110.

¹⁵⁰ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 114.

¹⁵¹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 221.

This section presents and develops Norman Pittenger's own turn to an explicit Christian theology in "another mode, [which] is in fact process thought," to use Pittenger's own phrasing.¹⁵² Understanding his theological argument regarding the Trinity and Jesus Christ is critically important for understanding his ecclesiology in the following chapter. Furthermore, Theodore Walker, Jr.'s, development of neoclassical metaphysics and black liberation theology toward a "black Atlantic account of strictly and broadly metaphysical aspects of struggle, power, and ethical deliberation" will offer an important critique of Pittenger's theological insights regarding love and justice.¹⁵³

Pittenger argues that love "must find expression in a genuine devotion to the cause of human justice" and further observes that "the Christian imperative thus to labor [with God as a co-creator of a greater and more widely shared social good], combined with the process insight into the basic dynamic and structure of reality, is inescapable."¹⁵⁴ The inescapable imperative to labor in genuine devotion to justice is critically important language that needs Walker, Jr.'s, sustained critique of neoclassical, process, and relational theologies to adequately articulate how the Christian participates in the struggle for liberating justice in the ordinary process of becoming. By demonstrating the mutual beneficence of black liberation theologies and neoclassical theologies for embracing "good news to all, especially to the poor and oppressed," Walker, Jr., expands the scope

¹⁵² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 28.

¹⁵³ Norman Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 111; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 70.

¹⁵⁴ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 111, 115.

of Pittenger's attention to justice as love-in-action amid our current climate crises.¹⁵⁵ Walker, Jr., furthers Charles H. Long's argument that commodification of creation is essential to modernity and Paul Gilroy's argument that the history of modernity must be reconceived from the point of view of enslaved blacks and the settlements of these peoples post-slavery.¹⁵⁶ Connecting commodification of creation, black Atlantic experiences, black liberation theology, and neoclassical theology, Walker, Jr., contributes significantly to this dissertation's understanding of ecological exploitation and destruction as a particular, modern oppression to be overcome.¹⁵⁷

The Divine Triunity

As Norman Pittenger develops his process theology of the trinity, he prioritizes "the experience and life of the Christian community" as it is rooted in and emerging from the relationships of Jesus and his earliest followers.¹⁵⁸ The doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity have developed alongside each other. For Pittenger, these theological foci are "indissolubly linked" because of Jesus Christ's revealing and enacting of God's priorities for the life of the world and because of the ongoing creative responses to the whole life of Christ through the fellowship of Christians down the ages.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 71.

¹⁵⁶ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 9-14.

¹⁵⁷ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 69.

¹⁵⁸ Norman Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith: Some Presuppositions and Implications of the Incarnation* (New York: Round Table Press, 1941), 135.

¹⁵⁹ Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 134.

Pittenger contends that the heart of the early Christian faith “was the historic Jesus, understood in the days of his flesh as a great prophet, a rabbi, a teacher, and perhaps by a few believed also to be the Messiah, the promised deliverer sent from God.”¹⁶⁰ Metaphysically, this is a significant observation for both Pittenger’s broader process theological commitments and this dissertation’s insistence upon the interconnectedness of God and the world for planetary wellbeing. “A Jesus with no integration into historic religious life,” he writes, “would be meaningless for those to whom he came,” for an ahistorical Jesus would be a radical exception to the interrelatedness that is inherent to reality.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, an ahistorical Jesus would be a meaningless abstraction that is incapable of bringing the gospel of love and justice to specific populations, incapable of meeting specific needs for liberation, justice, and love in the world through intimate union with God.

Pittenger is particularly concerned to emphasize the role that human experience within the community of Christians played and continues to play in Christian theology’s emergence. Appealing to Christian history becomes important for how Pittenger identifies seeds of insight and patterns of theological formulation. Because Christian theologies reflect on and amplify Christian societies’ own experiences of and responses to Jesus Christ’s life of love-in-action, Pittenger argues that christological insights extend

¹⁶⁰ Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 134.

¹⁶¹ Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 94.

throughout theologies of triunity that have emerged through Christian theological reflections.

Early Christian experiences of God emerged in response to God's decisive activity in Jesus.¹⁶² The gospel portrayal of Jesus as a Jew from Nazareth evidences an early Christian faith that the God of the Jews is the God of Jesus Christ and the God of those who have begun to live their lives in Christ.¹⁶³ "In his words and in his actions, [Jesus] expressed outwardly his conviction, born doubtless from his own inner experience, that the God of Israel...was also God of all the world," Pittenger notes.¹⁶⁴ Jesus Christ decisively reveals and enacts God's characteristic mutual immanence with all creation. For Pittenger, a Christian process theology of triunity develops this theme of mutual immanence by centering Christ without negating or neglecting the relationships of God with creation beyond Christ.

Pittenger argues that "God who is the cosmic Lover has expressed [Godself] decisively in the human loving which was and is Jesus."¹⁶⁵ For the Christian to

¹⁶² Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 137.

¹⁶³ Ecclesiologically, this is a critically important insight. Though this will be addressed in more depth in the second chapter, church emerges through many influences, including the influences of Jesus of Nazareth. Pittenger's argument that early Christian faith affirmed that "the God of Israel...was also God of all the world" counters ecclesiologies that emphasize Christian faith in the resurrection as the principal focus of the church's life and participation in the Reign of God. Israel's salvation informed the relationships that constituted Jesus's world. As such, the salvific relationship between God and Israel is necessary for becoming church today. Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 107.

¹⁶⁴ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 107.

¹⁶⁵ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 109.

experience Godhead in triunity and then develop a doctrine based upon reflection upon that experience, the Christian must begin with the experience of the whole event of Jesus Christ, “including preparation for him, his own life and doings, his crucifixion and death, and what followed after when his presence and power were once again known and a response was made to him in faith and discipleship.”¹⁶⁶

Pittenger maintains that Hebrew and Christian scriptures alike bear witness to divine mutual immanence. Furthermore, he argues that the divine-human unity achieved in Jesus enriches the scriptural witness, revealing God to be “the active, living, loving One, influenced and affected by [God’s] world, enduringly faithful in [God’s] love yet adapting that loving care to particular occasions, consistent in [God’s] purpose and unceasing in [God’s] identification with the [human community] yet always respectful of their freedom.”¹⁶⁷ God is not totally other than the cosmos but, as has been said above, exemplifies the social process through which the cosmos happens. God participates in creation with creative aims, through self-expressive communication, and in acts of free response to the world.¹⁶⁸ In partnership with God’s self-expression in Love, creation’s ongoing relationships with the divine “illuminate what has gone on before” as well as possibilities that can more readily make divine priorities actual in the world.¹⁶⁹ Worship

¹⁶⁶ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 109.

¹⁶⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 54; Norman Pittenger, *Unbounded Love: God and Man in Process, with Study Guide* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 53.

¹⁶⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead*, 24.

becomes a defining experience of the relationships between God and human communities as the Spirit of God influences people “to discern more and more of the meaning” of cosmic Love.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, the scriptural imagery of the Spirit of God poured out upon the people intimates that these ongoing relationships between humanity and divinity are not restricted to any singular experience of God.¹⁷¹ Through Jesus Christ, God revealed and enacted a radical inclusivity of experience that also characterizes divine creativity and responsiveness. God is the God of Israel and of all creation, for Israel and all creation have been caught up in the Spirit’s responsive, restorative, and enlivening relationships in the cosmos.

Pittenger develops the cosmic scale of divine inclusivity along the lines of process thought and argues that it is not necessary to envision God emerging, creating, and responding apart from the cosmos. The creative enterprise is a partnership of God and the world. God does not work against the cosmos or any particular event in the cosmos in any coercive or over-riding manner. Rather, God lures every creature “turn to [God] as the enabling power of love which is intent upon bringing [us] to accept [our] place as personal instruments in the effecting of good in the world.”¹⁷² God invites creatures throughout the cosmos to join the creative process by including divine aims within our own becoming. Creaturely responses to divine invitations are taken into the divine life, “thereby perfecting and heightening the intensity of [creaturely] life and achieving

¹⁷⁰ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 43

¹⁷¹ Pittenger, *Unbounded Love*, 53.

¹⁷² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 53.

fulfillment or satisfaction through a response which is richer and more adequate than the possibilities available through creaturely action alone.”¹⁷³ The relationships of love between God and creatures can fashion the world into the love, justice, truth, and beauty that characterize the life of God as it was and is revealed and enacted by Jesus Christ.

Among humanity, patterns of positively prehending Christ have given rise to a social process known as church. In one respect, church bears little difference from other socially ordered groups of human persons happening over time. Church can be recognized as a meaningful and socially ordered group to people who are not “members” of its society because of the congruity between church and other large-scale social processes in the world.¹⁷⁴ Church emerges as a distinctive social process in part because of how it is inspired by Love to incorporate and respond to experiences of Christ as God’s self-expression in love for the life of the world. Pittenger calls church “the fellowship of those who have responded and who do now respond to the impact” of Christ upon their lives and sharing of life together.¹⁷⁵ Becoming disciples in this fellowship, Christians experience God as one who desires and makes space for creative

¹⁷³ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 116.

¹⁷⁴ *Socially ordered* is the critical phrase in the congruity mentioned. By this, process ecclesiology sets a twofold argument: 1) The congregation of human societies of actual entities in church is more than a mere mathematical grouping or correlation of societies. There is an order to how church happens that characterizes its identity as a social process. 2) Church does not happen in any exceptional measure metaphysically speaking. That is, this argument recognizes a naturalness of Christian fellowship to the cosmos. As other groups of actual entities and societies of actual entities are guided by a degree of social order that is more than mere mathematical correlation, church happens no differently from other large-scale societies in reality.

¹⁷⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 65.

and loving relationships through which every member of creation can grow into holiness together. Pittenger describes discipleship in sacramental terms, noting that Christians are “made to belong more and more to God and to reflect more and more of [God’s] character of love, goodness, righteousness, truth” by participating in God’s creating, expressing, and responding love-in-action throughout the world.¹⁷⁶

Furthermore, Pittenger recognizes that the Spirit who inspires church to incorporate and respond to experiences of Christ as God’s self-expression cannot be limited to the churchly bounds of Christian faith. “The danger of seeing the Holy Spirit simply in the context of Christian life,” he writes, “is that we narrow intolerably one great aspect of the operation of God in God’s world.”¹⁷⁷ In keeping with his christological argument, Pittenger contends that the Holy Spirit who inspires Love “is defined by but not confined to the specifically Christian response in faith within the Christian community.”¹⁷⁸ Christian experiences of God’s creating, self-expressing, and responding cultivate an awareness of a God who is in love with the whole world, a world that includes but is not exhausted by Christian faith, experience, and fellowship. Through faith, we become aware that God creates *with*, self-expresses *within*, and responds *to* everyone in creation and the whole of creation.

As life is lived more fully in the life of God, both God and creatures learn and experience afresh the community of the cosmos, including their own relationships that

¹⁷⁶ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 43.

¹⁷⁷ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 41.

¹⁷⁸ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 41.

contribute to the emergence of the cosmic web of relations. Pittenger develops Dorner and Whitehead's insights here as he addresses the impossibility for revelation to be wholly disclosing in a single instance.¹⁷⁹ For Pittenger, the correlative development of the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation of Jesus Christ illuminate that incarnation cannot exhaust deity even as it can define it. The whole life of the incarnate Christ reveals and enacts deity because Christ is a signaling self-expression of deity. "For Christian experience, there can be no sharp line between" the immanence of the incarnate and the transcendence toward which the incarnate signals, Pittenger argues.¹⁸⁰ In this view, the doctrine of the Trinity fits well within the process vision of deity. He describes the divine triunity as Love who is "most deeply affected, influenced, concerned, [and] enriched" through its active relating with the world – immanent – while luring forth worlds of justice, beauty, and truth that go just beyond any present moment in spacetime – transcendent.¹⁸¹ In Pittenger's process theology of triunity, God becomes Godself in the dynamic process of creating with, self-expressing within, and responding to creation through a rhythmic pulsing of immanence and transcendence.

The significance of a doctrine of the triunity is, for Pittenger, more practical than speculative. Worship of God in triunity and triunity in unity, to fit Athanasian phrasing to Pittenger's own, is the characteristic action of Christian fellowship.¹⁸² "We know Jesus

¹⁷⁹ Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 139-140.

¹⁸⁰ Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 141.

¹⁸¹ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 51.

¹⁸² Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 22-23.

only as that one whom the Christian fellowship ‘remembers’ and whose living presence in the Spirit is communicated through the continuing existence of the community of faith,” he writes.¹⁸³ Christian faith, then, cannot be defined by an intellectual assent to some set of propositions. Christian faith is the “complete self-engagement with the ‘pure, unbounded love’ which ceaselessly works in and through the world and in and through every human life [to establish] the fullest and richest expression of love that is possible.”¹⁸⁴ A process theology of triunity serves to further Christian experiences of and participation in the ‘pure, unbounded love’ that weaves through the cosmos. It is to be a lived and living doctrine that opens Christian life to “the cosmic Love which creates us, which discloses itself to us, and which through our own response (however imperfect and feeble) enriches our lives – and adds joy” to God’s very identity.¹⁸⁵ Pittenger traces Christian experiences of divine creating, self-disclosing, and responding love through faith in Jesus Christ and churchly fellowship in the love of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ

From experience of the triunity in God, “we must then see that the entire creation is in some degree and manner the sphere of a divine activity and for that reason also the sphere of a divine self-revelation,” Pittenger writes.¹⁸⁶ Pittenger develops his process christology with particular concern to articulate the implications of divine self-revelation

¹⁸³ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 65.

¹⁸⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 5-6.

¹⁸⁵ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 117-118.

¹⁸⁶ Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 95.

occurring through the life of Jesus.¹⁸⁷ For Pittenger, re-presenting to the world that which was “plainly placarded before [humanity] in the person, teaching, and activity of Jesus of Nazareth” is one of the orienting concerns of Christian faith itself, and his theological work participates therein.¹⁸⁸ As with the significance of the doctrine of the triunity, Pittenger focuses on how christological inquiry can strengthen living Christian faith. “We are to have faith *in Jesus Christ*; which is to say, we are to commit ourselves to him in his disclosure, through concrete human existence, of the reality of God,” he writes.¹⁸⁹ Engaging philosophical argumentation for the merits of this or that definition of incarnation, parsing questions of historicity and faith, and other christological projects that marked the modern theological enterprise seem to fall away for Pittenger.

In strict Whiteheadian terms, Pittenger argues that Jesus Christ is that particularly important point of “disclosure of the significance of the whole [which] provides new occasions for future creative advance” of the many members of the world into cosmic love for and with one another.¹⁹⁰ Through Christ’s vivid disclosure of divinity, humans can come to experience and participate in “the divine manner of acting in the world and hence the very nature of the divine itself,” he writes.¹⁹¹ With language more familiar to

¹⁸⁷ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 82.

¹⁸⁸ Pittenger develops “plainly placarded” from A. H. Johnson’s work on Whitehead’s philosophy of civilization; Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 56.

¹⁸⁹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 85. (*emphasis original*).

¹⁹⁰ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 21.

¹⁹¹ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 56.

his Christian faith, Pittenger frames God's self-expression in Christ as a "climactic disclosure"¹⁹² of Love-in-Action "in a full and genuine human life."¹⁹³ Weaving his christology and his ecclesiology, Pittenger further argues that God's love for the world "may be known most intimately and deeply in the 'heightening' and 'perfecting' which characterizes the response made to what God accomplishes in the event of Jesus Christ and in the Christian fellowship as it is caught up and made participant in that response."¹⁹⁴ For Pittenger, Jesus Christ reveals that we can live together in a "wholeness of life (or in traditional language, redemption or salvation)" that impacts the world through creating, restoring, and transforming love.¹⁹⁵

Pittenger identifies a twofold significance of the Christ-Event for the Christian life.¹⁹⁶ First, and addressed above, the Christ-Event reveals cosmic Love-in-Action. Like all societies of actual entities, the Christ-Event emerges through the process of creative

¹⁹² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 61.

¹⁹³ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 85.

¹⁹⁴ Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity*, 112.

¹⁹⁵ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 85.

¹⁹⁶ When writing about Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, Norman Pittenger often uses the phrase "the Christ event" or "the event of Christ." I have articulated a precise use of the term "event" throughout this chapter that follows Pittenger's Whiteheadian influences and describes actual entities, or occasions, as the concrescence of prehensions in the process of creative advance. Pittenger does not make such a careful distinction when he speaks of Christ with "event" language. Rather, with this phrase, he means to articulate a more common understanding of the term as a discernible movement that is comprised of a society of events, or actual entities. In this dissertation, I will distinguish between the different uses of "event" by capitalizing "Event" when speaking of the Christ-Event in Pittenger's sense. Christ was and is a society of events, or actual entities, that reveal and enact God's characteristic mutual immanence with all creation in Love.

advance by integrating past influences, contemporary relationships, and future possibilities. Pittenger notes that “the [Christ-Event] was inclusive of the long history of Jewish religion and experience, of the immediate relationships in which Jesus found himself with the give-and-take of his daily life, and of the way in which through two thousand years of succeeding history his accomplishment has become an integral part of human affairs.”¹⁹⁷ Second, the Christ-Event “is an effective and affective event – that is, it both accomplishes something in the total cosmic ongoing or advance as this relates to human history and also it is so related to that ongoing or advance that it is open to and takes into itself the consequences which it has effectively brought about.”¹⁹⁸

To speak of Christ as an effective and affective event prioritizes the relational activity of the Christ-Event in the world. This is nothing more than the recognition that the Christ-Event was and is a society of actual entities, participant in and constitutive of reality as it emerges through the social process of creative advance. For Christian faith and experience, it is necessary to further the basic metaphysical statement. The Christ-Event happens as God is “*doing something* in that historical and human event.”¹⁹⁹ There is not a separation between God’s activity and God’s presence. “It is not as if God took up [God’s] abode here and *then* went on to ‘do something,’” Pittenger notes.²⁰⁰ The presence of God is God’s active love as participant in reality, as related to the whole

¹⁹⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 58.

¹⁹⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 59.

¹⁹⁹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 87.

²⁰⁰ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 87.

cosmos in the divine life. As the self-expressive act of God, the Christ-Event is then to be understood through what it achieves in active becoming; in the ways in which revealing cosmic Love happened and happens in the relationships that influenced and have been influenced by Jesus of Nazareth.

Especially important for the next chapter's treatment of Pittenger's process ecclesiology, the Pauline marker of the Christian as one who lives 'life in Christ' is a helpful entry into the dynamic relationality of the Christ-Event for Pittenger's process christology. Life in Christ defines the Christian as one whose becoming is chiefly influenced by and oriented towards the quality of life "identical with that which was the quality of life in Jesus himself. This is self-giving, participant, deeply concerned, and caring love."²⁰¹ The Christ-Event, first, enacts the divine priority for love. Pittenger elaborates, "In Christ, the loving-kindness of God our Saviour is shed abroad; [we] are offered the opportunity of being re-made in the divine image and conformed to the likeness of Christ."²⁰² Abounding in intimate interrelatedness, God's own life of Love is enacted for the world in an invitational manner. By this, I mean that process christology insists that genuine participatory relationships in the life of Christ are still bounded by the freedom of particular subjects to achieve their own identity.

In its insistence upon freedom, process christology maintains a robust understanding of grace as the givenness of God as Love-in-action, becoming fresh with

²⁰¹ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 16.

²⁰² Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith*, 113.

the world, saving the world, and luring the world into new and greater possibilities for love to be made actual in all of reality. When understood as the givenness of God for the world that results from the achievement of Love-in-action, grace becomes descriptive of the state of relationships, for it is the manner in which the divine has chosen to respond through love to the creation. As the relationships that constitute the divine life and all of reality emerge and change, so does grace happen and adapt in responsive and response-enabling fullness. The quality of life that marks the life in Christ is life lived in grace. It is a richer awareness of and more effective participation with God's priority for love in the world. It is a growing into sanctification, into union with God such that God's love is shed abroad in the human heart just as it filled "even the whole mind which was also in Christ Jesus."²⁰³

Active living in Christ is a way of living that continually responds to cosmic Love as it has been revealed to the world and enacted for the world by Jesus of Nazareth and the community that emerged in response to his life. The Christian is incorporated into and emerges through the Christ-Event in loving encounters that are energized by the divine triunity. The Holy Spirit vivifies the emerging en-Christed life, re-presents the Christ-Event without limiting it to or exhausting it within the emerging moment, and lures the whole world towards to fresh possibilities to love even more beautifully and justly than

²⁰³ John Wesley, "The Unity of the Divine Being," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 538.

before. As the divine triunity is revealed in the Christ-Event, so it is made present through the person's active life in Christ.

In articulating his process christology, Pittenger interprets the divine love that is experienced through the Christ-Event as relationality on a scale that immanently includes and transcends the cosmos. Pittenger refocuses his whole Christian theological project to this point: love-in-action is God's abiding purpose throughout the cosmos, and Jesus Christ is a decisive act of God's love through and at work in the world. Pittenger uses "the human analogy of love shared among us and known to us as we enter lovingly into another's life and open ourselves to receive love from another" because "this is our best insight into God's relationship with God's human children, supremely in the instance of Jesus Christ."²⁰⁴ The Christ-Event reveals and enacts the God-human relationship as fully God, alive within a particular human person, "awakening in us the response of love" to Love.²⁰⁵ Christian faith has confessed and borne witness "that here, in this man, the goodness of God is at work – healing, teaching, helping, strengthening, life-giving."²⁰⁶

Pittenger recognizes this holy relationality in the traditional office of Christ the "priest." As Christ makes Love-in-action "vividly clear to us, in our own human terms," God who is the God of all creation experiences humanity through the Christ-Event, and this includes the human experiences of being a Nazarene Jew who lived under Roman imperial occupation; the human experiences of travelling, teaching, healing, loving,

²⁰⁴ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 93.

²⁰⁵ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 93.

²⁰⁶ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 32.

eating, and drinking in particular ways.²⁰⁷ By rejecting classical appeals to substance metaphysics, Pittenger is able to describe Jesus Christ as an actual and decisive eruption of divine Love from within the dynamic relationality of the cosmos without needing to appeal to metaphysical exceptions. Through full communion of God and human in cosmic love, the Christ-Event enacts, “on the stage of history and in the circumstances of human existence, the right human relationship to God,” Pittenger writes.²⁰⁸

Finally, because Pittenger does not make an explicit equivalency between the consequent nature of God and Christ’s priestly offering of human life into the divine life, I do not interpret Pittenger as a Christian exclusivist. Rather than limiting divine activity to the Christ-Event to make it decisive for humanity, Pittenger contends that the Christ-Event becomes decisive because “the divine activity is operative, not in contradiction to humanity nor in rejection of any part of it, but in and through it all.”²⁰⁹ Pittenger is not saying that Christ alone offers divine Love into the world and true humanity into the life of God. Instead of centering claims about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, Pittenger emphasizes that participation in Love must enliven Christian action for the world. As this dissertation develops the nascent sacramental ecological theology in Pittenger’s writing, Pittenger’s claim that Christ “makes it possible for us to see a genuine union [of God and

²⁰⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 56; Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 59-63.

²⁰⁸ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 35; 2 Corinthians 5:19, NRSV.

²⁰⁹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 94.

humanity] without the reduction or negation of either of the two who are united” encourages an openness to experiences of cosmic Love beyond Christian faith.²¹⁰

An Initial Implication and Critique of Pittenger’s Process Theology

Pittenger’s process christology works to clearly demonstrate that the relationality that characterizes the Christ-Event, the full union of God and human in Love in action, is not an exception to the way the world emerges. God and the world relating with one another in magnificent Love naturally includes setting aims for love, justice, beauty, and truth that are specific to personal needs; includes overcoming suffering and the pain of loss; includes redeeming and restoring creatures who have actively degraded the health and well-being of their relatives in this world; includes creating freshening experiences of life itself. Christian faith receives and furthers witnesses to Jesus of Nazareth as a decisive focal point of the natural, emerging, and loving relationship between God and the world. Shaped through life in Christ, Christians are formed to recognize that true human existence is to be grasped by cosmic Love, to respond to cosmic Love, and to live in terms of the responsive relationship with cosmic Love. As people have responded to this recognition of the significance of Jesus, societies of en-Christed ones have come together and responded with solidarity through Love-in-action in their world. These communities have opened possibilities for subsequent generations to participate in life-in-Love in this Christian way. Through “the fellowship of such people, knit into unity by

²¹⁰ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 92.

their common response to the fact of Christ, Christian [faith, worship, and discipleship] find their expression.”²¹¹

The next chapter will articulate Norman Pittenger’s ecclesiology more fully and in the context of process ecclesiologies more broadly. However, the christocentrism of Pittenger’s ecclesiology and a short implication thereof should be noted here. Pittenger’s theology of church continues the christological enterprise as it has been articulated above. For Pittenger, life-in-Christ occurs through the sharing of life in church. He argues that “we can only come to know [the] event of Christ in the context of, and through participation in, the fellowship of those who have responded and who do now respond to the impact of that event upon them.”²¹² That is, Pittenger is convinced that life in Christ cannot be an isolated or isolating life. Furthermore, to be in relationship with Christ at all is to be necessarily related to other persons who are living life in Christ.

Church emerges, then, as “a community caught up in a response of love to Love, of human love to the divine Love; [whose] fellowship is characterized precisely by such shared love...[as] a spearhead of a kingdom where Love, God’s love, reigns supreme and is expressed in human love of one’s [kindred].”²¹³ Yet, Pittenger’s christocentrism in his ecclesiology and in his broader project neither enables a narrow and exclusivist Christian supremacy nor does it support a dangerous Christian exceptionalism that locates the allegiances of life-in-Christ beyond the cares and concerns of the present world. As God

²¹¹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 104-105.

²¹² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 65.

²¹³ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 66.

is the God of all creation, the en-Christed person learns to love *through* Jesus Christ and church rather than exclusively *toward* Jesus Christ and The Church. Life in Christ cultivates an awareness of God's loving with and within creation, of creation as emerging cosmic interconnectedness with and within God's life, and of human life as natural to creation and its complex and dynamic emerging. Human love of one's kindred, then, includes participating in God's Reign of Love by loving our other-than-human kindred. In the third chapter, I will develop this argument more fully as an interpretation of life-in-Christ that is in keeping with Pittenger's broader process theology.

While Pittenger's Christian process theology offers an important vision of God as the God of all creation, I agree with Theodore Walker, Jr.'s, assertion that neoclassical and postmodern constructive theologies cannot be adequate Christian theologies if they only articulate God as the God of all creation without also identifying God as the God of the oppressed.²¹⁴ Norman Pittenger is not a postmodern theologian in the register of Walker, Jr.'s critique, but he is certainly a neoclassical and process theologian whose own constructive critiques of classical theology can be thickened and made more precise when brought into conversation with Walker, Jr.'s insights. This section concludes, then, with a brief turn to Theodore Walker, Jr., and his development of Charles H. Long's articulation of commodification logic and its significance for liberating theology today.

Theodore Walker, Jr., broadens the neoclassical explication of God as the God of all creation when he insists that "a fully adequate postmodern theology must explicate a

²¹⁴ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 25.

doctrine of God as the God of all creation and a doctrine of God as the God of the oppressed.”²¹⁵ Walker, Jr., proposes this twofold orientation for Christian theologies that seek to respond to the manifold and interlocking oppressions of modernity. He develops the work of Charles H. Long and constructs a neoclassical, Black Atlantic theology that argues that “overcoming modernism means overcoming the worldview [and world order] shared by slave traders, slaveholders, and others who profited from modern economic-social relations.”²¹⁶ Neoclassical and constructive Christian theology must account for “the commodification of African and Native American humans and lands, and related colonial activities” as “the main events of modernity,” Walker, Jr., argues.²¹⁷ Doing so epistemologically prioritizes patterns of relating among humans and between humans and other-than-human kindred and experiences of these relational patterns that have been foundational for much of the modern world order even as they have often been ignored in the construction of modernity’s stories about itself.²¹⁸ More importantly, doing so centers “the good news proclaimed by Jesus – good news to all, especially the poor and oppressed” – as the orienting concern for any Christian theology that seeks to identify possibilities for and contribute to the construction of God’s Reign of Love today.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 25.

²¹⁶ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 9-10.

²¹⁷ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 9.

²¹⁸ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 18.

²¹⁹ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 71.

Walker, Jr.'s, constructive critique presents a particular challenge for my work as I develop Norman Pittenger's process theology in response to the dynamic conditions of food and meals amid the oppressive conditions of climate crisis. With a broad scope, Pittenger argues that life in Christ is aimed toward common goods and necessitates Christian action for the transformation of the world in faithful partnership with God for love, beauty, and peace. However, to paraphrase Thandeka's characterization of Whitehead's God, Pittenger's vision for liberation and justice looks like a calm and orderly English countryside.²²⁰ Walker, Jr.'s, critiques reveal that Pittenger's notions of liberation and justice do not attend to or account for local experiences of death, exploitation, and oppression even as they can serve intentional construction of and participation in societies of persons who are committed to planetary wellbeing.

Pittenger's theological project, particularly as he is concerned to account for the meaningfulness of the social life in Christ, communicates universal good news. Yet Walker, Jr., contends that "universal good news fails to qualify as a specifically Christian gospel" even as it is awash with Christian language.²²¹ This failure is because universal

²²⁰ The English countryside is not a paragon of thriving biodiversity and ecological wellbeing. Centuries of deforestation, intensive grazing practices, monoculture conifer timber plantations, peat erosion, and river restructuring to enable floodplain agriculture are just a few examples of enmeshing human activities that limit biodiversity and the flourishing of our other-than-human kin in these countryside settings. Monica Coleman quotes Thandeka as saying, "Whitehead's God has the manners of an English gentleman." I add the ecological analysis to this ingenious critique. Thandeka as quoted in Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 81; Susan Wright and Alastair Driver, "What Does Rewilding Look Like?," August 5, 2021, Documentary Short Film, 8:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjurVFWM6c0>.

²²¹ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 70.

good news inadequately articulates “the more inclusive good news” that is capable of “describing, evaluating, and overcoming” particular oppressions that have characterized modernity.²²² For Walker, Jr., proclaiming universal good news is inadequate for Christian theologians because it is a failure to understand and theologically account for how “transatlantic slavery, genocide against Native Americans, and other colonial interactions [including environmental degradation through transnational corporate agribusiness]” have been foundationally significant patterns of relatedness for modernity.²²³ Without explications of how God experiences and responds to the particular and imbricating oppressions of modernity, neoclassical and constructive theologies are hampered at best and dangerous for the wellbeing of creaturely life at worst because they do not accurately depict and respond to the patterns of relatedness through which our world has emerged and continues so to do. This critique will continue to be developed over the course of the dissertation. In so doing, I expand both Pittenger and Walker, Jr., as I move toward a process theology of the Eucharist for planetary wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has broadly followed the lead of Theodore Walker, Jr., and articulated a doctrine of God as the God of all creation. In so doing, I have attended to the works of process philosophers and theologians who cast important cosmological and

²²² Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 70.

²²³ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 25.

theological visions that seek to address the entangling and dynamic relationality of God with, within, and beyond creation. These thinkers and their work could be characterized as neoclassical, postmodern, liberative, constructive, process, womanist, relational, or some combination of these descriptors, and I have developed a process vision of the world within a constellation of their influences. Most notably, I have focused on Norman Pittenger and his development of a Christian theology through Whiteheadian process thought.

Long's insights into commodification logic and the ways in which Walker, Jr., has developed Long's work for neoclassical theology influence how this dissertation will develop Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist. The process ecclesiology that I will develop articulates a vision of the Eucharist that proclaims the more inclusive good news of liberation to human and other-than-human creatures and communities who are oppressed and exploited through the distinctly modern regime of transnational corporate agribusiness. In the third chapter, the "distinctly modern" phrase will be explored by considering the term "Plantationocene," in conversation with Walker, Jr., to describe the current ways in which humans are influencing Earth as a planet. In the fourth chapter, critiques from Walker, Jr., Long, and others expand Pittenger's theology of the Eucharist to consider how the Christian meal is influenced by "common" meal cultures – the memories, hopes, and relationships of meals. Finally, Walker, Jr., and Long will join M. Shawn Copeland, and Monika Hellwig in the fifth chapter to thicken the relationship between justice, love, and Christian action through the Eucharist in Pittenger's process ecclesiology.

CHAPTER II - THE SOCIETY OF EN-CHRISTED LIVING: TOWARD AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF ORGANISM

How church happens matters for planetary wellbeing. In the midst of overlapping crises of global climate change, Christian theologies that are concerned for the life of the world must articulate how churches relate to their environing world in ways that reveal and enact good news to the poor and the oppressed in human and other-than-human communities alike.²²⁴ The task of process ecclesiology is to set forth a vision of church as a society that reveals and enacts this good news through its participation in the decisive act of God's love through and at work in the world in Jesus Christ. In so doing, process ecclesiology must also describe the significant interweaving of the individual's life in Christ with the church's communal life and growth through Christ. I argue that, in attending to these broad goals, process ecclesiology frames church as an organism that emerges as an influential locus of the co-creative relationship of God and communities of persons over time. In this chapter, I follow Norman Pittenger's observation on this point:

²²⁴ Attending to these influences will entail explication of “the conditional or hypothetical necessities of liberation theology, including especially a doctrine of God as the God of the oppressed”; various contingencies, including especially our various actual and possible connections to transatlantic slavery, black Atlantic experiences, colonialism, and other modern oppressions [including the exploitation and destruction of other-than-human creatures and creations]”; “evaluative judgements about the significance and righteousness of actual and possible past and present social relations, as well as possible future relations”; and “social ethical prescriptions for making liberating differences” as these overlapping critical engagements pertain to justice in ecological relationships. Theodore Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections: A Black Atlantic Synthesis of Neoclassical Metaphysics and Black Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 69-71.

process ecclesiology can also be understood as “an ecclesiology of organism” as it explores and expresses the societal Life in Christ.²²⁵

This chapter is an integrative review of process ecclesiologies that have been developed by Bernard Lee, Marjorie Suchocki, and Norman Pittenger. Lee was a contemporary of Pittenger, and most of Suchocki’s scholarship came toward the end of and following Pittenger’s career. Lee and Suchocki each develop elements of process ecclesiology that Pittenger introduced and developed in his own right. Their work has received more attention in subsequent years, so addressing their contributions to the field before addressing Pittenger’s own ecclesiology situates Pittenger’s insights within a broader conversation that describes the church as a living participant in cosmic interconnectedness.

In this chapter, I will review Lee and Suchocki’s ecclesiologies before turning to Pittenger. These three process theologians each highlight the dynamism and relationality of churchly organisms to different degrees. Incorporating Lee and Suchocki’s work into this chapter will expand the image of process ecclesiology while offering a foundation for an analysis of Pittenger’s ecclesiological project. In Pittenger’s ecclesiology of organism, any particular person’s Christian life presupposes a societal Christian life. Christian discipleship – though Pittenger more often uses the Pauline language of *the en-Christed life* – emerges through the co-creative relationships of God and communities of Christian

²²⁵ Norman Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 15, 19.

faith over time. As church *happens*, Christian discipleship *happens*.²²⁶ The final section of this chapter will, then, explore Pittenger's characterization of Christian discipleship as sacramental participation in God's work with and throughout creation.

PROCESS ECCLESIOLOGY IN BERNARD LEE AND MARJORIE SUCHOCKI

Two central claims characterize the process ecclesiologies of Bernard Lee, Marjorie Suchocki, and Norman Pittenger: church happens in an explicitly christocentric mode and church happens through dynamic interrelatedness. The Christ-Event is central to church identity. "While we cannot assert that [Jesus Christ] explicitly established an institution," Pittenger argues, "the new society called Christian was brought into being by Christ, by the impact of his life upon [humanity, and] has been sustained through power which it has claimed proceeded from him."²²⁷ Church happened and happens through the constellation of responses to the influence of the Christ-Event upon the world and the individual persons who contribute to its emergence.

Secondly, church happens through dynamic interrelatedness. Even though it may make use of the definite article, process ecclesiology asserts that *the church* can never be adequately understood as a static, essentialized entity from whence activity might or

²²⁶ Karen Baker-Fletcher first encouraged me to use the phrase "Church happens" as a complete sentence when I was her student. The phrase will appear throughout this dissertation, and it will often do so to explicitly convey the dynamism that Pittenger, Lee, and Suchocki have all identified in their own ways. Grammatically, I think that the phrase adequately conveys church as a social process, a "church" and, to use Timothy Murphy's term, a "churching." Timothy Murphy, *Counter-Imperial Churching for a Planetary Gospel: Radical Discipleship for Today* (Anoka, MN: Process Century Press, 2017), 183.

²²⁷ Norman Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World* (Louisville: Cloister Press, 1946), 89.

might not happen. Church happens as an event, dynamic and complex, in the midst of genuinely reciprocal relationships between triune God and humans. These relationships influence how church happens in particular contexts, and the church influences these relationships through its witness to the life of Jesus Christ in the world.

Lee, Suchocki, and Pittenger develop their arguments for church as a dynamic interrelatedness in various ways, emphasizing dynamism or interrelatedness to different degrees. All three agree upon the necessary connection of the two, though. Bernard Lee emphasizes dynamism, focusing upon the emerging society and how it becomes in its emergence, while Marjorie Suchocki emphasizes interrelatedness in her innovative argument for intersubjectivity as a helpful way of understanding both sin and salvation. I believe that Pittenger's emphasis upon an ecclesiology of organism holds together each characteristic with an even approach and provides a fertile ground from whence a process theology of the Eucharist for ecologically just eating can be developed.

Bernard Lee

Process ecclesiology is, at its core, a *natural* ecclesiology. The church is not an exception to any central metaphysical claims made in a broader processive understanding of reality. "If one were allowed but a single statement in which to characterize Whitehead's philosophy, it would surely have to be that *process itself is the reality*. Thus too, the Church's becoming is its reality," Bernard Lee writes.²²⁸ He advances a process ecclesiology that follows from his dual analysis of christologies that have been developed

²²⁸ Bernard Lee, *The Becoming of the Church: A Process Theology of the Structures of Christian Experience* (New York: Paulist Press), 172.

along the lines of Whitehead and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This theological pattern – God to Christ, Christ to Church – is found in his contemporary Pittenger and in Suchocki after him.²²⁹ Lee’s orienting ecclesiological concern is how the Church becomes a meaningful participant in revealing and enacting God’s love in the world. The relationship between ecclesiology and christology is central for Lee’s project because of the revelatory and participatory significance of Jesus in the God-world relationship. “How the Church comes off will equally be greatly influenced by our understanding of Jesus, for the Church arises out of human responses to what Jesus is about,” Lee writes.²³⁰ In turn, how Jesus is understood will be greatly influenced by how God is understood, “for God is available through and in him.”²³¹

The understanding of God developed by Whitehead is significant for Lee’s ecclesiology because of how it links God’s becoming with the world’s becoming. A basic understanding of God in Christian process theology is that God is not a stranger. Lee argues that God is more than “not a stranger,” for God is the call to transcendence in Love who “offers the world the high hope of adventure, the quest for further perfection and fulfillment.”²³² God desires for the world to transcend its current moments, growing

²²⁹ Indeed, one of Pittenger’s chapter titles in *The Christian Church as Social Process* (1972) is “God, Christ, and the Church in Process Reconception.” Seventeen years later, Marjorie Suchocki published her work straightforwardly entitled *God, Christ, Church*.

²³⁰ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 161.

²³¹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 161.

²³² Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 205.

in a process of creative advance towards fullness of life.²³³ Through faith in the Jesus-Event, the Church experiences God's desire for the world's transcendence as a summons to creative love.²³⁴

Lee develops Whitehead and argues that faith in the Jesus-Event is a society-creating act by individual Christians.²³⁵ The Church is created through the interlocking relationships of those persons for whom the Jesus-Event is important in their lives. Like the relational constitution of reality itself, this "interlocking arises from the way in which all the member occasions of a community order themselves to each other."²³⁶ Because each event is fundamentally relational in its process of becoming, "there is no such thing as an individual-not-in-community" even as that community is constituted by the ways that individuals relate to one another.²³⁷ Said differently, particular events matter for the identity of every community, and community matters for the identity of every particular event. Maintaining community and furthering community in response to God's calls into fullness of life, however, requires continued investment in the community *by specific*

²³³ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 162-163.

²³⁴ Lee uses "the Jesus-event" in the same manner that Pittenger speaks of "the event of Christ" or "the Christ event." As mentioned above, I maintain the distinction between this more common usage and the technical use of "event" in Whiteheadian metaphysics by capitalizing "Event" unless directly quoting Lee.

²³⁵ "...the essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world." Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 214.

²³⁶ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 164.

²³⁷ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 164.

events, by specific members of the community. This is the process understanding of the basic sociality of reality, a fundamental claim characterized by many as a “philosophy of organism.”²³⁸

The Individual-in-Community

For the Church, the individual-in-community matters for at least two reasons. First, the emphasis upon individual events in the process of creative advance highlights the creative acts of the particular that contribute to any emerging communal nexus. “The Church is created by the responses of individual persons to the Jesus-event,” Lee writes.²³⁹ Highlighting individual contributions to the community does not result in an individualistic ecclesiology, however. The individual responses to the Jesus-Event are only possible because the community – the Church – makes the Jesus-Event and its intensifications and appropriations in the life of the Church present for the individual. How particular communities have appropriated the Jesus-Event for themselves, engaging past events in the consequent nature of God through memory and faith, shapes how individuals experience and participate in the Church.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected Edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1979), 18.

²³⁹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 169.

²⁴⁰ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 169.

Lee expands the scope of relationships beyond the institutional Church as he develops Whitehead's argument for world solidarity *Religion in the Making*,²⁴¹ writing, "being a Christian is a result of a constant kind of *experiencing* which makes the Jesus-event play a constituting role in one's own becoming."²⁴² The Christian's sense of solidarity with the world, with and within which they become, deepens as they experience the Jesus-Event through the relationships of the Church. The Church embodies Jesus through the Sacraments, focusing its ministry through the present and influential Jesus-Event in the sacramental lives of its members.²⁴³ The Church, Lee argues, relates to the world beyond itself through its members' own witness to the Jesus-Event as it has been made present and influential in their participation in the Church's life.

The second reason that the individual-in-community matters for Lee's ecclesiology is that it roots Church-becoming within the world's matrix of relations. Church does not happen as an exception to the world's own happening. That is to say that

²⁴¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making: Lowell Lectures 1926* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 58-61.

²⁴² Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 172. (*emphasis original*).

²⁴³ The sacramental system of the Church is critical at this juncture as it is the primary pattern of events through which Jesus becomes present through the life of the Church and for the life of the world. "The Sacramental System" is an important phrase for Lee as a Roman Catholic theologian. He writes "'Sacrament' with an upper case 'S' to indicate specifically that system of Sacraments that we have come to call the seven Sacraments, though they clearly fit into a much larger category of sacrament: there are many sacraments of God's presence in Jesus, who is himself a sacrament of God; the Church itself is sacrament." In this chapter, I will try my best to follow this convention in the section that presents Lee's ecclesiology. Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 169, 173, 209-254.

“‘in-the-world-or-nowhere’ is where one can participate in the life of God.”²⁴⁴ God lures each individual event to participate in cosmic harmony through their subjective manifestations of truth, beauty, and love. The interconnectedness of all creatures with one another and with God is a characteristic of process ecclesiology for Suchocki and Pittenger as well, and it is significant for this dissertation’s conviction that the Eucharist is a meaningful event for shaping ecologically just and loving adaptive responses to global climate change. How church happens matters for the wellbeing of the planet, for the Church is an organism whose life is inextricably woven together with the life of the world.

Rather than conforming to a static collection of ethical expectations derived from scripture, this second facet of the individual-in-community interprets the Christian life to be the opportunity to really participate in God’s life through one’s own actions throughout the world. Lee’s notion of Christian community rests on the assertion that “God participates in the creativity of *every* event.”²⁴⁵ He posits a rich ecclesial intimacy with the divine, for the Church has possibilities to be filled with the life of God in new and creative ways as its members carry forth the community’s witness of the Jesus-Event in new and creative moments. I might even dare that Lee’s ecclesiology *expects* the Church to love God with an intimate intensity of passion and compassion that moves it both into itself more deeply and beyond itself more inclusively.

²⁴⁴ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 170.

²⁴⁵ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 170. (*emphasis original*).

Over time, the Church has become a public expression of solidarity between persons and with the world that is fundamentally informed by personal responses to the Jesus-Event and God, who is at work throughout history. For Lee, Christian love structures the Church's emergence and influences human relationships through and experiences of the world.²⁴⁶ Through the process of creative advance, the Church emerges because of how each particular Christian incorporates churchly influence and the world in their own becoming. Together with the influence of God's initial aim, the Church "presents God to the world over and over again through a constant re-appropriation of the Jesus-event" in the subjective becoming of each event.²⁴⁷ The many churches past are offered to the world as data that bear the appropriated Jesus-Event's influence upon the becoming of future occasions.

The Christian relationship to the Church is one of mutual reciprocity in which the becoming Christian receives from the Church ways of living in Christian love that can be appropriated for their current moment. Proclaiming the Gospel must, then, attend to the actual ways in which Christians feel the Jesus-Event as salvific in their own becoming and the ways that the Jesus-Event influences the world for love and justice. The holy influence of the Church may depend more upon Christians bearing witness to God's love through common tasks of "binding up the wounds of the world, healing it and making it safe" through service than anything else.²⁴⁸ In this way, the Church is to exist for the

²⁴⁶ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 203.

²⁴⁷ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 205.

²⁴⁸ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 171-172.

Christian rather than the Christian for the Church. The relationships in Christian love which constitute the Church serve the Christian because they present possibilities for a fullness of life in Christ that can be made actual in the world.

The Church as Society

Whitehead's description of a society is critically important for Lee's ecclesiological project because of the interplay between the one and the many that Lee interprets in the becoming of the Church.²⁴⁹ In the Church, Christians "share a conviction that the Jesus-event is important to them and to the world."²⁵⁰ Developing the descriptor "important" in a Whiteheadian manner, Lee argues that the Jesus-Event "gives [the Christian] clues to the meaning of the whole" of reality.²⁵¹ Particularly, the Christian experiences the centrality of the love of God for their own existence as well as for the life of the world in the Jesus-Event. "The Jesus-event shapes [the Christian's] becoming and there is in some way present in [the Christian] and part of [the Christian]."²⁵² For Lee, the Church's "common element of form" as a society is how it becomes the relational matrix that receives and shapes the becoming of a particular Christian in such a way as to further the importance of the Jesus-Event in the Christian's life.²⁵³ Christian unity emerges

²⁴⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 50-51, as quoted in Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 174.

²⁵⁰ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 175.

²⁵¹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 175.

²⁵² Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 176.

²⁵³ Whitehead, as quoted in Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 174-176.

through the collective acceptance of the Jesus-Event as being *for us* and *for the life of the world*.²⁵⁴

The common element of form of any society, however, is not created *ex nihilo* in each new occasion's prehension thereof. The Christian does not reinvent the Church in toto. "The defining characteristic of a society emerges in an individual through certain conditions imposed upon him in his prehension of those who are already members of the society," Lee writes.²⁵⁵ This comes to bear in Lee's ecclesiological project in three critically important ways. First, the dynamic interrelatedness among members of the Church is not contained within the Church. As with all actual entities, Christians, consciously or not, bear witness to the relationships that are important in their lives. As any Christian is positively prehended by any event, the significance of the Church in that Christian's life is also prehended. As the significance of the Church is prehended, so, too, the significance of the Jesus-Event is prehended.

In this account of Christian interrelatedness with the world, Lee implies an evangelistic character to the Christian life that has less to do with explicit verbal proclamation and more to do with living in such a way that the importance of the Jesus-Event in one's life is clear and evident. Christians influence the world merely by participating in the process of creative advance. Given this fact, Lee argues that the quality of the Christian's relationships with others beyond the Church is crucially

²⁵⁴ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 250.

²⁵⁵ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 176.

important for fulfilling Christ's mission of Love in the world. The Church grows as the Body of Christ for the world as it becomes positively influential for how others experience cosmic love.²⁵⁶

Second, as a member of the Church, the Christian is a datum for prehension by other members as well as their own future becoming.²⁵⁷ As the relationships that constitute the Church increase in their influence of the new member, the Jesus-Event is prehended in ever-intensifying ways. The Jesus-Event's grasp upon the Christian life is maintained through the dynamic matrix of relationships that fosters such significances. The Christian happens in response to those who have happened before them, their past occasions included. The Church can be said to be apostolic in its inheritance of past events in which the Jesus-Event has been important, and the Church can be said to be apostolic in that it sends its present members into the next moments of reality to bring to bear the significance of the Jesus-Event in their own lives. As the Jesus-Event is brought to bear in one's own becoming, the Christian finds that they are a creative force in the life of the Church.²⁵⁸ The society cannot exist apart from its membership since, through its members, it is made present to itself and the world.²⁵⁹ The Church emerges, then, through a multivalent mutual reciprocity: members with one another and members' experiences of the Jesus-Event in its fullness in faith. The latter entails the sustaining

²⁵⁶ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 177.

²⁵⁷ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 177.

²⁵⁸ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 177.

²⁵⁹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 179.

power of the Spirit of Jesus as well as the revelation and enactment of the Reign of God as it was made manifest in the Jesus-Event. For a process ecclesiology, Church *membership* must mean mutual participation in the communal life of God and others through the Jesus-Event. On the one hand, membership in the society which is Church is no different from the individual-society relationships that abound in the cosmos. On the other hand, because of its common element of form, the Jesus-Event, Church membership must be ready to critique the influences of forms of societal relationships which neither foster nor further the love of God shed abroad the cosmos. Indeed, it may be because societal membership is natural to the cosmos that the Church can be able to effectively recognize and respond to societies which do not seek to manifest God's reign of love throughout creation.

