MARS HILL GRADUATE SCHOOL

PLACE, EMBODIMENT, AND DIVERSE PARTICULARITY: DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL PRACTICES ROOTED IN AN ORIENTING MYTH OF BIBLICAL TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN A CONTEXT DOMINATED BY THE MYTH OF GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This project addresses the problems of human dislocation, ecological destruction of place and homogenization of local cultures by offering biblical narratives as an alternative orienting myth to the dominant shaping myth of globalization. Part I explores a Trinitarian spirituality rooted in the biblical narratives of Yahweh's covenant with Israel, the Incarnation, and the Holy Spirit's work at Babel and Pentecost. In Part II, this Trinitarian spirituality is applied, creating categories in which local congregations can begin to understand spiritual practices involving food systems, land use, and economics as liturgical acts which function both prophetically and sacramentally to form us around an orienting myth based in the biblical narratives even while we exist in relationship to oppressive social and economic systems rooted in the competing myth of globalization. Finally, this author sets forth the task of relocalization as a faithful Christian expression of Trinitarian spirituality which presses not only against the myth of globalization but, more importantly, toward particular and diverse expressions of the Kingdom of God in local communities throughout the world.

‘Place’ has something to do with accepting our contexts and being accepted. If we are placeless people without roots we are not only insecure but also in danger of abusing the world and people around us in a vain attempt to create an artificial identity we do not naturally experience. . . . Sacred place or, better, the sacred quality of place, is where the timeless and the deep can be found and in this is both grace and revelation. Because of this, place needs to be a fundamental category of theology and spirituality.

—Philip Sheldrake, 1998

PREFACE

Last summer, I found myself sitting at lunch with some friends while Jocelyn described how she has come to understand Advent differently since our move to the Pacific Northwest two and a half years ago. We moved here from southeastern Tennessee, a latitude that grants far more light and warmth during the Advent season. Our first winter we were shocked to find ourselves plunged into darkness by 4:30 pm. Jocelyn's lunchtime narrative brought to light an understanding of our lives here that has been crucial in shaping this project: until we were in this geographic locale (farther North than we have ever lived), we did not feel in our bodies the decent into darkness that marks Advent in this place. Here, the darkness leads into the hope of the Incarnation which is celebrated just as the days reach their darkest, with the winter solstice breaking just as we prepare to celebrate the dawning of hope in the birth of Christ. Somehow now, after years of celebrating this season, we both know the truth of advent in a way that we could only metabolize into our spirituality from being aware of our bodies in this physical place.

This project is largely about what it means for my Christian theology to be integrated into my own experience of my body, my community, and the place in which I live. To do this work, I have traveled some 3,000 miles from the places that my ancestors have called home—though I am aware that, like all land, there were others who belonged to that place before we did. In the rainy Pacific Northwest, I have often been visited with the questions asked of Hagar in the desert: "Where have you come from, and where are you going?"[1] As these questions have opened up the stories of my own journey, they are leading me into a vision of what it means for a particular community of faith to stay in and take ownership of our own struggles within the placedness of a geographic locale. In the Genesis 16 story of Hagar, she is sent back to live in community with her abuser. This narrative presses hard against the stories I have been told in the

[1] Genesis 16:8 (TNIV).

context of a Westernized myth system of dissociation from pain, which allows me to believe I can move on and separate myself from the places I have destroyed, the relationships I have abandoned, and the scars in my own body which reveal a story of who I am. Yet, somehow, Hagar's identity, dignity, and connection to God's covenant are restored in this encounter. Hagar's story holds together the themes of land, body, and diverse particularity which I see as a way forward for the church today. In Hagar's story there is no easy solution, but this woman holds together in her story much of the tension I feel regarding questions about what it means to live in relationship with the God who self reveals in ways that indicate importance of land, body, and diverse particularity. Hagar carries in her body—the body of a displaced foreigner—one of the children of God's promise—a promise connected to land and family. While at times I feel as though this work is a wandering in the desert, Hagar's story reveals that God awaits us in the wilderness.