Third, the Christian's experience of other Christians is significant in shaping their own Christian identity. Membership in the Church means that the Church becomes part of the member's own self.²⁶⁰ Developing both Teilhard and Whitehead's work relating the self and the body, Lee argues that "whatever in the world an entity prehends positively enters into its own internal constitution: becomes Body."²⁶¹ The Christian participates in that society which is the Church because they have included the Jesus-Event into their own identity as important. Lee develops the Pauline metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ rather literally because of the ways process thinking

²⁶⁰ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 177-178.

²⁶¹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 178.

dismantles the dualism of mind and body found in the substance thinking so heavily developed in the so-called Enlightenment.

Referencing Teilhard, Lee writes that “The Body (the self) is not the matter that *belongs* exclusively to a man’s soul. Body is not that part of the world that is totally mine.”²⁶² The rejection of ownership of the material by an immaterial soul is a critical first move for Christian relationality within the Church for Lee. “Body,” Lee writes, is “the totality of the world that has become partially mine. It is what has become mine because I have made it part of my own becoming – I have allowed it a participation in my self-hood.”²⁶³ One’s own identity is defined by how one becomes in participative relations with the whole world rather than how one is exclusively owned by an immaterial force of cohesion. The relationships that we each experience in the world have material impacts on who we each become and how we become in our next moments together. Religious experiences of the Jesus-Event, then, are an aspect of embodiment, for the Christian “lets the Jesus-event into his own becoming,” making the Jesus-Event effectively present within the Christian’s own body-self.²⁶⁴ The Jesus-Event thus shapes the Christian’s experiences of solidarity with the totality of the world through a summons to live “in the structure of Christian love, as made explicit in the life of Jesus.”²⁶⁵ Furthermore, by describing bodies this way, Lee widens the scope of Christian solidarity

²⁶² Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 178. (*emphasis mine*).

²⁶³ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 178.

²⁶⁴ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 178-179.

²⁶⁵ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 205.

with the world beyond human bodies and human communities, for every creature embodies the world through their own participative becoming therein.

Lee is particularly interested in the ways this threefold pattern can be experienced in the Church's sacramental life. Acknowledging that the Church emerges in myriad ways through the relationships of Christians, Lee develops his ecclesiological project with particular attention to the Sacraments. "The reality of the Christian depends upon the continuing presence of the Jesus-event in the structure of his becoming," Lee writes, "and Sacraments are the Church's principal means of insuring and facilitating that continuance."²⁶⁶ Becoming Christian in each new moment of life includes a re-incorporation, a re-embodiment of the Jesus-Event in response to the new possibilities that Christians encounter in the process of creative advance. There is no static, "once saved, always saved" notion of salvation at work in Lee's ecclesiology. Though an experience of salvation may describe the incorporation of the Jesus-Event for the Christian, no single experience of salvation can be so decisive for the Christian that it forecloses further possibilities to experience the Jesus-Event in saving ways for future moments.

Furthermore, Lee argues that the Sacraments are significant for forming Christian identities "since there is no automatic meaning of what [being Christian] means, at any given moment or juncture in life."²⁶⁷ Christians, Lee writes, "are required consciously to

²⁶⁶ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 180.

²⁶⁷ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 181.

work out the structure of our Christian existence.”²⁶⁸ Though process thought does not limit knowing or feeling to human consciousness, Lee claims that the structure of Christian existence must include an intentional awareness and active acceptance of the influences that the Jesus-Event and the Church have on the Christian in order for the Christian to become a meaningful influence for Love in the interweaving communities of the world. Because the Sacraments attend to different important moments in the Christian’s life – baptism in infancy, confirmation in adolescence, marriage or ordination in adulthood, for example – they “objectify the Jesus-event from a different perspective,” Lee writes.²⁶⁹ The different perspectives of the different Sacraments have “the possibility of adding further specification as the Jesus-event is related to the particularities of a person or situation of a community.”²⁷⁰ Ultimately, the Sacraments serve to communicate the revelation of the Jesus-Event, serve to effect divine love for the human in the presence of God and through participation in the Jesus-Event’s movement in the Church.²⁷¹

The Sacraments, shaped by the Church in whose life they happen, make the revelation of the Jesus-Event present for particular contexts by emBodying the lives of the Christians who have gathered and constitute the Church for that time. The Sacraments, thus, enact the sanctification of the Church as a holy community for the

²⁶⁸ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 181.

²⁶⁹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 181.

²⁷⁰ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 181.

²⁷¹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 185.

revelation of God's love presently and enact prophetic calls upon the Church to account for the ways in which it has and has not made the radical love of God present in the world in influential ways so that it might strive to live more fully into the Reign of God in the future. The Church needs the Sacraments, for the Sacraments make present "God's way of loving" such that it becomes "operative within Christian community" and within "the configuration of our own patterns of loving" as individual Christians.²⁷²

The Church is itself "the Sacrament of God's love" just as it holds within its life a system of sacramental experiences and patterns that have been enacted, appropriated, and handed down through the temporal extension of Christian relationships.²⁷³ The ritual practices that have been developed and handed down aim to recognize the particular ways in which Christian relationships include and mediate God to each other through the Jesus-Event. As the rituals have communicated the significance of these relationships, persons have incorporated them into their own becoming, marking their Christian identities through their participation in these ritual acts.²⁷⁴ Appropriation of the ritual act through the Church has made the givenness and depth of God's love through the Jesus-Event effectively present to the Christian as constitutive of their own becoming. Through this presence, "a Sacrament is a positive prehension of the Jesus-event."²⁷⁵ That is, the Jesus-Event, while past in the historical life of Jesus, is made to be present in particular

²⁷² Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 185.

²⁷³ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 185.

²⁷⁴ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 211.

²⁷⁵ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 212.

and influential ways in the community which is called *Church*. “The Church has one foot in the Gospel and another in the contemporary world, and it creates a life out of where its two feet take it,” Lee writes.²⁷⁶ Though a seemingly abstract way to talk about Sacrament, Lee’s articulation of the Church’s Sacramental system as processes “by which the Church maintains the presence of the Jesus-event” proves useful when the diversity of theological interpretations of the Sacraments is taken into account.²⁷⁷

Lee is less keen to defend the particularities of a theological position like transubstantiation as he discusses the presence of the Jesus-Event in sacraments. Rather, Lee emphasizes “the organic interaction of multiple factors in Sacramental life,” and the offering of the Jesus-Event for Christian life through the intuition of the Church.²⁷⁸ Through the Sacraments, Christians participate in the Church’s processes of making the Jesus-Event present in its contemporary world in such a way as to contribute positively to the “real internal constitution of the Christian’s life.”²⁷⁹ The Christian and the Church are embodied in one another through the practice of the Sacraments.²⁸⁰ Of course, the Christian is also influenced by communities and environments beyond the Church and its sacramental system. How Christians feel and incorporate the Church’s influences for

²⁷⁶ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 212-213.

²⁷⁷ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 215.

²⁷⁸ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 219.

²⁷⁹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 213.

²⁸⁰ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 206.

their life will both shape and be shaped by these other, imbricating experiences like family relationships, labor, recreation, and, as I will argue later in this dissertation, meals.

The dynamic relationships through which the Church emerges do not entail a radical disconnect between the past and the present in sacramental practices. There are “elements of ritual sameness” that contribute to the perduring identity of the Church.²⁸¹ Such elements – like the bread and cup, the liturgical prayers, etc. – point to the Jesus-Event in its own historical integrity as well as the ways the Church has revealed the Jesus-Event as important in its own past occasions. Offering the Jesus-Event for present interpretation and appropriation, the Sacraments contribute to the consistent survival of the Church amid diverse times, spaces, and cultural particularities. Lee emphasizes that the present Sacramental life of the Church is intended to cultivate a growing awareness of God’s presence and love through the world. The Sacraments provide a pattern for the becoming Christian to experience Christian love without foreclosing on possible new and influential experiences of God in the future.

The Sacraments become, in Lee’s view, the “principal dynamics for the interpretation of Jesus’ ‘importance,’ and the assimilation of the Jesus-event into on-going history.”²⁸² The Sacraments participate in the life of the Church beyond its survival, then. The faithful presentation of the Jesus-Event is not an abstraction of the Jesus-Event. Through the Sacraments, God and the Church act together to make the

²⁸¹ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 207.

²⁸² Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 201.

Jesus-Event present in contextually relevant ways, revealing and enacting God's love and its importance for the world.²⁸³ The Church's identity does not intensify in the life of the Christian because it possesses some singular substance which any hopeful participant must also possess in order to be part of the Church. The Christian is invited to participate in the Jesus-Event through particular acts of faith in the Church. In the Sacramental life, the particular Christian "intends to take the Jesus-event most seriously in the configuration of its own reality."²⁸⁴ The Sacramental symbol works through the combination of its participation in the Jesus-Event, the faithful interpretation of the symbol by the Church, and the positive prehension of the Jesus-Event by the particular becoming Christian.²⁸⁵ It is in this relationship of the Jesus-Event, the community formed in response thereunto, and the life lived in response thereunto that the Jesus-Event becomes "causally efficacious and is therefore *PRESENT*. The Jesus-event presents itself through symbol to a new occasion of experience."²⁸⁶

A final contribution of Lee's ecclesiology in the mode of process emerges from this insight of presence. His notion of *sacrament* assumes an understanding of presence that eschews substance modes of location and influence. The organic interrelatedness of the Church and its Sacramental life is the consequence of a broader presupposition of

²⁸³ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 203.

²⁸⁴ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 202.

²⁸⁵ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 217.

²⁸⁶ Lee, *The Becoming of the Church*, 217. (*emphasis original*).

process thinking: “the entire universe is an organic community of interlocked events.”²⁸⁷

The interrelatedness of the universe means that “the entire universe is mutually present to itself,” with consequences for how spatial and temporal presence is understood.²⁸⁸

Spatially, universal mutual presence means that any occasion is available to be made present in the life of another through the web of relations which constitutes the cosmos.

Temporally, universal mutual presence means that the whole past is available to influence any presently becoming occasion. “At any given moment, we stand on the shoulders of *all* past history,” Lee writes.²⁸⁹

Daunting as the enormity of these relations may seem, there are plenty of occasions with little influence at all upon a presently becoming occasion even though it is made present. That there are occasions which are prehended so negligibly as to be rarely – if ever – noticed indicates the complexity of the web of relations and the power of more immediate occasions to influence one’s becoming. Here, Lee turns to Whitehead’s “practical distinction between the whole world and the ‘actual world.’ [Wherein] the actual world is that part of the whole world which contributes to the configuration of an actual occasion.”²⁹⁰ Presence is not an overload of influences that stretch the occasion from microbes in the gut to far-flung star systems. Rather, “whatever shapes or creates

²⁸⁷ Bernard Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” *Religious Experience and Process Theology*, ed. Harry James Cargas and Bernard Lee (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 285.

²⁸⁸ Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” 285.

²⁸⁹ Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” 286. (*emphasis original*).

²⁹⁰ Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” 286.

me in any way is present to and in me,” Lee writes, evoking his discussion in *The Becoming of the Church* of embodiment and selfhood.²⁹¹ Though proximity may be a significant factor in Lee’s notion of presence, proximity is not necessary for *x*-occasion to be more present than *y*-occasion is. Spatially, this is significant for the deconstruction of substance modes of thought which locate *a thing* as statically within an impenetrable unit of space. *Presence* becomes the degree to which one is causally efficacious for another rather than a static location in fixed space or time. This means that *memory* is more than an intellectual task of recalling that which is *over there* in some unreachable perpetuity. Lee most explicitly develops his argument for presence as causal efficacy in his work on the Sacraments, but it has implications for a broader processive understanding of the Church that are implied in his work with the Sacraments.

Lee develops a notion of presence from process thought that shifts questions of identity and mission in ecclesiology. If, as process thought argues, “we no longer think precisely in terms of ‘present’ or ‘not present’; we presume presence and ask about its size,” then ecclesiological inquiry should begin from the recognition that the Church is always already influencing the world by its participation in God’s love in the Jesus-Event.²⁹² For process ecclesiologies, especially those concerned with the sacraments, questions of presence and influence, then, ought to be focused on the quality of the Church’s influence on the world and on enriching the Church’s influence through loving

²⁹¹ Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” 286.

²⁹² Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” 287.

participation in the Jesus-Event. In this shift from static notions of presence to participative dynamism, “what is ‘there’ breaks out of its neutrality” because it becomes “a particular presence in [an occasion’s] actual world,” Lee writes.²⁹³ The Church can be more valuable or less valuable for the communities in which it emerges by how it makes the love of God present for those communities. Intersubjective self-awareness becomes critical for adequate becoming as the Church. Such self-awareness necessitates that meaningful understandings of a church’s histories, traditions, and scriptures be held in creative tension with prophetic acts of self-transcendence in love in the present moments so that God’s Reign might be more fully realized in the future.

In the understanding of presence on offer in Lee’s work, the Church is and can become more valuable for the life of the world because the gift that the Church can offer the world – the presence of God through the Jesus-Event – is a natural dynamic of the cosmos. There is no sacred supernatural substance entitled “God’s love” that is held and meted out by the Church. The love of God, rather, is the dynamic and relational identity of God that is both intimate to each occasion of reality and inclusive of all reality. The Church has within its identity an ecological responsibility to identify, participate in, and make possible the Reign of God’s love throughout the world. A process model of ecclesiology suggests that the Church’s process of creative advance be opened to the adventure of God’s love as it is made present through every relationship, not just the human relationships with which theology has been predominantly concerned. In such

²⁹³ Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” 288.

expansiveness, the Church may come to know the fundamental lovability of every occasion in the cosmos, and, knowing such, open itself evermore, enacting afresh the love it has revealed in the present-ness of the Jesus-Event.

Marjorie Suchocki

The church begins in Christ.²⁹⁴ For Marjorie Suchocki, ecclesiology must take its starting point from the responsive and dynamic relationship of God and the world that has been opened to new possibilities through Christ. Similar to Bernard Lee, she attends to classical questions of ecclesiology through the metaphysical commitments of process theology and aims to articulate deeper forms for Christian expressions of love and justice that have outgrown traditional forms of church.²⁹⁵ Ecclesiology becomes, in her project, “the ongoing completion of christology” as it expresses the mediation of the benefits of Christ to the world through the continuing activity of God with the world.²⁹⁶ Christ is crucial for the Church, for Christ is remembered afresh through persons’ active faith in their present moments.

Christian Faith

For Suchocki, faith is neither belief nor intellectual assent to a creedal statement. “Faith is a response-ability,” she writes.²⁹⁷ Faith enables particular acts which

²⁹⁴ Marjorie Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 132.

²⁹⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 179.

²⁹⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 129.

²⁹⁷ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 136.

communicate divinity-in-action in manners consistent with but not confined to such revelations in the past. Faith is the interplay of memory and action that influences the Christian to become in such a way as to participate “in the benefits of Christ.”²⁹⁸ In this way, faith enables response to Christ and the community through whom Christ is mediated just as it holds one accountable in their becoming present.²⁹⁹

Furthermore, “faith presupposes grace,” for faith is the response to that event which happened without oneself yet is available to oneself because of the actions of others.³⁰⁰ This reimagining of faith also reimagines grace, for grace cannot be a substantial gift, a *thing* which is given by the external actions of another. Rather, grace *happens*, and faith is the happening enabled by and in response to grace in a creative partnership. Paul’s Athenian sermon could be said of grace, too, for grace communicates God’s noncoercive action in the world and fosters the spacetime in which the church faithfully proclaims its experience of Christ. In grace, we “live and move and happen.”³⁰¹

Faithful response to grace has occurred throughout time and space, bringing together persons in various sociocultural contexts into the body called *Church*. “Each one has received a Christly possibility for the immediate future, formed in conjunction with her or his personal past situated in time and culture.”³⁰² Together, these subjects have

²⁹⁸ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 137.

²⁹⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 136-137.

³⁰⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 136.

³⁰¹ Acts 17:28, NRSV.

³⁰² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 137.

constructed the church in the midst of the earth, in response to their reception of the gospel as well as in response to the particular needs of the world in which they live. There is a genuine community in the Church's creative response for the wellbeing of all that incorporates-yet-transcends individual responses in faith. That is to say "the church is not a collection of individuals who all happen to come to faith...The church is the community of all those whose identities have been so formed through faith" and the community through whom the gospel's proclamation in word and deed makes possible the creative advance of the world in faith and towards cosmic wellbeing.³⁰³ Yet the church-as-community does not evolve a singularity of mind that annihilates dissent or the contributions of particular expressions of faith in the lives of particular members. Suchocki's proposal for *organic intersubjectivity* in living communities may very well be the most significant contribution of her ecclesiology to process theology.

Organic Intersubjectivity

Developed within a process-relational accounting of original sin as both a Christian theological category and a societal reality, intersubjectivity is the dynamic force of influence constituted by, and influential upon, members of any organization.³⁰⁴ Intersubjectivity is an organismic interpretation of the way individuals relate to one another and to the whole of any organization of which they are a part in the fulfillment of the organization's mission. Suchocki develops this insight with an important realism.

³⁰³ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 137.

³⁰⁴ Marjorie Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 119-127.

Structure itself is not inherently evil and may involve quite complex hierarchies and systemic patterns of interaction which “witness to the complex requirements of structuring very large groups” towards the realization of the organization’s ends.³⁰⁵ The effect is a diffusion of authority and agency throughout an institution that is shaped through a dynamic and responsive matrix of participants.

Reflecting process thought’s sustained attention to the cosmic relationship between the one and the many, Suchocki’s theory of intersubjectivity characterizes the relationship between persons and institutions as reciprocal even if not perfectly equal. “The person must deal with the relational effects of the institutions upon the whole of who the person is,” she writes.³⁰⁶ Institutions influence “the whole of who the person is” because an institution is both an environmental influence and part of the individual’s personal past. The prehension of institutional culture – its self-understanding, norms, goals, and vocabulary to name a few – will occur to some degree within the person’s own becoming, thus influencing who the person becomes.

The person, however, also influences the institution’s becoming. The institution may exercise a greater influence upon the person than the other way around, but no institution is impassible. “In a relational world, the uniqueness of the individual becomes a factor in the total identity of the institution. So then,” Suchocki notes, “each member of the institution participates not only in personal identity, but in group identity.”³⁰⁷ The

³⁰⁵ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 120.

³⁰⁶ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 120.

³⁰⁷ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 121.

hierarchical structures that emerge amidst the complexity of living human communities have often been critiqued as a “prime tool for reinforcing the power of privilege” afforded the few at the cost of the many.³⁰⁸ Liberation theologians like Theodore Walker, Jr., have articulated the insidious embedding and enforcing of the power of privilege on a social scale in modernity through patterns of interpersonal domination and degradation. In modernity, these dominating influences foster and enforce patriarchal, racist, heteronormative, able-bodied, imperial, and commodifying human experiences as “normative” or “decent” over and against human experiences that diverge from these established norms. Yet the oppression that occurs when this has happened throughout human history has never been strictly *necessary*, for oppression is never a necessary expression of relationality.³⁰⁹ Suchocki’s project anticipates this as she addresses the Nicene-Constantinopolitan claim that the Church is holy.

Organic Intersubjectivity and The Nicene Marks of the Church

Because “responsibility itself is created and shared through the intersubjectivity of the institution,” the church can only manifest *holiness* in its communality.³¹⁰ The ways in which Christians relate with one another, the world, and God reveal and enact holiness in church. Suchocki’s observations are insightful for other process theologies. The community named *Church* is not a static substance identified through some underlying and unchanging essence. Nor does *Church* evolve as a superconscious individual,

³⁰⁸ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 120.

³⁰⁹ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 48.

³¹⁰ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 122; Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 147.

annihilating the unique contributions of those who have constituted the community of faith. Church happens and enacts holiness through the diverse ways that communities of persons relate to one another, the world, and to God in their present, faithful response to Jesus Christ.³¹¹ These relationships participate in Christ's holiness through the church, for "it is the community that brings the individual to birth, not the individual who creates the community."³¹²

Through its relationship with God, a church experiences holiness as a purifying and energizing transformation toward cosmic wellbeing.³¹³ Suchocki's Whiteheadian influence is clear. "What the church accomplishes is felt by God [in God's consequent nature] and dealt with by God in transforming wisdom."³¹⁴ God's feelings of churchly becomings will include the varying degrees to which aims of love and justice were made actual in contextually relevant and transformative ways. God's feelings of churchly becomings will also include the myriad ways that these aims were missed, intentionally or otherwise. This is the infinite compassion of God directed towards the body who has received divine aims in its past that lured it towards "the Reign of God through identification with Jesus Christ."³¹⁵ In response to feeling the church, "God blends the whole church everlastingly with that constellation we call Christ in the primordial nature

³¹¹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 138.

³¹² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 133.

³¹³ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 146.

³¹⁴ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 147.

³¹⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 138.

of God.”³¹⁶ In this divine blending, the church participates in God’s becoming. For Suchocki, “God transforms the community of the church in the integration of the consequent and primordial natures, and in that divine process God welds the church into true holiness.”³¹⁷ Scriptural imagery of the refiner’s fire rings through Suchocki’s description of the divine prehensions of the church in creativity. The purification, however, is not a damning of the church’s actuality in favor of some abstract, glimmering city in the clouds. “The transformed church in God is not tangential to the kinds of holiness to which the church is called in history.”³¹⁸ The fullness of Christ in the church and the church in Christ within God’s becoming is offered “in the multiplicity of aims given to the individuals of the church, each aim being given in light of all the others.”³¹⁹

Holiness occurs as “the church lives from its identity in Christ” in its present relationships.³²⁰ For Suchocki, this identity is handed down through the *apostolicity* of the church, the relationship of the present church to its past.³²¹ Accounting for the becoming of the Church over time, Suchocki’s attention to apostolicity shapes her argument for intersubjectivity in the present. The extent to which the church has revealed and enacted the Reign of God in the world is not separate from the patterns of

³¹⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 147.

³¹⁷ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 146.

³¹⁸ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 146-147.

³¹⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 146-147.

³²⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 148.

³²¹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 138-141.

relationships that have developed over time in its intersubjective culture. That is to say that the present is not entirely novel for intersubjective communities, for they receive and must engage influences from their past.

Christian communities have characterized their own intersubjective development in relation to one another but also to their predecessor communities through the adaptation and use of scriptures, liturgies, theological insights, and other patterns of living. Suchocki defines apostolicity broadly, writing that it “is the sense in which the church is continuously affected by and responsible to its past, beginning with the testimony of the apostles to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”³²² For Suchocki, “proclamation” is critically important for understanding the apostolicity of the church. Christian testimony to Jesus’s life and significance for the world occur in the present because of faithful and contextually appropriate occurrences of Christian faith, hope, and love down through the ages.

Christian proclamation, Suchocki writes, is “the constant testimony to the resurrection...and continuance of the teaching of Jesus” and has constant and relative poles.³²³ The “constant pole” of proclamation is rooted in the objective past and is recalled through the power of memory in the act of faith. For Christian communities in the present, faith-in-action re-presents the nexūs of relationships and modes of intersubjectivity that were influential in the world for Jesus of Nazareth, his ancestors,

³²² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 138.

³²³ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 138.

and the communities of persons who gathered in response to his life and ministry. The apostolicity of the church contains the different ways in which Christians have responded to one another, their world, and God as embodied and communal proclamations of Love-in-action rather than propositional and individual assents to collections of text.³²⁴

Just as the Christian gospel is proclaimed through concrete enactments of love, service, healing, and communal well-being, it calls and enables the presently becoming church “to reflect God’s image in communities of love and justice” in their own context.³²⁵ The particular expressions of church over time demonstrate “the relative pole of proclamation.”³²⁶ Here, Suchocki effectively argues for the influence of the past upon Christian becoming in the present without pushing her definition of apostolicity toward the impotently abstract or unyieldingly deterministic. The relativity of proclamation is at least twofold in Suchocki’s process ecclesiology: the apostolic witness of the church to the life and ministry of Jesus is to be made manifest in contextually relative and adequate ways for present church happenings, and the apostolicity of the church cannot foreclose future expressions of church by expecting flawless duplication of a “successful proclamation” in all places and all times following the initial success.

The church’s faithful becoming entails a continuity with the past that requires a responsiveness to change in the present as well as a willing openness toward future judgments and transformations in the radical love of God. “Faithfulness to the past, when

³²⁴ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 139.

³²⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 139.

³²⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 139.

that past is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ,” Suchocki writes, “calls upon us for a radical openness to new and unexpected forms of inclusive wellbeing, God’s reign.”³²⁷

As the church’s relationship to its past is continually open to new possibilities for revealing and enacting God’s Reign in the world, the base for Christian *unity* is created.

Suchocki develops her theology of Christian unity through her attention to the church’s relationship to its possible futures. Arguing that the church’s past cannot foreclose upon its future becoming expands notions of identity and unity beyond a deterministic past or a coercive present. Instead, future possibilities for revealing and enacting God’s Reign in the world are genuinely open to shape the identity of the church.³²⁸ In the divine creativity of God’s own becoming, Christ creates a real bond amongst the community of Christians with each other and with God. Focusing her discussion of Christian unity on the future is not a delay of unity as *only* a possibility. Christian unity is really enacted within divine becoming, and the responsive relationship between God and the world entails that the unity which is actual in God is offered as to the church as a live and holy possibility for its own particular time and space. This is partly what Suchocki means when she writes that the church’s appropriation of Christ is the “ongoing completion” of the revelation of cosmic Love through Christ.³²⁹ The present church experiences unity in the sharing of a future *in Christ*. To the degree that the

³²⁷ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 141.

³²⁸ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 143.

³²⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 129.

church reveals and enacts God's Reign in the world – to the degree that holiness occurs through the church – the church manifests a unifying influence in the world.

Given that church happens through the relational matrix of personal responses to Christ through faith, the unity of the church must not be misunderstood to be some melting pot mechanism in which the diverse particularities of Christian lives and communities are ignored, misappropriated, or annihilated by a coercive God. As apostolicity has a constant and a relative pole, so, too, can Christian unity be understood in an oscillating relationship between constancy and relativity. The constancy of unity is that God is consistently, faithfully leading the church into new modes of love and justice that reveal and enact the Reign of God. In strict Whiteheadian terms, it could be said that the constant pole of unity in the church is the result of God's superjective nature.³³⁰ God's superjectivity creates value-laden actual entities.

For Suchocki's project, divine superjectivity is experienced in Christian unity as God brings eternal and specific value – Christ – into real togetherness with physically prehended data from within God's own consequent nature – namely, how the church has happened in its past.³³¹ The possibility offered to the church in its initial aim will faithfully be the "Christly possibility," or the possibility offered so as to conform the church to the nature of God.³³² The church experiences unity in its experience of this

³³⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

³³¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures 1925* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 165.

³³² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 144.

common gift of God. However, if Suchocki's proposal for the intersubjectivity of institutions is correct, true unity cannot be understood as a constant giving of possibility that fails to take account of the personal uniqueness of each Christian.³³³ Each member of the church must be able to reflect the church's future in Christ in their own specific context.

The faithful response to grace that brings Christians together enables the personal and communally appropriate reflections of their Christly call towards communal wellbeing. In this way, unity in the church must be relative to the specific cultural contexts, capable of adaptation and conditioning "by what the world in any one location can bear."³³⁴ The initial aim for love and justice orients each and every Christian toward God's Reign as it has been made manifest in previous expressions of Love-in-action in the world while remaining unexhausted in its fullness. The Reign of God continues to beckon the presently becoming Christian just beyond their moment, into the next moments of the adventure of Love. Suchocki's treatment of unity echoes the observation of the powerful influence of a community's openness towards transformative love that was discussed above in the church's apostolicity.

Paying careful attention to the church's past will show forth the faithful response of Christian communities as they have revealed and enacted God's Reign in their worlds. It will also lay bare the many moments of sinful response to the world in which the

³³³ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 120-121.

³³⁴ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 145.

church happened.³³⁵ How can church respond with God's transformative love to the sins of its past? Is Christian unity just a way to force oppressors and the oppressed into the same hierarchies where oppression can continue behind a veil of unity? "Every aim from God will be toward that which builds up the richness of community," Suchocki writes.³³⁶ God's gift of unity to the church is God's offer for the church to join in the "togetherness of all things in the infinite satisfaction of God [that is] the ultimacy of love, pervading and transforming each participant through the power of God's own subjectivity."³³⁷ Christian unity, in its fullness, is not ignorant of any suffering caused by sin or any sin that causes suffering. While God's attention to the particularities of each actual entity shapes that relationship – oppressors will have to give up their oppressing to enter into Christian unity – overcoming sin through the redemptive work of God must be communal, for sin is most insidious in the victimization of persons through the intersubjective dynamics of our relationships.³³⁸ For the individual Christian, faithful discipleship emerges in one's openness to participating in future possibilities for God's Reign through Jesus Christ, for these futures spring from the divine Love itself that lures

³³⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 145.

³³⁶ Marjorie Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 123.

³³⁷ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 123.

³³⁸ Suchocki, *The End of Evil*, 126.

the world into unity.³³⁹ Suchocki's consideration of the sacraments further illustrates the gift of Love that unifies by offering Christ.

There is a threefold dimensionality in Suchocki's sacramental theology: focus on present community, relationship to the past and future of the church, and catalyst for creation of communities of love and justice as witness to the Reign of God in the world.³⁴⁰ These three dimensions weave through one another, constituting the church's communality *in its present and to its past and future*. "The presence of one to another, whether in relation to past, future, or present," lies at the heart of the sacraments.³⁴¹ In relation to its past, the church experiences an "intense power of continuity" through the ritual practice of the sacraments.³⁴² Apostolicity is experienced through the continued proclamation of Christ's resurrection and teaching in the celebration of the sacraments. Indeed, it may be in the sacraments where the apostolic faith most plainly plunges deeper than words, enlivening the bodies of the faithful and eliciting responses of relationship with more than the human creatures to whom churches are so often limited. In relation to its future, the church experiences the sacraments as shaping the openness to Christ's influence in anticipatory and revealing ways. The Christian experience of the church's

³³⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 162.

³⁴⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 161.

³⁴¹ Suchocki's attention to ways in which the church extends its identity in Christ through its internal and external relations is indicative of her broader process claim that the process of subjective and intersubjective relating is reality itself. In sacramental theology, this is clearly *contra* substantial theologies' preoccupations with sacramental substance. Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 162.

³⁴² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 161.

unity leads to an imaginative appreciation of “not only the present creation of community, but also the many who will succeed” the present community.³⁴³ The responsibility of faithful living is revealed in the sacramental experience of unity-through-possibility. Finally, in relation to its present, the church experiences the sacraments as shaping and constituting present occurrences of holiness. As church happens among persons who participate in their Christly calls together, “there will be love, justice, openness, and mutuality within the community...dynamically embodying Christ [as a] catalyst for love and justice in society, looking toward inclusive wellbeing.”³⁴⁴ In Suchocki’s intersubjective, relational ecclesiology, the sacraments contribute to subjective self-transcendence through an interplay of memory, imagination, and empathy.³⁴⁵ The sacraments serve as invitations into “the mutual enrichment” of others in Christian community.³⁴⁶ Celebration of the sacraments as a community of faith becomes a living witness to the community’s own self-transcending partnership with God in a passionate and compassionate love for the world.

Shaped through its inheritance of the past and its hopes for the future, the church emerges into holiness in the present. In Suchocki’s process ecclesiology, holiness is a

³⁴³ By *imaginative*, I do not mean unreal or fanciful. Rather, following Suchocki, the personal act of anticipation-in-appreciation is an *imagining* of future consequences from present actions in such a way as to stir within the present becoming a sense of empathy for those who have not yet come to be. Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 162.

³⁴⁴ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 162.

³⁴⁵ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 36-46.

³⁴⁶ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 42.

present quality of the church's relationships with the world. As such, it conceptually refuses abstraction. Holiness "is relative to the particularities of circumstances," Suchocki writes.³⁴⁷ This relativization is the link between the interplay of apostolicity, unity, and holiness with the fourth Nicene mark of the church: *universality*. The "relativization of holiness becomes a basis for the diversity and ecumenicity of the church" because the relativization of holiness for particular circumstances means that "no one concrete achievement can be normative for the others."³⁴⁸ Here, Suchocki prefigures the proposal of Timothy Murphy for a planetary gospel as she discusses the universality of the church.

Ecclesial universality is, first and foremost, found in God.³⁴⁹ The Christian experience of universality through the church is relative to the particular cultural contexts within which Christianity has developed to its present moment. No Christian church can be said to be the absolute, normative Christian church. "The great temptation to the church is to begin to think of itself as the already given reign of God," she writes.³⁵⁰ Instead of an absolutized norm for the world, the church is called to be a sign of the reign of God.³⁵¹ For Suchocki, two important arguments emerge when the universality of the church is reconceptualized in this way.

³⁴⁷ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 149.

³⁴⁸ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 149-150.

³⁴⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 179.

³⁵⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 166.

³⁵¹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 166.

First, the call of the church, regardless of cultural location and specificity, is always the gospel call to transformation for collective wellbeing in Love. This is not to say that the content of the call is rigid or coercively imposed. Rather, “the transformative work of the gospel is a many faceted and open process” which will be worked out within each particular church in unique ways befitting the needs of the cultural contexts in which church happens.³⁵² This argument is dependent upon Suchocki’s argument for the intersubjectivity of institutions in a unique way. Society at large is to be understood as a multiply woven tapestry of intersubjective institutions. A person experiences the influences of this multiplicity at once within their experience of society at large even as a small number of institutions may exercise dominating influences over a person’s process of becoming.³⁵³ In a Whiteheadian sense, the person’s relationships with those institutions in their process of becoming will be more or less “important” to the degree that the person more or less positively prehends the historical events, values, and aims of the institutions into their own becoming, into their own sense of self. Here, Suchocki draws an analogy between the person in society and the church in a culture. “Every particular church will weave patterns that are unique to its own culture into its form of existence.”³⁵⁴ Due to the fluidity between the church and its culture, churches must interact cultures in self-aware and critical ways, she suggests. “Can this particular [cultural] pattern express well-being for the whole community?” and “Does this

³⁵² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 165.

³⁵³ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 126.

³⁵⁴ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 165.

particular [cultural] pattern perpetuate ill-being for members of the community, contrary to the love of the gospel?” become chief questions for adequately doing gospel work.³⁵⁵

Second, gospel work that happens within a particular cultural spacetime is enriched through the universal activity of the church’s life in Christ, which makes possible the continuing transformation of the cosmos towards goodness, truth, and beauty. “All forms of the church stand under the norm of the reign of God,” Suchocki writes.³⁵⁶ Within God’s own process of becoming, the church is blended “everlastingly with that constellation we call Christ in the primordial nature of God.”³⁵⁷ This experience of holiness in God is offered as a future possibility for the presently becoming church to manifest in its own life, within its own cultural matrix of relations. The communality that is characteristic of Christian holiness “reinforces the interdependence of the many and the one for the achievement of love and justice” which is presented afresh to the church in every age and every cultural setting as the church is offered its unity in Christ as a future possibility for concrescence.³⁵⁸ The interdependence demonstrated in apostolicity, reinforced in holiness, and offered again in unity encourages a humble approach to the deeper forms of love and justice hoped for in God’s Reign. “Each culture, drawing from

³⁵⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 165.

³⁵⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 165.

³⁵⁷ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 147.

³⁵⁸ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 150.

the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, manifests its own unique incarnation of the gospel” which is aimed towards the manifestation of God’s Reign.³⁵⁹

Suchocki recognizes that, “for much of Christian history, the universality of the church had the connotation that Christianity is the only faith acceptable to God.”³⁶⁰ In her ecclesiology, however, she argues that the universality of the church should be “taken to mean that Christian faith can be expressed in any culture at any time; it is not inherently restricted to the cultures of its origin or primary development.”³⁶¹ The universality of the church, then, cannot be located in a single instantiation of the church in history, for each expression ultimately proves to be finite. In salvific terms, the church can say that “Jesus reveals the boundless grace of God,” but the church cannot then attempt to limit the *boundless* grace of God to the church’s own expression of its faith in Christ.³⁶²

Individual moments of churchly movement towards the Reign of God cannot be universalized, for that ignores the boundaries which shaped that particular moment’s own emergence, thus betraying the moment’s identity. Yet finite moments do relate to one another, influencing and receiving the influences of other moments. For Suchocki, our finitudes are harmonized within the Reign of God.³⁶³ The universality experienced in the church cannot then be an imperial dominance of Christian patterns of structural

³⁵⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 167.

³⁶⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 167.

³⁶¹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 164.

³⁶² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 176.

³⁶³ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 171.

governance, exclusivism of thought, nor strict moralism throughout society. Rather, the universality of the church depends upon diversity with a humble recognition that “salvation comes from God in many ways, and [the church is] simply sharing the way that has been manifested [to it.]”³⁶⁴ The notion of universality on offer challenges the church towards love of the other in both passionate and compassionate ways: the passion for its own life in Christ to be enriched in community with others who seek the wellbeing of the world and the compassion to receive the other into the church’s own life without intent or act to colonize or annihilate their particularity. The church can faithfully proclaim Christ and become a vital partner in the realization of cosmic wellbeing in this compassionate love.

PROCESS ECCLESIOLOGY IN NORMAN PITTENGER

Though citations to Pittenger’s own development of a process ecclesiology are sparse in Lee and Suchocki’s work, I believe that Pittenger’s complex and sustained ecclesiological proposal is critically important for both of their visions and provides fertile ground for this dissertation’s development of a process theology of the Eucharist for ecologically just eating. This chapter will conclude by presenting what I have called Pittenger’s “ecclesiology of organism.” Pittenger broke new ground for Christian process theology by turning his attention to ecclesiology.³⁶⁵ To a degree, I present his

³⁶⁴ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*. 178.

³⁶⁵ I agree with Timothy Murphy when he says, “to my knowledge, Pittenger wrote the first book on process theology and the church.” Timothy Murphy, *Counter-Imperial Churching for a Planetary Gospel*, 191n47.

ecclesiology as an effort to shine light back upon work that has gone underappreciated as the field has continued to develop in the half-century since its publication. More importantly for this project, I think that Pittenger's broad and thoughtful consideration of church can be fruitful for how Christians can positively contribute as a community to the necessary changes human societies must make in how we eat in the midst of global climate change. Church happens through the intimate interrelatedness with others that characterizes the life in Christ, the "life in Love" itself that has been made available through the decisive act of God in Jesus Christ.³⁶⁶ Pittenger's ecclesiology of organism recognizes the dynamism and interrelatedness of the cosmos and turns to consider Christian fellowship as distinct societies of events that make holy and creative possibilities actual experiences of life together in the world. Without wholesale abandonment of traditional ways of speaking about church, Pittenger offers a robust option for understanding who church is, how church has happened, and what church can become for the life of the world.

Process ecclesiology emerges within and contextualizes a fuller account of life in Christ. For Pittenger, the purpose of ecclesiology is not to defend any particular institutionalized form of churchly living. Rather, process ecclesiology is concerned to account for the dynamic and interdependent "fellowship of lovers, lovers of their fellow [humans] and lovers of God in Christ."³⁶⁷ As in both Lee and Suchocki, Pittenger's

³⁶⁶ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 15.

³⁶⁷ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 16.

ecclesiology of organism is rooted in a robust and multifaceted christology. Historically, the impact of Jesus Christ upon the lives of human persons has been so significant that it has inspired a coming together of persons to create a “new society called Christian.”³⁶⁸ This new society and its subsequent iterations interpreted their own identities, purposes, and capacities for achieving those purposes through the faith that they had been gathered and empowered by the same Spirit who marked the Christ-Event as revealing and enacting the Reign of God. Becoming the communal expression of life in Christ, church happened and continues to happen as a site for the revelation of God at work in the world through the witness of Jesus Christ and in the creativity of the Holy Spirit. Church happened and happens by continuing “Christ’s work and is properly regarded as the extension of the Incarnation and Atonement.”³⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Pittenger writes that church emerges as the “‘social humanity’ by which the [Christ-Event] continues his work and his presence, as, in [Christ’s] ‘personal humanity,’ he was expressed in the days of his flesh.”³⁷⁰

Through baptism into the life in Christ, the Christian disciple becomes incorporated into the Body of Christ as a co-operating participant with God and other human persons in the salvific movement of God towards the world.³⁷¹ Yet this participation is not fully formed in the baptism. “The seed is planted in the child or adult

³⁶⁸ Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 89.

³⁶⁹ Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 90.

³⁷⁰ Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 91.

³⁷¹ Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 122, 129.

by baptism; it will not grow if it receives no care and attention,” Pittenger writes.³⁷² Here, an ecclesiology of organism incorporates the necessary growth of individuals and the important work of communities to care for and attend to this growth into the very image of church itself. Pittenger argues for a “vitalistic conception” of church in *Life as Eucharist* and states that church is “vital, living, and dynamic” in *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*.³⁷³ Church happens as an emerging society of persons who live in Christ. As an emerging society, church happens from the particular identities of those persons and communities whose relationships have constituted and continue to constitute its becoming. For Pittenger, church emerges as a society of societies with actual pasts that enliven churchly identity in the present and churchly hope for the future.

The most significant actual past for the church is the Christ-Event and its intimate relationship with the Christ-Event as it has been experienced in Christian faith. “The Church is *Christ in and with his members*.”³⁷⁴ Both the Pauline vision of the Body of Christ and the Johannine vision of the vine with its branches communicate a core theme of Pittenger’s process ecclesiology. “We cannot avoid the central place that intimate interrelatedness, organic wholeness,” held for Christ’s understanding of his relationships with his disciples and the disciples’ own notions of these relationships in the

³⁷² Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 129.

³⁷³ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 13; Norman Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 105.

³⁷⁴ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 12. (*emphasis original*).

communities that have emerged in responsive love to the Christ-Event.³⁷⁵ Pittenger continues,

One life flows through the whole reality of the Church: it is the life of Jesus Christ. And that means that it is the life of God, the eternal Love that makes and sustains all things, now united inextricably and ineffably with human nature and flowing into [humanity] to lift them to the life of ‘life in love’ that *is* ‘life in God.’³⁷⁶

The organic wholeness that brings the life that was revealed and enacted in the Christ-Event into loving communion with the lives of all creatures is inadequately expressed whenever church is mistaken to be a thing, static and pre-ordained, to which particular actions can be ascribed as consequences of its identity.

A living fellowship, church emerges *within* the world rather than descending from on high as if an alien *to* the world. Life together in Christ, to expand Catherine Keller’s insight, figures the “inception – not as exception but, to the contrary, as fulfillment, that is as realization” – of the gathering of all time in the messianic revealing and enacting of God’s purposes through Jesus Christ.³⁷⁷ This is “a christology that does not supersede, that does not except itself from the All, but that takes it all in, contracts it all in itself, in and as the messianic event.”³⁷⁸ The church’s participation in kairos-time, then, should not

³⁷⁵ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 12.

³⁷⁶ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 13. (*emphasis original*).

³⁷⁷ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*, *Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 148.

³⁷⁸ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 149.

be understood as an exception to chronos-time.³⁷⁹ Rather, “kairos” communicates the rich openings that the Christ-Event makes for church to experience its past as it lives towards God’s Reign of Love in the present.³⁸⁰ Within the world, church emerges to bear witness to the Christ-Event for its own contexts, in its own times, and in its own spaces.

When read with his christological insights, Pittenger’s ecclesiology presents church as a lively participant in the Christ-Event’s effective and affective relationships with the world. As the branches of Christ’s vine, church participates in the divine life by taking-in the whole of creation and offering it abundant and new life in love through the Christ-Event.³⁸¹ The interweaving of past, present, and future in the revealing and enacting of God’s Reign of Love is not a foreclosing but a holy disclosing of possibilities for church to enact in its own becoming, in its own contexts, for its own growth in the life in Christ.³⁸² To more fully articulate the Christ-Event’s influence for churchly emergence, Pittenger borrows the Hartshornean phrase and argues that church itself is a social process.³⁸³

³⁷⁹ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 149.

³⁸⁰ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 149.

³⁸¹ Norman Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love: Human Experience and Christian Faith in a Process Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 156.

³⁸² Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 84.

³⁸³ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 66.

Church as Social Process

Lee's refrain that "the Church's becoming is its reality," can be recognized in Pittenger's use of the language of *social process*.³⁸⁴ Church happening as a social process is in keeping with the metaphysics that ground Pittenger's ecclesiology. The fact that church happens as a social process enriches the Christian witness to God's intimate and life-giving relationships with all of creation. Metaphysically, Pittenger's identification of church as social process insists "that the only way in which we can really grasp the deep significance of [Christian fellowship in church] is in terms of its ongoing existence, in which like all other entities there are the three essential aspects which establish identity: memory... relationship... aim."³⁸⁵ I argue that the ecclesiology of organism encourages committed Christian articulation of the significance of the Christ-Event for all occasions in creation because it recognizes the ways that church happens like other societies in the world. Ecological justice becomes integral to any church's witness to Jesus's life within their own because Christians must pursue this justice as integrated members of God's cosmic household. "Naturalist" fails to be a pejorative modifier of the ecclesiology of organism because the memory, relationships, and aims through which church emerges – relationships of God with humans, humans with humans, humans with other-than-human creatures, and humans with God – are natural to the cosmos itself.

Memory, Relationship, and Aim

³⁸⁴ Lee, *The Becoming of Church*, 172.

³⁸⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 76.

Pittenger focuses much of his ecclesiological project through the chronological lenses of memory, relationship, and aim.³⁸⁶ Framing his broader argument in this way helps to show that church happens as one of the many “persistent ‘routings’ which constitute this or that continuing entity in the world.”³⁸⁷ Church is a living process. Pittenger presents its historical emergence, current relationality, and thrust for becoming through the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.³⁸⁸ In Pittenger’s writing, these theological virtues become how Pittenger speaks of the church’s relationship to its past in memory, present in relationships, and future in aim. The Church’s faith is how it remembers the Christ-Event through antecedent Christian experiences of the Christ-Event and as its initial aim for becoming into divine love; the Church’s love is its present relationships with its world, creating life anew with God and the world; the Church’s

³⁸⁶ Though he does engage the Nicene Marks of the Church, he doesn’t treat them in such a sustained manner as he does the theme of *social process*. They appear in an early work, *Christian Way in a Modern World* (1947), and later in *The Lure of Divine Love* (1979) and *The Pilgrim Church and the Easter People* (1987), but each appearance accounts for no more than a few pages within broader efforts to discuss the organic occurrence of church. Even his statement that these marks give “the meaning of the word ‘Church’ itself,” is less purposed towards a renewed institutional church than has been critiqued by Murphy. While creedal attestation is important for Pittenger, “the creeds themselves are not part of the characteristic structure of the church; they are but ways in which the faith is stated, in language appropriate to the time when they were promulgated, and there is no reason why they may not be revised to state this faith in more understandable terms and with greater factual accuracy – but it is the faith, not the creeds, which is important.” Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 158; Norman Pittenger, *The Pilgrim Church and the Easter People* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 48; Murphy, *Counter-Imperial Churching for a Planetary Gospel*, 19.

³⁸⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 83.

³⁸⁸ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 105; Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 82-83

hope is its looking-forward to Love-in-action filling the world. The following three subsections follow Pittenger's pattern and use the theological virtues as titles, but this is not to suggest that faith-memory, love-relationship, and hope-aim, happen in siloed separation from one another in Christian experience.

Faith

To be sure, past iterations of church remain influential upon the present as part of the consequent nature of God. This is a metaphysical fact the significance of which Pittenger develops in his attention to memory. "In the Church, the past which is 'remembered' is the event from which Christian faith takes its origin – the event of Jesus Christ."³⁸⁹ Pittenger's insistence that the Christ-Event not be divorced from Jesus's Jewish identity further enriches Christian memory for social growth into the fullness of God's cosmic love.³⁹⁰ Because it is rooted in decisive divine action, church "is not simply a human invention or a gathering-together of [humans] who happen to share many of the same beliefs and wish to express together their agreement."³⁹¹ Christian memories of the Christ-Event certainly include human acts, thoughts, and convictions, but all of these, through the faith which shapes life in Christ, were human responses "in Holy Spirit to the event of Christ."³⁹² It is in this sense that apostolicity has been recognized in the handing-

³⁸⁹ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 77.

³⁹⁰ Norman Pittenger, *The Divine Triunity* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1977), 107.

³⁹¹ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 156.

³⁹² Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 156.

down of the witnesses and faith of Christian fellowship. Church “springs from actual historical fact; it is based on that which God has done for [humanity] through the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Christ.”³⁹³

Connected to memory, faith includes “thinking about and consciously relating” to the Christ-Event, yet it extends beyond such an obvious notion of human intellectual recall.³⁹⁴ “There is also the way of ‘remembering’ which is deeply organic,” the recognition of the persisting, integral, continuity of the self through time.³⁹⁵ Deeper memory than intellect follows in the panexperientialist process epistemology that undergirds Pittenger’s project, but the connection of memory to Christian faith is what is so significant for any event of Christian community that seeks to bring about justice through divine love in the present age. It is faith precisely because it can be only through the witness of others that any particular person can come to know, let alone grow in, life in Christ.³⁹⁶ Within the Body of Christ, there persist experiences of committed, loving participation in God’s work in the world. Particularly for the ecological concerns of this dissertation, such experiences include scriptures, liturgical texts, and the witnesses of human and other-than-human creatures alike to constructive participation in God’s loving and weaving through cosmogenesis. Contracted with present and future in the revealing

³⁹³ Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 94-95.

³⁹⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 78

³⁹⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 78.

³⁹⁶ Indeed, when understood this way, “faith through grace” may actually make metaphysical sense.

and enacting of God's Reign through the Christ-Event, anamnestic memory both roots current participation in God's life and spurs an eager expectancy towards the edge of actuality itself, towards the fecundity of possibility for love to receive, create, and transform.³⁹⁷

Love

Jesus Christ, through the faith that shapes life in Christ and in the gracious presence of Holy Spirit, becomes present for the world through how church happens in love in its present relationships. An ecclesiology of organism argues that church is the society which comes into existence through the loving interplay of people in faithful relationship with the cosmic Lover who has been revealed and enacted in the world through Christ. The present spacetime of church is constituted by the qualities of the relationships church fosters, seeks, and creates as it makes plain the justice of abundant living in Christ. And each of these relationships are participative acts in the life of God and the lives of others.

As Suchocki thoroughly argued, the dispositions and actions of persons whose relationships constitute the community influence the community just as the community influences its constituent events. How the individual members of the society act matters for how the Church witnesses to Love in the world. "Whether we like it or not," Pittenger notes, "there is no direct and entirely unmediated access to Jesus Christ for us today."³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 78.

³⁹⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 65.

Bearing witness to Jesus Christ in each and every moment of one's life is the lofty goal of Christian discipleship, and Baker-Fletcher's questions demonstrate the stakes of the closely-knit character of memory and relationship when she asks, "Is this Christ the Jewish rabbi Jesus who was crucified by the Romans? Is this Christ we are talking about the Jesus who was Mary's son, that Peter knew, and that Sojourner Truth found to help her preach powerfully to others in her freedom journey with entire communities? Or is it the Christ of conquering, enslaving, Western economic imperialism?"³⁹⁹ Bearing witness to Jesus Christ will be a false and destructive witness whenever the disciple fails to be an accomplice to God's work to bring "deliverance, healing, freedom, and good news to the poor, widows, orphans, the blind, the captive, and most simply, to the least of these."⁴⁰⁰ When church happens in love, Christian fellowship will bear witness to Jesus Christ's revelation that the good news for these has come in creating, receiving, and transforming love.

In praxis, church happens in love when it enfleshes truth that "is social and political because it is the visible and enpeopled presence of shalom in a violent and unjust world...because it is a form of communion that is characterized by a new government made present in Christ, a government that leads those who accept it not merely to become 'involved in' politics but to *be* an alternative and new politics in and for the world."⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 129.

⁴⁰⁰ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 129.

⁴⁰¹ Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 298.

When church happens in love, it behaves in such ways as to recognize the absolute necessity of its relatedness to and with the communities through which it happens. This is not a *carte blanche* acceptance of some worldly agenda but openness “to that world and to the influences which the world brings to bear upon it” so that it might fully offer the world to God and God to the world through the life it has experienced in Christ.⁴⁰²

In its loving present, church cannot ever separate itself from its world nor its life in God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, because it shares in the world’s suffering, need, sin, and death, church happens as a self-aware entanglement of God and creation that can “point to a transcendent horizon of liberation” that is found in God’s self-expression in the totality of the Christ-Event.⁴⁰³ In dynamic presence, church happens towards justice for all of creation through the increase of abundant life in Christ. “To live without the futuristic reference would be to fail in the *fulfilment of* [the church’s] *proper identity*...the fulfilment of the purpose of God in creation.”⁴⁰⁴

Hope

For Pittenger, the move to Christian hope in the ecclesiology of organism is an embrace of “the truth that in a creative process there must always be stress on ‘what is to come’ and on ‘the God who is coming’.”⁴⁰⁵ As church happens in love in the present, it

⁴⁰² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 78.

⁴⁰³ Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 301; Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 111-112.

⁴⁰⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 79.

⁴⁰⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 79.

discerns and embraces the significance of the initial aim of the Christ-Event for its moment and gazes onward into the possibilities for making the Reign of Love experienced in Christ more active. In this sense, Christian hope can be characterized as a social imagination that “includes a memory of how the society got where it is, a sense of who it is, and hopes and projects for the future.”⁴⁰⁶ Because “Jesus Christ...gives us the *clue*” that every event of the cosmos happens within and towards Love-in-action, church articulates a social imagination that it is to play a significant role in the liberation that accompanies the fullest expressions of Love-in-action throughout the cosmos.⁴⁰⁷ Pittenger describes an expansive ministry that is focused more on the realization of a Reign of Love than it is on the preservation of any institution called “Church.” To put it in more christological terms, just as “Jesus Christ does not *confine* deity; he *defines* deity,” church will not confine deity as it emerges within the world.⁴⁰⁸ The catholicity experienced through church then becomes an enlivening glimpse into the organic interconnection of the whole cosmos, including God’s own weaving through the same. It is in this sense that the Christian social imagination is an integrated ecology, an integrated and integrating relating of members of the cosmic household with one another

⁴⁰⁶ William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 57.

⁴⁰⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 61.

⁴⁰⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 61.

in the loving life of God, the great divine organism who includes yet transcends the cosmos.⁴⁰⁹

In Pittenger's process ecclesiology, hope is further influenced by how church remembers in its faith. As a social process, a society of societies, church is not a singularly eternal moment. The relationships through which church emerges fade and are lost over time. The passing away of ministries or generations within a congregation are examples of the perishing of this sort on small scales. Monica Coleman rephrases Whitehead's observation that "the past fades" as a *continual losing*.⁴¹⁰ Grief and mourning may be fruitful responses to the losing in the short-term, but Coleman argues that reckoning with finitude – personal and churchly – underscores the importance of partnering with God to remember the world. For Pittenger, remembering who church has been through faith encourages the present church to recognize the gospel's conspiratorial hope into God's aims for the elimination of evil. Churchly hope encounters the fact of finitude by luring a meaningful social imagination into existence that re-members the world, that lovingly refuses to let the world fade through disintegration.⁴¹¹

Hope-filled reckoning with finitude also cultivates humility in the present. Hope for the Reign of God through church happenings requires Christian communities to

⁴⁰⁹ Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 94.

⁴¹⁰ Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 56-57.

⁴¹¹ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 61.

confront the complex intermingling of sin and holy creativity that mark the church.⁴¹² A thread of tragedy runs through the ecclesiology of organism that, for Pittenger, impacts how the church is conceived of as “holy” in the sense of the Nicene Marks of the Church.⁴¹³ Faced with the brute fact of the fading of the past, Christians and churches

⁴¹² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 83.

⁴¹³ I mentioned above that Pittenger constructs his ecclesiology with a chronological method. Were he to focus his project through a more traditional lens like the Nicene Marks, the chronological approach would still have an important influence on his work because of process thought’s broader emphasis on events and emergence in time. For example, Pittenger’s attention to the church’s hope amid finitude has implications for how the church is understood to be and become holy as a social process within the world. This footnote provides a brief excursus on how Pittenger conceives of the holiness of church, with insights from Catherine Keller, William Cavanaugh, Marjorie Suchocki, and Karen Baker-Fletcher.

Pittenger identifies two senses in which holiness is a marking experience of the church. First, Christian fellowships have recognized God’s holiness at work in their lives, distinguishing them from other social processes. Pittenger insists that this first sense of holiness – set apart from other social processes for the work of God – is not an exclusive separatism or a notion of an already-achieved and, hence, static purity. Holiness as exclusive separatism from corruption, similarly to what Catherine Keller explores with her notion of anthropic exceptionalism in *Political Theology of the Earth*, promotes a sense of holy sovereignty over and distance from the web of relations through which church emerges. Ecologically, this provides energy to a paradigm of disconnect between persons and their environing world. The fourth chapter of this dissertation will discuss how modern anthropological visions have contributed to food systems that promote disconnection between humans and other-than-human creatures and intensify global climate change in the process. Holiness as static purity denies “the human conditions through which, vis-à-vis [humanity], God has willed to work,” namely the conditions of interrelated becoming, of growth, of love-in-action. Connected to exclusive separatism, static purity would ultimately render the church useless in the life of the world, for, as Pittenger sees it, it effectively communicates that the church understands itself as completed, fully accomplished of all it set out to do. While this observation may be accurate for *a* moment and in *a* context, such a statement could never be an adequate rendering of ecclesial holiness because it would fail entirely to account for the ongoing character of the process of sanctification in the intimate, mutual partnership between God and the church. Rather, Pittenger argues that church happens differently from other social

must critically consider the contingency of their very existence, the quality of their present relationships, and the possibilities for their future existence should those relationships continue unimpeded. Church “is very much an affair of time, space, history,

processes because of the church’s source – the Christ-Event – and the church’s call – to make real the Reign of Love through Christ’s witness.

Though Pittenger does not constrict God’s activity in the world to the activity of the Christ-Event and church, he places a much greater emphasis on the holiness of the Christ-Event for individual Christians and Christian societies alike than does Suchocki after him. For Suchocki, the church enacts holiness through the diverse relationships that constitute its intersubjective emergence in a responsive relationship of faith in Jesus Christ. These relationships participate in Christ’s holiness through their participation in the church. For Pittenger, church emerges into holiness because it is a dynamic community through which God communicates Godself in Christ and Christ’s members for the world in their moment. This sense of holiness is faithfully expressed in a compassionate suffering with the world rather than an antagonism towards the people, events, and processes “beyond” churchly bounds. Living into its holiness, church happens towards greater harmony with the world in and through the Reign of God.

The second sense of ecclesial holiness develops the first’s connection between church and world. Church happens as “the home of sinning [humans] who are on the way to becoming God’s” people for the life of the world, Pittenger writes in *Christian Way in a Modern World*. William Cavanaugh expresses this second sense of holiness in *Migrations of the Holy*, noting that “the holiness of the church is visible in its very repentance for its sin. The church is visibly holy not because it is pure, but precisely because it shows to the world what sin looks like.” In showing the world what sin looks like, and the powers that inscribe and enforce it in the world, church also shows God’s own memory of crucifixion and suffering. The opportunity for the church to placard before the world God’s empathy “with our suffering and pain whenever and wherever the world persists in acts of persecution and crucifixion,” to use Karen Baker-Fletcher’s words, is the sacramental gift given in confession and repentance. Empathic holiness emerges when the people whose lives are woven together in church recognize that they also participate in the communion of the cosmos within the life of God. Empathic holiness grows through God’s redeeming partnership with the church, overcoming sin and evil, and healing the destruction of life that is left in sin’s wake. Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 75; Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*; Pittenger, *Christian Way in a Modern World*, 93; William Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 165; Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 143-145.

and human or finite conditioning,” Pittenger reminds.⁴¹⁴ As participants in God’s creating, redeeming, and transforming work throughout the world, church experiences God’s holiness and is given the opportunity to bear witness to holy love for the world.⁴¹⁵

Sacramental Discipleship

Pittenger’s theological anthropology is woven throughout the ecclesiology of organism. This is a significant facet of his ecclesiology that bridges this chapter’s exposition of process ecclesiologies with the next chapter’s focus on Christian sacramental ecotheology. The ecclesiology of organism advances what I call in this section “sacramental discipleship.” Christian discipleship occurs as the Holy Spirit enlivens and encourages a person’s participation in the life and ministry of Christ. The disciple’s growing life in Christ forms them so that, after the example of Christ, their witness to God’s love for the world reveals and enacts this same love in their planetary setting.⁴¹⁶ By describing discipleship as “sacramental” in this process ecclesiology, I

⁴¹⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 74.

⁴¹⁵ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 157

⁴¹⁶ I join Rivera, Keller, Murphy, and others who have benefitted from Spivak’s insightful distinction between the global and the planetary. Spivak argues that a shift must happen such that humanity can “imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents.” Understanding subjects to achieve their actuality through the web of relationships which constitutes the cosmos, process theology is well-equipped to understand Spivak’s call to planetarity as a call to recognize and emphasize a creature’s groundedness within the more influential relationships of its particular contexts of becoming – contexts which certainly overlap and vary in significance of influence. In Whiteheadian language, such a planetary focus forms world loyalty, attending to the conditions of actual entities and their relationships that shape events throughout the world rather than ignoring these events in favor of abstract principles that may or may not translate across contexts. In my view of sacramental discipleship, the Christ-Event

mean to emphasize that the disciple's revealing and enacting of God's love as crucially important for what it means to participate in the life in Christ.

True human existence, Pittenger argues, is to be grasped by cosmic Love, to respond to cosmic Love, and to live in terms of a responsive relationship with cosmic Love.⁴¹⁷ He relies heavily on the Pauline phrase "life in Christ" to describe how the Christ-Event reveals and enacts possibilities for all of creation to experience the responsive relationship of cosmic love in their own particular lives.⁴¹⁸ The Incarnation of Jesus Christ becomes the significant focal point for human living in Love because the Christ-Event revealed that the "Reign of God as Love is to be expressed in a world caught up into and in response to [God who is] precisely that Love."⁴¹⁹ The Christ-Event indelibly influenced the world through the historical ministry of the Nazarene rabbi and continues to influence the world through the organic communion of people who have felt and continue to feel gathered into Love-in-action by the Spirit of God, the church.⁴²⁰

Church is the social life in Christ that makes the personal life in Christ possible for individual disciples.⁴²¹ Church gives the en-Christed life – Pittenger's phrase for

enriches world loyalty because it offers possibilities to the disciple that further God's aims for the loving and creative redemption, restoration, and transformation of the world. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, Wellek Library Lecture Series at the University of California, Irvine (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 73.

⁴¹⁷ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 104.

⁴¹⁸ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 13.

⁴¹⁹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 106.

⁴²⁰ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 12.

⁴²¹ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 15.

Christian disciple – the opportunity to participate in the quality of the life of Christ. The language of gift or grace is most appropriate, for no one becomes a Christian on their own.⁴²² Furthermore, in process ecclesiology, grace for abundant living is not a neatly wrapped substance that transforms the disciple’s life and circumstances if they possess it or dooms them if they do not. Rather, grace is the Love-in-action within which the disciple emerges into “a fellowship of lovers, lovers of their fellow [human] and lovers of God in Christ.”⁴²³ Divine and creaturely others give the disciple the possibilities for their Christian faith, hope, and love.

Sacramental discipleship participates in what Harold J. Recinos calls “The Good News Politics of Jesus” that “calls us to live beyond our self-interest and allegiances that idolize power and wealth, and permits us to find God in the requirement of loving each other.”⁴²⁴ This notion of discipleship suggests a shift in thinking regarding sin and salvation in process ecclesiology. “Following Jesus in the name of the God who suffers, acts, and overcomes death means the church proclaims the world cannot be separated from God’s will for it,” Recinos argues.⁴²⁵ Disciples participate in becoming church,

⁴²² This is, of course, consistent with the Whiteheadian philosophy of organism as Pittenger understood it. Even though an actual entity is self-creative in its decision-making, no decision is ever made without the influences of other entities. As Coleman puts it, “Relationality is not a choice. It *is*... Relationships weave together our moral, cultural, religious, lived-in, believed-about, hoped-in world. Relationships are what keep us together.” Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 75.

⁴²³ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 16.

⁴²⁴ Harold J. Recinos, *Good News from the Barrio: Prophetic Witness for the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 80.

⁴²⁵ Harold J. Recinos, *Good News from the Barrio*, 81.

influencing the faithful and hopeful witness to Christ in the world by revealing and enacting the Love that characterizes God's creative entanglements within the world.⁴²⁶

Process theology assumes that the world weaves together the health of the individual and the society such that relational health is entwined with any person's spiritual, mental, and physical health, thus influencing the fullness of their life.⁴²⁷ The ecclesiology of organism expands Christian understandings of sin, challenging depictions

⁴²⁶ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 75.

⁴²⁷ Modern anthropologies predominantly argued for a "pure individual," one who was unencumbered from the influences of anything or anyone else. Political philosophers and economists developed this anthropology to support a capitalist market system based on a theory of social contracts that bound individuals to one another. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I explicitly address how these anthropological assumptions have characterized modernity and have impacted human relationships with the world through meals. Theodore Walker, Jr.'s work with Black Atlantic thought and constructive, neoclassical, postmodern theologies is important for this critique. He articulates connections between modern scientific inquiries that separated mind from matter and the commodification and enslavement of millions of Africans. Further, his constructive work is instructive in identifying how modern philosophical understandings of human persons invented a "nature" upon which human life is lived, from which resources are commodified and taken, and against which the right aims of humanity are placed. Though not to the extent of Walker, Jr., and his interlocutors – and certainly benefitting from the wealth of European colonial expansionism's utilization of natural sciences – the early ecologist Alexander von Humboldt recognized this twofold implication of the mechanistic worldviews of his day. Part of his sustained criticism of the transatlantic slave trade was rooted in his insistence that creation functioned as a complex, interconnected, and dynamic whole that could support human wellbeing without a natural need for racist or nationalist ideologies if humans would but recognize their own interdependence with all of creation. The mechanistic worldview which relied upon a divorced mind and body also created colonized societies which could whip the enslaved and indigenous bodies while denying a mind beyond the human person. "For Humboldt colonialism and slavery were basically one and the same, interwoven with man's relationship to nature and the exploitation of natural resources." Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*; Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 123.

of sin as, principally, a violation of God's honor through willful disregard for God's aim for the world.⁴²⁸ Instead, sin is "a failure to love" that harms other creatures *and* God.⁴²⁹ "God receives the effects of one's deeds into God's own experience... [For] sin against creation is also against God."⁴³⁰ Catherine Keller's observation that "creation and salvation are inseparable...two moments of the same ongoing, open-ended, process,"⁴³¹ conveys the change in the focus of salvation that also occurs in this theological model.⁴³¹ For process ecclesiology, this twofold shift entails that Christian discipleship is an ongoing and deepening "identification with cosmic Love" through which "Christ will be 'formed in us'; we shall become more fully the 'en-Christed' persons we are intended to be."⁴³² As the disciple grows into their life in Christ, they "are increasingly led to reflect the image of God discovered in Christ and offered to us by the power of the Holy Spirit as gift, as demand, and as lure."⁴³³ Pittenger envisions discipleship as a commitment "to

⁴²⁸ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 15-80.

⁴²⁹ Bryan P. Stone, "Process and Sanctification," in *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love*, ed. Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 71.

⁴³⁰ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 57.

⁴³¹ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 108.

⁴³² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 60; Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 53.

⁴³³ Bryan Stone's articulation of a process theology of sanctification that is theologically influenced by John and Charles Wesley is useful for understanding sacramental discipleship as Pittenger presents it here. Though he doesn't cite Pittenger in his chapter, Stone suggests "that, by taking a closer look at three essential aspects of creative synthesis – *community, creativity, and freedom* – we can arrive at a distinctively process triad for speaking about the image of God and, at the same time, can do justice to

join with the driving thrust of God in the creative advance towards fuller life.”⁴³⁴ The theology of sacramental discipleship that I develop from Pittenger seeks to articulate possibilities for Christians to experience the interrelationality of Christian life in the church on a planetary and even cosmic scale.

And these experiences are urgently needed as our planet experiences the death-dealing and climate-changing consequences of our human failures to love one another and our other-than-human relatives. Sacramental discipleship “demands that we think of God as intimately related with and profoundly participant in the creation, [desiring] for that creation its fullest realization in good,” and partnering with the people who God calls to become church through the Christ-Event and in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴³⁵

Pittenger argues that “sacramentalism [as it describes the created world’s mediation of God in love] is both natural to human beings and natural to the world, and it is also the way in which God effectively works in the creation.”⁴³⁶ There is an ecological theology budding in the ecclesiology of organism that has not yet borne flower or fruit. Because it is the social process of triune God and humanity, church can happen in profound ways that “convert human consciousness to the earth, so that we can use our minds to understand the web of life and to live in that web of life as sustainers, rather than

important Wesleyan insights about the nature of sanctification.” I agree and think that Pittenger’s theological anthropology ultimately moves in this direction. Stone, “Process and Sanctification,” 77, 94.

⁴³⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 113.

⁴³⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 51.

⁴³⁶ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 167.

destroyers, of it.”⁴³⁷ The following chapter constructs a needed expansion of Pittenger’s nascent ecological theology to equip the church for this converting work. An apocalypse is at hand, revealing the extent to which human sins have destroyed abundant life and continue to do so, but it will not reveal only devastation. The church has the opportunity, or so the ecclesiology of organism claims, to reveal restoration through its own enacting of the Christ-Event for the life of the world.

⁴³⁷ Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 250.

CHAPTER III - ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL: NORMAN PITTENGER'S SACRAMENTAL ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY

Dogwood, you brought me joy in the midst of cold loneliness. Bobcat, you awoke within me an awe at silence and patience. Scorpion, you taught me to become more aware of my relatives who also seek shelter. Trailing Trillium, you disclosed a world of divine grandeur when I thought only human questions could do so. Rock and Mountain, you held my life and love with the lives and loves of so many others over so many years. Oak and Pine, you offered cool respite and soothing fragrances in the heat of summer. Dove and Mockingbird, you sang me to the freshness of each new day. Bass, Cottonmouth, Poke Salat, Bream, and Blackberry, you fed me and gave me the gift of life.

Y'all and so many more folks loved me and countless others even when we didn't always love you back. Y'all and so many more folks taught me that God's not done creating the world. Y'all and so many more folks taught me that I am never alone; I need only pay attention.

I love you all. Dusty in drought, covered with snow, freshly mulched with your own leaves, or drinking deeply from Rain, Spring, and Creek, you have healed me in compassion and grace. And you have revealed a love that holds and heals us all. This journey could not have happened without your generations and your gifts.

Thank you.

“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

- Psalm 19:1-4

I address the letter that opens this chapter to the people who lived and live in a small cove in northeastern Alabama, and the nineteenth psalm is what first taught me to pay attention to them as my relatives in the life of God. This chapter will articulate the budding ecological theology in Norman Pittenger's ecclesiology of organism, but I could have missed those sprouting shoots altogether had I never been loved by the people I've named and the many more who have called that place “home.” I have been loved into what John Chryssavgis calls the “binding unity and continuity that we share with all of

God's creation," and this chapter is an effort to honor, thank, and love God's creation in reciprocity.⁴³⁸

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, I suggested that Norman Pittenger's ecclesiology of organism contains an ecological theology that is waiting to bloom. This chapter brings his ecological theology to flower. Ecological theology is concerned with the world's entangling relationships; relationships between God and particular communities of creatures, and relationships between God and the cosmos on the whole, and relationships among creatures in ecosystems and bioregions. Norman Pittenger writes that "sacramentalism in the right sense is both natural to human beings and natural to the world, and it is also the way in which God effectively works in the creation."⁴³⁹ This statement is the foundational conviction of what I call Norman Pittenger's nascent sacramental ecological theology. Pittenger did not write an ecotheology in any explicit sense, but there is an ecologic permeating his work that can bear significant fruit for Christian theology today.⁴⁴⁰ In the midst of our planet's current climate crises, exploring

⁴³⁸ John Chryssavgis, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: Orthodox Christian Insights from Theology, Spirituality, and the Sacraments," *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 153.

⁴³⁹ Norman Pittenger, *God in Process* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1967), 78.

⁴⁴⁰ Most of Pittenger's ecclesiological writing occurred before or in the early stages of the environmental movement that came to prominence in the United States in the latter third of the twentieth century. The first celebration of Earth Day, for example, occurred only months before the publication of Pittenger's *The Christian Church as Social Process*.

Pittenger's ecclesiology⁴⁴¹ with ecotheological questions at the fore proves a valuable approach for strengthening Christian ecological solidarity through a robust theology of the church and the sacraments.

Over three sections, I argue in this chapter that Pittenger's Christian⁴⁴² sacramental ecotheology recognizes and develops themes of interconnectedness, biophilia, and justice as planetary wellbeing through Jesus Christ's revelation and Love-in-action. This chapter is a critical retrieval and expansion of Pittenger for current process and sacramental ecological theologies. I hope to grow the impact of his work for twenty-

⁴⁴¹ In brief review of his ecclesiology, church happens as a particular social process that reveals and enacts the love of God, through the Christ-Event, in the creativity of the Holy Spirit, and for the life of the world. Church emerges within the world and is intimately related to all sorts of creatures and creaturely relationships that weave the world's own emergence. Pittenger argues that church is a social process in the world, both kin with other events and a distinctly influential opportunity for humanity to participate in God's love-in-action in the world. Church happens as a living fellowship that is rooted in the decisive life of Jesus Christ, looks forward to the fullness of God's Reign of Love-in-action, and furthers the love of God through church's many and varied relationships in the present. How church happens matters for how the world happens.

⁴⁴² This dissertation is explicitly concerned with Christian constructive theology and aims to articulate a theology of the Eucharist for Christian adaptive responses to dynamic conditions of food in climate change. I am Christian and aim to speak into Christian communities with this work. I will collapse the phrase *Christian sacramental ecological theology* into *sacramental ecotheology* in this chapter. I do so, however, with caution and humility. Christian theology has attempted to monopolize language about the sacred in support of imperial conquest and political order. In so doing, it has justified destruction and desecration of human and other-than-human life on genocidal scales. Confession of and repentance for these events are important acts for healing the world through the restoration and celebration of the cosmic web of life. Christianity fails to understand Christ if we profess him to be the *only* place where God is revealed. "He does not *confine* deity; he *defines* deity. He gives us the *clue* to what everything is about; that clue is Love-in-action." Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 61.

first century Christian questions about the dynamic conditions of climate change in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, and keeping his theological commitments in the foreground of this chapter will be important for that work.⁴⁴³ In each section, I situate Pittenger's theological insights within the appropriate theme as he contributes to and can be critiqued by the insights of Christian ecotheology more broadly.

REVEALING AND ENACTING LOVE

Sacramental ecotheology recognizes, celebrates, and explores how creation and creatures reveal and enact God's multifarious love for the world. In this first section, I expand this definition by attending to each term in the phrase *sacramental ecotheology*. Because I am particularly concerned to retrieve Norman Pittenger's process theology for Christian theological inquiry today, his notion of sacramentality will be the focus of the first subsection. His ecotheology is far less explicit than his sacramental theology. The budding flower imagery of the introduction serves as a helpful and guiding metaphor for how Pittenger's theology will appear in the second subsection and the rest of the chapter. There will be moments when I will only be able to identify where his work might contribute with further nourishment from the broader environment. At other times, he offers insights that can provide refreshment for Christian ecotheology as it contributes to the struggle for liberation for the whole world.

⁴⁴³ I think that Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist will be particularly significant for Christian questions about and adaptive responses to food, food security, and the human relationships with the world through food that are reciprocally related to climatic conditions.

Sacramental

For Norman Pittenger, a sacramental event mediates God to world through its own becoming in the world, opening for other events the chance to witness and participate in the redemptive, transformative, and creative Love-in-action that animates the cosmos.⁴⁴⁴ The catechetical definition of a sacrament – a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace – grounds Pittenger’s writing on the sacraments more specifically.⁴⁴⁵ In the relationship between the outward-visible and the inward-spiritual, he recognizes a dynamic efficacy that is apt for a broader understanding of sacramentality in his ecclesiology of organism.⁴⁴⁶ That is to say that, in sacramental events, “something does in fact take place which is of such a kind that it awakens response.”⁴⁴⁷ Sacramentality, for Pittenger, describes the actual events that reveal and enact Love for the life of the world. Though revealing enacts and enacting reveals, this section will attempt to attend to each – revealing and enacting – as active characteristics of sacramental events in Pittenger’s sacramental theology.

Revealing

Pittenger writes, “Every occurrence in the world discloses *something* of what is going on” with God’s love and God’s relationship to the way events happen in

⁴⁴⁴ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 78.

⁴⁴⁵ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 78.

⁴⁴⁶ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 77-85.

⁴⁴⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 58.

creation.⁴⁴⁸ At the heart of what it means to become actual in the world is a capacity to reveal something about the world. This conviction is grounded in Pittenger's process theological commitments: every actual entity happens through a process of creative advance that includes influences from God, all other actual events, and the becoming event's own aims for itself. Though the becoming event is the final decider – decidedly cutting away most possibilities in favor of the one it actualizes – these influences and aims shape the event's identity. When it influences others, including God, the ways that God and the world helped shape that event are disclosed to some degree.

In this sense, revealing and enacting the relationships of the world are part of the process of emergence throughout the cosmos. This commonality may provoke a criticism, however. "Is there anything *special* about the sacramental event, then? If it is just how the world emerges, then how does such a view account for the peculiar impact of some revealings and acts relative to others?" Pittenger's sacramental theology, much like Bernard Lee's that was discussed in the previous chapter, addresses this concern by developing Whitehead's notion of importance. Events influence other events to varying degrees. All events, because they happen, alter possibilities for other events. When events happen in such a way as to "have a once-for-all quality," a particularly insightful opening into the significance of a period, person, or movement of life for the whole world, such events are described as *important*.⁴⁴⁹ "It is worth stressing both terms in that familiar

⁴⁴⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 61.

⁴⁴⁹ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 57; Norman Pittenger, *Love is the Clue* (London: Mowbray, 1967), 48-49.

phrase: *once*, because they have indeed taken place, with their distinctive character and import, at a *then* and a *there*,” Pittenger writes.⁴⁵⁰ “*For-all*, because they continue to illuminate other aspects and areas of the historical process, helping us to see what it is driving towards precisely through our having been grasped by what the particular *once* was itself driving towards.”⁴⁵¹ For Pittenger’s sacramental ecotheology, distinguishing *importance* in this way broadens the scope of his theological project.

Christian experience bears witness to the importance – in this technical sense – of Jesus Christ for the world. The entire world situation has been changed because of the ways in which the world has encountered Love in Jesus Christ.⁴⁵² Yet not only has the world been changed, but God has also been changed by how the Christ-Event happened, by the love it released into the world, and by the participation of creatures in making God’s Reign of Love actual in response to God’s self-expression in Jesus Christ. The gospel of the Christ-Event is not, then, bound to the species *Homo sapiens*, for God’s aim for “the widest sharing of good” includes each and every creature with whom Jesus became kin as he enfleshed the passionate, receptive, redemptive, creative, and transformative love that thrums through each moment of the world.⁴⁵³ Revealing God’s love-in-action does not always happen as a mediation or on a scale that is easily

⁴⁵⁰ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 57.

⁴⁵¹ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 57-58.

⁴⁵² Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 48.

⁴⁵³ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 59.

recognizable to human creatures.⁴⁵⁴ God's relationship with each becoming event gives that moment the opportunity to incarnate God's love for the world in such ways that befit the emerging event and declare how God has partnered with it for the life of the world.⁴⁵⁵

As I made clear in the previous chapter, the ecclesiology of organism depends heavily on Pittenger's christological work. His sacramental theology emerges from this christocentric ecclesiology. The sacramental reveals the activity of God in the world, and the Christian is attuned to experience these events because of how they participate in the life in Christ.⁴⁵⁶ Christ revealed "God as intimately related with and profoundly participant in the creation," Pittenger argues, "purposing for that creation its fullest

⁴⁵⁴ This insight is not unique to Christian theology. Robin Wall Kimmerer says that "thinking about plants as persons, indeed, thinking about rocks as persons, forces us to shed our idea of the only pace that we live in is the human pace. It's, I think, very, very exciting to think about these ways of being which happen on completely different scales, and so exciting to think about what we might learn from them." For Pittenger, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and others, Christian theologians – particularly Western Christians in and upholding modernity – have erred in failing to recognize, celebrate, and explore the revelations of God throughout the creation. Robin Wall Kimmerer, "The Intelligence of Plants," *On Being*, <https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-wall-kimmerer-the-intelligence-of-plants/>.

⁴⁵⁵ If God expected Lily to incarnate love-in-action as if it were Neutrino, Elephant, or Human, then God's expectation would be supremely unloving. Such an expectation would fail to consider Lily's particularity, cosmic context, capacities and needs, and the relationships through which Lily has emerged in the world. Thankfully, God considers Lily with an unsurpassable passion and love because God experiences Lily in their epochal fullness and intensity as each moment passes into the Consequent Nature of God. Lily influences God's becoming such that God would never expect them to become someone who they are not. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 229.

⁴⁵⁶ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 51.

realization in good.”⁴⁵⁷ Sacramental occasions reveal the dynamic relationships through which both God and creation emerge, the character of those relationships, and, particularly, that God *is* Love.⁴⁵⁸

Recognizing that Pittenger is neither alone in his claims that God is at work with and revealed through the creation, nor was he the first Christian theologian to make such claims is significant for how I critically retrieve Pittenger’s work for a constructive process theology today. There are actual Christian experiences in the past that influence how I read Pittenger’s sacramental theology as fertile ground for developing his budding ecological vision. There are liturgical practices, patterns of scriptural witness,⁴⁵⁹ and habits of life together⁴⁶⁰ that serve as touchstones for developing Pittenger’s sacramental ecotheology.

In Orthodox Christian traditions, for instance, recognizing, celebrating, and exploring the revelatory capacity of the whole creation happens in the Divine Liturgy and

⁴⁵⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 51.

⁴⁵⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 49-50.

⁴⁵⁹ In this chapter’s section on biophilia, I will engage Mari Jørstad’s biblical scholarship regarding the personhood of other-than-human creation. In the section on justice as planetary wellbeing, I will turn to Luke 14:1-25 to help articulate themes of planetary wellbeing in this Pittengerian sacramental ecotheology.

⁴⁶⁰ Early Irish monasticism is one such habit of life together in Christian experience. Though not unique to these communities, Early Irish Christianity understood itself to be living participants in a “sacral landscape,” reflecting both cultural influences of ancient Ireland and Continental Christianity. Early Irish Christianity, particularly in its monastic practices, promoted an ecologically rich notion of holiness that influenced how human communities constructed themselves and their ecclesial spaces within the world. Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 42-56.

the rhythms of worship.⁴⁶¹ The praises of creatures happen as heavenly declarations of the glory of God, in the angelic hymns, and even through the River Jordan's questions.⁴⁶² The psalmists, prophets, and hymnographers have given human language to these praises, but other-than-human creatures bear witness to God's love "by simply being [themselves], by being fully alive."⁴⁶³ Sacramentalism is natural to the world, to return to Pittenger's phrase, in the sense that creatures are invited to live into their identity as beloved fellow-workers with God who bear witness to God's multifarious and creative acts of love throughout the cosmos.⁴⁶⁴ The theology of the icons furthers this theme, noting how God has *ordained* matter to bear witness to the saving work of the whole Christ-Event for the life of the world.⁴⁶⁵

Pittenger's work on revelation in sacramental theology highlights what Mary Elizabeth Moore later calls the "sacrament as a symbol of God's work in creation, the

⁴⁶¹ Elizabeth Theokritoff, "Liturgy, Cosmic Worship, Christian Cosmology" in *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration*, 295-306.

⁴⁶² Theokritoff quotes a hymn for the vespers service of January 2 that recalls a conversation between the River Jordan and John the Baptist. River Jordan asks "Why do you hesitate to baptize my [sic] Lord? ...He has sanctified all creation; let Him sanctify me also and the nature of waters, since for this He has been made manifest." Theokritoff, "Liturgy, Cosmic Worship, Christian Cosmology," 304.

⁴⁶³ Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 183.

⁴⁶⁴ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 78.

⁴⁶⁵ St. John Damascene, *On Holy Images*, trans. Mary H. Allies (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/johndamascus-images.asp>.

source of praise and thanksgiving.”⁴⁶⁶ Moore writes that “sacramental acts re-present the giving nature of God, clearing a sacred space for the community to *receive from* God and *participate in* the being of God.”⁴⁶⁷ Pittenger describes the creative rhythm of reception and participation as God at work through creaturely activity in ways that evoke “Christian action in the world.”⁴⁶⁸ Furthermore, God experiences all of this creaturely activity in a loving passion and responds afresh in love. Sacramental revealing, for the ecclesiology of organism, is not, then, merely *about* divine activity. Revealing enacts.

Enacting

And enacting reveals. Sacramental events enact something in and for the relational and creative advance of the cosmos on a whole that promotes the divine priority for restorative love and peace in particular contexts.⁴⁶⁹ These acts make present God’s love in ways that are true to the event and adequate for the event’s context. Recall the example of God’s love for Lily earlier in this chapter. Pittenger’s insight here is particularly important for constructing a sacramental ecotheology. If sacramental events do not enact that which they reveal – cosmic Love – in ways that are adequate for their contexts, then they carry no significance for the struggle for liberation from

⁴⁶⁶ Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 26-27.

⁴⁶⁷ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 27.

⁴⁶⁸ Norman Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 72.

⁴⁶⁹ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 59.

oppression.⁴⁷⁰ Mary Elizabeth Moore's description of sacrament as efficacious is helpful in making this connection clear.⁴⁷¹

Moore identifies two ways in which sacraments are efficacious that advance Pittenger's insight that sacramentalism is the way God *effectively works* throughout the world.⁴⁷² "The sacraments are efficacious, first, in the sense that God truly gives God's Self," Moore writes.⁴⁷³ Pittenger describes this first efficacy when he writes that "God is self-expressed through the whole creation in just such a sacramental or 'incarnational' manner."⁴⁷⁴ God's true gift of God's Self is important, Moore writes, "so that people can

⁴⁷⁰ Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 200-213.

⁴⁷¹ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 28-30.

⁴⁷² Moore also writes about the distinction between *sacrament* and *sacramental* as she understands it for her project, and her discussion contributes a clarity regarding those terms to this sacramental ecotheology that Pittenger never really offers. She writes that "the formal sacraments of the church awaken people to the sacredness of God's whole creation, mediating God's grace and enabling the community to participate more fully in the grace of God that is everywhere revealed." The sacraments participate in a broader sacramentality that is rooted in hope for and is responsive to the call of God to live in such ways that mediate God's grace for the wellbeing of the whole world. She expands the catechetical understanding of sacrament and, in so doing, explicitly identifies the scope of salvation for an adequate Christian theology. "Sacraments," she writes, "are the conveyance of God's grace through signs in creation for the sanctification of human beings and the well-being of all God's creation." Particularly when considering the efficaciousness of sacraments, thinking about the relationship between sacraments and a broader sacramentality helps the present dissertation not get bogged down in precise demarcations of sacramental propriety. As such, I read Moore's descriptions of the roots of hope in sacraments as descriptive, too, of what Pittenger would recognize as sacramental events. Pittenger, *God in Process*, 78; Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 9-10.

⁴⁷³ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 29.

⁴⁷⁴ Pittenger, *God in Process*, 78.

know and be supported and guided by God.”⁴⁷⁵ Sacramental events happen, first, through God’s outgoing that arouses desires for and reaching towards God’s life through people’s acts. The process of creative advance recognizes this as the superjection of God for the life of the world. Christians influenced by John and Charles Wesley have called it prevenient grace

The first efficacy also points to who is at work through sacramental events. Moore notes that “the sacraments are made efficacious, not by the perfectly performed liturgy, but by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷⁶ Recognizing the movement of the Holy Spirit in these events helps expand Pittenger’s notion of justice through becoming a fellow-worker with God.⁴⁷⁷ He writes that “to be a fellow-worker with that cosmic Lover is to respond to the call and lure which makes us discontented with our own ease and comfort” and spurs us on to struggle alongside the Holy Spirit for liberation in the world.⁴⁷⁸ Because it is the Holy Spirit who makes sacramental events efficacious, we who participate in that efficacy become conspirators with God for the wellbeing of the world.

This leads to the second efficacy that Moore identifies: “the sacraments actually change the present situation.”⁴⁷⁹ Sacramental events can effect change because the transformative love that they reveal is also an invitational love, a love that persuades its

⁴⁷⁵ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 29.

⁴⁷⁶ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 29.

⁴⁷⁷ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 113-117.

⁴⁷⁸ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 114.

⁴⁷⁹ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 29.

beloved to enrich and further the scope and experience of love through the world. Developing a sacramental ecotheology from Norman Pittenger, the efficaciousness of sacramental events is crucially important, for it speaks to God's persuasion of all creatures to labor for the mutual sharing of transformative love throughout the world as that love has been experienced and encouraged in the Christ-Event.⁴⁸⁰ Ecotheology explores the meaningfulness of the God-world relationship that highlights the revealing and enacting of this transformative love.

Ecotheology

In developing her Christian ecofeminist theology, Rosemary Radford Ruether reinterprets and advances what she calls the sacramental tradition of Christian ecological theology.⁴⁸¹ She lifts up the intertwining of christology and cosmology as the key theological theme of the sacramental tradition, though the ways these have been woven together has varied with different thinkers and in different contexts.⁴⁸² Among the thinkers that she names as representative of the sacramental tradition are process theologians John B. Cobb, Jr., and Marjorie Suchocki. I agree on this characterization with Ruether. Furthermore, I find her insights into and description of the sacramental tradition of Christian ecotheology more broadly to be useful for situating Pittenger within longstanding and ongoing ecotheological conversations in which he never explicitly

⁴⁸⁰ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 115.

⁴⁸¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 229-253.

⁴⁸² Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 229.

located himself. This section will be brief as the whole chapter seeks to point out and nourish Pittenger's ecotheological insights, but I think it is still necessary for the broader project.

Classical Christianity, Ruether argues, can be characterized by its attempts to overcome the differences between Hebrew and Greek views of the world, accepting both the psychophysical union of the human body and the conviction that becoming and transience were, in some way, evil.⁴⁸³ "Christians shared with Hellenism the view that the whole cosmos was alive, pervaded by dynamic energy that Christians identified with the immanent Logos of God," she notes.⁴⁸⁴ Referencing Wallace-Hadrill's work in *The Greek Patristic View of Nature*, she writes that "even animals and plants had soul, and the human soul shared with them the animal and vegetative soul."⁴⁸⁵ Christian experience of human life affirmed that our existence "was inseparable from this cosmic whole, within which humans stood as microcosm."⁴⁸⁶ Western Christianity moved away from this cosmological imagination, she argues, in the Late Medieval and Renaissance eras in Western Europe.⁴⁸⁷ "'Ideas' became mere 'names' for collections of individuals...the universe no longer disclosed the divine essence, but merely the 'ordained will' of

⁴⁸³ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 234

⁴⁸⁴ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 234.

⁴⁸⁵ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 235.

⁴⁸⁶ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 235.

⁴⁸⁷ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 237-240.

God.”⁴⁸⁸ This move influenced Early Modern visions of separation between God and Nature that, in turn, influenced Christian imperialism’s destructive treatment of the world beyond European, Christian, masculine humanity.⁴⁸⁹ For Ruether, the sacramental tradition adequately describes the God-world relationship when it explicitly responds to these philosophical and theological constructions of Early Modernity and the havoc that Christians have wrought on the very cosmos through and with which Jesus Christ reveals and enacts divine love.

Ruether argues that the holistic vision of the God-world relationship that emerges in different sacramental visions of the cosmos is valuable today for converting human consciousness to the earth, so that we can experience “the web of life and...live in that web of life as sustainers, rather than destroyers of it.”⁴⁹⁰ In her analysis of the sacramental tradition, Ruether highlights process theology – naming John B. Cobb, Jr., and Marjorie Suchocki in particular – as a kind of contemporary ecological theology that can contribute to an ecological spirituality that overcomes tensions between the human and the world that have become normalized for Western Christian theology.⁴⁹¹ Process theology is particularly valuable as it critically reflects upon and advances notions of mentality, experience, and influence that include God and subatomic creation alike. Together with sacramental ecological theologies that incorporate insights from

⁴⁸⁸ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 237-238.

⁴⁸⁹ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 238-240.

⁴⁹⁰ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 250.

⁴⁹¹ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 231-237, 246-247.

evolutionary sciences – as that of Teilhard de Chardin and his inheritors – process theology influences Ruether’s project to “recognize our kinship with all other beings.”⁴⁹²

Ruether is right to identify the contributions that Teilhardian and Whiteheadian theologies have made and continue to make to the sacramental tradition through their critical engagement with inquiries in physics, biology, paleontology, and other natural sciences. She is also right to acknowledge that “rebuilding human society for a sustainable earth will require far more than a plethora of technological ‘fixes’ within the present paradigm of relations of domination.”⁴⁹³ To this end, Pittenger offers an important perspective as a Whiteheadian process theologian. He is not trying to use process theology to reveal connections and the mutual challenges and enrichment between scientific insights, technological advances, and Christian witness.⁴⁹⁴ Rather,

⁴⁹² Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 250.

⁴⁹³ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 258.

⁴⁹⁴ Theodore Walker, Jr., sustains a critical engagement with constructive postmodern theology on these exact connections, challenges, and enrichments. For Walker, Jr., theology that is adequate for the struggle for liberation will learn from the Black Atlantic experience and articulate that God is the God of all creation *and* the God of the oppressed. Theological critiques of modernity that focus on the rise and insights of the natural sciences as they emerged in Western Europe and the United States fail to adequately address the gospel to the suffering and the oppressed of the world, especially when those who suffer have been victims of “scientific advance.” Along with patriarchy and the genocide of Indigenous peoples, Walker writes that “exploitation and destruction of nonhuman creatures and creation” are “important modern oppressions to be overcome.” Theology that is adequate for the struggle for ecological liberation today will learn from the Black Atlantic experience that modernity created and recreates a necrotic distance between its normative vision of the human person and every existence that fails to conform this vision. Guided by Walker, Jr., and Karen Baker-Fletcher, I argue that Ruether’s “paradigm of relations of domination” is a paradigm of “interlocking forms of oppression and evil” that assumes commodification and expendability of anyone who

Pittenger argues that process theology makes sense of scriptural attestations of divine love for a world that increasingly understands its own experiences of dynamism, relationality, rest, and contrast. Pittenger's process theology contributes to and exemplifies the sacramental tradition of ecological theology because it pursues the revelation and meaning of divine Love-in-action for a world that is becoming self-aware of its relationships, emergences, perishings, discords, and harmonies.

Pittenger's ecological theology is sacramental because of his dual emphasis on revealing and enacting as has been noted above. For an adequate ecotheology to emerge within a Pittengerian process framework, participation in love will rise to the fore. For Pittenger, participation in love has been most decisively expressed and made known to the world through the life of Jesus Christ. The Christ-Event effects and affects the personalizing love of God for the whole creation.⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, because Jesus has been recognized to be "the climactic disclosure of God," the world has been given significant clues to recognize any and all other disclosures of God in participative love for the life of the world.⁴⁹⁶ This means that reciprocity in participation is a high value for Pittenger's ecological vision, and this theme lays a foundation for a sacramental ecotheology that can

isn't paradigmatically ideal. Theodore Walker, Jr., *Mothership Connections: A Black Atlantic Synthesis of Neoclassical Metaphysics and Black Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 69-71; Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 62.

⁴⁹⁵ Later in this chapter, I discuss the personalizing love of God for the whole creation and engage Mari Jørstad's biblical scholarship to advocate for an expansion of personhood beyond *Homo sapiens*.

⁴⁹⁶ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 61.

promote and pursue justice as planetary wellbeing in God. The following sections of this chapter take up each of these themes; biophilia, or reciprocal love of life, and justice as planetary wellbeing.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND BIOPHILIA

This section critically considers the sacramental ecotheological themes of *interconnectedness* and *biophilia*. Because these two themes deeply inform one another, I have chosen to handle them in the same section of this chapter. I open with a brief review of Norman Pittenger's understanding of relationality, recalling the discussions of chapters one and two, before critically engaging an active debate about interconnectedness that spans a number of academic disciplines. Following this subsection, I turn to consider biophilia, introducing the term and its use by two ecologists before developing Pittenger's own biophilic language. This section closes with an argument from biophilia for the recognition and treatment of other-than-human creatures as persons.

Interconnectedness

In this section, I develop the theme of interconnectedness over two sections. In the first section, I discuss interconnectedness as "relationality" to capture how Pittenger centers relationships in love in his theology. Attending to Pittenger's language in this way means that I use "interconnectedness" and "relationality" synonymously. In the second section, I discuss interconnectedness in terms of the consequences of human action for Earth and the efforts to describe the extent to which humans are impacting our shared home.

Relationality

Norman Pittenger articulates a Christian theology of organism that affirms that the world emerges through internally and externally related events.⁴⁹⁷ It should be no surprise, then, that the dynamic interconnectedness that characterizes the cosmos is a theme of his sacramental ecotheology. In this section, I will briefly re-present Norman Pittenger's description of relationality in the theology of organism. Doing so is particularly important for understanding how Pittenger argues for love and justice as dynamic, responsive, and participative acts in the divine concern for the life of the world. In the sacramental ecotheology, love will be discussed as *biophilia* while justice will be discussed as *planetary wellbeing*.

This dissertation's sacramental ecotheology can express the Pittengerian notion of relationality rather succinctly: we all happen through relationships with one another. That is to say that Pittenger explains an organic notion of the cosmos as home to God who shares in a dynamic mutuality of feeling with all creatures great and small.⁴⁹⁸ God participates in the world through "ceaselessly present, everlastingly energizing, unfailingly loving activity through the whole creation," Pittenger writes.⁴⁹⁹ For his sacramental ecotheology, then, classical theological themes of aseity and omnipotence alike fail to adequately describe God and fall short for two related reasons.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 9.

⁴⁹⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 54

⁴⁹⁹ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 21.

⁵⁰⁰ Norman Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead, Makers of Contemporary Theology* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), 21.

The former is inadequate because it completely misunderstands the point of the Christ-Event and the abundance of love manifest in the world through Christ.⁵⁰¹ The latter is inadequate because it mistakes love to be capable of coercion, capable of overriding the freedom of the beloved to enrich the relationship with their own love.⁵⁰² From different directions, then, these models fail to grasp the fact that “deep down in the world, basic to its dynamic and structure, is not sheer coercion or force [or absence], but genuine persuasion or love.”⁵⁰³ This conviction that the basic dynamic of the world is love is the key to Pittenger’s notion of relationality for his sacramental ecotheology. Pittenger references Whitehead when he describes that this basic dynamic works through experiences that enrich and promote for the individual creature a sense of “cosmic ‘refreshment and companionship’” in their life.⁵⁰⁴ The resulting vision of relationality is “of a unity between human existence and the world order [the basic dynamic of love], even if there is a real distinction between the two,” he writes.⁵⁰⁵ Pittenger’s insistence that humanity is organic to the world beyond our species means that we influence and are influenced by all of our relatives as we grow into our lives.

⁵⁰¹ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 20.

⁵⁰² Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 19-20.

⁵⁰³ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 117.

⁵⁰⁴ Norman Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love: Human Experience and Christian Faith in a Process Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 15.

⁵⁰⁵ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 12.

In Pittenger's sacramental ecotheology, unity does not mean an annihilation of differences for the reproduction of a single prototype. God's love, Pittenger insists, is at work in the world to enable creatures to "give ourselves fully in love and to love in the right way."⁵⁰⁶ God offers creatures varied and adequate opportunities for growth into fuller relationships with one another and God and receives back into God's own life the many ways that we made these and other possibilities real for our lives together.⁵⁰⁷ Unity, then, emerges through different events coming together and contributing their own histories and influences into an ever-deepening solidarity in response to God's gifts of possibilities for the world to become more loving, more creative, and more beautiful.