INTRODUCTION: RENEWING A TRINITARIAN ORIENTING NARRATIVE IN A CONTEXT OF COMPETING MYTHS

In an age of increasing ability to dissociate ourselves from our local contexts through technologically mediated means of escape, it seems apparent that one of the problems of postmodern spirituality is our cultural sense of displacement—of souls from our human bodies, bodies from within community, and communities from within their local ecological webs. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh identify this as a pervasive condition of homelessness which is linked to our disloyalty to biblical narratives of God in favor of other cultural meaning-making myths, saying that,

> Embracing idolatry is not a matter of living without memory. Instead, embracing idolatry is to embrace the memory, the mythology, and the narratives of gods other than Yahweh.
>
> This is a very important point: human life is narratively rooted. Humans construct their lives and shape their world into home in terms of grounding and ultimate memories. The overwhelming testimony and claim of Hebrew Scriptures is that embracing the memories of idolatry will always result in homelessness. Covenantal amnesia—forgetting the story of the homemaking God—might afford the people a place, even a "home" in the midst of another vision of life, another narrative, but such a home is judged to be no home at all.[2]

Like ancient Israel, we are faced with myths that offer alternative ways of understanding our relationships in the world than those offered by the biblical narratives. In the context of USAmerican[3] society, we are immersed in the shaping myths of global connectivity and our technologically enabled mobility. Neil Postman describes our society's guiding myths as the monopolization of our meaning making systems by our technological development, saying, "The elevation of one god requires the demotion of another. 'Thou shalt have no other gods before

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[2] Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 13-14.

[3] I have chosen to use the term USAmerican in reference to society in the United States of America rather than the more common "American" which hegemonically elevates one nation over all of the other peoples who share the two continents bearing the name "America." Similarly, using this term highlights the constructed nature of the USAmerican national identity and governmental systems and reminds us that Anglo members of this society are neither the first or only inhabitants of this land. I credit this usage to my wife, Jocelyn, who first brought this issue to my attention.

me' applies as well to a technological divinity as any other."[4] That we have ceded both ethical authority and the source of our identity to these myths requires us to consider the means by which this has occurred. Postman continues his analysis by suggesting that our current USAmerican myth of progress through globalization and technological advancement operates by displacing our prior narratives of meaning—he says, "Symbol drain is both a symptom and a cause of a loss of narrative."[5] The dominant narratives in our society—of global connectivity through technology, and repurposing both place and people as resources of our economy—are herein collectively referred to as the myth of globalization.[6] The multiplicity of stories which comprise this myth form a societal liturgy of shaping narratives which conspire within our economic, interpersonal, and technological ways of being in the world, to convince us that the specificity of our physical place and even our own bodies are trivial roadblocks on our path to transcendence (economic, social, temporal, and physical). The repetition of this message through our mass media, commercialism, and identification with brands and corporations that

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[4] Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 165.

[5] Ibid., 173.

[6] Throughout this project I have used the term "the myth of globalization" as shorthand for the combination of social messages and structures of globally scaled consumer capitalism combined with our use of technology which form the dominant narrative by which USAmericans navigate our self understanding, our social interactions, and our relationship to place. My meaning relies on the Anthropological category of myth as a shaping story which informs and frames a society's self understanding. This mythology is, in a functional sense, an accurate portrayal of our societal life in that our participation in supporting the structures of global capitalism *does* grant us mobility and access to more of the world's bounty than would otherwise be possible. In this sense, this type of capitalism delivers on the promises of its myths, but it is a simulacrum based on a conception of the world that is not feasible given the finitude of "resources" and the global population. An important part of this myth is that through our technology we are "globally connected," when, in reality, much of the "connection" consists of gathering or dispersing data indirectly through machines in a way that eliminates actual human social interaction. Further, while the extent to which our new technologies lead toward disembodiment and dualism is hardly greater than that of older technologies such as letter writing, the set of cultural myths which accompany these technologies convince us that we are even more "connected" than we ever were before, thus leading us to value disembodiment over physical presence.

In crafting the concept of "the myth of globalization," I am indebted to the work of Jacques Ellul in ferreting out the ways in which our myths around technological development as both global and individual have increasingly replaced our cultural myths that previously oriented us to what it means for us to be human.

(Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff,* Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990], 16-19.).

signify our social status as "global citizens," has formed a set of cultural stories which leads us to believe that, through our position of economic advantage, we have ascended above dependence on place. This mythology is so powerful because it rests upon the structures of global capitalism, which, by reducing human and ecological life into economic factors, has been successful in wielding control of much of what it would label as "resources." It is important then, in this moment, to focus the attention of Christian spirituality on how biblical narratives may inform our Trinitarian understanding of our relationship to God in a way that provides us with new meaning in the shadow if the myth of globalization and serves as an alternate shaping myth to help us recover the importance of place, embodiment, and the specificity and diversity of local communities. In this understanding, our hermeneutic and ecclesiological practices become modes of shaping and conferring an alternative myth within our society, thus leading the church into the role of forming disciples and in so doing, living out prophetic alternatives within our society.

While attention must necessarily be given to shepherding the increasing numbers of "urban nomads" within our society, at some point we must deal frankly with the premise of the modern project and ask: is it good for humans to live in urban (and sub-urban) settings that erase much of that which makes such a space into an ecologically recognizable place? Rather than suggesting a regression to an imagined earlier utopia, we must dynamically engage the placedness of humanity within creation, pointing toward an eschatology of ultimate redemption. Such a task calls for a spirituality that is robust enough to guide local communities into the specificity of their own narratives and place while also journeying with the God that the biblical testimony reveals in the person of Jesus Christ. For some, this work will take place in re-vision

work in cities, while others will apply this work in suburban and rural contexts. All are necessary, and all are already beginning to happen.

Based on the premise that God is still about the creative work of forming us in God's own image,[7] this project seeks to articulate a healthy human spirituality within the framework of the biblical narrative of God's triune activity in the world as our chosen orienting myth, thus cultivating the health of human beings, along with the entirety of creation, through spiritual connection to God in our bodies, our diverse local communities, and our connection to place. This work may soon be dictated by ecological pressures pushing us toward smaller scale resource usage and crisis surrounding our energy consumption practices; however, there are specific theological reasons for prioritizing place that are rooted in our understanding of our relationship with God in the biblical narrative which may offer correctives to spiritual practices in local congregations as well as ecological ethics. By exploring a Trinitarian spirituality that leads to the health of human communities and creation, we may point away from both ecological disaster and a sense of spiritual dislocation, and begin moving toward a vision of the restoration of creation and the coming kingdom of God.

This task leads us into a reprioritized theology that roots us in our local contexts through understanding our liturgical practices in light of a biblical myth connecting our "placed" lives in the narrative of the Triune God. Such a theological approach pulses with the interconnectedness of an ecological system wherein each organism is intricately linked with others in a way that

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[7] For this concept of God's continued creative action in the world, I draw upon Moltmann's work in *God in Creation* where he describes the multi-dimensionality of God as creator, saying,

> So if 'creation' is to be the quintessence of the whole divine creative activity, the corresponding doctrine of creation must then embrace creation in the beginning, creation in history, and the creation of the End-time: *creation originalis – creation continua – creation nova*. . . . The idea of God's unity is preserved only through the concept of creation as a meaningfully coherent process. This process acquires its significance from its eschatological goal. The symbols 'the kingdom of God', 'eternal life' and 'glory' are ways of describing this eschatological goal of God's creation.

(Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, Trans. Margaret Kohl [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993], 55.)

allows life to flourish. Reading the biblical texts in this way, we see that the mystery of who God is in the world has been played out in the heartache and joy of embodied life among human beings, in the specificity of the created places we occupy and on the relational grounds in which we interact with one another.

We will deal individually with the aspects of place, embodiment, and the diversity of local specificity that we incorporate into a renewed spirituality for our age. In following a Trinitarian model, we acknowledge the interdependent life which we in the world mirror back to the God in whose image we are created. We will set forth a framework for communal creation of local liturgical practices. This frame will guide us into a unified vision of ecclesial life which holds together prophetic, sacramental, and liturgical dimensions of an applied Trinitarian spirituality. Out of this vision we will highlight certain categories around economics, food production, and social justice which must be addressed in specificity by any local community who takes seriously the biblical narrative of God's covenant with humanity through Israel.

PART I

A TRINITARIAN SPIRITUALITY FOR RECOVERING PLACE, EMBODIMENT, AND PARTICULARITY

Section 1.