Finally, because creatures throughout the cosmos are free to respond to various influences on the shape of their becoming, how we decide to participate in the relational web of the cosmos matters as we are invited to become into God's desires for a world of peace, zest, harmony, adventure, and love.⁵⁰⁸ Through our mutuality of feeling with our relatives in the world, each and every becoming event bears consequences for how they and those they influence become into the world. By emphasizing interconnectedness, Pittenger's nascent sacramental ecotheology highlights that all action is social action.

We cannot escape the brute fact that we influence and are influenced by the world in which we live. And, while this should be encouraging news that contributes to furthering solidarity amongst members of bioregions and other local groups, it is also the

⁵⁰⁶ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 48.

⁵⁰⁷ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 117.

⁵⁰⁸ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 12-14.

case that human influence on the world has not always promoted the health and wellbeing of our human and other-than-human relatives. The following section considers an emerging debate about the scope of human impact and the responsibility for impact upon the life of our common home, Earth.

Epochs and Boundaries

In this section, I turn to discuss framings of interconnectedness that are currently debated in various processes of inquiry in the academy and beyond.⁵⁰⁹ It is undeniable that human persons and human communities have influenced other-than-human relatives and their lives for the entirety of our species' history. Indeed, a chief observation of Pittenger's sacramental ecotheology is that "life – and above all humanly experienced life – belongs to and is part of the natural world."⁵¹⁰ As I modestly engage the work of Donna Haraway and others, I am guided by a question that arises from Pittenger's observation about naturalness to the world: Given that we belong to the natural world, how have we humans enacted our interconnectedness such that we now threaten the lives of our human and other-than-human relatives alike with anthropogenic climate change?

Our planet is experiencing tremendous changes that are being triggered and created by human activities. *The Anthropocene* is a rising title for the geological epoch of

⁵⁰⁹ Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159-165; Donna Haraway, Noboru Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing, and Nils Bubandt, "Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene," *Ethnos* 81, no. 3 (2016): 535-564.

⁵¹⁰ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 9.

time in which we earthlings currently live, an epoch in which the works of humanity mark their presence on the planetary scales of stone and sea. Other names have been proposed – *Capitalocene*, *Plantationocene*, *Chthulucene*, and *Humanosphere* to name four⁵¹¹ – that nuance just how or which humans have made impacts and at what scale those impacts have been most particularly felt.⁵¹² The aim of each of these names is an attempt to reckon with the ways that particular humans and human communities have related to our planet and our other-than-human relatives with whom we share the planet in recent centuries.

The Anthropocene seems to be the name that has caught on most prominently, yet there are significant contentions with the term and significant possibilities for creativity from the term.⁵¹³ Haraway describes the term as aiming to articulate the “situated human impact on the Earth of a global scale.”⁵¹⁴ In a related article, she defines it as a boundary rather than an epoch that “marks severe discontinuities” and “means many things, including that immense irreversible destruction is really in train, not only for the 11 billion or so [human] people who will be on earth near the end of the 21st century, but for myriads of other critters, too.”⁵¹⁵ Scott Gilbert agrees with Haraway, identifying the

⁵¹¹ Haraway et al., “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene.”

⁵¹² Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene” 159-165.

⁵¹³ Haraway et al., “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene.”

⁵¹⁴ Haraway, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 539.

⁵¹⁵ Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene” 160, 161.

Anthropocene as “a short geological *event* rather than an *epoch*.”⁵¹⁶ Likening it to the boundary events of extinctions millions of years ago, Gilbert says, “The Anthropocene is, you know, ‘The Great Dying’, which is not an epoch, it is a transition time.”⁵¹⁷ Definite outcomes of the transition, however, remain undisclosed.

For sacramental ecotheology, identifying a name – whether of an epoch or an event – provides a critical lens through which to analyze how human distortions of love for the world have been important for shaping the world today.⁵¹⁸ Pittenger argues that he has been part of a shift in how Christian theology understood sin in the middle part of the twentieth century that marked a critical retrieval of earlier notions of sin. “Our contemporary Christian thinkers,” he writes, “are intent on making it clear that sin is *not* a series of moral peccadilloes; it is a lack of the right love, or love in a wrong way.”⁵¹⁹ Anna Tsing’s analysis of the critical edge of the Anthropocene helps articulate a possible ecological aim for this shift to a more explicitly relational view of sin. She says, and I want to quote her at length:

For me, the term Anthropocene maintains a productive distance to ‘Man’, the modern human conceit. ‘Man’ does not mean humans, but a particular kind of being invented by Enlightenment thought and brought into operation by modernization and state regulation and other related things. It is this ‘Man’ who can be said to have made the mess of the contemporary world. It was ‘Man’ who was supposed to conquer nature. Building that recognition into the name Anthropocene could potentially – at least at this moment when the term has not yet been used so much – bring some

⁵¹⁶ Gilbert, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 540-541.

⁵¹⁷ Gilbert, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 540.

⁵¹⁸ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 48.

⁵¹⁹ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 48.

thought to the contradiction of asking for solutions from the very creature that cause all the problems in the first place.⁵²⁰

Integrating Tsing’s insights with Pittenger’s articulation of sin, I argue that sacramental ecotheology must recognize that human sins against our other-than-human relatives have not defined us as a species. No longer can “anthropocentrism” be the chief sin for ecological theology. Sacramental ecotheology must be more precise in its analysis of sin, for *Homo sapiens* have not begun and perpetuated the lack of the love that drives the current climate crises on Earth.⁵²¹ Particular communities, cultures, and societies of *Homo sapiens* have prioritized patterns of conquering and death-dealing relationality. Heightened precision in this regard is not mere tinkering on the edges of church teaching or theological education. It, instead, attunes sacramental ecotheology to the intersectional analyses of sin and oppression that are needed for a robust contribution to the struggle for planetary liberation.

Theodore Walker, Jr., insists that an analysis like Tsing’s is needed for any adequate Christian theology that seeks to overcome the multitude of enmeshing oppressions that characterize the constellation of events known as ‘modernity.’⁵²² Such an

⁵²⁰ Tsing, “Anthropologists Are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 541.

⁵²¹ Karen Baker-Fletcher and Christopher Carter’s conversation in response to a series of papers in the 2019 Religion and Ecology Unit of the American Academy of Religion’s session entitled, “Whose Earth Reconsidered: James Cone and Ecological Justice,” deeply influence this particular observation from Tsing’s analysis. Carter, if my memory serves, defended anthropocentrism for Black Americans and Black communities and churches as necessary for asserting their humanity to begin with. Baker-Fletcher, again if my memory serves, connected this observation to King’s notion of somebodiness and human dignity.

⁵²² Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 19-21, 45.

analysis is needed, Walker, Jr., argues, because the beginning of modernity is defined not by the predominating rise of a particular form of scientific inquiry and its related technological advances. Rather, “modernity is also and mainly about the increasing commodification of the world, starting with the emergence of transatlantic slavery in the fifteenth century,” he writes.⁵²³ Sacramental ecotheology will be fatally inadequate for the struggle for liberation from the vile and varied oppressions of modernity if it fails to account for how, to use Tsing’s words, “‘Man’ does not mean humans, but a particular kind of being invented by Enlightenment thought and brought into operation by modernization and state regulation” and commodification and genocide of humans who were not quite ‘Man’ enough.⁵²⁴

Sacramental ecotheology benefits from these geological and anthropological discussions of epochs and boundaries because a more precise analysis of human distortions of love for our kindred can help Christians partner with God to overcome our sin in adequate and saving love. Donna Haraway and Noboru Ishikawa join Tsing and consider alternatives to the “Anthropocene” designation that encourage the needed precision in sacramental ecotheology’s analysis. Both “Capitalocene” and “Plantationocene” build on Ishikawa’s comparison of cycles of financial capital in human societies and the impacts of transnational corporate agribusiness on planetary nitrogen

⁵²³ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 15.

⁵²⁴ Tsing, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 541.

cycles.⁵²⁵ Haraway describes the Capitalocene as capable of insisting upon a longer, more complex, and contextually situated analysis of the epoch or transition event in which we find ourselves than can the Anthropocene – especially given the latter’s ambiguity regarding the generalization of actions to the whole species.⁵²⁶ Tsing adds that the Capitalocene provides a critical analysis of how capital moves through and across societies to influence ecologies even at tremendous distances away from the site of the capital or the capitalist. Tsing says that “this move, which I think of as alienation, changes the plants, the animals, and the organisms that become part of the plantation,” through the commodification and transportation of even life’s genomes.⁵²⁷

The plantation system, they all note, did not disappear with the formal end of the transatlantic slave trade or the emancipation of enslaved Indigenous Peoples of Africa, the Americas, and their descendants. To participate more adequately in the struggle for planetary liberation, this dissertation agrees with Tsing when she says that “we need to understand the dynamics through which plants and animals are abstracted in order to become resources that can be used for investment. Plantations and feedlots are places where this happens.”⁵²⁸ The next chapter is devoted particularly to this task. The

⁵²⁵ Haraway, Ishikawa, and Tsing, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 555-557.

⁵²⁶ Haraway cites Andreas Malm as the originator of the term “Capitalocene” in 2014. Haraway, Ishikawa, and Tsing, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 555.

⁵²⁷ Tsing, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 556.

⁵²⁸ Tsing, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 556.

Plantationocene, they discern, might “make one pay attention to the historical relocations of the substances of living and dying around the Earth as a necessary perquisite to their extraction.”⁵²⁹ Haraway argues that, “because it is more efficient in the logic of the plantation to exterminate the local labor and bring in labor from elsewhere, ...the plantation system depends on the relocation of the generative units: plants, animals, microbes, people.”⁵³⁰

The Plantationocene serves as a useful frame for this dissertation’s understanding of how humans have enacted our interconnectedness with our planetary relatives because it recognizes the toll of the logic of commodity upon human lives, other-than-human lives, and God’s life as we become integral to one another through the meeting of basic bodily and societal needs through food. Furthermore, because it can account for both contextual situatedness and a significant degree of complexity in these relationships, the Plantationocene can also be an apocalyptic event that can be ended through the struggle for liberation. Haraway insists that we cannot struggle for liberation alone as individuals or as a species, and I agree. “We have a mammalian job to do, with our biotic and abiotic sym-poietic collaborators, co-laborers. We need to make kin...who and whatever we are, we need to make-with – become-with, compose-with – the earth-bound,” she writes.⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ Haraway, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 557.

⁵³⁰ Haraway, “Anthropologists are Talking – About the Anthropocene,” 557.

⁵³¹ Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” 161.

Our job to do, I argue, requires that we love. As Pittenger reminds, that is our human task. Humans are made to be lovers.⁵³²

Biophilia

Biophilia is, simply, love of life. It is a necessary characteristic of Norman Pittenger's sacramental ecotheology because, to employ a favorite phrase of Pittenger's, "love is the clue" to experiencing human life, God, and other-than-human creation in all of their interconnecting fullness.⁵³³ Love is the clue to how the whole cosmos happens through manifold dynamic relationships between each and every event in reality. For sacramental ecotheology, biophilia is a quality of life itself that is cultivated through acts of compassion, creativity, solidarity, and attentiveness together with all of our relations in the world. Even though he does not use the term *biophilia*, I argue that Norman Pittenger's cosmic vision of love is an articulation of biophilia as an orienting concern, as it were, for his sacramental ecotheology. This concern permeates Norman Pittenger's whole theological project, and it offers fertile soil for the ecotheological advance of his work that I make in this dissertation.

In this section, I open with a brief treatment of biophilia as it is described by noted myrmecologist E. O. Wilson in his book *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*.⁵³⁴ I then turn to Robin Wall Kimmerer, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi

⁵³² Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 47.

⁵³³ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*.

⁵³⁴ E. O. Wilson, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

Nation and botanist. Her critiques and expansions of modern scientific processes of inquiry and learning, particularly her insistence upon reciprocity as a key feature of biophilia, shape how this sacramental ecotheology develops Pittenger's work. Though they approach and develop this theme from different methodologies, Kimmerer and Pittenger both suggest that other-than-human creatures are subjects who act in the world. Kimmerer even calls them persons. This sacramental ecotheology considers this premise with both Pittenger's process theology and Mari Jørstad's recent biblical scholarship to conclude that biophilia emerges through the consistent and faithful love of another living subject who is free to love you in return. Human, I will argue, is a kind of personhood, a way of becoming a person in a cosmos replete with people. For this sacramental ecotheology, biophilia will be more properly concerned with *how* all of the persons of the cosmos are together and the degree to which we participate in genuine mutuality of becoming in one another's lives. Biophilia opens conversations of justice in the relationships through which the cosmos itself happens.

Biophilia for E. O. Wilson and Robin Wall Kimmerer

Loving life emerges through knowing life.⁵³⁵ Biologist E.O. Wilson recognizes this connection, writing that the affiliations that arise through "processes of biophilic

⁵³⁵ One of Wilson's earliest proposals of biophilia occurred in a book of the same name that was published in 1984. This sentence references the brief opening definition that he offers in that book. I chose to focus on how develops this theme in the later work *The Creation* because, in it, Wilson explicitly works to broaden the scope of his conversation. He opens this book with an appeal to specifically Christian people to set metaphysical disagreements aside to consider the value of relationships with creation that affirm, celebrate, and work to save life on Earth in response to experiences of wonder and learning. E. O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 1-2.

cultural evolution” have a moral consequence.⁵³⁶ “The more we come to understand other life forms,” he notes, “the more our learning expands to include their vast diversity, and the greater the value we will place on them and, inevitably, on ourselves.”⁵³⁷ For Wilson, humans have evolved to experience and value the variety and individuality of species but have strayed from this tendency through other social processes. Humans have a moral imperative to consciously engage our genetically encoded capacity to learn about, reflect upon, and value other-than-human species in their diversity and reflection. Education that wants to encourage biophilia must weave together learning about our world and reflection on learning about our world. When humans reflect on what we learn about others and our world, we must, then, choose to affiliate with other species. When we consciously practice affiliation-through-reflection, we can begin to love life appropriately.

Wilson’s proposal robustly supports the expansion of educational opportunities – within the Eurocentric academy and beyond – for the sake of planetary life, health, and wellbeing.⁵³⁸ Yet, his discussion of education betrays the inadequacy of his notion of biophilia for the present sacramental ecotheology. Wilson presumes that the human who learns to love can be fully human without being loved in relationships of dynamic reciprocity. Biophilia is an honorable way of living that emerges from the passionate love for learning.⁵³⁹ “The basic ingredient for a love of learning is the same as for romantic

⁵³⁶ Wilson, *The Creation*, 63.

⁵³⁷ Wilson, *The Creation*, 63.

⁵³⁸ Wilson, *The Creation*, 127.

⁵³⁹ Wilson, *The Creation*, 140.

love, or love of country, or of God: passion for a particular subject,” Wilson writes.⁵⁴⁰ Biophilia emerges as a moral imperative because the knowledge acquired changes the human situation and demands an ethical response to the new knowledge. Learning as a way of life becomes a persistent routing of wonder towards the other. Inquiry into how the other can increase my own knowledge increases and furthers opportunities for the me to act ethically, to love life. The world becomes the theater of Nature, and the human can be transformed by what they learn while attending that theater.⁵⁴¹ Human relationships to the theater of Nature as Wilson describes them, however, remain extractive and emphasize the benefits of human knowing for human action.

Robin Wall Kimmerer’s critique of the Western scientific schema – of which Wilson is a notable proponent – addresses the anthropological assumptions under Wilson’s project of biophilia. “Knowing that you love the earth changes you,” she writes.⁵⁴² Love “activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.”⁵⁴³ Loving the earth and being the beloved of the earth is a deeper knowing than the affiliation-through-reflection advocated by Wilson. Affiliation-through-reflection has a constant actor, the human subject. It is as if the other-than-

⁵⁴⁰ Wilson, *The Creation*, 127.

⁵⁴¹ Wilson, *The Creation*, 138.

⁵⁴² Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 124.

⁵⁴³ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 124-125.

human people have no intrinsic value unto themselves, for only through the human subject's self-reflection and self-examination can affiliation and biophilic evaluation take place.⁵⁴⁴ Kimmerer, on the other hand, describes biophilia through the theme of reciprocity and gratitude. She argues that understanding relationships throughout the world through the lens of reciprocity encourages humans to recognize the intrinsic capacity for other-than-human people to love us humans and to act of their own accord apart from a colonizing human gaze.

Love that knits together relationships of reciprocity reveals a fundamental difference between capitalist economics and living ecosystems: the definition and consequences of *scarcity*. "What if scarcity is just a cultural construct," Kimmerer asks, "a fiction that fences us off from gift economies?"⁵⁴⁵ Participating in the feast of Serviceberry alongside her namesake, Robin, and other birds, Kimmerer writes that she experiences "abundance shared."⁵⁴⁶ The gift economy that thrives through biophilia does not manufacture scarcity where it does not actually exist; however, "if we view these berries, or that coal or forest, as an object, as property, it can be exploited as a commodity in a market economy."⁵⁴⁷ In terms of markets and commodities, scarcity acts as an

⁵⁴⁴ Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990), 122-140.

⁵⁴⁵ Robin Wall Kimmerer, "The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance," *Emergence Magazine* (December 10, 2020), <https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/the-serviceberry/>.

⁵⁴⁶ Kimmerer, "The Serviceberry."

⁵⁴⁷ Kimmerer, "The Serviceberry."

imposed phenomenon to further privatization, generate higher revenue, and/or foster collectable (or hoarded) prestige.

As noted above, one of the important contributions of the term Plantationocene is its critical capacity to account for the manufacturing of scarcity by eliminating labor as soon as it is more efficient to do so, thus creating a scarcity of labor that can only be filled by further commodification of the laborers whether they be plant, animal, fungal, or human people. Kimmerer argues, however, that, if scarcity actually happens in an ecosystem, then “that is real scarcity: when the rains don’t come.”⁵⁴⁸ Ecosystems experience scarcity as “a physical limitation with repercussions that are shared, just as abundance is shared.”⁵⁴⁹ Experiencing biophilia through reciprocity “makes you happy – and it makes you accountable... You’re likely to take much better care of the gift...than the commodity...because it is knit of relationships,” Kimmerer notes.⁵⁵⁰ Reciprocity is critically important for biophilia to be meaningful at all in the present sacramental ecotheology because reciprocity encourages the formation of communities of solidarity within ecosystems.

Biophilia from Norman Pittenger

Norman Pittenger never uses the term “biophilia.” I develop biophilia as a theme of his budding ecotheology because of the centrality of love for his whole theological project. According to Pittenger, love knits communities together in solidarity through our

⁵⁴⁸ Kimmerer, “The Serviceberry.”

⁵⁴⁹ Kimmerer, “The Serviceberry.”

⁵⁵⁰ Kimmerer, “The Serviceberry.”

profound participations in the concrete fulfillment of each other's lives.⁵⁵¹ Christian theology knows this to be the case, he argues, because of Christian experiences of Jesus Christ as the decisive expression of cosmic Love for the life of the world. "In the man Christ Jesus, God has acted [such that] love has been released into the world in an unprecedented manner, so that the entire situation has been changed," he writes.⁵⁵²

Developing Pittenger, I recognize that biophilia influences the emergence of personhood.⁵⁵³ Biophilia in Christian sacramental ecotheology is not an uncritical adoption of language and concepts beyond our experience with Christ. Rather, biophilia is how we are inspired to respond to the Christ-Event, "which is thus 'made real' in our lives" through our participation in Christ's Body and the cosmic Love that it reveals and enacts for the world in its own becoming in our present lives.⁵⁵⁴ "Like the influence of a loving friend, but with enormously more power, [the Christ-Event through the community of God's people] can alter us," he writes.⁵⁵⁵ "It can provide for us the renewal of strength as well as the direction of purpose, which will enable us to overcome the frustration of our loving."⁵⁵⁶ Such a christological and ecclesial notion of biophilia conveys what I have said elsewhere: how church happens matters for the life of the

⁵⁵¹ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 46.

⁵⁵² Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 48.

⁵⁵³ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 47.

⁵⁵⁴ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 48-49.

⁵⁵⁵ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 49.

⁵⁵⁶ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 49.

world. It also conveys the tremendous scope of the church's participation in God's love as it has been made known through Jesus Christ.

I argue, then, that the scope of *bio-philía* in Christian theology need not be limited to the biotic community of Earth. Creatures who are not "alive" in a Western scientific/biological sense have been included in Christian notions of God's creativity for centuries.⁵⁵⁷ Christian process theology supports an expansion of biophilia beyond biotic communities of Earth because it recognizes the profound and dynamic ways that events influence one another throughout the cosmos. For Norman Pittenger, a theology of organism is less concerned with hard distinctions between living and nonliving and more concerned to articulate, encourage, and evaluate personal and social participation in God's cosmic love.⁵⁵⁸ "Am I, are you, moving in the direction of deeper and more

⁵⁵⁷ Jørstad identifies the ground, Sun, Moon, Stars, Soil, Stone, and Water in personalistic texts in all three sections – Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings – of the Hebrew Bible. Christian liturgies have echoed Jesus's own reference to the prophetic tradition in John 4:10 when they identify the waters of baptism as "Living Water." The Council of Nicaea (787 CE) affirmed that the Church teaches the veneration – *τιμητικὴ προσκυνῆσις* – not the true worship – *λατρεία* – of the icons, for worship is reserved for God, who is the subject of Christian faith. The arguments in defense of the icons largely rested on the arguments made by St. John of Damascus in his *Apologia Against Those Who Decry Holy Images* that, among other defenses of the icons, God inhabited matter and chose to work out salvation through matter. St. John explicitly names the mountain known as Calvary, the rock known as the Holy Sepulchre, and the silvers and golds that construct with humans the crosses, chalices, and patens for the liturgy. St. Francis of Assisi speaks to Sun, Moon, Wind, Water, Fire, Earth, and even Bodily Death in familial terms in the "Canticle of the Sun."

⁵⁵⁸ In her analysis of Genesis 1, Jørstad's observations address the focus of orienting concerns and resonates here. "The text," she writes, "resists any clear distinction between animate and inanimate. First, the habitats created in days one to three participate in the creation of their inhabitants... Second, the sequence of creative acts complicates the picture. Vegetation is created on day three, that is, on a 'domain' day.

inclusive love of our neighbors, or am I, are you, moving in the opposite direction?”

Pittenger asks.⁵⁵⁹

Given the interconnectedness of reality, Pittenger suggests that today’s Christian answer to “Who is my neighbor?” must expand our love to include animals, plants, rivers, rocks, and the seemingly trivial events of far out space.⁵⁶⁰ “In other words,” he writes, “the moral question for each of us has to do with where we are going, how we are getting there, and the way in which our own particular routing is contributing to the wider social good – a social good that is part of the cosmic movement toward amorization.”⁵⁶¹ Biophilia, for Norman Pittenger, is an integral aim of the whole cosmos, and humans have been invited and empowered to live as participants with cosmic Love. How we relate to all of those with whom we share the world is a Christian concern and opportunity to enact gospel in the midst of planetary crisis.

Other-than-Human Persons

The luminaries, however, are created on day four, a ‘populating’ day. Middleton calls vegetation and the luminaries ‘borderline creatures,’ and concludes that while ‘Genesis 1 is clearly concerned with ordered categories, this order is not rigid,’ and its categories have ‘fuzzy boundaries.’ This reasoning seems backwards. *It is not that Genesis 1 has unclear categories, but that the categories of modern interpreters do not quite fit the picture.*” Mari Jørstad, “The Life of the World: The Vitality and Personhood of Non-Animal Nature in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. diss, Duke University, 2016), 111. (*emphasis mine*).

⁵⁵⁹ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 55.

⁵⁶⁰ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 57.

⁵⁶¹ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 57.

Mari Jørstad argues that the writers of the Hebrew Bible used personalistic terms to portray other-than-human⁵⁶² creatures throughout the various genres and collections of texts.⁵⁶³ “Mountains, trees, billows, and soil are not inert or inanimate, but persons who act, feel, and communicate,” Jørstad writes.⁵⁶⁴ Furthermore, the creatures who are featured in the personalistic texts are, in fact, *creatures* rather than inert stuff or divinities.⁵⁶⁵ This is a particularly important observation for this sacramental ecotheology as it directly addresses categories of interpretation that have arisen as part of the modern intellectual project’s attempted divorces of humanity from our common planetary home. Dismantling patterns of interpretation that further the exceptionalism of humanity at the cost of the lives and wellbeing of other-than-human creatures in the Plantationocene is critically important in the struggle for justice as planetary wellbeing. The third section of this chapter will expand upon how recognizing the subjectivity of other-than-human creatures encourages events of solidarity for planetary wellbeing. Jørstad’s insights are important for this section’s consideration of interconnectedness and biophilia, too.

Jørstad relies on what I call a hermeneutic of strangeness at the end of her project. Throughout much of her work, she critiques biblical interpretations that twist and distort

⁵⁶² Nota bene regarding language: Jørstad uses the phrases “non-human creation” and “non-animal creation” when identifying groups of creatures that do not include humanity or animality. Though I prefer the phrase “other-than-human,” I will not change Jørstad’s use whenever I directly quote her work.

⁵⁶³ Jørstad, “The Life of the World.”

⁵⁶⁴ Jørstad, “The Life of the World,” 335.

⁵⁶⁵ Jørstad, “The Life of the World,” 105.

the scriptural texts so that some of the admittedly foreign cultural conceptions might seem less strange to modern communities of reception. Rather than needing to smooth over or outright ignore differences between the currently conventional and the foreign or strange, Jørstad experiences a promise for reframed approaches to the relationships through which our common home emerges. “The strangeness of personalistic nature texts,” she writes, “can help us think beyond the human, beyond human needs, and help us ‘[give] watchful heed’ to the wishes of all God’s creatures, include[ing] those with whom most of us rarely think to relate in personal terms, such as soil, forests, rivers, oceans, and clouds.”⁵⁶⁶ Learning to relate with other-than-human creatures in personal terms refreshes experiences of the interconnectedness of the cosmos. Biophilia, then, emerges through the persistent routings of these experiences toward the sharing of greater love for one another in the life of God.⁵⁶⁷

When sacramental ecotheology recognizes the wealth and breadth of the personalistic textual tradition in the scriptures, prayers, hymns, and practices of churches, it can “engender in us a kind of openness” to the world of which we are all a member.⁵⁶⁸ A series of experiences that I have had while writing this dissertation may further elucidate what Jørstad means when she speaks of the importance of cultivating attention to other-than-human kindred with whom we share our common homes, bioregions, and planet as *persons* and not only subjects. As lockdown measures began in Boston in

⁵⁶⁶ Jørstad, “The Life of the World,” 344.

⁵⁶⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 59.

⁵⁶⁸ Jørstad, “The Life of the World,” 343.

March 2020, my living room was arranged such that the desk upon which this dissertation has been written was pushed up against a windowed wall. Around the vernal equinox, the days were particularly blustery and rainy, and the northwestwardly window rattled every now and then as a gust of wind whipped around the side of our building. Wind drew my gaze away from the screen of my laptop, through the screen on the outer portion of the window, and to Maple, standing resolute in the storm. I noticed a branch with a small, newer branch forming. Though we were not close enough to one another for me to measure it with any metric, customary, or imperial accuracy, I thought that maybe I could measure it with a knowing glance. “I see you today. I hope I see you tomorrow,” I said to Maple, focusing particularly on the small branch, and I returned to the day’s work. Over the next few days, I offered similar words when sitting at the desk, but never much else.

I recognized in Maple a companion in that moment, and I attempted to cultivate this recognition with each new day’s routine of sitting to the desk to read and write. In noticing Maple each morning, I acknowledged that Maple was an emerging organism. Sometimes, this acknowledgement was the recognition of a longer branch or a bigger leaf than an earlier day. Other times, I had to humbly acknowledge that Maple was growing and photosynthesizing beyond my senses of sight, smell, or touch. This is a consistent view with other Christian process theologies.⁵⁶⁹ Expressing my hope to see Maple the

⁵⁶⁹ The works of Nancy Howell, John B. Cobb, Jr., and Norman Pittenger were certainly influencing my experiences in during these events. Just a few weeks prior, I had attended a session of the Wesleyan Theological Society in Kansas City, MO, where Nancy Howell gave a paper on religion among our primate relatives. The discussion that

next day was a way of recognizing that we shared aims as kindred subjects on the move in creative advance.⁵⁷⁰

As days passed into weeks, I had not left the apartment building and relied upon that window and another open window for my breaths of fresh springtime air. With automobile and train traffic drastically reduced, I noticed birds singing more regularly and boisterously throughout the days. I kept expecting Mockingbird to alight on Maple's branch, but I never did see such an event. My eyes darted from screen to branch, seeking life. All the while, the branch was growing straight and had smaller, green-tipped branches shooting out from it. Looking for Blue Jay or Mockingbird one morning, I felt the cool breeze and smelled the sweet floral scents on the wind, and Maple waved. "I know you're there. Do you see me?" With all honesty, I admitted that I had forgotten who I had been looking at but not recognizing for weeks: Maple.

followed stimulated my thinking more deeply about the responsibility of Christians to recognize the subjecthood of our kin. I agree with John B. Cobb's insistence in *Process Theology as Political Theology* that Whitehead – and subsequently a theology informed by his work such as this dissertation – would agree with certain political theologies – Cobb is directly engaging Metz at this point in his book – that say "that apart from subjectivity there can be nothing at all," but that Whitehead would "not agree that apart from *human* subjectivity there can be nothing at all." Cobb writes, "Apart from human subjectivity, for example, there can be the subjectivity of a chimpanzee." Finally, Norman Pittenger's various expositions of Whitehead's philosophical significance for Christian theology are emphatic in embracing what some have called *panexperientialism*, though I do not think Pittenger himself ever used the term; namely that every event of the world experiences, in its own way, the myriad relations through which it achieves subjecthood, through which it becomes itself, and into which it contributes its own influence. John B. Cobb, Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 115.

⁵⁷⁰ Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 45.

The words of Aba Gebre Mariam Alene, an Ethiopian Orthodox priest, disturbed me in my confession to Maple. “Every plant contains the power of God, the treasure of God, the blessing of God. When someone plants a tree,” he says, “every time it moves, the tree prays for that person to live longer.”⁵⁷¹ I did not plant Maple, but I also did not fully consider how Maple’s subjective becoming was a way of actively participating in the personalizing love of God.⁵⁷² The personalizing love of God is the way God works in the world, and that transcends the human species. Indeed, a core conviction of sacramental ecotheology is that God’s love is at work in, through, and with the world more broadly than humanity. To borrow Walker, Jr.’s, phrase, this is “the more inclusive good news.”⁵⁷³

Sacramental ecotheology strives for the fullness of biophilia as participative acts in God’s personalizing, cosmic Love. In so doing, I argue that it must encourage attention to the personhood of our other-than-human kin as a critical move beyond modernity’s thing-ing of them and, eventually, of all of us. I am learning how Maple people participate in our community through gifts of oxygen, shade, shelter, and syrup, to name but a few, and I am experiencing a new depth of biophilia – namely that I, too, am loved.

The personalistic turn becomes important when biophilia gets to work for justice as planetary wellbeing because it encourages the human person to bear witness to and

⁵⁷¹ Aba Gebre Mariam Alene, “The Church Forests of Ethiopia,” *Emergence Magazine*, YouTube, aired February 7, 2020, 8:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fGe-CPWZIE>.

⁵⁷² Pittenger, *Love is the Clue*, 47.

⁵⁷³ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 70.

bear the burdens of other-than-human suffering in the Plantationocene. Jørstad's claim that personalistic "attention need not be particularly mystical" emphasizes that biophilic work for planetary wellbeing will foster an ecological solidarity through regular commitments to shared healing, creating, and living in our world.⁵⁷⁴ Modernity has shrouded planetary wellbeing, obscuring life in love from the unclean, the less-than-person, and the not 'Man' enough. As the sacramentalism that reveals and enacts divine love for the life of the world is natural to our life together in our common home, bearing witness and working for justice can be natural ways of overcoming Plantationocene oppression in love.

JUSTICE AS PLANETARY WELLBEING

In the midst of the Plantationocene's apocalyptic climate events, how might a sacramental ecotheology speak of justice? *Apocalyptic*, of course, is not the doom and gloom determinism of a world ending in fire or famine no matter what we do.⁵⁷⁵ Rather, *apokalypsis* is a revealing, a veil-lifting, a disclosing of the quality of relationships and the possibilities for their transformation, growth, or demise. Our current crises reveal diseased relationships among lives that are breaking or broken by the oppressive weight of human industrial activity.⁵⁷⁶ They also reveal the struggle for liberation that rises in

⁵⁷⁴ Jørstad, "The Life of the World," 343.

⁵⁷⁵ Catherine Keller and Mayra Rivera, "The Coloniality of Apocalypse," in *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2021/03/31/the-coloniality-of-apocalypse/>.

⁵⁷⁶ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 85.

response to the manifold oppressions destroying our common home.⁵⁷⁷ Norman Pittenger's sacramental ecotheology is profoundly concerned with the quality of the relationships that weave the world and how we all might more fully participate in God's life of love in the world.⁵⁷⁸ This final theme of this chapter – justice as planetary wellbeing – focuses on Pittenger's act of love to join in the struggle for the freedom of others that reveals and enacts God's love for the life of the world.⁵⁷⁹

Justice as planetary wellbeing is a third theme of the present sacramental ecotheology because sacramental events – human and other-than-human events – are never simply *about* what they reveal.⁵⁸⁰ Sacramental events, as mentioned above, also participate in God's experience that is being revealed. "If we take with utmost seriousness the conviction that God's 'nature and name is Love,'" Pittenger writes, then we must also "understand clearly that we have an inescapable responsibility both to speak and to act for the establishment of a just state of affairs in any and every part of the planet."⁵⁸¹ Justice as planetary wellbeing emerges as a theme because sacramental moments reveal and participate in divine judgment. This is the "judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved [and] the judgment of a wisdom which uses what

⁵⁷⁷ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 45-51.

⁵⁷⁸ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 111.

⁵⁷⁹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 113.

⁵⁸⁰ Driver, *Liberating Rites*, 200.

⁵⁸¹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 110.

in the temporal world is mere wreckage.”⁵⁸² Superstorms, floods, droughts, and wildfires are the apocalyptic events of anthropogenic climate change that reveal interlocking oppressions of deprivation, neglect, and destruction that characterize the dominant relationships among humans and between humans and other-than-humans in the world in which we live right now. Sacramental events respond to the relationships that have been revealed in catastrophe *and* to the possibilities for relationships that are revealed through participation in the Reign of God. Sacramental ecotheology recognizes the double response by speaking and acting for the emergence and expansion of relationships of love for the life of the world.

Sacramental ecotheologies develop this theme with particular concern for the planetary scope of love in action, and Pittenger would be amenable to an expansion even farther that includes the whole cosmos. While I echo the cosmic scale of Pittenger’s budding ecotheology – the web of relations through which reality emerges includes even the most trivial puff of existence in far out space – this *planetary* language focuses my attention on both Earth as the planet upon which human existence presently occurs and on my contextualized existence as part of Earth’s life. Theologians are right to attend to insights from astrobiology,⁵⁸³ and I think this is an exciting area of theological inquiry that a Pittengerian sacramental ecotheology could engage later. For now, though,

⁵⁸² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

⁵⁸³ Theodore Walker Jr., and Chandra Wickramasinghe’s 2015 book *The Big Bang and God: An Astro-Theology* is a brilliant example of neoclassical theology expanding beyond Earth’s ways of life.

considering justice on a planetary scope can encourage churches to focus their love in action on more immediate relationships like local watershed ecosystems, human industrial agriculture, or the designation of “wasteland” for landfills of anthropogenic garbage.

As the earlier theme of biophilia suggests, planetary wellbeing requires relationships of love for the life of the world. How might these relationships happen? For over half of a millennium, capitalist economics have been central to structuring relationships among many human communities and between humans and the world in which we live. Could the dynamic conditions of capitalism support biophilia to the extent needed for planetary wellbeing? If “poverty and ecological deterioration mutually affect one another and occur in tandem,” then could *sustainable development* occur through capitalist relational priorities and address both poverty and ecological deterioration?⁵⁸⁴ Furthermore, could sustainable development incentivize whole communities of humans to love the world beyond our species more than we already do, enriching all human lives while protecting necessary habitat and food resources for other-than-human creatures? Questions about the financial costs of responding to catastrophic climate events have joined these broader economic questions of sustainable development in recent years. The

⁵⁸⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 66.

increasing frequency and intensity of such events – hurricanes,⁵⁸⁵ flooding,⁵⁸⁶ ice storms,⁵⁸⁷ and drought⁵⁸⁸ to name only a few – infuses these questions with urgency.

In an economic system that prioritizes capital generation and accumulation, attending to these and other economic concerns in stark financial terms can plainly demonstrate monetary damages of climate events or the potential monetary savings of actively adapting to changing climates. The development of carbon tax schemes or the broader monetization of eco-relationally destructive habits and activities may contribute financial incentives to avoid these activities. Development along these lines, however, continues to prioritize modern commodity logics that pierce the intrinsic value of creatures to discover their “real” value for the marketplace.⁵⁸⁹ “*Sustainable development*

⁵⁸⁵ Yarimar Bonilla, “The Coloniality of Disaster: Race, Empire, and the Temporal Logics of Emergency in Puerto Rico, USA,” *Political Geography*, 78, (2020), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S09622629820301049>.

⁵⁸⁶ Jeremy G. Carter, John Handley, Tom Butlin, and Susannah Gill, “Adapting Cities to Climate Change – Exploring the Flood Risk Management Role of Green Infrastructure Landscapes,” *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 61, no. 9 (September 2018): 1535-1552.

⁵⁸⁷ Victoria Cavaliere, “Why some Texas residents are ending up with \$5,000 electric bills after the winter storms,” *Business Insider*, February 21, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-texas-residents-hit-with-soaring-electric-bills-winter-storms-2021-2>.

⁵⁸⁸ Pooja Pal, Himangana Gupta, Raj Kumar Gupta, and Tilak Raj, “Dynamics of Food Security in India: Declining Per Capita Availability Despite Increasing Production,” in *Climate Change, Food Security and Natural Resource Management: Regional Case Studies from Three Continents*, eds. Mohamed Behnassi, Olaf Pollman, and Himangana Gupta (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2019), 133-148.

⁵⁸⁹ I use the term *real* here intentionally to evoke *real estate* or *real property*, the economic unit that is connected to land in some way and that is owned and treated for the purpose of generating capital. In modern economic Liberalism and Neoliberalism, a

is an oxymoron,” for it frequently ignores the shared causes of poverty and ecological destruction.⁵⁹⁰ Boff argues convincingly that poverty and environmental deterioration “are the result of precisely the kind of development being practiced, ... whose logic is based on plundering Earth and exploiting the labor force.”⁵⁹¹

Framing her economic critique differently than Boff, Wangari Maathai deftly asks, “Can we really put a price tag on the carbon dioxide trees capture? I know scientists and economists are working out such valuations and I wouldn’t stop them. But the answer,” she writes, “surely is that what [trees] provide is literally incalculable.”⁵⁹² She wouldn’t stop the scientists and economists in the short term because the mechanisms that these scientists and economists may invent or adjust in inventive ways might very well increase our chances for life and planetary wellbeing a little while longer by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions or increasing carbon capture and storage. Maathai’s question, however, precisely identifies the flaw in relying on these mechanisms for long

creature’s value for the marketplace has been the guiding measure of its value to the human world. The more efficiently that it, as an *it*, can generate capital, the more valuable it becomes for the human who uses it. Pope Francis frames the stakes of the situation clearly when he writes, “Human beings and nature must not be at the service of money. Let us say NO to an economy of exclusion and inequality, where money rules, rather than service. That economy kills. That economy excludes. That economy destroys Mother Earth.” Pope Francis, *Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements*, as cited in Francis, *Care for Creation: A Call for Ecological Conversion*, ed. Giuliano Vigini (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 45.

⁵⁹⁰ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 67.

⁵⁹¹ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 66-67.

⁵⁹² Wangari Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 171.

term solutions that enact planetary wellbeing. She argues that compassion, empathy, and equity are necessary for the biophilia that contributes to justice as planetary wellbeing, but none of these can be monetized.⁵⁹³ None of these can be monetized because they cannot abide the confounding exploitations, commodifications, coercions, and destructions that undergird capitalist economics in modernity.⁵⁹⁴

A Symposium for Planetary Wellbeing

If planetary wellbeing will not fully emerge through the commodifying schema, then how might it come about? Many different events are needed to contribute to planetary wellbeing because no single event or even small set of events can transform the complex climate catastrophe that faces our planet. Of many events that have been proposed and that could be proposed, this dissertation is particularly concerned with meals and human cultures, the dynamic conditions of food in global climate change, and the possibilities for Christian adaptive responses to these conditions found in Norman Pittenger's theology of the Christian meal, the Eucharist. Given this concern for food, I propose a symposium, an occasion for fellowship with others that centers a meal, that critically reflects upon established patterns of relationships between humans and between

⁵⁹³ Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 171-181.

⁵⁹⁴ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 69-70; Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 66-69; George E. Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 1-27.

humans and other-than-human people in society, and that sends us forth from the meal to enrich the relationships we have found and discussed during the meal.⁵⁹⁵

For the remainder of the dissertation, meals will become a focal point.⁵⁹⁶ To close this chapter, I turn to the literary symposium of Luke 14:1-24 to consider three features of enacting justice as planetary wellbeing: *restoration*, *unexpectedness*, and *good news to the poor*. In the following chapter, meals themselves will be considered, and the fifth chapter will develop Pittenger's theology of the Eucharist for Christian adaptive responses to global climate change.

⁵⁹⁵ “We therefore have two interrelated phenomena that go by the name ‘symposium.’ On the one hand, there is the symposium as social institution, in which actual meals were conducted according to a social pattern of codes and customs. On the other hand, there is the symposium as literary form, in which meals, particularly those of the famous philosophers, were idealized according to established literary patterns and *topoi*.” Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 48.

⁵⁹⁶ I follow, somewhat playfully, the schedule of events for a symposium, and I want to be very clear that I hope this happens over a meal in the not-too-distant future. Food was, after all, a necessity of this Greco-Roman social institution. I consider the reading and analysis of scripture in this third chapter as similar to saying the pre-meal blessings before turning to meals philosophically and socially in the fourth chapter. Though I don't know exactly if Plutarch would categorize the fourth chapter of this dissertation as fittingly *symposaic* – a topic suitable for symposium discussions – or *sympotic* – a topic concerned with details of the symposium such as ethics of seating, proper conversation subjects, or general etiquette – it is my hope that the diversity of people who contribute to that chapter's footnotes convey “comments in an entertaining fashion, using interesting examples from events of the past or present” while also making sure to instruct. Instruction in the fourth chapter sets up the fifth chapter's development of Norman Pittenger's theology of the Eucharist for planetary dining. As the culmination of the symposium's discussion, the fifth chapter happens with the aim to “induce an emulous enthusiasm for courageous and great-hearted deeds and...charitable and humane deeds,” particularly as it concerns Christian adaptive responses to climate change that reveal and enact the love of God through their meals. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 49-54, 222.

Restoration

While on his way to the house of a leader of the Pharisees, Jesus encounters a man with dropsy.⁵⁹⁷ In what David Watson calls “another example of Jesus healing with a sense of urgency,” Jesus asks the lawyers and Pharisees who are present, “Is it lawful to heal people on the sabbath, or not?”⁵⁹⁸ He responds to their silence twice. First, he heals the man and frees him to live life on his own accord.⁵⁹⁹ Then, Jesus said to those who would not speak to him, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?”⁶⁰⁰ Again, they meet him with silence.⁶⁰¹

In this opening scene, the author of Luke-Acts is not positioning Jesus’s healing ministry against the Law. Watson argues that interpretative strategies regarding Sabbath law are at stake instead.⁶⁰² Jesus’s question about the child or ox that has fallen into a well indicates that he experiences the man with dropsy as a presenting and disabling symptom of disease rather than a disease itself⁶⁰³ and as a person in need of immediate

⁵⁹⁷ Luke 14:1-6, NRSV.

⁵⁹⁸ David F. Watson, “Luke-Acts,” *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, ed. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 315; Luke 14:3, NRSV.

⁵⁹⁹ Luke 14:4, NRSV.

⁶⁰⁰ Luke 14:5, NRSV.

⁶⁰¹ Luke 14:6, NRSV.

⁶⁰² Watson, “Luke-Acts,” 316.

⁶⁰³ Watson cites Nolland on this distinction. “Dropsy is a symptom, not a disease. It refers to massive retention of fluids in the body because of what are, mostly, quite

care.⁶⁰⁴ The urgency in how Jesus relates to the man with dropsy reveals Jesus's priority to interpret Sabbath law through the saving shalom vision of God. Shalom living, Randy Woodley argues, "is active and engaged, going far beyond the mere absence of conflict."⁶⁰⁵ In healing the man with dropsy, Jesus embodies the restorative freedom of the shalom vision and demonstrates that sabbath rest after a week of activity cannot be restorative for anyone if it prolongs or furthers the suffering of even one.

The encounter between Jesus and the man with dropsy that opens Luke 14 exemplifies the scope and urgency of restoration in a sacramental ecotheology's notion of planetary wellbeing. Woodley develops this active and engaged shalom alongside what he calls "the Native American Harmony Way." He argues that shalom is "a concept of healing and wholeness that includes a real partnership with creation...[that] is communal, holistic, and tangible."⁶⁰⁶ Restoration for planetary wellbeing happens in God's vision of shalom, particularly as "shalom addresses God's concern for the socially marginalized."⁶⁰⁷ The author of Luke-Acts connects the unnamed man's encounter with Jesus to the Great Banquet's seeking-out of persons with disabilities to dine with the

serious and even life-threatening health problems," Nolland writes. Nolland, as cited in Watson, "Luke-Acts," 315.

⁶⁰⁴ Watson, "Luke-Acts," 316.

⁶⁰⁵ Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 10.

⁶⁰⁶ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 20-21.

⁶⁰⁷ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 16, 20.

banquet host.⁶⁰⁸ This is an important connection for understanding justice as planetary wellbeing, for it describes restoration in the Reign of God as an integrating experience. By connecting restoration and liberation with dining, the author of Luke-Acts presents Jesus revealing and enacting “shalom, with its embedded concern for the poor, the marginalized, the animals, the birds, the earth, etc., [as] the divinely preferred way for humans to live.”⁶⁰⁹ The gospel disrupts patterns of social hierarchy that were traditional motifs in the symposium literary form and that were reinforced through the symposium meal etiquette.⁶¹⁰ “Shalom is not for the many, while a few suffer; nor is it for a few while the many suffer...In this way, shalom is everyone’s concern.”⁶¹¹ Here, Woodley’s description of shalom echoes Pittenger’s articulation of justice for a sacramental ecotheology.

Justice, Pittenger argues, happens as love at work and cannot be rightly understood to prioritize exceptionalist individualism or selfish activity. Referencing Paul,

⁶⁰⁸ Watson reads this connection as a, most likely unconscious, mitigation of the author’s earlier identification of the physical impairment of dropsy with spiritual difficulties. This depends on his reading of Hartsock and Braun’s arguments that “the insatiable thirst of the person suffering from dropsy” led to dropsy being used metaphorically for greed and wealth. Though this may very well be the case, I don’t think dropsy has to be used as a metaphor for spiritual difficulties brought on by the disease of greed in order for there to be a meaningful connection between the encounter and the parable of the Great Banquet. Healing and liberating an actual human person who had dropsy may be more meaningful for the scope of restoration as a liberation into shalom, for it continues Jesus’s ministerial self-understanding from his sermon in the Nazareth synagogue. Watson, “Luke-Acts,” 316.

⁶⁰⁹ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 80.

⁶¹⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 269.

⁶¹¹ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 21.

Eugene Debs, and John Donne, Pittenger describes justice as emergent through the love that implicates each of us in the lives of all others.⁶¹² For Pittenger, to live as if we each are “an island entire unto itself...is to blaspheme: it is to deny in practice that the love of God is indeed reflected in and part of the reality of love of the neighbor,” Pittenger writes.⁶¹³ Demonstrating the sabbath priority for shalom, Jesus’s encounter with the man with dropsy highlights the scope of restoration as an act of justice that “produces change for the good of all.”⁶¹⁴

Our planet urgently needs restoration in shalom. The Lukan event seems to answer Woodley’s questions “What is this salvation?” and “When is it appropriated?” with “True salvation is shalom salvation.” and “Today. Shalom living is for today.”⁶¹⁵ Sacramental ecotheology argues that planetary wellbeing cannot be delayed, so the immediacy of shalom living comes as good news for our world! Luke 14:1-6 further indicates that the present necessity for shalom living expects a particular kind of relationship among all creatures: kinship that honors subjectivity. Watson’s explanation of the passage as an example of disagreement over interpretative strategies of Sabbath law does not go quite far enough.⁶¹⁶ Jesus’s actions and questions demonstrate that the man with dropsy was never an object of debate for religious interpretative strategies. He

⁶¹² Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 111-112.

⁶¹³ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 112.

⁶¹⁴ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 21.

⁶¹⁵ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 163.

⁶¹⁶ Watson, “Luke-Acts,” 316.

was a human person with a life-threatening condition, and God’s intended shalom could not be experienced until his life was no longer threatened. Shifting human perspectives to recognize the subjectivity of our other-than-human relatives inspires restoration not out of pity for an object that could be taken out of one’s possession but out of concern for “other members of the community of life who are cocreatures loved by the Spirit.”⁶¹⁷ That is to say that recognizing the subjecthood of our other-than-human kinfolk encourages the compassion that is necessary for transformative and loving planetary wellbeing.⁶¹⁸

Attending to how Jesus interacts with the man following the healing is equally important for understanding the urgency of subjecthood for restoration in planetary wellbeing. The *New Revised Standard Version* translates ἀπέλυσεν in Luke 14:4 as “sent away.” Jesus did not heal the man and then send him away as if scolding the man or ridding the company of his presence. The verb ἀπέλυσεν can also be translated with a more liberatory tone: “set free.”⁶¹⁹ Reading the encounter between Jesus and the man who has been healed from dropsy in this liberating mode is more consistent with Jesus’s

⁶¹⁷ John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 66.

⁶¹⁸ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 248-253.

⁶¹⁹ ἀπέλυσεν is the third person, singular, aorist, active, indicative form of the verb ἀπολύω, which is primarily translated as “release, set free, pardon.” F. Wilbur Gingrich, ed., *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament, Second Edition*, revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 23.

own vision for his ministry in Luke 4:16-21.⁶²⁰ Rather than continuing to be an object of disdain or an other who is not needed for the wellbeing of the whole, the man is freed so he can exercise a self-determinacy that seemed to be lacking at the outset of the encounter. Restoration for planetary wellbeing must happen likewise.

For restoration to be an act of justice, an abiding sense of “mutuality or sharing, which are the expression of genuine love in its deepest sense, are requisite.”⁶²¹ And mutuality assumes some form of relatedness that honors the self’s “creative work in such a way as to affirm [the Other’s creative work] and they ours as well.”⁶²² The mutuality that is necessary for restoration will recognize that our common home and our kindred on Earth are subjects who emerge and live their own lives in rich relationships. They are not static objects of human debate but our kindred in God’s restoring love. The planet is neither a dead stage upon which human actors play nor is it a primordial resource cache that awaits proper human development and distribution.⁶²³ Earth teems with life, and that

⁶²⁰ “When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” Luke 4:16-21, NRSV.

⁶²¹ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 112.

⁶²² Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 253.

⁶²³ Boff critiques both capitalism and materialist socialism for promoting the latter half of this sentence from different directions. “Both these models of society have broken with the Earth. They have reduced it to a supply of raw materials and natural resources.

includes the human incarnations of life. When it admits that planetary wellbeing demands the liberation of other-than-human kin as the subjects they are, sacramental ecotheology can offer no deterministic vision of the future.⁶²⁴ Instead, it must be willing to risk vulnerability, willing to embrace the adventure of emerging together with kindred we can never fully master or control, and willing to learn from and with them in love. “The diversity found in nonhuman creation and the many varieties of reciprocal relationships teach us how much we all are meant to depend upon each other in loving relationship,” Woodley writes.⁶²⁵ This dependence requires embracing other-than-human creatures as relatives who act of their own accord in response to our common world home, and it also requires embracing new language for how restoration with them can happen.⁶²⁶

Unexpectedness

Accepting our kinship with other-than-human creation may feel like an alien stance to many humans who have been predominantly influenced by Western European

Persons have been reified as human resources or human capital, constituting the great reserve army at the disposition of the owners of the means of production (state or capital.) The Earth and the cosmic community are no longer heard in their myriad voices and tongues. The code for deciphering their symbolic and sacramental message has been lost,” Boff writes. Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 68.

⁶²⁴ I think it is interesting that Jesus’s post-healing offer of liberation is conveyed in the aorist tense, suggesting that the author of Luke-Acts doesn’t know what the man did next. In my evaluation of the author or the story, this ignorance of next moments is not a lack. Rather, process theology’s insistence that the future is full of possibilities but not actualities seems to be affirmed in a stance that is foreign to modernist authorial omniscience.

⁶²⁵ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 85.

⁶²⁶ Jørstad, “The Life of the World,” 336.

anthropologies of exceptionalism and self-reliance because these models depend upon negative notions of freedom that proselytize diminishment of others as the cost of the self's wellbeing.⁶²⁷ That is, I am only free to the degree that I am able to deny the imposition of any Other upon my life.⁶²⁸ Sacramental ecotheology expands a basic metaphysical statement that freedom means that the future is not already determined. It argues that planetary wellbeing can only happen through acts of positive freedom. Planetary wellbeing emerges through creatures being free to pursue and enact cosmic Love in their own lives and for their own contexts. This means that planetary wellbeing might very well happen through unexpected events and events that subvert or outright reverse conventional visions for the world and its relationships. This is a value in part because, as Jørstad notes, strangeness can open "space for new questions, approaches, and methods" in learning how to enact planetary wellbeing more fully than before.⁶²⁹ The unfamiliar can encourage becoming familiar.

Following the second silence of those who watched Jesus heal and liberate the man who had dropsy, the author of Luke-Acts writes that Jesus "noticed how the guests chose the places of honor" at the Pharisee's sabbath meal.⁶³⁰ The uniquely Lukan parable that follows Jesus's observation draws on literary motifs in "popular literature in general

⁶²⁷ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 253.

⁶²⁸ Jørstad, "The Life of the World," 336; Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*; S. Yael Dennis, *Edible Entanglements: On a Political Theology of Food* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019).

⁶²⁹ Jørstad, "The Life of the World," 336.

⁶³⁰ Luke 14:7, NRSV.

and symposium traditions in particular” to consider how social ranking will be assigned in the Reign of God.⁶³¹ Smith highlights literary similarities between this event and the symposia discussed in Plutarch’s *The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* and *Table Talk*.⁶³² All the examples open with observations of the actual choosing of positions. For all three, Smith notes, this observation sets the scene for the philosophical discourse of the banquet.⁶³³ Speaking seemingly to the whole dinner party, Jesus follows his observation with a parable of how one ought to pick their seat at a banquet when they arrive.⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 255-256.

⁶³² Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 255.

⁶³³ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 50-58, 255.

⁶³⁴ Luke 14:8-11, NRSV. Similarly to the discussion about the custom of positions at the table as reflective of social rank in Plutarch’s *Table Talk*, the parable “arises out of an issue presented by the situation of the meal itself.” Critically important for Smith’s project is recognizing that “this discussion about the meal setting [in Plutarch] presupposes that positions at table always carry a connotation of relative ranking.” The discourse in *Table Talk* does not seek to abolish relative rank but deals with it as a means for community governance. This interpretation can be expanded with an appeal to the relational and liberative metaphysics that undergird a process sacramental ecotheology. The presupposition of relative rank is, more broadly, a presupposition that we are all connected in societies and that meals are the imagination of the societies who eat them. That is to say: meals demonstrate who societies imagine themselves to have been, to be, and to become; meals demonstrate who a society tells the world it has been, who a society tells itself it has been, who a society deems worthy of food, who a society deems appropriate to become food, who a society wants to become, who a society might become given particular circumstances, what virtues structure the relationships in a society at a given moment, and what virtues a society must enact if they are to become who they want to become. Because of this, meal events – including meal memories, meal hopes, and relationships at the meal – must be sites for ethical consideration and action. Sallie McFague notes this in her consideration of The Great Banquet, writing, “The body is the locus: how we treat needy bodies gives the clue to how a society is organized. It suggests that correct ‘table manners’ are a sign of a just society, the Kingdom of God.” The fourth chapter of this dissertation deals with this in more depth, but it is worth noting here that the dynamic conditions of food and food security in the current climate crises that wreck

Jesus's parable directly engages the customary assumption that a person's position at the table is an indicator of where they rank in the social relations of the community. The author of Luke-Acts assumes that the custom is well-known enough to need no explanation in the literary presentation of the parable. The value of unexpectedness for planetary wellbeing is, to this point, rather unclear because the parable seems to follow the familiar strokes of the symposium genre and in portraying the symposium event.

As in Plutarch and other symposium literature, "the issue of ranking is resolved by reference to an ethical principle," Smith writes.⁶³⁵ Though he cautions against drawing any direct connections between Plutarch's particular work and Luke's setting of the parable, Smith does make clear that the commonality of the custom would likely have influenced how early communities of reception of Luke-Acts would have heard the parable.⁶³⁶ They are expecting Jesus's instruction for how to best order people at the table and in society.

Rather than reclining at the place of honor, Jesus counsels that the guest should arrive and choose their position "at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher' ...for all who exalt themselves will be

and will continue to wreck our common home demand reevaluation of the contributions of globalized food systems, particularly of transnational corporate agriculture, to the commodification of all life such that ecotheology may become more about lamenting shattered relationships than encouraging vibrancy in relationships very soon. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 55-58; McFague, *Life Abundant*, 174.

⁶³⁵ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 255.

⁶³⁶ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 256.

humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”⁶³⁷ The virtue for determining table positioning is humility. This is an unexpected shift in the literary form. In *Table Talk*, social rank at the table is engaged in four ways: defended as proper for maintaining good order (by Plutarch’s father, Autobulus), countered in favor of friendship and equality (by Plutarch’s brother, Timon), contextualized out of respect for attendees and the banquet’s purpose (by Plutarch), and countered in favor of pleasure (by Plutarch’s brother, Lamprias).⁶³⁸ These approaches, Smith argues, represented common ethical categories that were considered in debates over table etiquette in symposia, but humility was not one of them.⁶³⁹ Following Jørstad’s hermeneutic of strangeness, this Lukan parable is fertile soil for new questions for planetary wellbeing because the peculiar break from customary virtues for social ranking – friendship, order, or pleasure – highlights what the virtue of humility *does* in the banquet setting. Humility in this setting subverts social hierarchies that have obscured people’s experiences of the divinely intended shalom.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁷ Luke 14:10-11, NRSV.

⁶³⁸ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 55-58.

⁶³⁹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 255.

⁶⁴⁰ Though I am talking about the importance of the unexpectedness of humility for planetary wellbeing, I think humility itself is an important virtue for planetary wellbeing. I hesitate to lift it as a theme of planetary wellbeing from this parable, however, as *humility* has often been distorted in service of white, colonizing, misogynist, racist, ableist, heterosexist, and classist ends. Christian humility within the web of relations does not look anything like the humiliation of persons. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 156-162.

The parable's conclusion is unexpected given the customs of symposia in literature and society alike, and its unfamiliarity draws the hearer's attention to the larger christological witness that the author of Luke-Acts is emphasizing. The unfamiliar here reveals important themes of and for life together. In pursuing and participating in planetary wellbeing, sacramental ecotheology must, likewise, be so attentive to the revelations of unexpected events. Embracing unfamiliarity in sacramental ecotheology "goes beyond ideas of sustainability and responsible use," humbling people and communities for whom these stances allow continued suppression of loving reciprocity between humans and our other-than-human kin.⁶⁴¹ The unexpected experiences that happen in kinship reveal that planetary wellbeing "requires that we pay attention to the needs and desires of non-animal nature, to its griefs and its delights."⁶⁴² Pittenger emphasizes that God wants humans to pay such loving attention to our other-than-human relatives.⁶⁴³ God, Pittenger writes, calls humanity as a people to "open itself to be both a reflection of, and instrumental for, the divine purpose of...true justice and liberation," throughout the planet.⁶⁴⁴

In order to realize God's aims for true justice and liberation, we are invited to be "a fellow-worker with that cosmic Lover, [in response] to the call and lure which makes

⁶⁴¹ Jørstad, "The Life of the World," 337.

⁶⁴² Jørstad, "The Life of the World," 337.

⁶⁴³ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 116.

⁶⁴⁴ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 116.

us discontented with our own ease and comfort,” Pittenger continues.⁶⁴⁵ When we become fellow-workers with God, we begin to witness the dominations and domestications “that cast some people in a superior position and others in an inferior one,”⁶⁴⁶ and we begin to experience “God as intimately related with and profoundly participant in the creation.”⁶⁴⁷ Sacramental ecotheology encourages us to hone loving attention toward the whole world – including God and the self as we participate in our interconnected world – so that unexpected apocalypses for planetary wellbeing do not frighten us into conventional hierarchies and comfortable dualisms of “insiders and outsiders, haves and have-nots.”⁶⁴⁸ Embracing alternatives to these hierarchies and dualisms is a needed change for planetary wellbeing, a revolution for the life of the world.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁵ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 114-115.

⁶⁴⁶ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 172.

⁶⁴⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 51.

⁶⁴⁸ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 172-173.

⁶⁴⁹ Boff offers a helpful understanding of successful revolution when he writes, “A revolution is successful only when it is the response to an urgent need for changes; unless those changes are made, problems will continue, crises will deepen, and people will lose hope and meaning in their lives. Revolution represents what ought to be – and what ought to be has a power of its own. It disregards authorities who either confirm it or refuse it; it pays little attention to conservatives or novelty seekers. Changes, as small as they might be, go on, tearing up old foundations and laying down new ones, provided they respond to real and still unresolved problems.” Thankfully, as Pittenger has pointed out (and others like Walker, Coleman, and Ogden have developed in their own ways) “A process perspective is not only a helpful interpretation of the state of affairs; it is also, and even more importantly, a position which makes the effort for change both desirable and imperative.” Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 188; Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 117.

And Jesus offers a vision of this revolution immediately following the parable. He turns to the host and says,

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.⁶⁵⁰

Embracing the unexpected for justice as planetary wellbeing entails embracing the relationships that can happen when the kin who cannot repay the situation in customarily expected ways are invited to the table and included in the life of the society. These relationships reveal that the central question of planning a symposium – “Who is invited to share the food?” – carries tremendous responsibility, for it is really asking “‘Who lives and who dies’ because of how our table fellowship happens?”⁶⁵¹ In learning to embrace the unexpected, sacramental ecotheology becomes familiar with the unfamiliar and what they reveal about life together; that no single one of us will never be able to fully grasp or control our kin’s life with God, that the struggle for liberation must include planetary wellbeing, and that planetary wellbeing is an integral characteristic of the Reign of God. In so doing, “we can *expect* that there will be novelty,” and we can expect that “all our efforts to secure justice, all our labor for liberation, and all that these efforts and that labor may achieve, are *surely safe in God*.”⁶⁵²

⁶⁵⁰ Luke 14:12-14, NRSV.

⁶⁵¹ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 174.

⁶⁵² Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 115, 118.

Good News to the Poor

A third aspect of planetary wellbeing that this pericope discloses is that planetary wellbeing is good news to the poor. Jesus, after inviting the host to imagine a meal that un-expects repayment, received feedback from one of the dinner guests. “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” the man proclaimed.⁶⁵³ Geoffrey Wainwright reads this exclamation as “a valuable indication in the gospels that the feast in the coming kingdom formed part of the contemporary hope.”⁶⁵⁴ Yet Wainwright’s identification of hope here may be naïve if it is left to stand on its own. Even worse, this hope may be what Cone calls “a Platonic grasp for another reality because one cannot live meaningfully amid the suffering of this world.”⁶⁵⁵ The guest’s exclamation is clearly about the messianic banquet.⁶⁵⁶ Hope for the messianic banquet, however, cannot be the gospel that Jesus Christ incarnates if it means “that God is totally uninvolved in the suffering of [humanity and the world] because [God] is preparing them for another world.”⁶⁵⁷ This dissertation’s sacramental ecotheology agrees with Cone. Hope for the messianic banquet cannot divorce God from the suffering of the world, nor can it leave the world behind in some tormenting doom. Sacramental ecotheology also expands Cone,

⁶⁵³ Luke 14:15, NRSV.

⁶⁵⁴ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 24.

⁶⁵⁵ James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 123.

⁶⁵⁶ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 261.

⁶⁵⁷ Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, 123.

insisting that hope cannot detach the one who hopes from their past, present, or yet-to-come relatives, nor can it be hope for the fullest experience of divine love if it is hope for a static finality.⁶⁵⁸

For sacramental ecotheology, the dinner guest's exclamation is not necessarily significant because it identifies a contemporary hope but because it frames Jesus's parables as events of revelation during the evening's meal.⁶⁵⁹ As revelatory, Jesus's parables are to matter for subsequent events because of the clues they provide "to the totality of experience" and the "new occasions for future creative advance" that they make possible.⁶⁶⁰ Indeed, Smith interprets both the parable of dinner invitations and the parable of the great banquet with this revelatory significance because he focuses on how

⁶⁵⁸ Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, "Everybody lives downstream." With this phrase, she deftly grasps experiences of the woven-togetherness of emergent life throughout the cosmos and the consequentiality of hope that's more than any individual escape from present circumstances. Temporally, she considers how her life today matters for successive generations and how it has been impacted by previous generations. Spatially, she is aware of her relations and the significant impact that her living has on their lives as they share their bioregion. She gives an example of a tadpole who was caught in the algae that she was working to remove from a pond. "I told myself that my intention was not to hurt them; I was just trying to improve the habitat and they were the collateral damage. But my good intentions meant nothing to tadpoles if they struggled and died in a compost pile. I sighed, but I knew what I had to do. I was driven to this chore by a mothering urge, to make a swimmable pond. In the process, I could hardly sacrifice another mother's children, who, after all, already have a pond to swim in." Our entangled lives demand this robust hope – verdant, consequential today, and conspiratorial; that is, a hope that promotes life, does not defer its dream, and recognizes that we have all been invited to share in Spirit – quite literally to con-spire – who dances throughout the cosmos. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 97; Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 145; Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 181; Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 46-49.

⁶⁵⁹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 261.

⁶⁶⁰ Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love*, 101.

communities of reception might very well have situated Luke-Acts within their imbricating cultural milieus.⁶⁶¹

The parable of the great banquet, like the parable of dinner invitations before it, responds to a particular event in the evening's meal. In the parable, Jesus likens the Reign of God to a banquet with invitations sent to many guests, yet these guests each decline the invitation for one reason or another.⁶⁶² Responding to these decisions to not participate in the feast, the head of the household instructs his slave to entreat others, naming persons with disabilities and whoever else might be in the roadway, to come fill his house.⁶⁶³ "The shocking implication," Sallie McFague writes, "is that everyone – *anyone* – is invited" to this feast.⁶⁶⁴ The parable ends with the foreclosure of the original invitations, and the author of Luke-Acts leaves open the results of the slave's appeals to those persons in the streets.⁶⁶⁵

On Smith's read, "the parable serves to emphasize not only the joys of those who will share the messianic banquet but also the theme of judgment" as an example of the divine reversal of conventional expectations.⁶⁶⁶ McFague develops the significance of the divine reversal in the parable when she writes, "The Kingdom of God, according to this

⁶⁶¹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 270-271.

⁶⁶² Luke 14:16-20, NRSV.

⁶⁶³ Luke 14:21-23, NRSV.

⁶⁶⁴ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 173.

⁶⁶⁵ Luke 14:24, NRSV.

⁶⁶⁶ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 261.

portrait of Jesus, ...demolishes all our carefully constructed boundaries between the worthy and the unworthy and does so at the most physical, bodily level.”⁶⁶⁷ The divine reversal comes with eating, an event defined by dependence upon, vulnerability to, and interrelatedness with others. That Jesus instructs the host in the parable of dinner invitations to include persons with disabilities in their next luncheon should not be a surprise for anyone who has paid attention to the author of Luke-Acts. The parable of the great banquet elaborates upon these instructions in a surprising way for the dominant understandings of banquets in Jesus’s world by explicitly connecting these parables with Jesus’s liberating ministry as it has been “characterized as one to the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed” in Luke-Acts.⁶⁶⁸

In the symposium literary genre, well known in the world of Luke-Acts and easily associated with this banquet at the Pharisee’s home, the distinction between the poor and the rich was commonplace.⁶⁶⁹ But in broader Greco-Roman symposia both literary and social, Smith writes, “the emphasis is not on the distinction between the diners and the outside world but rather on the distinctions among the diners themselves.”⁶⁷⁰ By framing the parables within the recognizable theme of the messianic banquet, the author of Luke-

⁶⁶⁷ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 173-174.

⁶⁶⁸ Smith lists several texts to defend this claim, one of which has been noted above and another that will be considered next: Luke 4:18-19; 6:20-26; 7:22; 14:15-24; “and so forth.” Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 269.

⁶⁶⁹ Smith writes, ““The terms refer to a literary motif whereby the banquet is again seen as a symbol of luxury and wealth, and as promoting a distinction between ‘rich’ and ‘poor’...” Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 269.

⁶⁷⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 269.

Acts subverts the scope of distinctions in the symposium. “That is, a central theme of Luke’s theology is that salvation has come to the ‘poor,’ a term that he uses as a symbol for social outcasts in general,” Smith argues.⁶⁷¹

This central theme leads the author of Luke-Acts to expand the traditional motifs well beyond their literary scope and social practice. The good news of the parable “is not one of simple evangelism, of basic acknowledgement of the existence of outcasts,” Smith writes, “nor is it a message that one is only to feed and clothe the needy (although this idea is included in the overall theme in Luke).”⁶⁷² The event matters for the message. At the banquet of the Reign of God, “all are invited, with no authoritarian brokering, to share in the food.”⁶⁷³ Jesus’s expectation of table fellowship is good news for the poor, “for it is fellowship of the most intimate kind that is envisioned here,” fellowship that cannot experience relatives at the table and then rightly ignore them or the conditions of their life after the meal has ended.⁶⁷⁴ This parable offers a vision of planetary wellbeing in God’s Reign that is good news for the poor in two, comingled ways: meeting bodily need and transforming social patterns of oppression in the struggle for liberation.

⁶⁷¹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 269.

⁶⁷² Smith’s observation here is consistent with Theodore Walker, Jr.’s, insistence – derived itself from Luke 4:16-21 – that a fully adequate postmodern theology must explicate the gospel that addresses specific populations. “Without specific liberating references to the actual poor and oppressed,” Walker, Jr., writes, “merely universal good news is not good enough to equal the good news proclaimed by Jesus – good news to all, especially to the poor and oppressed.” Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 271; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 69-71.

⁶⁷³ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 174.

⁶⁷⁴ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 271.

McFague argues that the parable proclaims that “the Kingdom is known by radical equality at the level of bodily needs.”⁶⁷⁵ For planetary wellbeing, radical equality at the level of bodily needs must be the aim of every event that happens in the practice and honing of loving attention to our kin. This equality is not currently the case throughout the world. Human communities who revel in capital possession and control have failed to live so that their kindred’s needs are met, and they often live in such ways that their garbage pollutes, restricts, and poisons their kindred’s chances at wellbeing.⁶⁷⁶ Failing to meet others’ needs and destroying their chances for life are the sins of omission and commission in the interlocking struggle for planetary wellbeing. Salvation from this present viciousness can only come when each of us become fellow-workers with God to meet our kin’s bodily needs for food, clean water, shelter, safety, clean air and soil, and belonging. Karen Baker-Fletcher notes that this last need is particularly important because planetary wellbeing cuts against the individualizing and atomizing of life that defines modernity’s destructions.⁶⁷⁷ The personal can never mean atomized, uninfluenced, or uninfluencing for the world in which the person lives, yet today’s sufferings of the poor are often caused by the burdens of ecological devastation that isolate people from their communities and land in the name of capital profit.

⁶⁷⁵ Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant*, 166.

⁶⁷⁶ Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000); Dennis Love, *My City was Gone: One American Town’s Toxic Secret, Its Angry Band of Locals, and a \$700 Million Day in Court* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007); Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 310-340.

⁶⁷⁷ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 131.

The parable's focus on inclusion and exclusion in the social ranking of a banquet demonstrates how good news for the poor can challenge the dominant relational expectations of a society and challenge theological attempts to justify the suffering of the excluded as unavoidable. In the struggle for justice, love responds to the needs of a local community to be restored to right relationships within itself and in its world. Today, the poor, the communities that have been historically marginalized from dominant patterns of life or coerced into them, are more likely to have garbage dumps, petrochemical plants, phosphoric runoff containment, and other effluences of industrialization foisted upon them than the rich. Such locally unwanted land uses systematically threaten these communities' quality of life by degrading water sources, decreasing the availability of locally grown fresh foods because of soil contamination, and increasing exposure to life-threatening chemical compounds and pathogens. The parable invites us to pursue justice by promoting life and scorning "every form of masochism and any assent to suffering for its own sake."⁶⁷⁸ Pursuing justice in this way "demands that we look at the structural institutions and systemic forms separating the haves and the have-nots in our time, those invited to the table and those excluded," McFague writes.⁶⁷⁹

Practicing ecological solidarity that attends to these structural separations is a critically important component of justice as planetary wellbeing, for the systemic patterns of violence against our kindred and our shared home must be dismantled. The necessary

⁶⁷⁸ M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 92-101.

⁶⁷⁹ McFague, *Life Abundant*, 175.

deconstruction of oppression, however, cannot be the end goal for planetary wellbeing. The parable emphasizes that transforming social patterns of oppression in the struggle for liberation happens through the constructive work to restore relationships among people within a society. Restoration in the parable is not a simple return to a previous better state of relationships but creative movements for love in new circumstances.

Karen Baker-Fletcher's analysis of bell hooks's connection of Black migration away from the rural South with a larger disconnection from the land is, I think, a helpful example of the constructive practice of justice that is accentuated in the parable. Baker-Fletcher recognizes the value of hooks's argument to promote a rediscovery of kinship with the land yet writes that she is also concerned to "not romanticize the agricultural, rural South" in the late twentieth century because of its history of environmental abuses in predominantly Black, rural, and poor communities.⁶⁸⁰ In Baker-Fletcher's example, returning to the agricultural South as part of restoring healthy kinship relationships with land must be carefully considered because of the new oppressive circumstances that have emerged since the Great Migration and the connected ruptures that hooks identifies.⁶⁸¹ Baker-Fletcher insists that the insidious patterns of environmental racism that impact contemporary communities' relationships with land mean that "we have to ask, 'which agricultural South is hooks talking about, given realities of racial and economic discrimination?'"⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 52.

⁶⁸¹ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 52.

⁶⁸² Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 52.

Restoring healthy kinship relations in the discussion that Baker-Fletcher identifies and in our own bioregions must happen through constructive acts of justice that make God's love present to the world's needs today. We belong to one another and to God who is lovingly bound up with the world. Justice as planetary wellbeing emerges as good news to the poor because solidarity in God reveals the divine Lover who is the fellow sufferer, working with every moment to enact wellbeing in and for our world.

TABLE TALK

Social symposia did not end with the main course of food. Though topics for conversation and entertainment were decided upon and initial terms may have been set during the meal, the discussion and teaching that came to characterize these events happened alongside after-dinner drinking.⁶⁸³ Topics of “proved quality” for these philosophical table talks included the meal itself, the proper purpose of meals, and the etiquette of gathering the community for a meal.⁶⁸⁴ This dissertation agrees with Plutarch's assessment that these are quality topics for table talk and adjusts them for our moment today. In the following chapters, our kinship in the life of the planet will be explored particularly as we come together at meals; meals of families, meals of industrialism, meals of community, and meals of God.

⁶⁸³ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 257.

⁶⁸⁴ Plutarch, as quoted in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 257.

CHAPTER IV - OUR DAILY BREAD: MEALS AND SOCIAL IMAGINATIONS FOR PLANETARY WELLBEING

Evelyn Whitehead once remarked, “Cookery is one of those tasks which are insupportable unless done for people one loves. But for that, I myself would be willing to live on bread and cheese and would vastly prefer to.” Alfred North Whitehead responded to her insight, noting that “people are unlikely to get good food, no matter how many cooks they have, or how much they pay for them, unless the cooks love the people for whom they cook...Cooking is one of those arts which most requires to be done by persons of religious nature.” Evelyn Whitehead added to her husband’s comment, saying, “And a good cook cooks to the glory of God.”⁶⁸⁵

WHAT ARE MEALS?

The sacramental ecotheology that shapes this dissertation suggests that meals provide insight into social structures and assumptions about human relationships with our other-than-human kindred in our interconnected cosmos and in the Plantationocene. Drawing on William Cavanaugh’s development of Cornelius Castoriadis, I recognize that “the imagination of a society is the condition of possibility for the organization and signification of bodies in a society.”⁶⁸⁶ This chapter argues that meals are the imagination

⁶⁸⁵ Alfred North Whitehead and Lucien Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: New American Library, 1956), 250.

⁶⁸⁶ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, *Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 57.

of the societies who eat them.⁶⁸⁷ Meals are complex and embodied interactions that reveal and enact webs of relationships that characterize a society as well as the various communities of human and other-than-human people that have emerged and can emerge within a society.⁶⁸⁸

Meals reveal and enact constellations of real influences for the emerging world. Through meals, “what is real and what is not” are distinguished to the point that the real becomes part of the eater’s own life as physical, spiritual, and social nourishment.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁷ The phrase “the imagination of the societies who eat them” draws on William Cavanaugh’s own development of Cornelius Castoriadis’s use of *social imaginary*. Writing of Castoriadis, Cavanaugh notes that the social imagination is “not a mere representation of something which is real, as a flag represents a putatively ‘real’ nation-state; the imagination of a society is involved when the flag becomes what one will kill and die for. In other words, the social imagination is not a mere image of something more real; it is not some ideological ‘superstructure’ which reflects the material base.” Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 57.

⁶⁸⁸ I intentionally use “meal” instead of “food” for two reasons in this dissertation. First, meals are more than the food that is eaten during them. While it is certainly the case that food is an important part of a meal, this chapter seeks to recognize that food alone does not influence how a society emerges to the extent that meals do. Meals demonstrate “no substantive distinction between material and cultural production” by weaving food with broader relationships and ways of encountering those relationships within the world. In a meal, other-than-human creatures who become food are not reduced to only the food that they become. When this happens, human societies can be challenged to consider how we relate to our other-than-human relatives as the organisms they are, including how they become our food. Second, the emphasis on meals seeks to resist modern patterns of separation between foods and between food and eaters that mark western commodity relationships with food. As will be discussed later in this chapter, nutritionism is an extreme example of this separatism that reflects broader movements within modern commodification of other-than-human creatures as food. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 57.

⁶⁸⁹ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 57; Bernard Lee, *The Becoming of the Church: A Process Theology of the Structures of Christian Experience* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 177-185.

Clues to the eating society's identity and priorities for the world emerge through the different movements of a meal. By reckoning with the influences that are revealed and enacted in meals, societies can become more attentive to how they have ordered and continue to value bodies in particular ways of living in the world. As they cultivate attention in this way, societies can also become aware of possibilities for living in different ways than dominant paradigms of their present moment.

The constructive work of the fifth chapter focuses on a particular meal – the Eucharist. The fifth chapter depends on this chapter's ability to adequately describe relationships between meals and the societies who eat them and the consequences of these relationships for a world that is faithfully lured into becoming the Reign of God. Following this introductory section, this chapter will be divided into three sections. Norman Pittenger's process ecclesiological discussion of Christian faith, hope, and love as memory of the past, aim for possible futures, and the quality of holy relationships in the present frames this chapter's presentation and interpretation of meals as the imaginations of the societies that eat them. This frame is appropriate because meals, as social imaginaries, disclose interweaving influences in a society's process of creative advance, including "a memory of how the society got where it is, a sense of who it is, and hopes and projects for the future."⁶⁹⁰ Using the work of historians, chefs, ecological scientists, anthropologists, cultural educators, and others as case studies, I explore meals over the course of three sections: *Memory*, *Hope*, and *Relationship*.

⁶⁹⁰ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 57.

In the first section, I examine meal memories of the United States of America through a few different meals and foodways, including the American Thanksgiving Meal. I argue that learning a particular food or eating a particular meal remembers whole narratives of who matters through the eating because of the contributions that they have or have not made to the eating society over time. Meals encourage remembering that weaves the spiritual and material into the presently-becoming identity, making events of the past present and influential now.

In the second section, I identify different hopes that emerge through meals: hopes for oneself, hopes for different worlds, and hopes for community. Meal hopes for oneself become based upon the modern dismemberment of social bodies, including ecological bodies. These hopes for oneself are hopes for a different world than this one that happens through interdependent relationality; hopes for a change to the planet's structures for relationships, to the planet's climates. Yet meal hopes also foreground the relationality of the world, becoming hopes for community that prioritize good news for the oppressed and offer possibilities for new life in ways that may have previously seemed unimaginable under present ecological oppression.

In the third section, I argue that human relationships with and through meals are an ultimate concern for process ecclesiology. This turn to relationship critiques patterns of meals that are implicated in the Plantationocene's increasing commodification of living people and ecosystems into their component persons and things. It also recognizes that meals bind humans to specific spacetimes and creatures, ultimately denying the logic of commodification the atomization that is necessary for its total control of societies.

Meals always ground the societies who eat them in the planetary processes of life, identifying our relatives at the table and disclosing opportunities for gratitude and humility in response to the beloved dignity of all our kin.

Introduction

A meal's value for the eater is more than a mechanistic fulfilment of biologically needed nutrients through food.⁶⁹¹ Michael Pollan writes that, "as long as humans have been taking meals together, eating has been as much about culture as it has been about biology."⁶⁹² As an inheritor of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, this dissertation can speak of meals with more precision than Pollan's expansive relationship of meals and culture. Cookery and the meals emerging therefrom are an artform of the religious because they evoke one's own response to the solitariness of the self.⁶⁹³ Meals matter for how creatures relate to one another. Meals make plain our dependency upon

⁶⁹¹ This chapter draws on a variety of sources that develop this interpretation of food's significance for, at the very least, humanity. My experience of this as an eater is reflected in the broad collection of arguments that connect food and culture in the academy and beyond. The soaring popularity of docuseries and investigative documentaries about food, of travel writing and cookbooks, of memoirs that focus on food and family, and of cooking competition entertainment signify a widespread-yet-nuanced awareness of how human societal identities and foodways are intimately tied together. My focus on the connection between food and culture is bolstered by evidence from these popular media. In this section, Padma Lakshmi's docuseries *Taste the Nation with Padma Lakshmi*, Michael Twitty's memoir and history *The Cooking Gene*, Michael Pollan's monographs *In Defense of Food* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, and David Chang's travel series *Ugly Delicious* will join historians, theologians, philosophers, and anthropologists as cases in the defense of my thesis.

⁶⁹² Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 8.

⁶⁹³ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making: Lowell Lectures 1926* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 47.

others for our next moments of life and can awaken an awareness of the many and varied relationships that constitute our world. The rich social complexity of meals is a reason why they were considered appropriate topics for discussion in the literary and social symposia alike. The ingredients of, cooking techniques for, expected behaviors during, and anticipated responses to the meal intricately weave together persons who may be separated by great distances, times, and cultural geographies. And, while the relationships between people in meals may seem to be more evident in a slow food meal like a sandwich made from all local ingredients than in a large frozen pizza with a side of orange soda, these relationships influence how we eat and how we position ourselves in the world for future meals.

How we humans eat matters; eating materializes identities that influence our world. These identities are “not some ideological ‘superstructure’ which reflects the material base.”⁶⁹⁴ Rather, our identities emerge through shared practices of preparation and consumption of meals, through the relationships with other-than-human creatures who contribute or become food for meals, and through interactions with ecosystems that host agricultural, cooking, and dining activities. Furthermore, meals demonstrate ways in which we are connected to the entangling questions of food security, provision, health, and future amid profound shifts in our planet’s climate that have been caused by human actions. Finally, meals can reveal and enact hopes toward specific futures in and beyond

⁶⁹⁴ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 57.

our present relations and actions, futures that may intensify or abandon the relations that fuel climate change in transformative and consequential ways.

MEMORY

Memories reveal whose influences have been significant for a society as it has emerged into its present moment. Culinary historian and educator Michael Twitty writes that memory is “my most indispensable ingredient...I tell stories about people using food, I swap memories with people and create out of that conversation mnemonic feasts with this fallible, subjective mental evidence.”⁶⁹⁵ Whether a specific meal – like the Thanksgiving meal in much of the United States – or the meal cultures that overlap one another in the world, the memories of cooks and eaters thicken the present with the flavors, scents, and touches of lives gone by. Through different cases, this section considers how meals disclose memories of who a society has been and what influences have been valued and remembered in their emergent identity.

The Memory of One Meal

The evolution of the American Thanksgiving meal and its accompanying holiday in the United States demonstrates the mnemonic quality of meals. In this section, I use the American Thanksgiving meal as a case to demonstrate that a meal can convey memories of who a society has been on grand scales. Furthermore, these memories are multivalent and can emphasize different elements of a society’s identity for different societies within a society. Finally, meal memories can evolve over time as the present

⁶⁹⁵ Michael Twitty, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (New York: Amistad, 2017), 11.

circumstances of a society may dictate a need for new, broader, or more factually accurate origin stories.

For the American Thanksgiving meal, a menu of foods that reflected the Anglo-American New England kitchen was generally established custom by the end of the nineteenth century, but the cultural story of the stuffed or dressed turkey with its accompanying sides has remained in flux from its earliest recollections on through to the present.⁶⁹⁶ Moving away from Puritan religious events, memories of hardworking Pilgrims and harvest celebrations in the Thanksgiving meal became increasingly and attractively associated with middle-class socioeconomic values during the early third of the twentieth century.⁶⁹⁷ This dynamism is largely due to the dynamism and diversity of

⁶⁹⁶ Stuffing or dressing the turkey is one of the variants of the meal allowed by custom. Having grown up in the Deep South, I inherited the tradition of a cornbread-dressed turkey while my wife, influenced by her paternal lineage of Bay-Staters, inherited the white bread-stuffed turkey variant. To avoid marital discord, no analysis of the virtues of each variant will be here offered.

⁶⁹⁷ The successful agrarian Pilgrims are developed as a trope during the post-Civil War period. James Baker writes, “The postwar emphasis on family and nostalgia for an agrarian paradise lost fed the American people’s continuing interest in the first colonists, whose culture exemplified those things and their ultimate origin in American history...The Plymouth Forefathers were the ideal candidates for the Revolutionary Founding Fathers’ own ‘founding fathers.’ Also, it did not hurt that New England had a virtual monopoly on interpreting American history at the time, and had little competition in promoting its own forebears as the true founders of the nation.” (98-99) The Plymouth Pilgrims became the Origin, the pure of old because of their hard work to lay white citizens’ sought-after foundations. The hard work of Pilgrims could be honored, advanced even, by the rising industrial middle class if they would but work hard enough. With Estes’s presentation and analysis of the wars wrought by the U.S. against Indigenous nations during this same time period and Goizueta’s critique of frontier mythology, it’s critically important to also recognize how the evolution of this national origin story mirrored the frontier priorities of westward geographic and economic expansion. Commenting on the print *Thanksgiving Day in New England Two Hundred*

the nation whose “origin story” the meal has been tasked to tell. “We are now so accustomed to the ubiquity of Thanksgiving stories, plays, and images in classrooms, not to mention mass-produced holiday decorations, greeting cards, and ‘holiday specials,’ that it is hard to imagine a time when Thanksgiving was observed without any of these props,” James Baker notes.⁶⁹⁸ The turn of the twentieth century marks a significant period in the development of the storytelling task of the Thanksgiving meal, and “it was in the

Years Ago from an 1869 edition of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Baker puts it this way: “Presumably the contemporary frontier wars following the Civil War had made it difficult for Victorian artists and their audience to relate to any historical image of peaceful relations between the colonists and their Indian neighbors. The now-familiar outdoor dinners significantly appeared only after overt violence out west was over.” (11) Yet even these outdoor dinner memories – memories which lived largely on canvas and newsprint – were themselves acts of overt violence against the still-living Indigenous communities who were being forced onto reservation life, the Indigenous children who were stolen away to boarding schools like Carlisle, and Indigenous leaders who were executed by military units and other state forces. The frontier was expanded – as Goizueta says it must be – by the social remembrance of Indigenous communities as relics of the past, agrarian teachers of Pilgrims who were eclipsed by the Pilgrims’ own agricultural and cultural prowess. To eat the Thanksgiving meal during the so-called Progressive Era was to remember the success of the Pilgrims and the antiquity of Indigenous Americans more than it was to remember their lineage and living inheritors. James W. Baker, *Thanksgiving: The Biography of an American Holiday* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2009), 98-99, 11; Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2019), 89-131; Robert Goizueta, ““Beyond the Frontier Myth,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Eldin Villafañe, and Roberto S. Goizueta, 150-158 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

⁶⁹⁸ Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 115.

classroom that Thanksgiving had its greatest impact” on the stories of “American” societal identity in the period.⁶⁹⁹

Decades of social upheaval followed the US Civil War. Migrations of formerly enslaved persons from the American South created and transformed northern cities and communities. The Reconstruction era ignited political engagement among Black Americans who remained in the South, and white supremacist reactions to Reconstruction undergirded campaigns of terror against Black communities there and elsewhere in the nation that persist to this day. Military action against Native Americans, a sustained assertion of national sovereignty in various times and spaces of the continent, increased as a professional military class began to be established in the United States.⁷⁰⁰ Economic mechanisms to accommodate the societal impacts of industrialization and expansion of

⁶⁹⁹ As Roberto S. Goizueta notes, the term *America* has come to be synonymous with the United States of America as a linguistic expression of the frontier myth, ignoring the communities, societies, and nations of the western hemisphere that live on the continents of North and South America. Whether geographic expansion westward, or geographic and economic expansion southward, America must practice civilization. That is, it must extend the frontier, for “to be civilized *is* to extend the frontier, to expand, to seek new opportunities, to dominate, to conquer.” My argument, developing Baker’s, that the Thanksgiving meal is the imagination of “American society” identifies this linguistic expression of the frontier myth to be at work in the meal’s bifurcation of the real American from the not-real American, that is, from the other inhabitants of the land who do not trace a genealogy to British settler colonists in the North Atlantic. Goizueta, “Beyond the Frontier Myth,” 153; Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 115.

⁷⁰⁰ The largest mass execution in United States history was approved by Abraham Lincoln on December 26, 1862. Thirty-eight Dakota men were hanged in an act of retribution following the US-Dakota War. One week later, Lincoln would sign the Emancipation Proclamation. Roughly ten months later, Lincoln would issue his Thanksgiving Proclamation following the Union army’s victory at Gettysburg. Violence against the Indigenous peoples of this continent is part of the Thanksgiving meal beyond the arrival of the Plymouth settler colonists. Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 89-131.

the railroad system contributed to widening gaps in wealth and material goods. Continued national expansion through settlement technologies like allotments and the reservation system coupled with the arrival of new immigrant groups from southern and eastern Europe to dramatically shift demographics through migration, both voluntary and forced.

The chaotic social milieu of the United States in the late-nineteenth century seemed a threat to the white communities that felt particularly long-established in the nation. “Whereas earlier the leaders of society had felt secure in the assumption that all Americans (or all who mattered) shared a common ancestry, body of religious principles, and cultural inheritance, they now realized that this was no longer the case.”⁷⁰¹

Simultaneous efforts to restrict immigration and increase Americanization of new immigrants were social policies that went hand-in-hand and sought to help establish a clear definition of “American society.”⁷⁰² Both a moral and political project, some were to be excluded plainly – the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 may epitomize such efforts – while many more experienced the insidious annihilation of cultural markers in the name of assimilation.

Exclusion-through-assimilation depended upon a fresh offering of a heritage that could incorporate the distinct cultural experiences of communities across the nation as building blocks for a unified cultural experience. In addition to ethnic diversity, this new social adhesive would be needed to unite agrarian societal identities and growing

⁷⁰¹ Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 117.

⁷⁰² Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 118-119.

industrial urbanism. Such a welding, Baker argues, was needed “so that the best of the old was not lost, conflicting interests could be mediated without violence, corruption prevented, and private gain subordinated to social order.”⁷⁰³ The Thanksgiving meal became the event that could reveal and teach who American society had been at its best while also expecting new citizens – both immigrants and the young who were coming of age in a new era – to join in the enactment of the society’s best self. Through public education calendars and curricula, schoolchildren became both audience for and teachers of civic holidays, complete with their attendant feasts.⁷⁰⁴ The memories later associated with the meal, themselves strongly developed by the sensuousness of cooking and eating the food, would also be memories cloaked in childhood. If genealogical connection to the Plymouth Pilgrims could not be an effective cultural memory, the meal itself could become a shared memory for the growing society.

As the twentieth century continued, the consumption of the meal and the origin stories of American society – regardless of the accuracy of the facts surrounding the origins themselves⁷⁰⁵ – began to include other ways to consume. The “real American” who is remembered in the Thanksgiving meal is one who prioritizes familial connections and wholesome foods that situate a regional identity as the preferential national identity. Time to prepare, consume, and rest in the sustaining gifts of the meal is time away from other social processes of industrial and agrarian life alike. “Aimed at the hearts of

⁷⁰³ Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 118.

⁷⁰⁴ Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 115-128.

⁷⁰⁵ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 14.

children and the pocketbooks of their parents, Thanksgiving parades presented a fairy-tale atmosphere that had a minimum of Thanksgiving themes and imagery.”⁷⁰⁶ Watching or attending these parades became part of the ritual that centered a meal even when the parades themselves aimed the focus of the day away from the meal. “They represented a sort of penance offered by a noncommercial holiday to the greater good of the nation’s merchants.”⁷⁰⁷ The Thanksgiving meal began to spark memories of the capital that had been or had failed to be accumulated during the year. Instead of just food consumption, it had begun to usher in a season of capitalist product consumption. Even the creatures who would be encountered in the meal itself became more and more disconnected from family tables as industrial food systems evolved and expanded.

Memories of Many Meals

Cultural origin stories and debates over the legitimacy of such stories are some of the memories that emerge and evolve through meals. Memories of belonging in families and communities, of being excluded from or enslaved by society, and of laboring in planting and harvesting emerge through the cooking and sharing of a meal. African American and Jewish, Michael Twitty recognizes that “the food of both diasporas depends on memory. One memory is the sweep of the people’s journey, and the other is the little bits and pieces of individual lives shaped by ancient paths and patterns.”⁷⁰⁸ These little bits and pieces often recall family members, particular creatures who became

⁷⁰⁶ Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 147.

⁷⁰⁷ Baker, *Thanksgiving*, 147.

⁷⁰⁸ Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 11.

ingredient foods, or bioregions that gave birth to the meals and communities that share them. Andi Murphy, host of the Toasted Sister podcast, says, “A lot of people on my podcast talk about Indigenous food as being connected to our DNA, being spiritually connected to Indigenous food.”⁷⁰⁹ This call to re-cognize, to know again, the spiritual connections between foods and particular peoples can be an act of lament for those whose lives and gifts have been taken from the society.⁷¹⁰ Knowing food spiritually enriches the significance of living places in the embodied participation in meals.⁷¹¹ Meal memories do more than reveal or enact a thin place between the spiritual and the material. They reveal

⁷⁰⁹ Andi Murphy, “The Original Americans,” *Taste the Nation with Padma Lakshmi*. June 18, 2020, documentary series, 3:14, <https://www.hulu.com/watch/a88b7774-fefe-41cf-97db-21ade4c6b0e1>.

⁷¹⁰ Fry bread, a food often associated with Indigenous peoples in the Southwest and Great Plains, “has a short 100-year history” that is a painful history because its very recipe demonstrates the eradication of the food memories of Indigenous peoples through the reservation systems that forced wheat flour, lard, sugar, and salt on the kitchens of the detained. Murphy, “The Original Americans,” 3:16.

⁷¹¹ “You will hear many stories, myths, and rumors about Southerners eating dirt.” And, according to Michael Twitty, “there’s some truth in it.” Eating dirt as a vitamin-like iron supplement has been and is a practice of many impoverished communities across the world. Twitty notes this. But eating dirt is more than addressing a mineral deficiency in the operating system of the human machine. “He dug into the soil of an exposed hillside looking for a perfect, unblemished nugget of Prince Edward County red clay. I had no idea my father, who I felt was mostly sane, was about to feed me dirt,” Twitty writes. Twitty sets the experience of his first – and last – meal of red clay within his family connections to Prince Edward County and his visit to the heart of Virginia tobacco country. “I was not just of Virginia – Virginia was in me,” he puts it. The living landscape of his paternal ancestry became part of his personal society with the material digestion of clay, intensifying the ways in which he already felt connected with the people and places whose stories he had learned and was learning. Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 44-45.

and enact the interpenetration of the spiritual and material within the other, the entanglement of the whole cosmos in events past and emerging.

Though some hallucinogenic foods may very well plunge the eater into an otherworldly mystical experience, the entanglement of spiritual and material in meals is most often experienced as firmly tied to particular spacetimes and bioregions. Just as “there is no chef without a homeland,” there are no meals without homelands and the various relatives through which a society has emerged and happened *as home*.⁷¹² Evelyn Whitehead’s quip that she would prefer to live on bread and cheese if it were for the people who she loves evidences how materially significant love is in the meal. The priority to remember, reveal, and enact love through the meal is not a flighty or saccharine sentimentality. Italian chef Massimo Bottura articulates the weaving of the spiritual and material as a remembrance rooted in emotions and physicality. “I couldn’t be the one I am if my grandmother didn’t transfer this kind of emotional experience [of learning recipes and food by cooking together] when I was a kid,” he told David Chang.⁷¹³ Learning and remembering a particular food, for Bottura, happens in the interlacing of that food with the recipe that suggests it, the creative physicality of preparing it, and the feelings that accompany the interpersonal exchanges surrounding it. Learning and remembering a particular food evokes a whole narrative of who matters

⁷¹² Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*, 6.

⁷¹³ Massimo Bottura, “Stuffed,” *Ugly Delicious*, directed by Morgan Neville, produced by David Chang, February 23, 2018, Documentary episode, 37:00, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80191120?trackId=200257859>.

through the eating because of the contributions that they have or have not made along the way.

Narratives of who matter through memories also reveal complex interweaving of societies in the world. Multiple societies influence the same person's growth and identity simultaneously. Ultimately, meal memories must account for this complexity as they contribute to more consequential intrapersonal meaning-making. Another way to say this is "the imperial story just doesn't cut it" as a social imaginary in which the revealing and enacting of love is prioritized because the imperial story too heavily privileges the coercive imposition of social order over creative participation so that its expansionist goals can be realized.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁴ Remembering the diversity of societies in the philosophy of organism makes space for this observation. The actual entity alone is the basic occasion of reality. Social order emerges among the actual entities that participate in and creatively influence common elements of form in their own particular emergences. A society is a nexus of actual entities that either illustrate or share in a social order. Actual entities within a society depend upon one another for the character of their own becoming in a mutuality of feeling. Societies, then, can be as intimate as two actual entities or as massive as multi-organism bio- and geophysical systems. There is a tremendous resonance between the philosophy of organism's notion of *society* and the notions of *society* offered in various Indigenous points of view, including Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe uses of the term as noted by Watts. Furthermore, though Cavanaugh argues in *Theopolitical Imagination* that the imperial story promulgated in modern statecraft actually fails to happen as a social process, the philosophy of organism can account for the state as a social process no matter how monstrous or demonic of a process it is. In so doing, the philosophy of organism can provide a sound foundation for an ecclesiology of organism that argues for the church as social process that is able to reveal and enact the Reign of God in the world as an alternative to the imperial futures of the present world. Interestingly, Cavanaugh seems to step back from his position of a strict non-analogy between state and church in a later essay, entitled "The Church in the Streets: Eucharist and Politics." His clarifications come through his engagement with Schmemmann alongside de Lubac. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 34-35, 89-92; Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 227, 260-261; Vanessa Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency Amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First

Fritz Usinger's depiction of his family business captures the meaning-making potential of these intimate memories. "We were caretakers of our great grandfather's dream," Usinger remarks.⁷¹⁵ Usinger's has been a sausage-making mainstay of Milwaukee's German community for generations, and the way Usinger describes their identity as a company highlights the role that food-production and meals have played in focusing their world through their family. Twitty invokes his West African relatives and ancestors, saying, "If you sit at my table and eat with me, you'll know who I am."⁷¹⁶ In saying this, he bears witness to and invites glimpses into his own emergence through intimate memories with food. Maya Harjo expands memory beyond human creatures as she explains the significance of the Cultural Conservancy's Native seed library in the Bay Area. "A lot of folks like me, we're away from our ancestral lands, and so our Native seed library, I think, does the really important work of reconnecting our community members who are in diaspora with their seeds, who are equally in diaspora. There's that

Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!)," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 23.
<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/19145>; Farris Blount and Tim Hahn, conversation with the author, January 28, 2021; William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 44; William Cavanaugh, "The Church in the Streets: Eucharist and Politics," *Modern Theology*, 30, no. 2 (2014), 388-389.

⁷¹⁵ Fritz Usinger, "The All-American Weiner," *Taste the Nation*, 11:00, <https://www.hulu.com/watch/14dc9ea1-a4f1-4f20-a2f9-8da327b2ad51>.

⁷¹⁶ Michael Twitty, "The Gullah Way," *Taste the Nation*, 5:29, <https://www.hulu.com/watch/a54a7ee5-418a-435f-8840-a683b7b43a51>.

reconnection of ancestral memory between them,” she says.⁷¹⁷ Remembering weaves the spiritual and material into the presently-becoming identity, making events of the past present and influential now.⁷¹⁸ How a society remembers itself influences who that society is becoming.

The Consequences of Memories

These different insights indicate that there are material consequences to memories; most especially memories of meals and the memories retold through meals. Western colonizing cultures, many driven by particular Christian theologies of humanity and creation, have been less willing to recognize – or have been willingly ignorant of – the material consequences than Indigenous peoples in different places across the planet. On the other hand, colonization has been quick to sever the material ties between peoples and places, based on a belief that people “can actually remake themselves in whatever place and time in which they find themselves.”⁷¹⁹ Colonizing attempts to sever the material of memories from the ideas of memories implicitly admit the power of memory to recall the consequential relationships that locate people in particular places and times over generations of life together. This is an expression of what Randy Woodley calls “the

⁷¹⁷ Maya Harjo, “Cultivating Native Foodways with the Cultural Conservancy,” *Tending Nature*, directed by Corbett Jones and Anna Rau, aired November 29, 2020, 15:19, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-nature/episodes/cultivating-native-foodways-with-the-cultural-conservancy>.

⁷¹⁸ Bernard Lee, “The Lord’s Supper,” in *Religious Experience and Process Theology*, ed. Henry James Cargas and Bernard Lee (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 286.

⁷¹⁹ Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 135.

dualistic American myth of *pseudo-place*.⁷²⁰ Instead of identifying within the bioregional webs of relationships endemic to this continent, settler colonialism legitimates land-theft by inscribing memories of a place that never existed. Aiming always ahead, the imagination of the nation could simultaneously claim land as its own and destructively assimilate societies that are characterized through land-based and place-oriented relationships by discounting their memories as relics of a pre-scientific world, as superstitious, or as not industrious enough to prepare for the future without the incursion of the free nation and its dominant culture.⁷²¹

⁷²⁰ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 135.

⁷²¹ Eliminating Indigenous memories and the material consequences of those memories is a critical step in eliminating Indigenous communities in settler colonialism. Nick Estes writes that “settler colonialism – the specific form of colonialism whereby an imperial power seizes Native territory, eliminates the original people by force, and resettles the land with a foreign, invading population...The process is never complete, and the colonial state’s methods for gaining access to new territories change over time, evolving from a program of outright extermination to one of making Indigenous peoples ‘racial minorities’ and ‘domestic dependent nations’ within their own lands, and of sacrificing Indigenous lands for resource extraction...Indigenous elimination, in all its orientations, is *the* organizing principle of settler society.” Estes argues that a difference in relationship to the past and a difference in the importance of memory for the present are critical to the ongoing process of elimination. For settler narratives, the past is important as a springboard into the future. It remains dead and gone as society marches forward, ever. Further compounded by an understanding of divine providence guaranteeing its future “from sea to shining sea,” settler claims to land create “in a sense a real place, but the place is amorphous,” Randy Woodley writes. The Indigenous inhabitants of that place are then understood to stain the divinely secured destiny of the future-oriented society for myriad reasons, including but not limited to, as Estes phrases it, their own notions of “the present to be structured entirely by our past and by our ancestors.” Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 89, 14; Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 133.

The systematic extermination of the buffalo nations by the United States Army following the postbellum 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie is an example of the material consequences of meal memories during emerging industrial food systems in this country.⁷²² The military actions against the Oceti Sakowin⁷²³ and the buffalo coincide with an early and rapid industrialization of agriculture in the United States. The development of industrial agriculture fundamentally altered the relationships between human and other-than-human creatures in the meal cultures of the United States by prioritizing capital accumulation and expansion of the food system for financial gain. In the genocide waged against the buffalo and the Indigenous nations who were and are their relatives, the United States worked to clear the way for the further expansion of this industrial vision across the continent. Attacking how the Oceti Sakowin and buffalo

⁷²² Prior to, during, and following the U.S. Civil War, urban centers like Chicago became central market hubs for railroad-based agriculture across the westwardly expanding nation. As I will discuss more thoroughly in this chapter's section on meal hopes, a central assumption of the industrializing food system was and remains the commodification of other creatures.

⁷²³ "The Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota nations never called themselves 'Sioux' – that term derives from an abbreviation of 'Nadouessioux,' a French adoption of the Ojibwe word for 'little snakes,' denoting the Ojibwe's enemies to its west. Instead, they simply called themselves the 'Oyate,' the 'Nation,' or the 'People,' and sometimes the 'Oyate Luta' (the Red Nation); as a political confederacy, they called themselves the 'Oceti Sakowin Oyate' (the Nation of the Seven Council Fires). Their geographical span was vast. The oldest Dakota-speaking nations were located mostly in the western Great Lakes forests, glacial lakes, and rivers... The Nakota-speaking nations are the caretakers of the middle territory that began on the eastern banks of the Missouri River... And the youngest and largest, the Lakota-speaking nations, covered the vast expanse of the Northern Plains west of the Missouri River." Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 69-70.

remembered their life together through food and meals became a critically important step in U.S. military policy and governance.

The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie was sued for by the United States government following two years of successful “hit-and-run battles” waged by an alliance of Indigenous nations in response to the Sand Creek massacre and the incursion of the Bozeman Trail through historic buffalo hunting grounds.⁷²⁴ It established a “permanent reservation” with set-apart hunting grounds for the Oceti Sakowin roughly equivalent to the size of the present-day state of Nevada.⁷²⁵ For the United States, management of Indigenous memory of life with buffalo became a significant piece of treaty enforcement. “Article 11 of the treaty...stipulated that the Lakotas surrendered ‘all right to occupy permanently the territory outside their reservation as herein defined,’ but retained the right to hunt in the Powder River country, ‘so long as the buffalo may range thereon in such numbers to justify the chase.’”⁷²⁶ Within the U.S. Army, leaders like William Tecumseh Sherman suspected that such a provision in the treaty would allow for “sustained resistance through buffalo hunting over a vast region [that] would make it impossible to reign in the militant division.”⁷²⁷ Though Sherman and others largely ignored the meal memories and relationships that the Oceti Sakowin had with the land and other-than-human creatures beyond buffalo in such an analysis, they implicitly

⁷²⁴ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 105.

⁷²⁵ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 108.

⁷²⁶ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 108-109.

⁷²⁷ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 109.

recognized the consequences of memories of life together through food and meals for the Oceti Sakowin.

Fifteen years earlier, “Little Bear, a leader of the Hunkpapa [the Lakota-speaking Nation at the Head of the Circle], waged a bitter campaign against the white traders on the Upper Missouri” who had been systematically withholding the contractually obligated treaty annuity payments from the United States government to the Oceti Sakowin.⁷²⁸ Key to their resistance efforts was “the return to subsistence buffalo hunting.”⁷²⁹ American Fur Company employee Edwin Thompson Denig’s derogation that such a return was a “wish to return to their primitive mode of life” succinctly expressed the future-oriented imagination of the rapidly industrializing United States.⁷³⁰ Sihasapas and Hunkpapas returning to subsistence buffalo hunting was a simultaneous rejection of the encroachment of capitalist endeavors through their territory and an active and embodied expression of the Oceti Sakowin’s memories of the relationships between human and other-than-human creation.⁷³¹ At the heart of the Oceti Sakowin’s memory is “Pte Ska Win (the White Calf Buffalo Woman), who made the first treaty with the human and nonhuman worlds. To be a good relative is to honor that original instruction,” Estes

⁷²⁸ The payments were obligated in the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie. Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 97.

⁷²⁹ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 97.

⁷³⁰ Edwin Thompson Denig as quoted in Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 97.

⁷³¹ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 98.

writes.⁷³² The buffalo and the Oceti Sakowin memories of life together through food and meals were materially significant for Little Bear and the resistance as the buffalo fed the humans who continued to assert their right to live in their homelands unencumbered by the intrusions of traders, trails of capital, and diseased forts.⁷³³

Article 11 of the 1868 Treaty, when read through General Sherman's interpretation, seems to enable Oceti Sakowin meal culture and protect the life that wove together the buffalo, the land, and the Oceti Sakowin.⁷³⁴ However, "the 'Indian problem' was also a 'buffalo problem,' and both faced similar extermination processes, as much connected in death as they were in life."⁷³⁵ Estes lays bare the material consequences of the memories of the buffalo and the Oceti Sakowin, stating that "the destruction of one required the destruction of the other."⁷³⁶ The targeted decimation of the buffalo was a direct attack on the sovereignty of the Indigenous nations with whom the United States had entered into treaty relations. Millions of buffalo were slaughtered with genocidal disregard in events that forever altered the webs of relationships through which the buffalo, the humans, and the lands had emerged.

The United States government's purposeful severance of the relationships that were remembered in Oceti Sakowin meal cultures forced those nations onto reservations

⁷³² Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 109.

⁷³³ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 98.

⁷³⁴ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 109.

⁷³⁵ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 110.

⁷³⁶ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 110.

as dependents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.⁷³⁷ Further infringing upon Indigenous sovereignty, the Bureau of Indian Affairs enforced “civilization regulations” that aimed to attack the social body of the Indigenous nations, and “a violation [of ‘the civilization regulations’] brought punishment through starvation by withholding rations or imprisonment.”⁷³⁸ Leveraging access to traditional foods and meals were coercive acts that attempted to break Indigenous nations of the priority for communal wellbeing over selfish possession and gain. Such coercive action demonstrated that the United States recognized how significant the way peoples remembered their shared life together through meals was for sustaining an Indigenous communalism that could not abide the rapidly industrializing and capitalist food systems in the United States. How people provided and prepared their meals, what foods they ate, how they ritualized their meals,

⁷³⁷ *Dependent* is, here, a legal term that derives from Chief Justice John Marshall’s opinion in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), where he invented the legal phrase “domestic dependent nation” to distinguish foreign nations from Indigenous nations who “occupy a territory to which we [the United States of America] assert a title independent of their will.” Marshall wrote, “[the Indigenous nations] look to [the U.S.] government for protection; rely upon its kindness and its power; appeal to it for relief to their wants; and address the president as their great father. They and their country are considered by foreign nations, as well as by ourselves, as being so completely under the sovereignty and dominion of the United States, that any attempt to acquire their lands, or to form a political connexion with them, would be considered by all as an invasion of our territory, and an act of hostility.” This case remains one of the bedrock cases – together with *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) – of United States legal relations to Indigenous nations. During the writing of this dissertation, *McGirt v. Oklahoma* (2020) was decided in a landmark decision that recognized the legal sovereignty of Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Cherokee Nation, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Chickasaw Nation, Seminole Nation, and Quapaw Nation have also been recognized in succeeding cases.

⁷³⁸ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 117.

and how they related to food and to the places where they grew or gathered or hunted food all contributed to shaping their ways of life and collective memories. These many factors also shaped how they imagined and created their world.

HOPE

I have said above that food and meals are the imaginations of the societies that eat them. Meal memories reveal who societies have been when they prepared and gathered to eat. These memories have been critically important for influencing the interpersonal relationships through which societies have emerged in particular ways. Whitehead argued that “the past is the reality at the base of each new actuality.”⁷³⁹ That is, the past is that which energizes each new actuality in its own emergence into reality, in its own becoming.⁷⁴⁰ There is an effervescence to the past, a haunting; memory revealing the universe’s own “character of solidarity that is immanent to each entity.”⁷⁴¹ Yet we live *from* the past rather than *in it*, Pittenger writes.⁷⁴² “Each actual thing is only to be understood in terms of its becoming and perishing.”⁷⁴³ Process is the reality of the universe.

⁷³⁹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 356.

⁷⁴⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 356.

⁷⁴¹ Elaine Padilla, “Spooky Love: Dwelling in the Face of Ecosystemic Annihilation.” In *Ecological Solidarities: Mobilizing Faith and Justice for an Entangled World*, ed. Krista E. Hughes, Dhawn B. Martin, and Elaine Padilla, 116-146 (State College: Penn State University Press, 2019), 123.

⁷⁴² Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 78.

⁷⁴³ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 354.

The process of becoming, deciding to bring into actuality these possibilities rather than another set of possibilities happens, as Monica Coleman puts it, in the decision to “become our own thing.”⁷⁴⁴ Because “on all levels of reality, relationships are inevitable,” the ecclesiology of organism developed in this dissertation understands hope to be an act that enmeshes the becoming subject with God.⁷⁴⁵ For Coleman and other process theologians, freedom in becoming and hope towards the future are connected. “Because we are genuinely free, the future is not guaranteed. It is easy to assume that one may continue on as one has done in the past. Yet one can choose not to do so,” she writes.⁷⁴⁶ The work of God is the gift of God’s own “hopes and preferences for the world,” gifts of possibility for beauty, love, and justice in response to how the world has happened that are “not thrust upon the world without its proper preparation and its glad

⁷⁴⁴ Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 74.

⁷⁴⁵ Hope enmeshes the becoming subject with God because the possibilities that the becoming entity identifies for itself relate somehow to the possibilities God offers to the entity. Even in hoping to make possibilities that God does not desire become actual, the subject relates to God through the decision against God. Hopes are not necessarily holy or even positive in the long run, for they have “nothing to do with a future abstracted from the present, with pictures of a heavenly happy ending or just a marketably better tomorrow.” The Christian witness to reality is that “God is always working with what the world has to offer...[offering] us the possibilities that introduce newness into the world.” The divine question in each response to creaturely hopes, Isaiah tells, is “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 74; Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*, *Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 174; Isaiah 43:19, NRSV.

⁷⁴⁶ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 74.

assent.”⁷⁴⁷ Each entity is invited into an adventure of making possibilities actual for itself and the world. That is to say that the present, energized by the past, is related to futures beyond itself.

This metaphysical argument may be clearly made by turning to meals. Eating lays bare the relationships of past and future through present becoming. Even in a purely physiological view, I eat because I desire to restore my body to previously experienced energy levels so that I might exert again in the future. Though such a physiological interpretation is, at best, deficient when considering the importance of meals for human societies, it has come to dominate human relationships with food in the United States and other areas of the world where meals are characterized by what Mbow et al. identify as “over-consumption, large amounts of livestock produce, sugar, and fat.”⁷⁴⁸ The physiological approach to meals rests on the assumption that meals happen for the sole purpose of preserving the capacity for human energy exertion. “At this level, our bodies are understood as having nutritional ‘requirements’ in terms of quantifiable amounts of these nutritional constituents... These abstract categories are supposed to reveal the underlying ‘truth’ of one’s physical wellbeing,” Gyorgy Scrinis argues.⁷⁴⁹ Rather than attend to meals as rich aesthetic events that share gifts from other creatures among family

⁷⁴⁷ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 75; Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 79.

⁷⁴⁸ C. Mbow et al., “Food Security.” In *IPCC Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems*. (August 7, 2019), 480.

⁷⁴⁹ Gyorgy Scrinis, “Sorry, Marge,” *Meanjin* 62, no. 4 (2002), 112.

and community, those characteristics that Mbow et al. and Scrinis identify depend upon occluding the relationality of meals behind various patterns of preparing, packaging, and branding. Patrick T. McCormick writes of the cultural dominance of the physiological view that, “once we become real Americans, our food disappears.”⁷⁵⁰ Suzanne Hamlin further asks, “Are we *ashamed* of eating?”⁷⁵¹

The rise of physiological approaches to food relations over the twentieth century fostered what Scrinis terms “the ideology of nutritionism.”⁷⁵² Rather than critiquing particular advice regarding a person or people’s diet, Scrinis argues that “any such specific dietary advice is really secondary...to the main message promoted by the nutrition industry: namely, that we should understand and engage with food and our bodies in terms of their nutritional and chemical constituents and requirements.”⁷⁵³ Scrinis focuses much of his analysis and critique on the way the ideology of nutritionism works to assert itself as “all we need to understand” as human persons navigate their individual relationships with food and meals.⁷⁵⁴ I think his insights can be taken a critical

⁷⁵⁰ Patrick T. McCormick, “How Could We Break the Lord’s Bread in a Foreign Land? The Eucharist in ‘Diet America’,” *Horizons* 25, no.1 (1998), 43-44.

⁷⁵¹ Suzanne Hamlin, “Le Grand Excès Spices Love Poems to Food,” as quoted in McCormick, “How Could We Break the Lord’s Bread in a Foreign Land? The Eucharist in ‘Diet America’,” 44.

⁷⁵² Scrinis, “Sorry, Marge,” 113.

⁷⁵³ Scrinis, “Sorry, Marge,” 113.

⁷⁵⁴ Scrinis, “Sorry, Marge,” 113.

step further, though, and highlight how hopes for certain possible futures influence meals and societies where nutritionism and other commodifying approaches to food reign.

Hoping for Oneself

Prioritizing the “nutritional and chemical constituents and requirements” particular to each body as the guiding principle for human relationships with food has material consequences for the present because of how it participates in a broader vision of the future.⁷⁵⁵ Nutritionism has emerged through industrial modernity’s hopes that mechanistic efficiency for cost benefit can adequately order, value, and operate the world. Succinctly, the meal hopes that organize and signify bodies to conform to priorities for mechanistic efficiency in this way are hopes for one’s own self.⁷⁵⁶ They are, first and foremost, hopes that *I* should persist in this moment so that *I* might seize upon the next moment. These hopes depend upon a vision of an isolated human person that came to prominence during the early modern period, where the stress on individualism, conquest, and commodification shifted cultural perspectives on food, as on all aspects of life.⁷⁵⁷ William Cavanaugh’s identification of the rise and significance of the formally

⁷⁵⁵ Scrinis, “Sorry, Marge,” 113.

⁷⁵⁶ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 57.

⁷⁵⁷ The connection between individualism and conquest in modernity must not be missed. Filipe Maia develops Anthony Giddens’s argument when he writes that, “much as European explorers envisioned new lands to the west and set out to colonize them, Giddens believed that modern capitalism glimpsed a future and set out to colonize it. The beginning of the modern period is embedded in a new form of imagining the future, one that deeply impacted capitalism.” Theodore Walker, Jr.’s critique of constructive, neoclassical postmodernism further supports the important connection between individualism and conquest in the modern period and adds an analysis of

discreet human person for the modern state is important for understanding how the meal hopes for oneself are connected to patterns of increasing individualization and

commodification. Individuals not only travelled, conquered, and commodified, individuals were created as such through their own suffering of the subjugation of enslavement, of “becoming a commodity.” His analysis of commodification expands considerations of “the early modern period” out from a conversation primarily about scientific challenges to contemporary cosmologies and mechanics. By centering the commodification of the world, Walker, Jr., and other Black Atlantic scholars can identify broader social movements – like the Transatlantic Slave Trade – that the scientific insights of modernity helped to serve in various capacities. Walker, Jr., writes that, “while acknowledging influences from the sixteenth century and earlier (including the Renaissance), constructive postmodern scholars see the modern paradigm becoming fully actual and increasingly dominant in the seventeenth century. Black Atlantic thought calls for adding a fifteenth-century marker – the August 8, 1444, sale of 235 commodified humans shipped as cargo from Africa by Portugal...For Du Bois and black Atlantic scholars, modernity is also and mainly about the increasing commodification of the world, starting with the emergence of transatlantic slavery in the fifteenth century.” For Walker, Jr., Black theologies that emerged through the influences of Du Bois, Long, and Gilroy have recognized that “prior to the formation of distinctively modern identities and conceptions, they see slave ships on the Atlantic.” The logic of commodification that Walker, Jr., identifies from Black Atlantic thought is the critically important marker of the emergence of modernity as it re-orders humans as individual and self-interested, contractually – and thus contingently – related to only their equals, and exceptional to the point that the rest of the world becomes flattened as a curious diorama for Man’s exploration and grasp. For the present ecological ecclesiology, it is important to notice how the Church participated in and capitalized upon the processes of commodification of the world. The Doctrine of Discovery, as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz notes, is still influential in United States and Canadian law and wraps together Roman Catholicism, European statecraft and colonialism, United States jurisprudence, the enslavement and trade of Africans, and ecological devastation in the name of private agribusiness as particularly Christian contributions to the Plantationocene. It is also important to recognize William Cavanaugh’s critique of the same modernity when the sovereign state turns its gaze upon the Church, creating “‘religion’ as a set of beliefs which is defined as personal conviction and which can exist separately from one’s public loyalty to the state.” Filipe Maia, “Trading Futures: Future-Talk, Finance, and Christian Eschatology.” (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 2017), 51; Theodore Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections: A Black Atlantic Synthesis of Neoclassical Metaphysics and Black Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 3, 7, 14, 15; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 197-217; Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 31.

dismantling of social bodies.⁷⁵⁸ Catherine Keller’s notion of “anthropic exceptionalism” and S. Yael Dennis’s political theology of food further Cavanaugh’s insights, contributing an analysis of these political patterns and their influence on present and predicted destructions wrought in anthropogenic climate change.

William Cavanaugh argues that “the distinction between mine and thine is inscribed into the modern anthropology.”⁷⁵⁹ The individual human person is understood to be naturally isolated from other human persons, formally discreet. “Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke all agree that the state of nature is one of individuality; individuals come together on the basis of a social *contract*, each individual entering society in order to protect person and property.”⁷⁶⁰ The individual’s self-interest may compete with other individuals in the world, and the contract works to protect the individual in the midst of conflict. The assumed existential threat in such competition looms over both the individual and the integrity of any interpersonal interaction into which the person might enter. Cavanaugh contends that, “as in Christian soteriology, [modern anthropology posits that] salvation from the violence of conflicting individuals comes through the enacting of a social body” through social contracts.⁷⁶¹ In modernity, the sovereign

⁷⁵⁸ Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 9-52.

⁷⁵⁹ Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 17.

⁷⁶⁰ Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 17.

⁷⁶¹ The modern state becomes the chief exemplar of this body through attempts to manage the various social contracts at play by monopolizing the just exercise of coercion – capitalizing upon the inherent violence assumed in the modern anthropology – as its expression of sovereignty. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 19.

becomes the person – or institution given a public face by a person – who is able to insure the legitimacy of the contract, preventing violence between naturally self-interested persons and anticipating and mitigating existential threats before they can rend the contracts and the societies that result.

Centering the contract as the interpersonal mechanism of social interaction brings “the future to the center of the political calculus,” for contracts are necessarily future-facing, to be fulfilled at some time in the future as stipulated in the terms of the contract.⁷⁶² Because one joins or exits social groups through the free exercise of their own will and for the purpose of realizing their own self-interest, the individual’s relationship to time changes with the modern anthropology. Others have also developed critiques of modernity’s ways of relating to future time, demonstrating how pervasive and complex the modern anthropology remains in the world.⁷⁶³ Attention to the future

⁷⁶² Maia, “Trading Futures,” 56.

⁷⁶³ Filipe Maia’s critique focuses on financialized capitalism and the neoliberal futures market. Alison Kafer “offers a politics of crip futurity” from a political/relational model of disability. Catherine Keller’s political theology of the earth considers the schemata in which human relationships with the earth are ending, being created, possible, or foreclosed. Nick Estes chronicles Ojibwe history and resistance and reflects “upon the ways our past and present struggles are connected, as they are to *both* past and present international anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements around the world.” In Estes’s work, a critically important characteristic of the social contract theory and its assumptions about time are uncovered: the assumption of equality. The free exercise of the will to join or exit social groups assumes a shared equality and liberty among the members of the social group that extends into the future and is assumed to remain exclusive to the present group. “Declaring a universal human right to liberty while enslaving millions is another distinguishing mark of modernity,” Walker, Jr., argues. Estes’s detailed accounts of forced relocations of hundreds of Indigenous Nations on this continent demonstrates the consequences of social contract theory. Given that the modern state exists to maintain peace among contract-holders, denying the equality of certain

through the calculation of possible risks and rewards that could happen with the actualization of particular possibilities is demanded in present decision-making. By positioning the future at the fore of personal and interpersonal relationships with time, early modern anthropology has readjusted the relationships to the past as well. Filipe Maia argues that the entry of the future into political decision-making in the early modern period was further undergirded by “the theory of progress [which] understood ‘History’ as a totality...a knowledge that does not predict, but that *produces* the future.”⁷⁶⁴ The theory of progress constructed “historical laws that rendered historical progress not as mere accidents, but as *necessary*,” foreclosing possibilities for radical differences to emerge in the future.⁷⁶⁵

Not only might certain futures be deemed impossible – especially those possibilities that might challenge the trajectory of socio-economic dynamics that order the present⁷⁶⁶ – but the theory of progress that Maia critiques also excludes particular

groups of humanity – enslaved Africans, Indigenous Nations on this continent, and immigrants to the nation are prime examples – becomes a politically advantageous act, for social contracts can only bind equals who exercise will as expressions of personal liberty. Denying those same groups the very identity “human” becomes an even more important goal, as the “de-human” now falls into the ranks of the bestial, the props on the stage for human acts, or, the dispensable cogs in a cosmic machine. Maia, “Trading Futures,”; Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 3; Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*; Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 23; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 16.

⁷⁶⁴ Maia, “Trading Futures,” 57-58.

⁷⁶⁵ Maia, “Trading Futures,” 57.

⁷⁶⁶ One of Maia’s most poignant insights is that “this vision of progress construes a future that ultimately reinforces the power of the powerful in the present. Koselleck’s fundamental point is that the Enlightenment vision for the future gathered and ultimately

pasts and memories of those pasts from participation in the modern social body.⁷⁶⁷ “In this context,” Maia writes, “to grasp the progressive movement of history and participate in the anticipation of the future constituted a social group.”⁷⁶⁸ Grounded in a progressive concept of history, modern imaginations of society identified particular possibilities as more or less meaningful and ordered their present affairs through political and economic management of contract-relations to fulfill these possibilities. No matter how monstrous or grotesque they have been and continue to be, the societies that emerged – revealing and enacting particular modern values of nation-state sovereignty, economic and capitalist individualism, white supremacy, and various forms of colonialism – are social processes.⁷⁶⁹

strengthened the rising bourgeoisie and was the ‘political power *par excellence* in whose name the Absolutist State was overthrown.’ In the face of the social crisis, however, bourgeois power embraced dictatorial regimes to secure its own vision of the future. As Koselleck’s metaphor [of the theory of progress constantly drawing ‘loans without collateral’ on the future] unfolded its financial elusiveness, the load drawn on the future contained an implicit collateral – the dictator.” Maia, “Trading Futures,” 59-60.

⁷⁶⁷ Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 89, 14.

⁷⁶⁸ Building from Koselleck, Maia argues that “the bourgeoisie constitutes itself as a class around the expectation of the coming of a future. This particular experience of time was imbricated in the social formation of the modern world and the theory of progress was a contributing factor to the rise of the eighteenth-century elite. By the same token, the theory of progress confirmed that the power of these elites was no mere accident, but historically necessary.” Maia, “Trading Futures,” 59.

⁷⁶⁹ Though Cavanaugh’s descriptor of the social process that happens in what he calls “state soteriology” – “a body of a grotesque sort” – may very well be a satisfactory theological evaluation, it is critically important for any adequate ecclesiology to recognize that even a grotesque ordering and signifying of bodies under the state’s claim to sovereignty is a social process. His argument in *Torture & Eucharist* that “the Eucharist thus realizes a body which is neither purely ‘mystical’ nor simply analogous to the modern state: the true Body of Christ” cannot be interpreted as a hard break between

The modern anthropology that Cavanaugh identifies at work in the early modern political theories of Locke, Rousseau, and Hobbes, and that Maia identifies in modern political economists like Adam Smith envisions a relationship between individuals and the sovereign state through a deeply antagonistic lens.⁷⁷⁰ The fundamental commitment to the mythos of pure individualism has failed to provide firm and fertile grounding for societies committed to the wellbeing of all its members. Social bodies of different kinds come to be experienced as competitors to the authority of the modern sovereign, sparking existential anxiety that can only be treated through manipulation of the social contracts. By hoping for oneself, “the subject, attached by invisible spokes to the hub of the

the church and the state as social processes. Rather, as he later writes in “The Church in the Streets,” “the Church’s liturgy as a particular type of the broader category of ritual helps us to see that what is going on at the level of the state is not of an entirely different order than the Church’s own proper business.” In the present ecclesiology of organism, rejection of the hard break between the church and the state as social processes is critically important. Because the world happens through the relationships of overlapping social processes – like the ways in which ecosystems within the world are dynamic matrices of creatures’ relationships – experiences that happen through particular social processes can be fertile ground for critique of other social processes through which a person also participates in the world. The ecclesiology of organism directly challenges modern notions of community, sovereignty, and economic self-interest by its profession that the God through whose life church happens is the God of all creation, entangled with and entangling each and every moment of reality through a profound receiving, redeeming, and creating love. Furthermore, because of Jesus of Nazareth’s decisive revealing and enacting of divine Love-in-action, the church knows this same God who is the God of all creation to be the God of the oppressed, the one whose love is at work throughout the world to liberate the oppressed, including the other-than-human peoples who have been oppressed by the modern fetish of alienating humans from one another and from all people. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 44; Cavanaugh, “The Church in the Streets,” 388; William Cavanaugh, *Torture & Eucharist*, 206; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*.

⁷⁷⁰ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 22-26.

[sovereign], learns to respond only to the central disciplining apparatus...[which ultimately desires] each citizen playing the simultaneous roles of watcher and watched.”⁷⁷¹ This anxiety gives rise to state disciplines upon its own citizenry as exercises of the sovereign’s claim to omnipotence through “the manifestation of its other – the revolutionary, the subversive – as filth,” Cavanaugh writes.⁷⁷² In the Plantationocene, ecosystems that do not produce food efficiently enough are the subversive social bodies that must be broken and controlled by plantation disciplines.

S. Yael Dennis argues that transnational corporate agribusiness challenges modernity’s notions of sovereignty and state governance through these plantation disciplines. She writes, “the short-term economic priorities of the sovereign decision makers have little to do with our collective, long term welfare.”⁷⁷³ Modern anthropological assumptions about society-making are increasingly appealing to some kind of Schmittian super-sovereign to serve as a manager of economic risk in the highly complex calculus of determining the future under climate change.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷¹ Cavanaugh, *Torture & Eucharist*, 48.

⁷⁷² In his analysis of torture, he argues that “we misunderstand modern torture if we fail to see that enemies of the regime are not so much *punished* as *produced* in the torture chamber. Torture does not uncover and penalize a certain type of discourse, but rather creates a discourse of its own and uses it to realize the state’s claims to power over the bodies of its citizens.” Modernity’s anthropological hope of pure individuation gets created – for the state – through modern torture’s capacity to “fragment and disarticulate all social bodies which would rival [the sovereign’s] power.” Cavanaugh, *Torture & Eucharist*, 22-47.

⁷⁷³ S. Yael Dennis, *Edible Entanglements: On a Political Theology of Food* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019), 180.

⁷⁷⁴ Dennis, *Edible Entanglements*, 171-172.

Hoping for Different Worlds

The focus on oneself that I have described above feeds hopes for a particular schema of the world that is simply incompatible with the long-term health and wellbeing of the planet and all of us who live here.⁷⁷⁵ The meal hopes that I have called “hopes for oneself” emerge from and influence an anthropological assumption that human persons are excepted out of the cosmic web of relations; epitomized in “the sovereign exception [who] takes itself out of the common.”⁷⁷⁶ Attending to the work of climate scientists for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, this section considers how the hopes for oneself influence meals that threaten to lastingly alter the diverse environments in which we live, including degradation through anthropogenic climate change. As the section title suggests, these meals hopes aim for a different world.

Once separated from the common, the exceptional human licenses himself – for it has most often been He who has been exceptional – to then “‘take out’ whatever impedes

⁷⁷⁵ Catherine Keller first alerted me to this nuance in Paul’s writing. Paul identifies that which is passing away in his first letter to the Christians of Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 7:31, he writes, “παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.” Notice that what is passing away is neither the world as *cosmos* – κόσμος – nor the world as household of relations - οἶκος. Rather, the pattern of living that characterizes the age, the schema – σχῆμα – is passing away. This observation is critically important for Keller’s political theology of the earth. “In this time,” she writes, “matter is refusing to remain discretely enclosed in our world schema. It is icily mirroring us to ourselves in our species meltdown. And now would we learn to *mind* our matter? To question the terms of human sovereignty over the animal, the plant, the element – not to mention over fellow humans deemed animalistic, vegetative, or elementary?” Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 71-72.

⁷⁷⁶ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 48

[the] ascent” towards the other world where the “hopes for oneself” are fully actual.⁷⁷⁷

Keller identifies roots of this modern individualism in what she calls “anthropic exceptionalism...the normative separation of the human from the nonhuman, from the animal, from ‘nature.’”⁷⁷⁸ Anthropocentric exceptionalism contributes to social imaginations in which particular human individuals are the exceptions to the fray of nature both as nature’s masters and as idols for other humans who are still caught in nature’s struggles.

Because this world does not happen in ways that are conducive to such human exceptional supremacy, violent attempts to change the world become amplified, repeated, and cast forward in echoes of injustice that strive to foreclose possibilities for love, justice, and beauty. “Capitalist social relations,” Maia argues, “conjure a form of transcendence that reflects unjust social relations and reinforces human oppression.”⁷⁷⁹ Recalling the analytical expansiveness of “The Plantationocene,” the suffering that Maia discusses is, of course, not limited to human societies.

Meals that are influenced by hopes for exceptionality can never fully break the relationship of the human person with the other creatures who become food in the eating and the other humans who prepare and share the meal. Yet the pangs of hunger – and even the threat of scarcity that leads to hunger – can be manipulated in the name of capital to occlude possibilities for empathy among the hungry as well as between eaters

⁷⁷⁷ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 48.

⁷⁷⁸ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 48.

⁷⁷⁹ Maia, “Trading Futures,” 36-37.

and the eaten.⁷⁸⁰ For the process ecclesiology that frames this dissertation, all of those connections between humans and other-than-human creatures who have been life-giving food in the hungry person's past cannot be obliterated, for they remain within the consequent nature of God. These past relationships can, however, be so obscured or hidden by traumatizing acts that the past itself appears fragmentary and chaotic for present becoming and future possibilities for life. Paradoxically, meals that exemplify the Plantationocene are malnourishing, impacting some bodies through deficiency, others in excess, and yet still others by forcing disordered relationships between people and their food.⁷⁸¹ Malnourishment fragments social bodies as memories of life-giving relationships with food disappear, as hopes for restoration of these relationships dissipate, and as present relationships to food are distorted and vilified.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸⁰ Cavanaugh, *Torture & Eucharist*, 37.

⁷⁸¹ Mbow, et al., "Food Security," 442; McCormick, "How Could We Break the Lord's Bread in a Foreign Land? The Eucharist in 'Diet America'."

⁷⁸² "The immediacy of the pain shrinks the world down to the contours of the body itself; the enormity of the agony is the sufferer's only reality. Pain is often called 'blinding' because it eliminates all but itself from the field of vision. The elimination of the victim's world has a temporal dimension as well. Past attachments and future hopes are destroyed by the brute present immediacy of pain...The future becomes the possession of the regime above all through the indefinite nature of the imprisonment. The prisoner's life stops at arrest; if and when it will begin again is entirely within the power and the knowledge of the security apparatus...The torturer eliminates not only the future but the prisoner's past as well...This is more than a simple conversion and renarration of one's past; it is instead the obliteration of that past. Under intense and virtually unlimited torment, past attachments to people and causes become pale, distant shades, and the victim's larger world is exploded into fragments, bits of flotsam in a sea of pain." Cavanaugh, *Torture & Eucharist*, 37.

High-input, industrial agriculture has accompanied the pervasive spread of the Plantationocene meals. During the Green Revolution of the mid-twentieth century, technological innovations in agronomy occasioned unprecedented growth of global food supplies and security.⁷⁸³ Walker, Jr.'s, critique of definitions of modernity that prioritize scientific advance expose a critical inadequacy of the Green Revolution's advances, though.⁷⁸⁴ Behind the public face of industrial development of "economical and nutritious new foods for the poor," how do the capitalist hopes for mass production operate within these new foods and the "meals" that they constitute?⁷⁸⁵ What kind of relationships are hoped for in these meals? Plainly, the Green Revolution's technological advances also advanced the commodifying and individualizing Plantationocene's "so-called age of discovery" deeper into human relationships with food than ever before.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸³ Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. Revised edition. California Studies in Food and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 145-147.

⁷⁸⁴ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 14-21.

⁷⁸⁵ Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 146.

⁷⁸⁶ One of the more significant impacts of high-input industrial agricultural economies is that farmers have now, too, become consumers. Claire Cummings notes that farmers "have to buy their seeds...their chemicals...every aspect of the production cycle. Below that is this sense that we have a mechanistic idea of the universe. We know how life works. It's a machine. We can take it apart [and] do with it what we want. It's about power and control and then eventually profit." Walker, Jr.'s, critique of constructive postmodern analyses of modernity that don't reference early modern slavery is instructive here. "When we analyze modernity without reference to early modern slavery," Walker, Jr., writes, "it appears that modern theory was leading practice...However, when our analysis includes study of early modern slavery, then we see that early modern practice was a major cause of modern dualistic theory...Modern scholars were well connected to the profit-making end of a 'free market' global economy largely driven by profits from transatlantic slave trading and slave holding" because they benefitted from and

The title of this section may seem counterintuitive in a dissertation that understands meals as important factors for socioecological justice. Yet, it communicates conclusions from scientific studies that have occurred in recent years and contribute to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) monitoring, reporting, and advocacy for a healthier planet. Meals are changing the world because overconsumption in the Plantationocene aims for a planet that can accommodate the consequences of high-input transnational corporate agribusiness. And "the overall impact of climate change on food security is considerably more complex and potentially greater than projected impacts on agricultural productivity alone," Porter et al. write.⁷⁸⁷ As climates and environments do change, those changes impact meals in complex ways.

contributed to "a worldview that could reconcile their...commitment to enslaving others with their...commitment to liberty for themselves." The mechanistic cosmology that grounds high-input industrial agriculture cannot be understood, resisted, or dismantled without the critical analysis that Walker, Jr., offers here. This is why I find "The Plantationocene" to be a useful moniker for analyzing the dynamic constellation of events that make up our present planetary moment. High-input industrial agriculture dominates the transnational capitalist food market. In order to further market competitiveness and advance profit margins, transnational agribusiness corporations depend on the dualist philosophical arguments and positions that justified the commodification and enslavement of humans as cargo and property throughout the Early Modern period in order to justify the commodification of human laborers in food systems alongside the commodification of our other-than-human relatives who are becoming food. Claire Cummings, "Cultivating Native Foodways with the Cultural Conservancy," 9:18-9:45; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 19-21.

⁷⁸⁷ J.R. Porter, et al., "Food Security and Food Production Systems," in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. C.B. Field, et al., 485-533 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 502.

Decades of hoping for worlds that can accommodate the meals of the Plantationocene, advancing modern anthropic exceptionalism through our tastes and stomachs, has prioritized single-trait selection for productivity in the animals and plants who become or produce food, dangerously curtailing genetic diversity in our creaturely relatives.⁷⁸⁸ Studies of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, a particularly important marker for measuring the impacts of food systems on climate change, indicate that “agriculture activities within the farm gate and associated land-use dynamics are responsible for...some 20% of total anthropogenic emissions,” while “food systems emissions beyond the farm gate, such as those upstream from manufacturing of fertilisers [sic], or downstream such as food processing, transport and retail, and food consumption, generally add to emissions from agriculture and land use.”⁷⁸⁹ Later, Mbow et al. note that

⁷⁸⁸ Studies are beginning to show that such selection tends “to result in animals with lower heat tolerance. Recent work adds to previous understanding and indicates that heat stress in dairy cows can be responsible for the increase in mortality and economic losses; it affects a wide range of parameters in broilers [chickens]; it impairs embryonic development and reproductive efficiency in pigs; and affects ovarian follicle development and ovulation in horses. Water stress also limits livestock systems. Climate change will affect the water resources available for livestock via impacts on runoff and groundwater. Populated river basins may experience changes in river discharge, and large human and livestock populations may experience water stress such that proactive or reactive management interventions will almost certainly be required.” J.R. Porter, et al., “Food Security and Food Production Systems,” 502; Maya Harjo, “Cultivating Native Foodways with the Cultural Conservancy,” 11:41-12:30.

⁷⁸⁹ While it is certain that such additions from beyond the farmgate occur, quantifiable data are “uncertain due to lack of sufficient studies,” C. Mbow, et al. argue. In 2006, Michael Pollan referred to ecologist David Pimental’s conclusion that “growing, chilling, washing, packaging, and transporting [a] box of organic salad [from the farms in California where 80% of the U.S. organic lettuce crop was, at the time, grown] to a plate on the East Coast takes more than 4,600 calories of fossil fuel energy, or 57 calories of fossil fuel energy for every calorie of food.” The size of the United States actually

“the proportion of upstream/downstream emissions fall significantly for less-intensive and more-localised [sic] production systems” even though these methods and systems are seen as competition to recent efforts at agricultural and food system globalization.⁷⁹⁰

Studies that focus on supply-side food system contributions to climate change – particularly agricultural processes – are not the only significant body of literature studying the environmental impacts of meals. Mbow et al. summarize a recent study that argued “that higher consumption of animal-based foods was associated with higher estimated environmental impacts, whereas increased consumption of plant-based food was associated with estimated lower environmental impact.”⁷⁹¹ This study from Godfray et al. contributes to the report’s later conclusion that “avoiding food waste during consumption, reducing over-consumption, and changing dietary preferences can contribute significantly to...reducing the environmental footprint of the food system.”⁷⁹²

I cannot overstate the methodological importance of this conclusion for the present

demonstrates both Mbow et al.’s uncertainty and Pimental’s findings. Mbow et al. write, “A study conducted by Wakeland et al. (2012) in the USA found that the transportation-related carbon footprint varies from a few percent to more than half of the total carbon footprint associated with food production, distribution and storage.” C. Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 476, 479; Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 167.

⁷⁹⁰ Dennis highlights the political and economic forces of anthropic exceptionalism at work in this juxtaposition, writing that “the industrial agricultural system churns toward even greater unification around high input agricultural methods, mowing down peasant farmers daring to stand in its way...[failing] to account, however, for the fact that climate change poses threats on another register entirely.” Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 479; Dennis, *Edible Entanglements*, 167.

⁷⁹¹ Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 479.

⁷⁹² Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 487.

dissertation. Developing a process theology of the Eucharist that aims to contribute to the liberation struggle for ecological justice and planetary wellbeing, this dissertation principally approaches the dynamic conditions of food and meals in anthropogenic climate change from the consumption of the Eucharist meal as food. If climate change is, partly, contingent upon contributions from diets, then the processes that pattern meals into diets can be important influences for adapting societies to climate change in ways that include mitigation efforts and promote planetary healing and wellbeing.⁷⁹³

Many of the insights from Mbow et al. reflect developments in scientific study and knowledge of the environmental impacts of agricultural and food systems following the publication of Porter et al.'s contributions to *Climate Change 2014*.⁷⁹⁴ Another section of the report builds on earlier IPCC reports and argues that “there are many routes by which climate change can impact food security and thus human health.”⁷⁹⁵ These many routes contribute to “an ecological instability so profound that no amount of

⁷⁹³ Referred to by Mbow et al. as “demand-side mitigation,” these possibilities will be discussed in the fifth chapter, as I argue that Christian adaptive responses to dynamic conditions of food in anthropogenic climate change can be principally influenced by the Eucharist event as it reveals and enacts the relatedness of the cosmos in God’s transformative love. Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 487-507.

⁷⁹⁴ That document stated, “In general, little work in food production or food security research has focused on determining whether climate trends affecting agriculture can be attributed to anthropogenic influence on the climate system. However, as the field of climate detection and attribution proceeds to finer spatial and temporal scales, and as agricultural modeling studies expand to broader scales, there should be many opportunities to link climate and crop studies in the next few years.” Porter, et al., “Food Security and Production Systems,” 492.

⁷⁹⁵ Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 450.

sovereignty seems likely to restore order or ensure security.”⁷⁹⁶ Climate and ecological changes will impact the amount of food through yield fluctuation, water variability and quality, and biotic factors like pollinators, pathogens, and pests; through changes to atmospheric chemistry, increasing carbon dioxide and other gasses that impact biomass and nutritional quality of plant-based food; through emergent disaster events that impact transportation and storage of food and potable water in the ever-globalizing western food system.⁷⁹⁷ “Other variables that affect agricultural production, processing, and/or transport are solar radiation, wind, humidity, and (in coastal areas) salinisation [sic] and storm surge.”⁷⁹⁸

Since *Climate Change 2014*, “there have been further studies that document impacts of climate change on crop production and related variables.”⁷⁹⁹ One particularly comprehensive study (Iizumi et al. [2018]) “suggests that climate change has modulated recent yields on the global scale and led to production losses, and that adaptations to date have not been sufficient to offset the negative impacts of climate change, particularly at lower latitudes.”⁸⁰⁰

Three other studies have shown that dryland settlements are concerningly “vulnerable to climate change with regard to food security, particularly in developing

⁷⁹⁶ Dennis, *Edible Entanglements*, 178.

⁷⁹⁷ Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 450.

⁷⁹⁸ Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 450.

⁷⁹⁹ Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 451.

⁸⁰⁰ Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 451-452.

countries; such areas are known to have low capacities to cope effectively with decreasing crop yields..., constitute over 40% of the earth's land area, and are home to 2.5 billion people" as of 2011.⁸⁰¹ These studies and others lead Mbow et al. to argue that "climate change is already affecting food security...in both large-scale and smallholder farming systems, [where] declines in crop productivity [are] related to rising temperatures and changes in precipitation."⁸⁰² Meals and the societies who eat them are already being impacted by anthropogenic climate change, and "any increases in climate extremes will exacerbate the vulnerability of all food-insecure people, including smallholders."⁸⁰³

The individualistic hopes of western generations past are presently foreclosing lives of countless people across the planet. While "we are told that high-input agricultural methods are necessary in order to produce adequate food for a growing population," so great a cloud of witnesses to already devastating climatic extremes, environmental degradation, and food insecurity testify that adaptation and reduced consumption are necessary in order for life to thrive on Earth.⁸⁰⁴ Further demonstrating the economic disparity of hoping for oneself and one's own in the Plantationocene, Porter et al. write, "some evidence also suggests that poorer households are more likely to reduce

⁸⁰¹ Mbow, et al., "Food Security," 452.

⁸⁰² These studies have documented these changes on all continents except for Antarctica. Mbow, et al., "Food Security," 453.

⁸⁰³ Porter, et al., "Food Security and Production Systems," 503.

⁸⁰⁴ Dennis, *Edible Entanglements*, 167.

consumption, while wealthier households liquidate assets to cover current deficits.”⁸⁰⁵

Members of these wealthier households will not be able to adapt well nor to lead adaptation efforts adequately as long as they understand their liquid assets as buffers that can except them from the consequences of changing climates.

Though they do not use the analysis of Keller and Dennis, Porter et al. emphasize that the needed adaptations cannot work if they are grounded in philosophical commitments to sovereign exceptionalism. “The local nature of many adaptation decisions, their interactions with other highly contextual driving factors, and the time and climate change-sensitive nature of adaptation decisions mean that *global, time-independent curves are not feasible*,” they write.⁸⁰⁶ People who seek to promote life through participation in adaptive measures to climate change must attend to local, contextually appropriate knowing and action in solidarity with their neighbors.

Yet Maia and Walker, Jr.’s, insights cannot be so quickly forgotten in this turn to IPCC reports and various data. Porter et al. reveal a commitment to some form of the modern theory of progress as they also refer to the integration of “local contextual information into adaptation decision making” as a “devolution of the decision-making process.”⁸⁰⁷ For Porter et al., adaptive responses seem to be properly pursued when they are one-way conduits from an authoritative decision-making body to local communities.

⁸⁰⁵ Porter, et al., “Food Security and Production Systems,” 503.

⁸⁰⁶ Porter, et al., “Food Security and Food Production Systems,” 518, 520. (*emphasis mine*); Maia, “Trading Futures,” 58ff.

⁸⁰⁷ Porter, et al., “Food Security and Food Production Systems,” 518, 520. (*emphasis mine*); Maia, “Trading Futures,” 58ff.

Such an interpretation of “adaptive response” reinscribes the modern theory of progress because it confirms the historical necessity of the power of the decision-making elite.⁸⁰⁸ In this analysis, the goal of adaptive response to climate change becomes the maintenance of bourgeois economic and political activity rather than the thriving of all life.⁸⁰⁹ Walker, Jr.’s, argues that the power of the modern elites is not, however, a historical necessity, for it was contingent upon the enslavement of Africans and the ruthless and insidious advance of a logic of commodification towards all life in a globalizing fashion. Walker, Jr., does not ignore empirical science as an important marker of modernity, nor does he deny the contributing role of scientific processes of learning to the growth of human knowledge of our world. He does, however, contextualize its emergence within broader processes of human relationships to one another and our world, prioritizing the experiences of the enslaved as indicators of, to use Gilroy’s phrase, “the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole.”⁸¹⁰

The meal hopes that I have described in this section envision a utopia, a not-place, in which the present structures of relationship uphold capital power through anthropic exceptionalism as a historical necessity. Expansion of and access to scientific insights

⁸⁰⁸ Maia, “Trading Futures,” 59.

⁸⁰⁹ Maia, “Trading Futures,” 59.

⁸¹⁰ Gilroy, as quoted by Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 20.

and agro-technological advances cannot reform these hopes for oneself.⁸¹¹ Planetary health and wellbeing needs alternative meal hopes.

Hoping for Community

Hoping for community happens in many ways. Two kinds of hopes for community will be introduced here as they are hopes that are embraced in the Eucharist meal: communities of creative resistance and communities of creative dreaming. These are not mutually exclusive hopes, for communities of resistance and dreaming often intermingle with one another. The distinction between the two, in fact, may only be in how their hopes are responding to their present worlds with visions for an otherwise world of love and justice. Hoping for communities of creative resistance and dreaming can reveal God's gifts of possibilities that prioritize good news for the oppressed by offering opportunities for new ways of living in spacetimes that may have previously seemed unimaginable and struggling for liberation from the oppressive ecological state of affairs in the present.

Christian participation in The Lord's Prayer expresses such hopes. There is a stated-but-of-ignored communal engagement with food in the prayer that has become central to Christian worship services. *Our daily bread* is not the mathematical aggregate of persons with their individual loaves but the collective reception of the single loaf. In the prayer's petition, the bread for which the church prays is singular and to the

⁸¹¹ "Some studies have shown that access to climate information *is not* the principal limitation to improving decision making and it can actually result in perverse outcomes, increasing inequities and widening gender gaps." Porter, et al., "Food Security and Food Production Systems," 518

communal reception: “τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν...”⁸¹² Were the prayer hoping for the Plantationocene’s supermarket, one Christian would gather at the bakery counter of God and participate in a liturgy of word and deed alongside other Christians. Receiving the purchased commodity of bread, it would be their turn to retreat from the scene, their cellophane-wrapped loaf in basket or bag, to be consumed or thrown away at some point in the future. Yet the prayer counters this future with an express interest in a coming communal wellbeing through the shared meal.⁸¹³ The multivalence of ἐπιούσιος opens the petitioner to prayer for bread for the day ahead as well as that eschatological day-to-come.⁸¹⁴ In this central prayer of Christian societies, the petition for communally shared meal names a future and clarifies those possibilities for living in the present that can reveal and enact the divine gift that is the Reign of God.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹² Luke 11:3 (The Online Greek Bible).

⁸¹³ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 2nd edition (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 30-34.

⁸¹⁴ Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 32.

⁸¹⁵ The occurrence of the prayer during the Eucharist liturgy in some Christian traditions should not be missed. Furthermore, the setting of the prayer in Matthew’s gospel expands the praying community’s focus beyond their immediate human bread-sharers. In Matthew 6, the possibilities that the prayer identifies for a shared life that can reveal and enact the Reign of God cannot be excepted out from the ecological good news that appears a dozen or so verses later. The same God who provides our bread feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field, too (Matthew 6:26, 28). As Rebecca Copeland has recently argued, “What one values and what one cares for reveals information about the individual doing the valuing and caring, even if it cannot explain the essence of that individual...Based on these [scriptural] claims – that God loves, cares for, and considers good all that God creates – an understanding of created *ousia* reveals something about *what God values*.” Rebecca Copeland, *Created Being: Expanding Creedal Christology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020), 56.

Meals of the Plantationocene are the imaginations of societies of isolation that practice a commodifying “discovery” of the Other that mistakenly centers the self as the prime arbiter of “real” and “authentic” food.⁸¹⁶ When meals are shared in families, neighborhoods, or communities like church or school, a society can emerge that foregrounds the people who bring themselves to the meal as vital and vibrant kindred. When aiming toward community in this way, meals also present opportunities for members of a society to experience and express gratitude for how each member of the society – including the members who become the meal – depend each upon another in their shared life together.

Communities of Creative Resistance

Theodore Walker, Jr.’s account of a metaphysics of struggle is influential for this first consideration of meal hopes for community. Walker, Jr.’s “black Atlantic account of strictly and broadly metaphysical aspects of struggle...especially struggle for freedom” provides an exacting account of possibilities for resistance to oppression.⁸¹⁷ He argues that Vincent Harding’s emphatic refrain “‘Struggle was inevitable’...is not merely describing actual past struggles” but is describing “struggle for freedom [as] an inevitable

⁸¹⁶ Emily J. H. Contois, “Welcome to Flavortown: Guy Fieri’s Populist American Food Culture,” *American Studies*, 57 no. 3 (2018): 143-160.

⁸¹⁷ Furthermore, Walker, Jr., suggests that any theology that seeks to overcome the oppressive state of affairs that characterizes modernity and its logic of commodification must explicate both the metaphysical truths that correct “many modern philosophical, theological, and ethical errors” and the concerns for “contingent social relations, including especially divine and human relations to oppression, liberation struggles, and mothership connections.” Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 45.

human response to oppression.”⁸¹⁸ This is important for understanding initial urges for resistance to oppression from persons and societies. Walker, Jr., recognizes a broad anthropological argument at the heart of Harding’s refrain. The history of the black liberation struggle demonstrates that humans are naturally creative and that we participate in transcendent hopes that beckon our creativity to materialize varied possibilities for life.⁸¹⁹ Walker, Jr., weaves the arguments of Kwame Turé, Karen Baker-Fletcher, J. Deotis Roberts, James Cone, and Howard Thurman to confirm this observation in *Black Atlantic thought and theology beyond Harding*.⁸²⁰

The history of the black liberation struggle also demonstrates that, “because of changing circumstances, the precise ‘definition of struggle for freedom’ is ‘fluid.’”⁸²¹ Because the circumstances of oppression are fluid, they cannot be understood as strictly necessary. Oppression is contingent and other worlds in which oppression is overcome and/or nonexistent are a possibility. Hoping for communities of resistance, then, are hopes that are directly responding to personal and communal experiences of the

⁸¹⁸ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 46.

⁸¹⁹ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 47.

⁸²⁰ Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 47-48.

⁸²¹ “Fluid” is an important descriptor for Walker, Jr., in his synthesis of neoclassical and Black theologies. He asserts that “Harding’s use of the river [as a metaphor to describe the history of black struggle for freedom] resembles the Whiteheadian-Hartshornean emphasis upon process and creativity...[as] a history of a flowing transformative and creative process.” Vincent Harding, quoted by Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 46-47.

“seriously oppressive compression of human creativity.”⁸²² Thickened by Rasheed Hislop’s description of food justice – “the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality’s root causes both within and beyond the food chain”⁸²³ – hoping for communities of resistance is an inevitable event that emerges in response to past and present oppressions as people become aware that the possibilities for an otherwise are alive.

In her landmark work *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*, Monica M. White “illustrates how black agricultural cooperatives engaged in community development efforts as a strategy of resistance...in response to extreme conditions of financial, social, and political oppression.”⁸²⁴ White’s critique of Scott and Kerkvliet’s theory of “everyday strategies of resistance”⁸²⁵ as missing “activities that are not disruptive but rather constructive, in the sense that the aggrieved actively build alternatives to existing political and economic relationships” in response to

⁸²² Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 47.

⁸²³ Rasheed Hislop as quoted by Alkon, “Food Justice and the Challenge to Neoliberalism,” 29.

⁸²⁴ Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 5.

⁸²⁵ These “refer to forms of resistance that are often overlooked or overshadowed by a focus on organized social movements. Everyday resistance typically is less confrontational, incurs less repression, and is usually enacted by individuals or small groups. It refers to ‘what people do...that reveals disgust, anger, or opposition to what they regard as unjust or unfair actions by others more wealthy or powerful than they...[and] the expressions of people who perceive injustice but for various reasons are unable or unwilling to push improvements in an organized, direct manner.’” White, *Freedom Farmers*, 6.

experiences of oppression and injustice is critically important for her analysis.⁸²⁶ The theoretical framework that she develops “builds upon and amplifies” Scott and Kerkvliet’s work as it principally asks: “Is it possible to conceptualize these ways of building self-sufficiency and self-reliance as resistance in their own right?”⁸²⁷ She calls her framework *Collective Agency and Community Resilience*.⁸²⁸ Though her insightful approach deserves its own thorough engagement, this dissertation is principally concerned with how human relationships with food in these cooperatives revealed and enacted hopes for what I have called communities of creative resistance. White argues that Black agricultural cooperatives practiced resistance to oppression through three primary strategies: “commons as praxis, prefigurative politics, and economic autonomy.”⁸²⁹ This section will turn to her analysis of Freedom Farm Cooperative to

⁸²⁶ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 6.

⁸²⁷ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 6.

⁸²⁸ “Collective agency involves social actors’ ability to create and enact behavioral options necessary to affect their political future. As such, it is an intrinsic part of social activism...I propose *collective agency* as a way to expand theories of agency to include a collective dimension. A community does not have a consciousness in the same way an individual does, but when a group of people comes together and believes in their mutual success, this creates a separate type of consciousness that drives collective agency. The concept of collective agency provides grounding for this book’s investigation of those who share a collective identity and who join together in efforts to create new social forms. Community resilience refers to the various structural aspects and components of human adaptation to extreme adversity, using ‘community’ as the unit of analysis...It concentrates on ways to adjust, withstand, and absorb disturbance, and to reorganize while undergoing change. It emphasizes structural approaches and community engagement, and intraracial/interracial exchanges that communities need in order to adapt to unforeseen conditions.” White, *Freedom Farmers*, 7-8.

⁸²⁹ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 8.

explore these strategies further as they help articulate events through which communities of creative resistance have emerged to enact the hoped-for otherwise in response to particular experiences of oppression.⁸³⁰

Freedom Farm Cooperative (FFC) was a community of creative resistance in Ruleville, Mississippi, that happened between 1967 and 1976. White quotes Fannie Lou Hamer, founder of FFC, at length to open her chapter:

Down where we are, food is used as a political weapon. But if you have a pig in your backyard, if you have some vegetables in your garden, you can feed yourself and your family, and nobody can push you around. If we have something like some pigs and some gardens and a few things like that, even if we have no jobs, we can eat and we can look after our families.⁸³¹

White employs Antonio Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual to describe Hamer, a resident of Sunflower County in the Mississippi Delta.⁸³² "Her words and works," White writes, "articulated the struggles and issues faced by those who were racially and economically disenfranchised" and actively pursued objectives for liberation from that disenfranchisement on a societal scale.⁸³³

Hamer's articulation of these struggles and the struggle for liberation emerged from her experiences of meals and, particularly, of their precarity. The political and socio-economic oppression of Black persons and communities in Mississippi, Hamer

⁸³⁰ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 65-87.

⁸³¹ Fannie Lou Hamer, quoted by White, *Freedom Farmers*, 65.

⁸³² White, *Freedom Farmers*, 69-72.

⁸³³ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 70.

argued, was a direct and vengeful reaction to those persons' and communities' participation in the struggle for liberation.⁸³⁴ “Where a couple of years ago white people were shooting at Negroes trying to register [to vote], now they say, ‘go ahead and register – then you’ll starve.’”⁸³⁵ Meals were sites not only of personal sustenance but of political interaction, of societal identity and health.⁸³⁶ Of Hamer’s unique contributions to the growing sensitization of the nation toward the hunger of its people, I interpret her articulation of hunger “as a weapon of oppression” as crucially important for understanding FFC as a community of creative resistance that was revealed and enacted through meal hopes for community.

Instead of rising from a conflict of desires or a state of scarcity – or, as the rising neoliberal economists of the time may have argued, the result of conflicting self-interests

⁸³⁴ “If you persist in dreams of black power to win some measure of freedom in white controlled counties, you go hungry,” an interviewer summarized from Hamer. Hunger, in Hamer’s analysis was the “‘non-violent’ weapon of white officialdom.” Fannie Lou Hamer, “Notes in the News: Going Hungry for Freedom,” *Progressive* 32, June 6, 1968, as quoted by White, *Freedom Farmers*, 71.

⁸³⁵ Fannie Lou Hamer, “Notes in the News,” as quoted by White, *Freedom Farmers*, 71.

⁸³⁶ Hamer was not the only person to recognize the political importance of meals and hunger at this time. Internationally and domestically, the 1960s was a decade of food and agricultural revolution. Domestically, Representative Samuel Resnick (of New York) and Senator Robert Kennedy (also of New York) both argued that Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty had failed to focus on hunger and, especially, on hunger in rural communities across the country. During a visit to the Mississippi Delta in 1967, Sen. Kennedy witnessed hunger and poverty at a scale for which he was not prepared. “My God, I didn’t know this kind of thing existed. How can a country like this allow this?” he asked a nearby reporter as tears stained his cheeks. By 1970, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization maintained that “the earth’s agricultural potential was great enough to support 157 billion people.” Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 144-159.

in the market – hunger and its connected pains had been weaponized for the “extreme, serious, and unnecessary manifestation of conflict” that employed “blameworthy deprivations and exploitations” against peoples and communities.⁸³⁷ Identifying the connections between meals and oppression meant that “Freedom Farm [could provide] a sphere for the development of a free mind, an opportunity *to create new identities*, and a new form of collective political consciousness” because of the fact that liberation from oppression was a possibility from the start.⁸³⁸ Enacting the possibilities for self-sufficiency and resistance emerged through a threefold strategy that prioritized housing, employment, and food because these were the braided cords of the white supremacist restriction of the vote and maintenance of Jim Crow.⁸³⁹ Approached through a cooperative model, FFC’s creative resistance was also a challenge to the rising economic reiteration of modernity’s anthropological atomization. FFC became an alternative to “the structural and economic inequities inherent in tenant farming and sharecropping” as it supported the construction of a sustainable community through the labor of the black farmers who were the community members.⁸⁴⁰

As a central component of FFC’s community of creative resistance, meals revealed hopes for relationships of dignity and love that recognized the interconnected

⁸³⁷ Joseph L. Allen, as referenced and developed by Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 49.

⁸³⁸ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 72.

⁸³⁹ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 72.

⁸⁴⁰ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 73.

wellbeing of the society. The logic of commodification prioritizes meals that further a capital profit margin. The phenomenon of the *cash crop* illustrates this well. FFC's hopes for community re-oriented meals away from cash crops in threatening acts of resistance to commodity logic. By 1972, FFC was serving more than 1,600 families through its prioritization of subsistence farming.⁸⁴¹ Prioritizing value systems that uplift the health, giving, and sharing of life, FFC enacted a community of creative resistance through its meal culture. In so doing, it can serve as an example for other communities who experience and will experience interlocking oppressions in the destructive events of global of climate change.

Communities of Creative Dreaming

This section returns to the Hulu documentary series *Taste the Nation with Padma Lakshmi* as a multi-episode case study about meals and creative dreaming. Lakshmi's conversations center meals as events that abound with hopes for communities that creatively dream new worlds for all of us. These dreams are not flights of fancy into an abstract or fantastically disconnected reality. They resemble, instead, what Keller calls the "twisted hope that binds us to the loom of life now" and regularly echo themes like creative transformation, social justice, and ancestral immortality that Monica Coleman develops in her communal and postmodern womanist theology.⁸⁴²

⁸⁴¹ White, *Freedom Farmers*, 76.

⁸⁴² Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 174; Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 85-167.

The theme of dreaming arises frequently during the *Taste the Nation* series.

“People come here for the American Dream,” Maz Jobrani says.⁸⁴³ Aida Nabeta moved to Paterson, New Jersey, “because [she] didn’t have a future in Peru for [her] kids.”⁸⁴⁴ “The restaurant thing was more of my father’s dream,” Cesar Valdivia frames his own work.⁸⁴⁵ When his father “decided to open up his restaurant, I decided to help him out ‘cause I know it was always a dream of his. And I fell in love with it myself,” Valdivia recalls.⁸⁴⁶ While the “American Dream” that Jobrani references has often meant striving for the private and self-interested ownership that Senator Dawes saw lacking in the reservation system forced upon Indigenous nations, the immigrant communities on which Lakshmi’s series focuses offer an alternative dream that challenges modernity’s anthropological individualism.

Hopes that are creative dreams often arises in response to questions of loss that particular meals or meal cultures strive to overcome. Reckoning with loss is a critically important characteristic of process theology. “While this loss of the past allows us to overcome and negate evil,” Monica Coleman writes, “it also means that it is difficult to maintain and perpetuate what is good.”⁸⁴⁷ Chef Brandon Jew, a second-generation

⁸⁴³ Maz Jobrani, “Where the Kabob is Hot,” *Taste the Nation*, 4:17, <https://www.hulu.com/watch/4d19ebb4-fa67-4935-ae23-9e5a547162e0>.

⁸⁴⁴ Aida Nabeta, “Dancing in Little Lima,” *Taste the Nation*, 6:10, <https://www.hulu.com/watch/4e187d50-bd8e-4df7-bb24-374830d5b3a6>.

⁸⁴⁵ Cesar Valdivia, “Dancing in Little Lima,” 17:11.

⁸⁴⁶ Valdivia, “Dancing in Little Lima,” 17:11.

⁸⁴⁷ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 85.

Chinese-American, identifies experiences of loss as critically important for the hopes he perceives through the Chinese-American meals he cooks and eats. “Both my grandmas passed away before I felt like I could really, like, get some of the recipes that I wanted,” Jew tells Lakshmi.⁸⁴⁸ For him and many others like him, shared recipes are opportunities for shared presence, for community to happen in creative ways.⁸⁴⁹ Rather than let that loss foreclose possibilities for communal remembrance of shared heritage to launch into new lives, Jew’s work in San Francisco’s Chinatown explicitly aims to disclose new possibilities for Chinese-American meals to bring forth communities of life and love.

For Jew, Chinatown, with all of its incredible history, is “having a hard time of understanding how to move from what it used to be into what it could be...[and] that balance [of Chinese traditions and American life] is something that I think comes out in our food,” he says.⁸⁵⁰ The restaurant's focus on balancing the meal is an expression of creative transformation that brings into existence communities whose shared life in their meals shapes how they interact with one another and the other-than-human world. Scott Chang-Fleeman is a farmer who has partnered with Jew to grow various Chinese vegetables on a Bay Area farm. Instead of the supply store’s commodity-laden shelves, Jew and his colleagues create their pantry staples in their kitchen, working with Chang-

⁸⁴⁸ Brandon Jew, “What is Chop Suey Anyway?,” *Taste the Nation*, 20:30, <https://www.hulu.com/watch/7dd42606-8fc5-4fa7-bd2e-ff55fb770cad>.

⁸⁴⁹ “A part of what motivated me to open this restaurant was, it was a sense of not accessing my grandma as much as I thought I should,” he continues, “because grandma cooking is so much feel of the skin. A lot of it is being next to them, ...[and] I wasn’t [present] enough.” Jew, “What is Chop Suey Anyway?,” 20:45.

⁸⁵⁰ Jew, “What is Chop Suey Anyway?,” 17:49

Fleeman and others to make possibilities for locally-rooted, ecologically just cooking and eating a reality. In doing so, they intentionally engage recipes that are as old as Chinatown and further them toward new aims for the community that embrace influences from other regions of China, other ethnic foodways, and more locally grown and tended ingredients.

Weaving their work into the history of the Chinese-American community in the Bay Area, this farmer-chef partnership is not dressing “Big Organic”, or some other back-to-the-land-yet-industrialized restaurant concept, up in Chinese or Chinese-American attire.⁸⁵¹ Chang-Fleeman identifies as biracial and is three generations removed from immigration. His experience of farming and working with Chef Jew has revealed creative possibilities for his own life and place within the different communities, Chinese and American.⁸⁵² “The farm has been a great way for me to create a physical manifestation of, really, celebrating my whole self and my identity.”⁸⁵³ Aiming towards life together through caring relationships with the other creatures on the farm has helped Chang-Fleeman create a community of multiply-layered-relationality that is further experienced when he contributes to the community-creating aims of Jew’s Chinese-American kitchen.

⁸⁵¹ Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, 134-184.

⁸⁵² “I think it’s a common paradox and question that a lot of biracial folks have. In your early, mid-20s, you finally start to address a lot of conflicts that you’ve had in yourself,” Chang-Fleeman tells Lakshmi. Scott Chang-Fleeman, “What is Chop Suey Anyway?,” 23:04.

⁸⁵³ Chang-Fleeman, “What is Chop Suey Anyway?,” 23:15.

When a society changes, disappears, or revolts against possibilities for richer experiences of love in community, the creative hopes must change to respond well to local needs. “Sometimes feelings of discord are the result of the conflicts in the world. Sometimes liberation is not possible, but survival and quality of life are,” Coleman writes.⁸⁵⁴ Meals become events that can re-orient the community who rises toward the new possibilities that prioritize survival and quality of life. The experiences of Hamid Mosavi, Naz Deravian, and other Iranian immigrants in Lakshmi’s episode “Where the Kabob is Hot” enrich and expand Jew and Chang-Fleeman’s analysis of meal hopes as response to loss. In his teens, Mosavi dreamed of becoming an architect, focusing on bridge-building. “Everybody that I knew that went to America got a degree and came back to Iran and became a real success,” he recalls.⁸⁵⁵ Immigrating to the United States when he was sixteen years old, Mosavi’s dreams quickly evaporated after the 1979 Iranian Revolution.⁸⁵⁶ “Do you remember how you were feeling, knowing you don’t have a home to go back to,” Padma Lakshmi asks.⁸⁵⁷ “I felt alone, I felt scorned. The Iran that

⁸⁵⁴ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 85.

⁸⁵⁵ Hamid Mosavi, “Where the Kabob is Hot,” 10:15.

⁸⁵⁶ Rapidly rising anti-Iranian sentiments in the United States in 1979 understood restaurants to be easy and symbolic targets for action against Iranian-American communities. Mosavi recounts to Lakshmi but one example of the violence. “I was working in Beverly Hills, in House of Iran at the restaurant...There was threats all the time. They were coming in with chains...chains and baseball bats...One night, as we were closing, there's a radio, big radio in front of the door. I was gonna pick it up and something actually grabbed me from the back and pulled me back. Some energy or something, I don't know what it was. And as I was pulling out the parking [lot], [the radio] blew up.” Mosavi, “Where the Kabob is Hot,” 11:45.

⁸⁵⁷ Padma Lakshmi, “Where the Kabob is Hot,” 12:31.

I know is gone. I don't have a place called, you know, *home* anymore... Mostly, I hid in the kitchens. Saved my life, to be honest," Mosavi responds.⁸⁵⁸

In the kitchens that saved his life, Mosavi became a master chef, opening his own restaurant with the guiding insight that "kabob shows love and care and brings people together."⁸⁵⁹ The chef's insight is further advanced by actor and food-writer Naz Deravian. She tells Lakshmi that the whole of Persian food, not just kabob, hopes towards loving community. Cooking "is the way we show our love. There's nothing more that we love than to feed you...so, if you come through [my] door, I'm feeding you," she declares.⁸⁶⁰ The table becomes the site for communal dreaming, for engaging other people in the creation of societies marked by a loving sharing in life together. But the food – and especially the intricate mixtures of aromas, flavors, textures, feelings of other creatures who become food – remains foundational.

Deravian says, "I think we [Iranians] are often generalized. You know, join us at our table, have a conversation with us. We can start with the food and then get into the nitty-gritty."⁸⁶¹ Starting with the food, Deravian hopes for community to emerge through weaving experiences, relationships, and aims of diverse people together into societies that

⁸⁵⁸ Mosavi, "Where the Kabob is Hot," 12:36.

⁸⁵⁹ Maz Jobrani insists that, "if you want to know an immigrant culture, go to their restaurants. It's non-threatening...For us [Iranian-Americans], kabob [becomes] almost like an olive branch to Americans." Hamid Mosavi, "Where the Kabob is Hot," 8:18; Jobrani, "Where the Kabob is Hot," 6:55.

⁸⁶⁰ Naz Deravian, "Where the Kabob is Hot," 22:32.

⁸⁶¹ Deravian, "Where the Kabob is Hot," 28:11.

can reveal and enact possibilities that modern individualism hides and works to eliminate in its hopes for oneself. Rosa Carhuallanqui argues that a communal conception of power is a critically important contribution that immigrant communities make to societies who hope for justice. “Being an immigrant makes you strong. We have incredible strength [because] *we* have power,” she states.⁸⁶²

Carhuallanqui’s hope emphasizes shared power that emerges through relationships that combat evil, fight injustice, resist violence, and quest for wholeness and health by sharing life together.⁸⁶³ In the final section of this chapter, life together in meals will be explored as *relationship*. Following Pittenger’s framing, relationship is the temporal present of meals. the imaginations of the societies who eat them.

RELATIONSHIP

Through the influences of the actual past and aims for the future, the event that becomes in the present is intimately related to its world. “Relationships compose the world. They *are* the world,” Coleman writes.⁸⁶⁴ Pittenger calls this argument from process thinking “an absolute necessity of relatedness.”⁸⁶⁵ He argues that the church must live “by its relationship with the contemporary world” because it “must necessarily live *in* the present.”⁸⁶⁶ Turning to the present in the final section of this chapter is a turn to

⁸⁶² Rosa Carhuallanqui, “Dancing in Little Lima,” 24:03. (*emphasis original*).

⁸⁶³ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 100.

⁸⁶⁴ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 75.

⁸⁶⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 78.

⁸⁶⁶ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 78.

consider the relationships that are revealed and enacted in meals. Meals are the imaginations of the societies that eat them, and they can disclose both how a society understands itself in the present and what influences it values for any future emergence.

Relationships Hoarded in Futures

The name of an economic technology underscores the tragedy of destructive meal relationships in the Plantationocene: futures trading. Filipe Maia's argument that "a new form of imaging the future, one that deeply impacted capitalism," is embedded in modernity's ways of living is instructive for understanding how meals have reshaped human relationships to other creatures through commodification.⁸⁶⁷ This section considers how commodification of people and ecosystems through capital-generating mechanisms like the futures contract disarticulate vital relationships in pursuit of the modern hopes for oneself. Following Anthony Giddens, Cavanaugh writes that the "attempts to consolidate territory and assert sovereign control [in modern statecraft] often

⁸⁶⁷ In his second chapter, Maia develops the work of conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck and addresses the concept of time in modernity as well as the Enlightenment theory of progress. "One needs to understand the historical period spanning from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century as more than 'elapsed time but rather as a period with its own specific characteristics...a temporalization [*Verzeitlichung*] of history, at the end of which there is a peculiar form of acceleration which characterizes modernity.' This rupture was, for Koselleck, more than historical – it was a rupture in the experience of time, a change in the ways in which societies understood the interaction between past experience and future expectations. This new mode of temporalization is attested by the development of the concept of modernity – of a *Neuzeit*. According to Koselleck, in temporalizing historical experience, the modern period was built upon a desire to break with the past, including with the futures once expected ('futures past'), and advance toward a completely new future." Maia, "Trading Futures," 54-55.

brought about violent conflict.”⁸⁶⁸ These conflicts were never just between “states,” however, and necessarily included economic, ecological, and anthropological assumptions in the campaigns. United States military actions discussed earlier in this chapter enforced federally prioritized capitalist economic expansion, carrying the regime’s relationships of food, land, and capital into battle.

Relationships of Rails and Grain

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz notes that the United States Congress passed multiple land acts at the behest of President Abraham Lincoln while southern representation in the federal legislature was absent, appeasing the settler-colonial expansionism of free-soilers who had contributed to his election.⁸⁶⁹ The Homestead Act, Morrill Act, and Pacific Railroad Act broke multiple treaties with Indigenous nations and provided land for state-based land grant universities, private homestead speculation and settlement, and private commercial interests that were expanding the industrializing Atlantic seaboard across the continent.⁸⁷⁰ Dunbar-Ortiz writes,

This dispersal of landless settler populations from east of the Mississippi served as an ‘escape valve,’ lessening the likelihood of class conflict as the industrial revolution accelerated the use of cheap immigrant labor...As

⁸⁶⁸ Interestingly, Maia’s argument also cites Giddens and is expanded above. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 43.

⁸⁶⁹ “Most of the western territories, including Colorado, North and South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona, were delayed in achieving statehood,” she writes, “because Indigenous nations resisted appropriation of their lands and outnumbered settlers.” Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, 140-141.

⁸⁷⁰ Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, 140.

industrialization quickened, land as a commodity, ‘real estate,’ remained the basis of the US economy and capital accumulation.⁸⁷¹

Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts was one of the most notable of proponents of the commodification of land at the time. In a speech in support of the General Allotment Act of 1887, Dawes argued that the reservation system was defective because it lacked “selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization.”⁸⁷² In Dawes’s speech, the contractual sociology of modernity is evident. For selfishness to be at the bottom of civilization, the human person must be understood as fundamentally isolated from any others and concerned first and foremost for their own self-interest.⁸⁷³

Forcing individuation, the capitalist market fosters an illusory self-sufficiency as a reachable goal that can serve as an indicator of accumulated wealth and the quality of one’s relationships. The more self-sufficient an individual is, the more “successful” they appear. Self-interest can be maximized through competition against others – even others in close relationship with the self – for the accumulation, use, and storing of scarce resources. “From a strictly utilitarian view,” Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “we’ve created a system such that we self-identify as consumers first before understanding

⁸⁷¹ Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, 141.

⁸⁷² Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, 158.

⁸⁷³ This liberal capitalism is echoed in Milton Friedman’s argument as Cavanaugh describes it at work in the economic project of the Pinochet regime: “a ‘country’ or a ‘society’ is a collection of individuals...The disarticulation of workers’ organizations through the strategy of torture was an essential component of the neoliberal economic model imposed on Chile and other Latin American countries,” Cavanaugh writes. Cavanaugh, *Torture & Eucharist*, 39.

ourselves as ecosystem citizens.”⁸⁷⁴ Economically, as Kimmerer notes, this anthropology runs counter to the ways that many human communities and other-than-human communities relate amongst themselves and with one another throughout the world. Yet, fueled by these congressional acts, decades of genocidal military campaigns enforcing federal policies of land and agricultural commodification over and against hundreds of treaties with Indigenous nations followed.

While the genocidal federal policies “on the frontier” were responsible to the political authority in Washington and flung settler-colonialism across diverse ecosystems, they happened locally through the centripetal force of Chicago via the railroad system. The Chicago Board of Trade intensified the scale and pace of the nation’s agricultural system. The commodity vision of human relationships with others that had already claimed the lives of millions of Africans and their enslaved descendants was industrialized through Chicago and its railroads.⁸⁷⁵ With the expansion of the railroad from Chicago, “areas with limited experience of capitalist exchange suddenly found themselves much more palpably within an economic and social hierarchy created by the

⁸⁷⁴ Kimmerer, “The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance” (December 10, 2020), <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-serviceberry/>.

⁸⁷⁵ The Chicago Board of Trade did not invent the commodification of creatures nor the agricultural futures market. It did, however, transform it under the principles of Liberal market capitalism and fundamentally reshaped people’s relationships with other creatures who have become food, clothing, or shelter. Grain elevator receipts and futures contracts functioned primarily as capital-generating mechanisms. This, in turn, encouraged increased consumption and degradation of environments through high-input farming. The turn to capital-generation catalyzed significant agricultural contributions to the anthropogenic climate change that is wreaking havoc upon the planet today. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 146.

geography of capital.”⁸⁷⁶ The railroad advanced the geography of capital through bioregions like a torrent of iron, writing off the land as but a stage upon which human matters occur and denying any visions of food as “a gift that [the land and water] can offer or withhold, depending on how humans live.”⁸⁷⁷ The expanding influence of railroads into prairie, including the lands of the Oceti Sakowin, entailed a major step in the development of industrial agriculture: the move away from single-owner-based sacks of grain as the base unit for measurement.

Distinguishing by sacks of grain maintained a more personal relationship between a particular farmer, the land, and the plants that grew there. The farmer was responsible for the corn - or wheat, oats, or other produce - that was in the sack until it reached the purchaser, and this also meant that the purchaser was more closely connected with the health and well-being of particular plants, land, and human persons, namely the whole farming family. Yet sacks of grain were harder to load and unload and were especially cumbersome once the grain reached the grain elevator.⁸⁷⁸ Removing grain from sacks, mixing grains from many different farms into a mountainous assemblage of colorful kernels that filled a railcar bound for centralized grain elevators, meant that the farmer and purchaser alike became less connected to one another and to the personal well-being of the other creatures who were becoming food.

⁸⁷⁶ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 92.

⁸⁷⁷ Mari Jørstad, “The Life of the World: The Vitality and Personhood of Non-Animal Nature in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2016), 118.

⁸⁷⁸ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 112.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Chicago Board of Trade established standards for grain quality and enabled the mixing of grains from different farms on such a large scale as to radically reshape agriculture and food in this country down to the present. What was a pragmatic decision profoundly intensified commodity relationships between humans and other creatures.⁸⁷⁹ Cronon's analysis is helpful at this point: "As long as one treated a shipment of wheat or corn as if it possessed unique characteristics that distinguished it from all other lots of grain, mixing was impossible. But if instead a shipment represented a particular 'grade' of grain, then there was no harm in mixing it with other grain of the same grade."⁸⁸⁰ The farmer's responsibility for food quality could not be traced far beyond that mountain of kernels, and it certainly couldn't be traced all the way to its final market, table, or trough. Meanwhile, the purchaser's awareness of the grain's origins became increasingly muddled. Just as the farmer couldn't easily trace beyond the railcar, the purchaser would likely not be able to separate out which kernels of grain came from which farm.

Breaking, Hiding, and Hoarding Relationships

This section continues the earlier attention to the case of commodity markets in Chicago to communicate how meals that are the imagination of the Plantationocene attempt to break, hide, and hoard the relationships through which our dining societies emerge. Whoever the creature was that contributed grain to the meal could be forgotten at

⁸⁷⁹ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 145.

⁸⁸⁰ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 116.

the table because who they were as a fellow creature within God's cosmos had been divorced from the product that made the food on the plate. Disconnecting the plant from the food rapidly fed and reinforced mechanical and industrial relationships to food and the processes of acquiring, preparing, sharing, and consuming food. Maya Harjo poignantly articulates the shift in relationship at hand:

Most vegetables that you get in a supermarket or most seeds you get from seed catalogues, they've never been handled by humans. They've been handled by machines. They've been planted by machines. They've been harvested by machines. They've been packed by machines. And to think about what is lost in that broken relationship. What are we not only depriving the seed of when we deprive them of that relationship but what are we depriving ourselves of when we don't have that relationship?⁸⁸¹

I contend that those relationships have not only been broken; they and their brokenness have been further hidden away behind a veneer of coming connection. In so doing, present suffering and oppression is neither challenged nor ameliorated.⁸⁸² Instead, Plantationocene meals reveal and enact malnourished relationships throughout the food system.

Cronon argues that “the changes in Chicago's markets suddenly made it possible for people to buy and sell grain not as the physical product of human labor on a particular tract of prairie earth but as an abstract claim on the golden stream flowing through the city's [grain] elevators.”⁸⁸³ Abstraction through the process of commodification

⁸⁸¹ Harjo, “Cultivating Native Foodways with the Cultural Conservancy,” 8:15.

⁸⁸² Maia, “Trading Futures,” 59-60.

⁸⁸³ Cronon describes how grain elevators began to function as banks, without interest payments and “secured not by gold but grain.” He writes, “Farmers or shippers

“accomplished the transmutation of one of humanity's oldest foods, obscuring its physical identity and displacing it into the symbolic world of capital.”⁸⁸⁴ The eating public began to see themselves eating commodities instead of other creatures, and farmers began producing commodities instead of tending to the lives and wellbeing of other creatures.

A second shift began to take advantage of this primary reorientation of food relationships as “the [grain] elevators created a new form of money, secured not by gold but by grain.”⁸⁸⁵ The agricultural market resembled the banking systems that were spreading across the country, and speculation upon the future success or failure of these markets became a lucrative business. Within thirty years of the Chicago Board of Trade’s introduction of a quality grading system, its “immense grain market, with all of its speculative frenzy, served as a clearinghouse of the capital and credit that moved western crops to their final customers.”⁸⁸⁶ In the midst of this frenzy was a capital-generating

took their wheat or corn to an elevator operator as if they were taking gold or silver to a banker. After depositing the grain in a bin, the original owner accepted a receipt that could be redeemed for grain in much the same way that a check or banknote could be redeemed for precious metal. Again, as with a bank, as long as people were confident that the elevator contained plenty of grain, they did not need to cash the receipt to make it useful. Because the flow of grain through the Chicago elevators was enormous, one could almost always count on them to contain enough grain to 'back up' one's receipt: the volume of the city's trade in effect made receipts interchangeable. Instead of completing a sale by redeeming the receipt and turning over the physical grain to a purchaser, the original owner would simply turn over the receipt itself. The entire transaction could be completed - and repeated dozens of times - without a single kernel of wheat or corn moving so much as an inch.” Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 120.

⁸⁸⁴ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 120.

⁸⁸⁵ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 120.

⁸⁸⁶ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 143.

mechanism that completed the economic divorce of foods from their organismic identities: the futures contract.⁸⁸⁷

Easily interchangeable, futures contracts were bought and sold as referents “to fixed quantities of standardized *grades* of grain. They called for delivery not at the moment the contract was struck but at a future date and time that was also standardized.”⁸⁸⁸ Focusing on a future delivery of grain rather than a direct receipt upon purchase, “the futures market was a market not in grain but in the *price* of grain...[for] one bought and sold not wheat or corn or oats but the *prices* of those good as they would exist at a future time.”⁸⁸⁹ Given that “the imagination of a time to come stands in direct relation to the ways in which human communities experience the present,” the imagination of societies through the commodifying activity through the Chicago Board of Trade cannot be understood as disconnected from the material realities of the meal cultures of the nation then and now.⁸⁹⁰

Possibilities envisioned through the Chicago Product Exchange market prioritized and continues to prioritize shaping, reshaping, and destructing diverse and overlapping ecosystems for the sake of capital gain. The centrality of scarcity in commodity logic further relates the present to an uncertain future by encouraging selfish and anxious

⁸⁸⁷ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 126.

⁸⁸⁸ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 124.

⁸⁸⁹ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 125.

⁸⁹⁰ Maia, “Trading Futures,” 46.

accumulation as an attempt to *prevent* unforeseen disasters.⁸⁹¹ The agricultural futures market cut away at persons' and peoples' identities that had emerged through their relationships with land, water, sky, and one another, replaced them with fluctuating prices, and then commanded with sovereign rule over the ordering of these commodity relationships to ward off scarcity. This practice encourages selfishness, encourages hoarding.

In accumulating, the individual begins to occlude the relational bonds that knit them with their human and their other-than-human relatives. In the western diet, the relationships of food have been so hoarded into capital-generating futures that even seeds have become trademarked, owned, and produced by a transnational, capitalist, corporate food and agriculture regime.⁸⁹² Malnourished relationships with food leave whole networks of life dangerously exposed to “the impact of climate change through changes in [temperature, precipitation, solar radiation, wind, humidity, extreme weather, and flooding].”⁸⁹³ Currently, changing climates are “projected to negatively impact all aspects

⁸⁹¹ Kimmerer, “The Serviceberry.”

⁸⁹² “Most seeds that you find in seed catalogs are hybrid seeds, which means that if you plant a hybrid corn seed and then save seed from the corn that you grow with that, the first generation is a clone. The second generation is completely unpredictable. And that's one of the ways that seed companies keep you reliant on them, because you have to keep going back in order to get that perfect first generation of all uniform-looking plants.” Harjo, “Cultivating Native Foodways with the Cultural Conservancy,” 11:41.

⁸⁹³ G. Jia, E. Shevliakova, P. Artaxo, N. De Noblet-Ducoudré, R. Houghton, J. House, K. Kitajima, C. Lennard, A. Popp, A. Sirin, R. Sukumar, and L. Verchot, “Land-Climate Interactions,” in *IPCC Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems*. (August 7, 2019), 142.

of food security (food availability, access, utilization, and stability),” contributing to further devastation of human life and the lives of all of our relatives on the planet.⁸⁹⁴ Because “the food system encompasses all the activities and actors in the production, transport, manufacturing, retailing, consumption, and waste of food, and their impacts on nutrition, health and well-being, and the environment,” human relationships with and through food are an ultimate concern for the ecclesiology of organism set forth in this dissertation.⁸⁹⁵

Relatives at the Table

Food binds humans to particular spacetimes and creatures, ultimately denying anthropic exceptionalism its final move. For total control, the logic of commodification relies on processes that bifurcate the conceptual and material. Meals, however, always ground the societies who eat them in the planetary processes of life. Meal memories, hopes, and relationships have been, are, and must continue to be critically important events that resist the logic of commodification and disclose restorative and life-giving ecological solidarities. This imperative is grounded in the organic claim that every eater is fundamentally related to everyone who is eaten. “If the planet is not thriving,” Coleman writes from a womanist perspective, “humanity cannot thrive. The health and well-being of humanity and the natural world are entwined.”⁸⁹⁶ Because we are so

⁸⁹⁴ Jia, et al., “Land-Climate Interactions, 142.

⁸⁹⁵ Mbow, et al., “Food Security,” 442.

⁸⁹⁶ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 98.

entwined, our relations with one another and the whole environment become critically important for us all.

For the ecclesiology of organism, the relatives who gather and are gathered at the meal's table can reveal and enact God's own priorities for adventure, zest, truth, beauty, and peace through communal harmony for and with one another.⁸⁹⁷ Meals are events that can "reflect the value of participating in and contributing to communal richness."⁸⁹⁸ Meals are also events that can reveal the present entanglements of food in the western diet with the dynamic and devastating conditions of anthropogenic climate change and transnational corporate food and agricultural regimes. Presently, these revelations can and do happen in the same meal events: peace and brokenness, adventure and monotony, beauty and discordant pain, zest and boredom, truth and marketed lies are disclosed in eating.

In the face of "more extreme climatic events [that] are projected to lead to more agrometeorological disasters with associated economic and social losses," meals that intensify the experiences of God's priorities in the midst of these contrasts will be gifts of salvation through communal harmony in love and for the life of the world.⁸⁹⁹ With sensitivities similar to this quote from Mbow, Dennis insists: "In responding to virtually

⁸⁹⁷ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 309-381.

⁸⁹⁸ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 123.

⁸⁹⁹ Mbow, et al., "Food Security."

incalculable risks, values matter.”⁹⁰⁰ How communities value the relationships through which they and their world happen influences and will continue to influence the material conditions of life for their relatives at the table and beyond, rippling through the cosmic web of relations.⁹⁰¹ Meals are opportunities for communities to disclose, in gratitude and humility, the beloved dignity of each creature and the contribution of each creature to the society’s experiences of love and life. In so doing, the shared moment of that disclosure enacts the struggle against oppressive commodification, materializing the healing of relationships that have been broken, hidden, and hoarded in modernity’s vile commodifying project.⁹⁰²

⁹⁰⁰ Dennis, *Edible Entanglements*, 168.

⁹⁰¹ Al-Zahrani et al. provide a fascinating example of this in their consideration of the global problem of food waste as it is manifest in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The global value on the fossil fuel industry – including how fossil fuels are greatly utilized for everything from fertilizer and fuel on farms to temperature-controlled transportation and storage throughout the global food and agricultural regimes – has had direct impacts on the prices of food as incomes from oil have long subsidized food prices in the KSA. They write that a recent 74% drop in the price of oil triggered increases in the prices for Benzene, electricity, and food commodities “to cope with the budget deficit.” They also cite the food subsidies that are funded by oil profits as contributing to the societal sense of the dispensability of food and, therefore, the ease with which food is wasted even in a kingdom that is a net-importer in terms of global food markets. Khodran H. Al-Zahrani, Mirza Barjees Baig, and Gary S. Straquadine, “Food Waste in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Implications for Extension Education,” in *Climate Change, Food Security, and Natural Resources: Regional Case Studies from Three Continents*, ed. Mohamed Behnassi, Olaf Pollmann, and Himangana Gupta (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2019), 73-101.

⁹⁰² Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 45-51

CHAPTER V – A PROCESS THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST FOR PLANETARY DINING: THINKING WITH PITTENGER FOR TODAY

The previous chapter followed Norman Pittenger’s broad framework for process ecclesiology as it presented and interpreted meal cultures through the lenses of memory, hope, and relationship.⁹⁰³ The chapter highlighted ways that human relationships to, with, and through food influence the material conditions of life for human and other-than-human creatures, including those creatures far beyond the eater’s immediate spacetime. The complexities of food and climate change should be experienced and known as an ultimate concern for Christians. The dynamic interactions of meal cultures and planetary climate changes in the Plantationocene threaten the planet’s wellbeing as well as healthy qualities of life for the many creatures and societies with whom we share this common home.

Meals characterize the en-Christed life together: meals of bread and wine, of memory, hope, and love, of God with us. This chapter is concerned with the characteristically Christian meal, the Eucharist, Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper. The previous chapter ultimately argued that meals are opportunities for human communities to reveal how they value the lives of our human and other-than-human relatives. This chapter furthers that argument as it attends to and develops Norman

⁹⁰³ In Chapter II, I note in the section “Memory, Relationship, and Aim” that Pittenger is more concerned to articulate church as social process than as institution with particular marks. Pittenger frames social process through the theological virtues of faith (memory), hope (aim), and love (relationship) in his ecclesiology. Pittenger’s chronological frame was useful for presenting and analyzing the interaction of meal cultures, human societies, and planetary wellbeing in Chapter IV.

Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist. I argue that the Eucharist must be a principal influence for Christian adaptive responses to dynamic conditions of food in climate change because this holy meal cultivates Christian eating practices that represent alternative values to the extractive and degrading values of western diet schemata. The following process theology of the Eucharist offers Christian theology a framework to articulate experiences of Love-in-action influencing Christian action for planetary wellbeing through people's faithful participation in the creating, restoring, and sustaining communion with God and all our creaturely kin that is re-presented in the Eucharist.

This chapter opens with a presentation of Norman Pittenger's process theology of the Eucharist, particularly as he argued it in *Life as Eucharist*. The second section of this chapter is shaped by Pittenger's own insight that participation in church through eucharistic action leads to Christian work in the world. The second section is influenced by the work of Theodore Walker, Jr., Karen Baker-Fletcher, Patrick T. McCormick, M. Shawn Copeland, and Monika K. Hellwig. The critical work in this section serves to thicken Pittenger's theology of the Eucharist as a roux thickens a sauce or soup, enriching scents and highlighting flavors.

Finally, this chapter sends forth. Churches need to adapt to the many changes facing our communities as climates change across the planet. Many are already having to do so. These "Christian adaptive responses" may very well become the regular patterns of life for many communities. For communities that are seeking refuge from inhospitable climate conditions in lands they once called home, meals can become opportunities for new life together, in new lands, and with new neighbors. The final section of this chapter

offers a process theology of the Eucharist as an integral informant for Christian living that seeks to reveal and enact the good news that God is the God of all creation and the God of the oppressed, and that loving God and neighbor-as-self demands solidarity in the struggle for the liberation of all creation from the weight of oppression. The life that we experience in the meal of Love forms the church to attend to all meals through practices of solidarity for planetary wellbeing.

NORMAN PITTENGER'S PROCESS THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Norman Pittenger's process ecclesiology orients his broader, budding sacramental ecotheology through his vision of church. He emphasizes Christian communities' capacities to reveal and enact holy relationships for planetary wellbeing. In this section, I present Norman Pittenger's theology of the Eucharist in the context of the ecclesiology of organism. A robust theology of the Eucharist is central to his ecclesiology and, in turn, to the ecologic that courses through Pittenger's broader theological project, implicitly and explicitly. Pittenger's focus on eucharistic worship as "the characteristic action of the Church" cannot be understood apart from his assertion that "sacramentalism in the right sense is both natural to human beings and natural to the world, and it is also the way in which God effectively works in the creation."⁹⁰⁴ Pittenger's expansive understanding of sacramentality encourages Christians to experience the Eucharist meal, the relationships with God that the meal reveals and enacts, and the church that the meal characterizes as a

⁹⁰⁴ Norman Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 22; Norman Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love: Human Experience and Christian Faith in a Process Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 167-168.

natural and dynamic relational complex that is influenced by and influential for the world. As Christian theology attempts to respond to and underwrite life-giving adaptation to climate crises in various contexts across the planet, Christian process theology has the opportunity to articulate a theology of the Eucharist that furthers Pittenger's insights.

The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

Church emerges through the inspired and living communion of people – divine, human, and other-than-human – who participate in and bear witness to Jesus Christ's influential presentation of Love-in-action for the life of the world. As was discussed in Chapter II, church has made and makes the en-Christed life public and present as a social process, as an organism.⁹⁰⁵ For Pittenger, the public presence of church means that church is an organism that is both influencing and influenced by the world as it realizes the social patterns of life in Christ for its context. The community that becomes church emerges through constellations of relationships that characterize their life together as life in Christ. Pittenger argues that eucharistic worship is “the characteristic action of the Church” because it orients these constellations of relationships toward “charity in a relationship with God.”⁹⁰⁶ Pittenger describes the liturgical movements of the Eucharist – offering, giving thanks, breaking, and giving – in the context of the emerging cosmos and

⁹⁰⁵ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 19.

⁹⁰⁶ Pittenger uses *charity* in accordance with its root in *caritas*, signifying the agapeic complex of love, grace, kindness, and compassion experienced in Jesus Christ's decisive incarnation of God. Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 22-25.

our creaturely participation within the life of God.⁹⁰⁷ Church becomes a society that offers its local embodiment of our interrelated world to God and that receives their offering – and more – back from God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰⁸ For Pittenger, the pulsing pattern of offering and receiving embodies “a deeply penetrating affirmation of the essential goodness of life and creation, redeemed by God as well as created by” God.⁹⁰⁹ In eucharistic worship, Christians intentionally participate in the process of creative advance by emerging as church for the life of the world.

The Christian experiences an enriched world loyalty through regular eucharistic worship because the offering made is of “the very world itself, the materiality of things, as well as history and events in the world, from dust to the *Divine Comedy*, from electron to spiral nebulae.”⁹¹⁰ As tokens of the church’s offering to God, the bread and wine of the ritual meal join our other-than-human kin with our human community through our shared presence.⁹¹¹ The bread and wine further signify our willingness to participate in God’s restoring and enriching love for all creatures through our cosmic communion.⁹¹² With the offering, the society gives thanks “not only for the naturally good things of life, of which

⁹⁰⁷ Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice: A Study of the Eucharist in the Life of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 79-98.

⁹⁰⁸ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 31-34.

⁹⁰⁹ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 87.

⁹¹⁰ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 32.

⁹¹¹ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

⁹¹² Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

the bread and wine are symbols, but also for the redemption of the world by Christ.”⁹¹³ The offering of the church’s life is prehended by God as a decision for covenantal partnership into holiness and becomes an influential datum in God’s own becoming. God becomes Love through beautiful, responsive creativity and offers God’s very self in the Eucharist meal.⁹¹⁴ For, as “we present our world to God, our work and all that we have and hope for,” we receive from God our very personal, social, ecclesial lives “now given a new dignity and sharing a new life because they are now actually ‘in Christ.’”⁹¹⁵ The divine action in the Eucharist is God becoming Love afresh for the wellbeing of the world through the community who is gathered in the presence of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹¹⁶

In the rhythm of offering and receiving, God’s becoming Love is experienced in the transformation of the offered bread and wine, Pittenger notes. Yet, the transformation is not from token-gifts into the actual flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, “through the action of the Holy Spirit, they have become the tokens of Christ himself” in God’s action toward and for the life of the world.⁹¹⁷ The divine action in the Eucharist does not annihilate the bread and wine from being the “good realities in the order of

⁹¹³ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 86.

⁹¹⁴ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

⁹¹⁵ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

⁹¹⁶ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

⁹¹⁷ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

natural creation” that the gathered Body knows them to be.⁹¹⁸ In the liturgy of the meal, Christians give thanks to God for the bread and wine by proclaiming the ways that the God of all creation and the God of the oppressed has partnered with all creatures to bring forth, sustain, restore, and beautify the world through Love-in-action.⁹¹⁹ This is a crucial insight for a process theology of the Eucharist because it identifies the relationship and distinctions between the Eucharist meal and other meals beyond the Christian ritual setting.

The Eucharist meal nourishes sacramental discipleship by cultivating humble attention to the ways our relationships reveal and enact Love in and for the world, and these relationships must include the food we eat. The bread and wine become known as means through which “Christ in his Body [makes] himself known to those who are his members by baptism.”⁹²⁰ By receiving bread and wine and offering it *as bread and wine* for the Eucharist meal, God includes a common meal within the divine action for the life of the world. “Once [the bread and wine] have been so used,” Pittenger notes, “it may be recognized that all common meals, and all food received together, have a certain capacity for conveying intimations of the presence of God” even if they are but intimations and not the full risen humanity of Christ that is experienced through becoming church in eucharistic worship.⁹²¹

⁹¹⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 155.

⁹¹⁹ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 85.

⁹²⁰ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 158.

⁹²¹ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 156.

Pittenger's insight regarding the relationship between the Eucharist meal and all common meals cannot be understood apart from his own Whiteheadian Christian process theology. God's inclusion of bread and wine as bread and wine in the divine loving of the world through Jesus Christ is a metaphysically significant act in the struggle for liberation from the Plantationocene oppressions of the planet. Meals fill the consequent nature of God.⁹²² God is familiar with meals, with the memories, relationships, and hopes that emerge through meals, and with the various ways that humans and human societies use meals to make sense of the world. God intentionally incorporates the Eucharist as a meal in God's own becoming for loving justice through the process of creative advance. Such incorporation, to use Pittenger's language, is the divine action in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist reveals that God *hosts and participates in* meals for planetary wellbeing. God chooses to respond to the suffering of the world with opportunities for human and other-than-human relatives to gather with one another to remember, participate in, and conspire towards the Love that weaves and calls forth cosmos. Here, I develop Pittenger's description of "what is going on" in the Eucharist in *The Christian Church as Social Process*.⁹²³ The budding sacramental ecotheology present in Pittenger's

⁹²² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected Edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1979), 346.

⁹²³ Pittenger writes, "What is going on, I should say, is the continually more intimate entrance of the faithful into the *past* which has made them what they are, the participation which they more intimately enjoy in a living relationship *today*, and their incorporation ever more fully into the drive or thrust to the *future* of the living Christ in his 'mystical body' towards the establishment in the world of human affairs of that Love-

work must expand his own notion of what is going on beyond the human species. This more expansive vision of the Eucharist echoes M. Shawn Copeland's attention to a praxis of solidarity informed by Bernard Lee and Bernard Lonergan's "mystical body of Christ" ecclesiologies.⁹²⁴

Pittenger argues that the liturgical actions of breaking and giving are experienced within this context of gathering and sharing. The bread is "broken that it may be shared," and the wine is poured out that it may be shared.⁹²⁵ Participating in the breaking and sharing "speaks much about [our] participation one with another in a life that requires give and take, sacrifice, and mutual help," he writes.⁹²⁶ The Eucharist is a gift that habituates humble attentiveness to the memories, relationships, and hopes of the many people who Christ re-presents in the meal. The gathered Body of Christ become participants in Christ's holy solidarity with the broken, despised, disappeared, exploited, and killed of the world precisely because they participate in the breaking, pouring, and sharing of the bread and wine that make Christ present in Love for the world in their midst. Cultivating attention to meal relationships for the sake of planetary wellbeing means that Christians are called to recognize how our en-Christed participation in the Eucharist makes a world transfigured through Love-in-action possible for all other meals.

in-action which is God's Kingdom." Norman Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 70.

⁹²⁴ M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 101-105.

⁹²⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 91.

⁹²⁶ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 91.

Eucharistic Worship Characterizes Church

Eucharistic worship is the worship wherein Christians are given the opportunity to remember in faith, make present through love, and order our lives for fuller participation in Christ's own incarnating Love-in-action for planetary wellbeing. For this reason, Pittenger calls eucharistic worship "the characteristic action of the Church."⁹²⁷ Eucharistic worship nourishes what I have termed "sacramental discipleship" by cultivating a humble attention to how others – other humans, other-than-human creatures, and Holy Spirit – bear witness to Christ's presence and thus make the influential experience of Christ possible for each of us now. Participating in eucharistic worship, the en-Christed community experiences conviction and forgiveness of our own failures to love through the grace of Christ who unleashes Love into our midst.⁹²⁸ The Eucharist becomes a meal of thanksgiving because it orients the gratitude that emerges through attention to our profound interrelatedness and interdependency to respond to the grace of Love that convicts, forgives, and restores. Forgiveness of sins within the context of a meal frees Christians for joyful participation in the holy relationships between God and church and reorients Christian awareness to recognize how all meals reveal and enact a vivifying and joyful love for the world.

⁹²⁷ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 22.

⁹²⁸ Bryan P. Stone, "Process and Sanctification," in *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love*, ed. Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 71; Marjorie Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 57; Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 108.

Pittenger describes the church as formed by both its interconnectedness with the world and the environing control of eucharistic worship. Church emerges as a complex organism within our interconnected universe, and eucharistic worship shapes the conditions for how the church interrelates through the world so that a greater intensity of Love can be experienced as planetary wellbeing. Regular celebration of the Eucharist meal structures life-in-Christ for the world within the pattern of offering and receiving in communion with God and our creaturely kindred. Pittenger's description resembles Whitehead's development of Bergson's idea of "canalization" at an intersubjective level.⁹²⁹

For Whitehead, canalization is the ordering of life's intensity and freedom within consistent bounds that allows for an organism to grow and flourish as a complex member of the cosmic web of relations.⁹³⁰ Pittenger theologically inflects canalization when he describes the en-Christed person as the one who "experiences what may be a slow or gradual, but *will certainly be a greatly enriching*, conforming of [their] personal grasp of Christian faith to the ongoing community's apprehension of that faith" through their personal participation in the liturgy.⁹³¹ Thinking of eucharistic worship through the lens of canalization reveals that the purpose of eucharistic worship is to make possible for the

⁹²⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 107-109.

⁹³⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 107.

⁹³¹ "Faith" in this quotation is how Christian memory makes present Christ as an influence for their own experiences of Love –Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 56. (*emphasis mine*).

world to experience over time a greater intensity of Love than is currently experienced.⁹³² The Eucharist meal reveals God's loving activity gracing the world beyond, with, and through our lives to bring about a "transformation, transfiguration, and reorientation" of the present into the divine Reign of Love.⁹³³

The transfigured world cannot be thought of as far off and remote to the needs, sufferings, passions, desires, and lives encountered in our present meals.⁹³⁴ "The liturgy helps us to see that we do not need to 'go out of this world' to know God," Pittenger writes.⁹³⁵ Nor do we need to escape this world to participate in God's "fulfillment of the Spirit's healing, creating presence."⁹³⁶ The otherwise world of the Reign of God is not a fully formed and static place at which we will arrive at the end of our days. One might think of this process in metaphoric terms. The slow work of Hawaii's Waimea River through a volcanic landscape may serve as an illustration of the canalizing process of eucharistic worship for planetary wellbeing. Waimea Canyon has hosted many flourishing communities of life over time because it did not arrive ready-made for the thriving of its present biome. Each creature who emerged in interdependence with the Waimea River and other creatures shaped the limits, bounds, and possibilities for how

⁹³² Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 72-76.

⁹³³ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 74-78.

⁹³⁴ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 117-127.

⁹³⁵ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 82.

⁹³⁶ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 120.

more creatures could blossom into life in the future. With the slow faithfulness of a river's relatedness to its community, Spirit graces church with canyon-like patterns of life so that we who emerge as church might experience and make present Love, which has called forth our abundant living in new and necessary ways for our world.

The Eucharist meal is a foretaste of the otherwise world that lures church into new patterns of living in our church and larger socio-ecological communities. The meal prioritizes “never ceasing exposure to the love of God” by making Christ present through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹³⁷ The eschatological reality of the Eucharist “resists both the reduction of human praxis to social transformation and the identification of the gospel with even the most just ordering of society.”⁹³⁸ No modernist theory of progress can adequately fund or describe the transformative relationships experienced through eucharistic worship. Rather, becoming “more fully the ‘en-Christed persons we are intended to be” will entail actively cultivating attention to meal relationships as a holy habit through our sharing of meals in solidarity for planetary wellbeing.⁹³⁹

EUCCHARISTIC LIFE AND CHRISTIAN ACTION

Attentive eating forms Christians into a culture of relating with food and the human community with more consciousness and gratitude. Furthermore, it discloses that “hope is not only in the future. Hope is in the present,” stirring up in us desires to live

⁹³⁷ See the section *Communities of Creative Resistance* in Chapter IV for a fuller discussion of the metaphysics of struggle and “otherwise worlds.” Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 53.

⁹³⁸ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 102.

⁹³⁹ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 53.

into worlds that are other than the present schemes.⁹⁴⁰ This hope is thickened on the faithful journey with God, who calls us “to arise from whatever oppressive, repressive, depressive slumber seduces us to inaction and to act with God, who is on the side of justice.”⁹⁴¹ Through the encounter with Love-in-action in the Eucharist meal, attentive eating of all common meals emerges as a habit that seeks and enacts holy food justice as part of what it means to become Christians for the world.⁹⁴²

In this section, I argue that Norman Pittenger’s understanding of the connection between eucharistic life and Christian action is not fully adequate on its own for a theology that promotes habits of attentive eating for food justice and planetary wellbeing.⁹⁴³ Two subsections structure this argument. The first subsection presents Pittenger’s understanding of the relationship between love and justice in his process theology of the Eucharist and then deepens Pittenger’s insights beyond his own work by engaging theologians who attend to the importance of particularity, materiality, and locality in theologies that support the struggle for liberation. The second subsection

⁹⁴⁰ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 120; Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*, *Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 71-72.

⁹⁴¹ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 121-122.

⁹⁴² Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 72.

⁹⁴³ Pittenger, of course, is not trying to respond to multifarious planetary crises related to climate change and food consumption. He is, however, concerned that Christian love emerge in the world with meaningful transformation into God’s Reign. The critique that I sustain in this section is focused on that concern.

further the first's constructive critique of Pittenger and focuses on cultivating attentive eating as a habit of eucharistic solidarity for Christians in the Plantationocene.

Love and Justice in Norman Pittenger's Process Theology of the Eucharist

The Eucharist meal is the remembering of the whole life of Jesus, the anticipation of our life together in the Reign of Love, and "an actual here-and-now making real of the communion of" God and the world through the gathering of the church.⁹⁴⁴ Pittenger identifies the Eucharist with the "release of love in the world...which gives Jesus his place as the power for social change."⁹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the love that Christ releases into this world is "in *this* world, since God's purpose is to work for just as much expression of the divine love as this world can contain."⁹⁴⁶ The connection between the Eucharist and Christian action is not escapist work. The Eucharist does not encourage the Christian to pursue some other spacetime that ignores the realities of this world for good or for ill.

The eschatological character of the Eucharist that Pittenger describes only accentuates this fact. "Even if the kingdom of God cannot be entirely contained in the here and now," he writes, "the created world can increasingly and indefinitely approach towards that end."⁹⁴⁷ Such an approach, such a growth in holiness of heart and life is made possible by faith in the Reign of God "in which our broken hearts may be healed, our shattered dreams put together again, our lives knit up, our frustrated desires fulfilled,

⁹⁴⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 69.

⁹⁴⁵ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 127.

⁹⁴⁶ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 78.

⁹⁴⁷ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 78.

our God-given humanity irradiated with the light that streams from the divine throne.”⁹⁴⁸

The Eucharist forms the Christian to recognize the brokenness of the world, its pain and suffering, to repent of our participation in breaking the world, and to participate in God’s life of tender salvation and restoration of the world in Love.⁹⁴⁹

The Eucharist as Pittenger describes it is good news because “it is a vivid and visible expression, in terms of this world, of the way things are to be in God’s intention” and the way things can become as we become Christian through our inspired living.⁹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Pittenger urges “that there is no conflict between love and justice in a process theology” and that, “if love is to be active, it must find expression in a genuine devotion to the cause of human justice.”⁹⁵¹ Pittenger is convinced that process theologies on the whole and especially process theologies that focus on the Eucharist are remarkably poised to foster movements for human liberation.⁹⁵² This is the case because a process perspective offers a helpful analysis of the consequences of philosophies of stasis and

⁹⁴⁸ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 84.

⁹⁴⁹ At different points in this dissertation, Pittenger’s resonances with the theologies of both John and Charles Wesley have emerged. Though Pittenger could have leaned into Wesleyan descriptions of the Eucharist as a means of grace more explicitly, here is another example of resonance within the Wesleyan-Anglican-Episcopal-Methodist family of Christianity. As Tim Hahn suggests, this very pattern could be succinctly recognized in a salvific order of Awakening, New Birth, and Sanctification. I agree. Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 89-90.

⁹⁵⁰ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 80-81.

⁹⁵¹ Norman Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 111.

⁹⁵² Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 115-116.

status, and it makes sense of God's relationships with and through the world amid tremendous novelty and change.⁹⁵³

Yet, elsewhere, Pittenger seems to avoid articulating connections between becoming church through loving justice in the Eucharist meal and any particular patterns of behavior that deepen solidarity and sharing in divine love. He reflects that "maybe the world is a place where good is being made, not found or given ready-made" and that, because the world may be such a place, "maybe our own efforts are required in the struggle."⁹⁵⁴ Pittenger's "maybe" evidences the challenging work that needs to be done today to articulate a theology of the Eucharist that speaks good news into the lives of the oppressed of the Plantationocene.⁹⁵⁵

⁹⁵³ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 111-118.

⁹⁵⁴ Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process*, 128.

⁹⁵⁵ A moment of his writing is particularly telling. In answering a question regarding the contributions of process theology and "so-called liberation theology," Pittenger remarks that "I believe that it can speak very positively, even if it does not subscribe to some of the "ideologies" which have been advanced in recent times." Later in that same analysis, he notes that process theology lacks any detailed measures to be adopted to promote and secure human liberation and that it need not be thought of as deficient in its lacking. Here, he claims that "regard for the total integrity of the theological discipline," guides his attention to the relationships between process theology, Feminist theology, Black theology, Gay theology, and liberation theology (and more, though he does not continue such listing) in a way that suggests that these theologies identify and struggle against oppression as a tangential or disposable facet of their disciplined theological work. The value that emerges does not seem to incorporate liberation into a healthy ecosystem of organisms but prioritizes an overarching theological discipline in which people "can learn much from, and therefore be greatly indebted to, the defenders of a quite different way of seeing things." What consequences are there for liberation in this view? What experiences of suffering prompt the struggle for liberation to begin with if the benefit of the struggle is merely becoming part of a pantheon that includes the oppressor as a "defender of a quite different way of seeing things"? Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 111, 113-114.

In his ecclesiological work, Pittenger identifies neither particular oppressions nor systems of oppressive power. By not doing so, “oppression” remains a category for conceptual engagement rather than the “extreme, serious, and unnecessary manifestation of conflict” to which “those suffering from oppression will respond with struggle for freedom.”⁹⁵⁶ Though Pittenger rightly argues that Christian liturgical action “is designed to help us become Christians” and “is intent upon making us Christian” people, he never connects these anthropological consequences of the liturgy with the materiality of both the Eucharist meal and all common meals that intimate the presence of God.⁹⁵⁷

The materiality of the Eucharist meal suggests that a process theology of the Eucharist must pay attention to how our living as the Body of Christ impacts the quality of life in our local communities, larger socio-ecological regions, and the world. As a meal, the Eucharist forms the church to construct worlds that prioritize food justice for planetary wellbeing in response to identified deprivations and exploitations in the Plantationocene.⁹⁵⁸ Because the Eucharist is a foretaste of God’s fullness in community that is tied into the materiality of the meal, the church must confess of and repent from our relationships that selfishly depend on or have depended upon denying the material wellbeing of our kindred on this planet. For Christ to be “formed in us” as Pittenger suggests is the task of the liturgy, we must “become – both individually and corporately –

⁹⁵⁶ Theodore Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections: A Black Atlantic Synthesis of Neoclassical Metaphysics and Black Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 49-50.

⁹⁵⁷ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 57.

⁹⁵⁸ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 97; Walker Jr., *Mothership Connections*, 49.

different kinds of bodies.”⁹⁵⁹ Such a transfiguration is necessary in response to oppression and bears material consequences for how life is remembered and how it is lived.

For Pittenger, the Eucharist is an “anamnesis of Calvary” and the salvific life, death, and resurrection of Christ.⁹⁶⁰ As the action of the Eucharist, anamnesis effects Christian fellowship in the depths of our being, not as the achievement of human camaraderie but as the gift of God through Christ and church.⁹⁶¹ Communion in this sense includes the totality of the cosmos as well as Divine Love through, with, and within whom the cosmos emerges.⁹⁶² “Central to this,” he writes, “is the Cross of Christ,” because “it is the pledge and the promise that broken things, frustrated things, sinful things, may be restored and in Christ are restored to their God-intended purpose.”⁹⁶³ However, Pittenger’s description of Christian fellowship in the cross fails to recognize that “the cross and the lynching tree represent unmeasured suffering and anguish.”⁹⁶⁴ This dissertation seeks to build upon Pittenger’s theology and communicate how ““justice is the expression of true love or concern” for particular people and communities

⁹⁵⁹ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 53; Patrick T. McCormick, *A Banqueter’s Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 93.

⁹⁶⁰ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 123.

⁹⁶¹ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 128-131.

⁹⁶² Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 131.

⁹⁶³ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 130.

⁹⁶⁴ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 124.

who have been made to suffer the oppressive weight of the Plantationocene.”⁹⁶⁵ In this task, the materiality and particularity of meals and the societies that share them become critically important. M. Shawn Copeland’s attention to the relationship between the cross and anamnesis is helpful to expand Pittenger’s process theology of the Eucharist.

Copeland notes that “the cross of Jesus of Nazareth demonstrates, at once, the redemptive potential of love and the power of evil and hatred.”⁹⁶⁶ By not making more explicit connections with the realities of extreme oppression and suffering, I argue that Pittenger risks reducing the memory of the cross to a “simplistic solution to the problem of evil.”⁹⁶⁷ A more potent anamnesis is necessary in the struggle against Plantationocene oppression. For the Eucharist to be “countersign to the devaluation and violence directed toward the black body” and each oppressed body in the Plantationocene, anamnesis must be understood as “the intentional remembering of the dead, exploited, despised victims of history.”⁹⁶⁸ Furthermore, anamnesis must be understood as the grounds for a solidarity that “mandates us to shoulder our responsibility to the past in the here-and-now in memory of the crucified Christ and all the victims of history.”⁹⁶⁹ Anamnesis in this manner resembles the memories that Karen Baker-Fletcher calls the “memories [that] we

⁹⁶⁵ Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective*, 111.

⁹⁶⁶ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 124.

⁹⁶⁷ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 124.

⁹⁶⁸ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 124, 100.

⁹⁶⁹ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 101.

are called to carry of those who have gone on before us [and that] remind us of who we are and whose we are.”⁹⁷⁰

The action of the Eucharist enriches Christian experience, revealing that “we are all called, with the rest of creation, to incarnate God in the here and now.”⁹⁷¹ From the memories, hopes, and relationships of the Eucharist meal, Christian action in the world participates in the struggle for liberation that cultivates communities that strive for God’s Reign of Love together. “Eucharistic celebration forms our social imagination, transvalues our values, and transforms the meaning of our being human, of embodying Christ,” Copeland notes.⁹⁷² Becoming different kinds of bodies through the Eucharist meal, as Monika Hellwig argues, is “a new life of community with others in Christ.”⁹⁷³ The Eucharist meal is Christian action for the life of the world because it is the praxis of solidarity among creation as well as in and with God who is the God of all creation and the God of the oppressed.

Attentive Eating as Practicing Solidarity

Becoming Christians amid Plantationocene suffering must include practicing eucharistic solidarity by cultivating attention to the memories, hopes, and relationships of

⁹⁷⁰ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 123.

⁹⁷¹ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 124.

⁹⁷² Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 127.

⁹⁷³ Monika K. Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 71.

all the common meals that we eat.⁹⁷⁴ Attending to the memories, hopes, and relationships of all common meals will reveal the present ways that meals in the western diet entangle us in the devastation of anthropogenic climate change and “the Spirit’s healing, creating presence on earth [that] means that we do not have to accept injustice and abuse while we wait for some better, eternal life in a world beyond the present.”⁹⁷⁵ Given the dynamic conditions of food relations in changing climates, every human community needs to cultivate attention to food and meals so that we can practice solidarity in the struggle for liberation from the current food regime. This is more imperative for those of us whose meal cultures have predominantly designed, operated, and benefitted from the extractive plantations that constitute the nervous system of transnational global agribusiness.

For Christians, it is imperative to cultivate attention to meals in the struggle for liberation because salvific processes of becoming Christian rely on participating in a meal that re-presents the dead, exploited, and despised victims of history as our kindred. Recalling the particularities of our dead, exploited, and despised kindred may happen in unexpected ways and may reveal insidiously iterating oppressions. The growing ubiquity of palm oil in transnational food production casts a particularly haunting example. Orangutans, some of the closest genetic relatives to *Homo sapiens* on the planet, and their relatives in southeastern Asian forests, die because of the exploitative and invasive

⁹⁷⁴ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 81-82.

⁹⁷⁵ Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*, 120-121.

plantations of Oil Palms.⁹⁷⁶ Furthermore, the toil of despised human laborers is exploited to produce palm oil from these plantations for such a low capital cost that the ecological costs are paid by the biome's suffering and the jeopardizing of planetary wellbeing. The growing ubiquity of palm oil in transnational food production means that there is a significant chance that the palm oil produced by exploiting human workers and threatening orangutans is actually baked into the bread of the Eucharist meal. Finally, modernity's liturgies of killing, exploiting, and despising mean that palm oil will not be the only additive to bread, wine, or juice that re-presents our mutilated relatives and cries out for justice.

Cultivating attention to meals in the struggle for liberation will reorient Christians to experience grace as creative Love-in-action which makes space and time "for the cry of the oppressed to be uttered and considered" in common meals as well as in the Eucharist meal where Jesus is remembered as oppressed, crucified, risen, and living in

⁹⁷⁶ In a recent study, Seaman et al. argued that, because they observed Orangutans persisting "in remnant forest patches within oil palm estates," that "these great apes may have greater ecological resilience to disturbance than previously assumed." However, such remnant sites of forest biome "alone cannot maintain viable populations" even if "they may act as important corridors or stepping-stones, connecting isolated populations, and facilitate migration in response to climate change." Human management of both remnant forest land and exploited plantation land presents a complex of relationships that, in recent decades, has practiced "forest conversion to oil palm [that] negatively affects orang-utan populations, leading to reduced densities." Citing Santika et al., the researchers noted a 25% decline in Orangutan population density between 2002 and 2015. Dave J. I. Seaman, Henry Bernard, Marc Ancrenaz, David Coomes, Thomas Swinfield, David T. Milodowski, Tatyana Humle, Matthew J. Struebig, "Densities of Bornean orang-utans (*Pongo pygmaeus morio*) in heavily degraded forest and oil palm plantations in Sabah, Borneo," in *American Journal of Primatology*, 81 no. 8 (2019): 1-12.

perpetual solidarity with the oppressed of the age.⁹⁷⁷ Reorienting the eating church is a process of intergenerational growth that participates in Christ's attentiveness to each person, human and other-than-human. Reorienting eating in this process is an intentional commitment to restoring relationships with one another in God's loving justice.

The utterances of the oppressed begin to emerge through meals beyond the Eucharist table as Christians awaken to our solidarity with those who suffer the isolating cruelties of oppression in the Plantationocene. "To identify with the oppressed concretely in even one respect and follow through with effective action," Hellwig notes, "leads into involvement with the whole highly resistant network of sin and selfishness."⁹⁷⁸ Attentive eating becomes a practice of solidarity in the face of the network of sin that leads the church to "question the sick and inordinate desires that maintain those structures" of oppression.⁹⁷⁹ In this confrontation, our kinship with one another at the table, with the growers, with butchers and grocers, with cooks, and with the food itself becomes a material threat to the Plantationocene's liturgies of breaking social bodies for commodity profits. As Christ is made present through church in the Eucharist meal, "we can still live and bid others live because we are drawn into a covenant with God and all [humanity] within which to give one's life for others is ultimately to save one's life."⁹⁸⁰ In the Eucharist meal, church teaches and learns how to seek, recognize, and live through

⁹⁷⁷ Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 71-72.

⁹⁷⁸ Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 78.

⁹⁷⁹ Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 79.

⁹⁸⁰ Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 81.

creative love with oppressed peoples in our world, including the oppressed peoples in the church.

Though this teaching may come through preached, sung, and/or prayed words, my process theology of the Eucharist contends that it is the Eucharist meal itself that “evokes a whole narrative of who matters through the eating.”⁹⁸¹ This is because the Eucharist meal is an event that depends upon God’s action with and through the beloved lives of God, Humans, Wheat, Grape, Yeast, Water, Soil, Wind, and Sun. These lives bear witness to the creating, responding, sustaining, adventurous, peaceable, zesty, beautiful Love that gathers in and sends forth the church as a coworker for a transfigured world. Being sent forth means that the meal hasn’t ended but inhabits our relationships just as the bread and wine inhabit our bodies.

When we practice solidarity through attentive eating, we come to appreciate meal preparation as the nurturing of soil, recipe books, and all the preparations that make the meal possible; these preparations lay the table for holy encounters with other-than-human and human people in the life of God. Because of these preparations, we can experience God countering the Plantation’s promises of self-aggrandizing and future-foreclosing certainty. We can become open to unexpectedness as a grace for creative thriving in a healing planet. Recognizing the vulnerability of Love, God beckons us into hopes for a world of justice through Love-in-action by travelling alongside us and infusing our

⁹⁸¹ See “Memories of Many Meals,” Chapter IV.

practices of solidarity with assurance that we are not alone. We have never been alone. Our kindred have fed us, and we are called to love them by feeding one another well.

THE EUCHARIST AND CHRISTIAN ADAPTIVE RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Feeding one another well is a higher calling than the technocratic Green Revolution would have us believe. The transitions away from dominant modes of food production and consumption under transnational agribusiness that need to happen will be difficult and must be part of a broader ecological conversion. Because the Eucharist neither forecloses relationships beyond church nor encloses church away from every broken relationship in the world, Christians can become people who attend to the tremendous responsibilities that come through our meal relations. The Body of Christ is sent forth from eucharistic worship into action within the sacramental world because of our experiences of in-Spirited living and loving at the Table.⁹⁸² Pittenger's ecclesiology suggests that Christians cannot participate in the Reign of Love and enforce a strict church-world isolationism or an escapism that inflects anthropic exceptionalism through Christian language of the by-and-by. Eucharistic worship reveals that the cosmos has been received, transfigured, and offered back to itself as God communes with the community and continually redeems God's creation in our midst.⁹⁸³ Our world is the world that God loves, and the Eucharist meal is an opportunity for the church to participate in God's transfiguring love of the world.

⁹⁸² Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 81.

⁹⁸³ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

Every celebration of the Eucharist re-presents the worshipping community's life together in Christ as participant in the salvific life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth that includes-yet-transcends the localities, materialities, and particularities of the en-Christed worshippers. Because of this, every celebration of the Eucharist also sends the worshipping community forth from the table in grace to love within the local communities that have been offered and received in worship.

The open-ended sending into Love is conspiratorial good news for how human communities, particularly those in the United States and other Western diet cultures, relate with food in dynamic conditions of climate change. As "the Church's liturgical action is designed to help us become Christians," the Eucharist becomes a foretaste of the messianic banquet that reveals God's priorities for biophilia, interconnection, and justice through our societal meal memories, hopes, and relationships.⁹⁸⁴ By participating in the enacting of God's priorities through a revealing foretaste of the Reign of God, "our participation in the Eucharist makes demands upon us, not just to share some of our personal wealth with the hungry," McCormick writes, "but, to confront and reform any and all economic and political practices and structures that make it difficult or impossible for the poor to secure their daily bread."⁹⁸⁵ The Eucharist meal reveals God's loving attention to the hungers for ecological justice. As Christian communities are forced to adapt to the realities of changing climates and the consequences for food supplies and

⁹⁸⁴ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 57.

⁹⁸⁵ McCormick, *A Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God*, 33.

health, we must realize that the Eucharist meal also reveals God's calls to join in the many actions necessary to realize ecological justice throughout the world.⁹⁸⁶

McCormick's development of Hellwig and Crockett's arguments is important for realizing the significance of the Eucharist for planetary wellbeing. Revealing God's priorities through holy communal meals threatens the anaesthetizing malnourishment of Plantationocene agribusiness. Like Pittenger's description of eucharistic action in *The Christian Sacrifice*, Plantationocene meals emerge through a fourfold pattern of activity: taking, breaking, obscuring, and hoarding.⁹⁸⁷ Meals in the Plantationocene emerge through the violent taking of other-than-human and human people from their homelands in order to cultivate a means for profit acquisition in another land; the patterned breaking of ecosystems into monocultured sterility; the packaged obscuring of reminders that eaters and eaten share in Spirit's cosmic entwining through particular places and their associated biotic and abiotic factors; the individuated hoarding of capital gains at the expense of exploited life and labor. Taking, breaking, obscuring, and hoarding, the food industry of the Plantationocene depends upon global control of relationships that ignores local witness to life and the significance of locality itself for planetary wellbeing.

On the other hand, the eucharistic banquet focuses on taking, giving thanks, breaking, and giving – practices that cultivate habits of hope focused on gratitude and the receiving and sharing of love. Such habits stir resistance to the totalizing attempts of

⁹⁸⁶ Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 1-20; McCormick, *A Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God*, 25-34.

⁹⁸⁷ Pittenger, *The Christian Sacrifice*, 79-98.

current commodity food empires and stir dreams of new worlds that actualize biophilic compassion.⁹⁸⁸ As the imagination of the society that eats it, the Eucharist matters as a meal for how Christians participate in God's work for justice as planetary wellbeing. Christian adaptation is already happening in response to particular crises of climate change, including the crises of food insecurity and inadequacy. As more communities hunger for food justice in changing climates, we who are fed by the land need to be attentive to the wellbeing of our kindred who grow, distribute, prepare, and become food not only because their wellbeing is bound up with our own but because they are beautiful and beloved participants in realizing God's priorities for planetary wellbeing.

Open Ending: Questions that Remain

Ending this dissertation must resist the impulses to send forth into some abstract milieu of intellectual crosscurrents or to proclaim a singular resolution to the considered subjects with an imperial certainty. A process theology of the Eucharist for planetary wellbeing has an open ending.⁹⁸⁹ This section briefly contemplates questions that remain for a process theology of the Eucharist that seeks to encourage Christian adaptive responses to the dynamic conditions of food in climate change. The vignettes that are presented in this section evidence attentive eating for ecological solidarity because of life with the Eucharist meal. They risk the adventure of Spirit's weaving and revealing Love. They seek to confess when sacramental discipleship has failed to remember, to hope, and

⁹⁸⁸ Keller, *On the Mystery*, 166-167.

⁹⁸⁹ Keller, *On the Mystery*, 159-176

to love. They position the church to consider how we can become better relatives in the zesty growth into holiness with God and all of God's other-than-human and human people.

Threats to Abundant Life

Amid its many revelations, the COVID-19 pandemic challenges the intimate, embodied, and vulnerable processes of Christian discipling. Christian questions about and responses to endangered public safety and wellbeing have been important for past experiences of tremendous social upheaval. Churches have grappled with concerns over public health and safety as they have navigated how to celebrate the Eucharist meal and holy baptism, how to gather for corporate worship and class meetings, and how to care for the people in their communities who have become sick, have suffered, and have died. Christian responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are, likewise, important. These questions reach beyond present concerns about COVID-19 and suggest broad questions for communities who seek to adapt to the endangering circumstances of anthropogenic climate change in ways that promote healing and loving relationships among all creatures. How churches address these questions and other questions about safety will evidence Christian solidarity as a living expression of the conviction that God is with us and working out salvation amid, through, and with the world, not despite it.⁹⁹⁰

Experiencing the Eucharist as a meal encourages the church to attend to the diverse memories, relationships, and hopes of other meals as we grow into holiness. In

⁹⁹⁰ Psalm 74:12, NRSV

these meals, dangerous working conditions on agribusiness plantations and drastically variable greenhouse gas emissions beyond the farmgate are made present alongside a parent's loving sacrifice for their children and the visions of a neighborhood block that shares burdens of socioecological neglect in justice-seeking solidarity. Experiencing the Eucharist as *Christ's* meal encourages the church to bear witness to Love in action in the world during times of profound loss and grief. The frustrations, exhaustions, fears, and longings that mark the days lived in the valley of the shadow of Death are not unique to Christian experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁹¹ The eucharistic community can bear witness to the Holy Spirit at work with and through the world, making spacetime for life to emerge, to heal, to flourish in love.

Warmer climates due to increasing greenhouse gas emissions, frequent extreme weather events like hurricanes or drought due to jet stream fluctuation, and lower carbon storage through deforestation for monoculture plantations all contribute to higher chances of prolonged human encounters with migrating and displaced other-than-human creatures. As climate change intensifies, the likelihood of human communities experiencing significant and novel zoonotic and vector-borne diseases like COVID-19, Ebola, malaria, Lyme, and rabies increases. Because the Christian enters more deeply into solidarity with the dead, exploited, and despised of the world through the Eucharist meal, Christian discipleship cannot be mistaken as impermeable to or silent upon these and other threats to abundant life. And, because faithful celebration of the Eucharist

⁹⁹¹ James Howard Hill, Jr., conversations with the author.

contributes to cultivating attentive eating as a practice of Christian solidarity, the Eucharist cannot be abandoned as if it is impotent in the face of these dangers.

Pittenger suggests the importance of the meal for fostering the solidarity that participates in and celebrates salvation coursing through broader patterns of reality in his title *Life as Eucharist*. The Eucharist meal emerges from and influences the organic rhythms of offering and receiving in the process of creative advance. An en-Christed community can eat every meal with care-full attention, which neither ignores the real conditions that oppress life nor abandons the struggle for liberation from the evil relations that further oppressive conditions. The local contexts of these care-full meals will influence how communities become conspirators with Christ and their kindred in the Holy Spirit's loving work.

Eucharistic Homelands

What are the homelands of the Eucharist meal, and how are Christians formed to experience our homelands through our eating? No meals are dislocated, and this includes the Eucharist meal. Michael Twitty's insight that "there is no chef without a homeland" evidences a critically important intertwining of meal memories and meal relationships.⁹⁹² Memories of and through a meal remember particular relations of the past and cultivate attentiveness to the influences of relations in the emerging present. These relations include locality with land and sea.

⁹⁹² Michael Twitty, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (New York: Amistad, 2017), 6.

I have noted above that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are tokens of Christ, and the process theology of the Eucharist that I am developing in this dissertation is concerned with how the Eucharist meal shapes Christian relationships with every other meal in our lives.⁹⁹³ The Eucharist meal responds to Jesus's instruction "Do this in remembrance of me."⁹⁹⁴ Remembering Jesus includes remembering the lands and seas from whence his meals came in a Palestine that was under Roman occupation. Yet the homelands of the Eucharist meal cannot only be the Levant of two millennia ago. Remembering Jesus also includes remembering the lands and seas that have sheltered and fed the Body of Christ across the planet as church has made the resurrected Christ present for and within the world. Furthermore, remembering Jesus includes remembering the lands and seas that are promised to and have become transfigured through his incarnation as God's self-expressing love.

The Eucharist's homelands emerge through the creative tension of these three homes. Eucharistic celebrations ought to orient Christians to our relationships with all of these lands and seas through Spirit's vivifying and incorporating love in the Body of Christ and throughout creation. Such an orientation should occur in different ways, yet the focus will be the same: form en-Christed attention to the health of the land and water that brings forth food in the immediate vicinity of church and its people. One pattern of formation could emerge through making grains and grapes that are local to the

⁹⁹³ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 33.

⁹⁹⁴ Luke 22:19, NRSV.

congregation into the bread and wine of the Eucharist. What alternatives to colonizing ecclesiologies could emerge if the wine was a gift of Muscadine from the clay and loam-soiled, warm, wooded, and humid foothills of the Appalachian parish gathering around the Eucharist table?

Another pattern of formation could emerge as a eucharistic society gardens or farms together and celebrates the Eucharist within the patterns of harvesting and eating in that life together. Still another could emerge as churches support a farmer's market to connect and care for their neighbors who have been victimized by food apartheid and the farmers who live in good relationships with the land to raise vegetables, fruit, fungi, and meat for the community. The practicalities of these patterns of formation will differ due to varying contextual realities that influence congregations of en-Christed eaters. Each of these patterns of formation emerge, however, through creative Christian response to similar influences: influences of ancient Palestine and other ancestral lands; the influences of current lands and current cultures of relating thereunto, and the influences of hopes into possible relationships between humans and other-than-human creation that reveal and enact God's Reign of Love for the world.

The Eucharist and Mass Extinctions

On the brink of mass extinction, what gospel is offered by the Eucharist, by an understanding of the Eucharist as a banquet for planetary wellbeing? Is it just another feast that takes the labors and lives of a multitude for the fueling of a few? The

Plantationocene is further marked by the widespread extinction of species.⁹⁹⁵ As lands and seas have been transformed by human activity, the extractive patterns of colonialism have ripped life from both human and other-than-human communities. The Eucharist reorients Christians to the profound value of communal life that vividly and visibly expresses “the way things are to be in God’s intention.”⁹⁹⁶ That is to say, the Eucharist is a meal that makes plain the eaters’ dependency upon and participation in God’s desires for love to empower and cultivate all relationships. While news that planetary wellbeing is coming through God’s liberative work with en-Christed community is good news for the millions of people who are marginalized by expanding plantations, portions, and pockets, the absences of those who have been marginalized to the point of death haunt the table and cry out for communion. Should current extinctive activities continue apace, human relationships with our other-than-human kin will be sinfully known by a devastating depletion of biodiversity in a short timeframe relative to the long history of our planet.⁹⁹⁷

⁹⁹⁵ Anthony D. Barnosky, Nicholas Matzke, Ben Mersey, Elizabeth A. Ferrer, Susumu Tomiya, Guinevere O. U. Wogan, Brian Swartz, Tiago B. Quental, Charles Marshall, Jenny L. McGuire, Emily L. Lindsey, and Kaitlin C. Maguire, “Has the Earth’s Sixth Mass Extinction Already Arrived?” *Nature* 471, no. 7336 (2011): 51-57.

⁹⁹⁶ Pittenger, *Life as Eucharist*, 80.

⁹⁹⁷ One of the great tragedies of the Plantationocene is that colonialism has so effectively asserted itself as definitive of *Homo sapiens* that the anthropogenic extinctions that are currently being recorded are becoming known as the fault of all humanity. This is a sinful lie that extends beyond white colonialism to include all forms of colonialism, patriarchy, kyriarchy, misogynoir, ableism, and heterosexism. This lie violently ignores and rejects memories of the millennia of human life together with our other-than-human kin that have not resulted in our current climate crises and its direct

Previous Christian patterns of discussing the Eucharist have focused on if or when substances are transformed through the ritual meal for the sake of the communicants' salvation. These concerns have left theologies of the Eucharist ill-equipped to articulate how the ritual meal reveals and enacts good news amid dramatic loss of life within and beyond *Homo sapiens*. The loss of biodiversity in our common home extracts energy and life from possibilities for our social becoming in love through justice. When entire species go extinct, their influence begins to fade from communal memory. Approaching the Eucharist from within the ecclesiology of organism, however, gives sacramental theology the opportunity to recognize how the ritual meal happens like other meal moments in our world. Every moment emerges in a creative weaving of past facts, present contextualities, and future possibilities. The Eucharist for planetary wellbeing reveals a more inclusive good news that compels solidarity with the dying and extinct,

threat to ecological wellbeing. This lie is sinful because of how that violence impacts the health of kinship across the planet. Karen Baker-Fletcher writes in *Dancing with God*, "such violence is always violence of kin against kin and kin against God in the eyes of God...[it] is a violation of God, humanity, and of the groaning, blood-soaked earth. The earth cries out to God, looking for healing and wholeness. The consequences of sin and evil is that James Byrd Jr., like all the beaten, maimed, and murdered of the world, will no longer eat with friends and family, sing songs for them, or smile." The consequence of the commodifying sin-that-erases is that our kin are disappeared from tables, from families, from societies whenever the commodifying systems and institutions demand their hunger, loneliness, and isolation to justify and further the commodifier's coercive power. Baker-Fletcher's framing of sin as violation means that redemption cannot come through suffering oppression but must come through overcoming it and forging solidarity through communities of resistance to the perpetuation of oppressive powers, conditions, and events. Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 111.

grounds action to mitigate extinctive conditions, and re-members the world by restoring and protecting habitats and ecosystems that bear the scars of Plantationocene oppression.

Consumption and Production in a Eucharist for Planetary Wellbeing

Though I assume that most Christians in the Global North experience the Eucharist principally from the perspective of consumption, a theology of the Eucharist for planetary wellbeing cannot be limited to a critique of consumption. Furthermore, it cannot depend upon neoliberal capitalist philosophies of consumer politics to transform the planet in such a way as to promote planetary wellbeing. The former critique risks remaining only a collection of words that remain ever in the discourse of a moment without significantly influencing the relationships of that moment. The latter politic relies on the same logic that has promoted multinational corporations to personhood in the jurisprudence of the United States: the monetary unit is the base unit for meaningful participation in and communication through society's relationships. Eucharistic action must reject these positions.

Eucharistic action for planetary wellbeing must also address the means of production and the ways in which the beneficiaries benefit. In climate scientific inquiries about agriculture, this has often been labeled as "within the farmgate." However, reorienting the means of production towards planetary wellbeing will require the analysis of a process theology of the Eucharist that both identifies and proposes compelling alternatives to the modern commodity logic of the Plantationocene because of how the Plantationocene has intentionally blurred the origins of foods, disoriented farmers into

consumers, and broken traditions of knowledge and wisdom that have shaped human relationships through food for generations.

In the struggle for liberation from Plantationocene sufferings, the church can become a community that lives in eucharistic solidarity through all of our common meals. We can also practice eucharistic solidarity by returning land to the Indigenous peoples of our area, by learning to plant and tend vegetable and fruit gardens in ways that honor the relationships that have cultivated the land from time immemorial, by supporting farmers who promote food sovereignty for their bioregional communities, by cooking in intergenerational communities of wisdom and knowledge, and by sharing meals in these communities. These practices target the means of production and recall memories of abundance through interdependence that can radically reshape our future.

The Eucharist as a Meal of Resistance

How could we think about the Eucharist as a meal of resistance? The decision by God and the decisions for God in the Eucharist make space for future meals beyond the Table to occur in loving, creating, and redeeming ways. God's invitation to participative justice through the Eucharist meal can encourage communities to partake of all their meals in ways that cut off transnational corporate agribusiness's extractive and destructive influence. These meals participate in the Eucharist's hope for communities of creative resistance. As Freedom Farm Cooperative showed, this is resistance that happens through refusing food bound up in extractive economics by constructing the otherwise world imagined in the struggle for liberation. Likewise, the Eucharist is an opportunity to

practice refusal by decentering the individual and luring forth a communal relationship with and dependence on God's grace in our lives.

Working to heal Plantationocene suffering by dismantling the Plantation itself necessitates a spiritual resiliency that encourages habits that participate in God's creative lure for holiness. For Christians whose dominant meal paradigm has been the western diet, the needed spiritual resiliency cannot happen in solidarity with those who suffer death-dealing of extraction without confession and repentance of our complicity in their suffering. Confession and repentance are the first practices of refusal in eucharistic worship as we cultivate attention to the "summons...to a social praxis in the here-and-now [that] contests sin's destructive deformation of ourselves and thus of the society we constitute."⁹⁹⁸ Practicing resistance in meals can happen when people organize hunger strikes to pressure for policy changes and enforcement; when churches insist on potlucks sourced by food from local farmers; when people spend time learning and cooking recipes with neighbors rather than swinging through another drive-through; when en-Christed communities participate in, feed, and support labor strikes that strive to ensure that people have enough time with their families and communities to cook and enjoy meals in the first place.

For Christians who are caught up in the western diet, cultivating solidarity with those who suffer the dietary pangs of extractive economics is likely closer to daily life than many realize. Millions of Christians face the effective ultimatum "eat this product of

⁹⁹⁸ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 104-105.

transnational agribusiness or die of starvation.” Refusal when this is the only viable option seems absurd. The eschatological vision of the Eucharist meal must remind the Body of Christ that great banqueting in the Reign of God is yet a possibility for our life together and not just some fanciful flight of posthumous justice. In the face of ultimatums like these, the Eucharist can become a meal of resistance to the present order that cultivates Christian love for one another through community gardening, harvesting, and banqueting; a meal that remembers ancestral recipes and ways of relating to food; a meal that calls us into greater love through justice for one another; a meal that sends forth by clearing the altar table so it can become the center of the food distribution and sharing event following the worship service.

CONCLUSION

In God’s cosmic love, we are intimately related with one another, with our other-than-human kindred, and with our planetary home. Meals reveal and enact ways that these intimate relationships weave us into processes of life beyond ourselves. We are related to every other-than-human person and human person who is involved in the food systems that shape bodies, societies, biomes, and our planet. Paying critical attention to meals can reorient the church away from metaphysical dilemmas and exceptions about static substances and toward experiencing the holy mystery of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist within the dynamic relationality of God’s life in the world and the world’s life in God. This holy mystery is a dynamic movement that incorporates – literally in-bodies – Christians, our human kindred, and our other-than-human relatives within the creating, restoring, and sustaining Love that permeates the cosmos while yet calling us beyond

ourselves. This holy mystery presents the interrelatedness of our local health with planetary health, and it inspires Christian responses with God for the life of the world.

In the Eucharist meal, the church experiences communion with God that inspires us to pursue compassionate and creative responses in our local communities to the broken and destructive relationships that characterize the Plantationocene. Justice as planetary wellbeing must emerge through diverse means to address the manifold devastations of life that have been wrought in the Plantationocene. As the Holy Spirit pours Love over the gathered Body of Christ and the offered Body Christ, the Eucharist makes God's desires and actions for the interdependent life of the cosmos influential in a plain and public way: a meal. In this meal, Christians are invited to experience a touchstone and a vision for adaptive responses that prioritize the healing of Earth and our shared healing as earthlings.

The holy meal is replete with memories: memories of Jesus's incarnation of God; of grasses emerging from seed and breathing air; of grapes whose relationships with God and all creatures shape how the human relates with their tastes; of yeasts and their transformation of sugars in fermentation; of water and the lives it gives; of human communities and people who have received the meal before and experienced depths of salvation through Christ. The holy meal is effusive with hope: hopes for survival and quality of life amid the valley of the shadow of death; for communities of creative resistance to oppression; for interrelatedness that inspires cooperative struggles for planetary wellbeing; for thriving biodiversity; for renewed attention to vital local knowledge and rhythms of life; for our banquets to become more like God's beautiful

banquet of love; for communities of celebration and healing that include us all. The holy meal attunes the church to experience our relationships in the world: relationships that intensify experiences of God as Love-in-action in our life together; that share in the abundant life of the world through meals; that reveal the dignity of each creature in divine love; that mediate repentance and restoration in God's love; that inspire societies to partner with God to love creatively and adventurously. In the eucharistic meal, the gifts of bread and wine are gifts of God through Soil, Sun, Wind, Water, Wheat, Salt, Grape, Yeast, and Human, for one another that we might become one for the world in Love.

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