Cultivating Place: Creation and the God of Covenant

In order to outline a biblical narrative of human relationship with God in the context of place, we inevitably approach the text out of the matrix of the dominant orienting mythology of our own time. As USAmericans, we live in the shadow of the myth of globalization which has been leading us away from placing importance on physical locatedness. This calls us to revitalize how we read and live into the biblical creation myth in a way that increases our capacity for recognizing and loving both God and neighbor. In Walter Brueggemann's work, *The Land,* he seeks to renew the concepts of land and place as central concerns of biblical theology. His analysis of the book of Genesis is that it functions to set up the tension of *expulsion from* and *anticipation of restoration to* the land where humanity is connected with Yahweh.[8] It seems that this dynamic is not unlike our current situation, wherein we are caught between the globalization of capitalistic economics and the possibility of future relocalization in an attempt to stay the ecological devastation that has come as a result of our exploitative land and energy use.

Within the framework of this setup, the Old Testament narratives of God's relationship with humanity center on the connection between Israel and God's promise of land and offspring. While it is less obvious in an age of industrial agriculture, the concern for land is not merely a concern for home, but it is also a concern (like procreation) for sustaining life through the cultivation of land into food. This understanding begins to make sense of the recurrent threats of famine and human infertility which jeopardize the covenant of God with Israel in many Old Testament texts. Brueggemann notes the tension of hope for secure connection to land within the

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[8] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 15-16.

narrative of displacement. He roots biblical faith within the covenant of Yahweh, thus leading to a spirituality that seeks to live prophetically into the promise of the narrative of scripture:

> Biblical faith begins with the radical announcement of discontinuity which intends to initiate us into a new history of anticipation. It challenges and contradicts a consciousness of land loss and expulsion as false consciousness. That is not the way life is intended to be or can finally be, because the power of anticipation rooted in the speech of God overwhelms the power of expulsion. A new history begins in that discontinuity and initiation. The remainder of biblical faith is the history of those who have broken off the old life of expulsion and have walked the risky way of anticipation.[9]

Given this dynamic of the relationship between God, humanity, and the land—what Brueggemann calls, "*a place with Yahweh*"[10]—we see that a condition of healthy human spirituality must hold on to our locatedness in a specific place. While humanity as a whole may have expanded to inhabit the earth, a particular human community that is capable of caring for all of its own members can rarely exceed the scale naturally bounded by the scope of the physical horizon[11] (a notion constantly challenged by technological means of escape from place). Particular communities relate to God, not globally, but from within the context of that particular community's physical locatedness. The connection between commitment to place through cultivation and culture's ability to transmit the guiding stories—in this case, the promise of God to Israel—are intimately connected to how we understand our relationship to the land in which we are placed. Wendell Berry describes the connection between our use of land, development of culture, and economy, and our practice of beliefs, saying,

> If we understand that no artist—no maker—can work except by reworking the works of Creation, then we see that by our work we reveal what we think of the works of God. How we take our lives from this world, how we work, what work we do, how well we use the materials we use, and what we do with them after we have used them—all these are

[9] Ibid., 16.

[10] Ibid., 5.

[11] This analysis relies heavily on the anthropology of Leon Kass which will be explored further in section 2 "Diverse Particularity and the Redemption of All Creation: The Holy Spirit's work at Babel, Pentecost, and Beyond"

> questions of the highest and gravest religious significance. In answering them, we practice, or do not practice, our religion.[12]

As Berry would have us understand, our relationship with the land is derived from and bears evidence of the faithfulness of our relationship with the One from whom we have received the land.[13] In light of ecological crisis and our USAmerican commitment to mobility, a renewed Christian spirituality calls for a prophetic renewal of our covenant with God through our commitment to the land in which we dwell.[14]

Ultimately, our approach to relocalized spirituality must begin by untangling ourselves from the mythologies that uproot us from our context. The biblical narrative reorients us to God's presence and enables us to live into our full humanity as creatures interdependent upon a particular place. When we live into and out of this narrative of God's relationship with us and the land, then we can participate more fully in our local contexts, shedding the dual problems of individualism and universality within the myth of global connectivity—exchanging it for an understanding of interrelationship between particularities. As Michael Pollan reminds us about our connection to the land in which we live, "it is a food chain, and all the links in it are in fact linked: the health of the soil to the health of the plants and animals we eat to the health of the eater, in the body as well as the mind. . . . Food consists not just in piles of chemicals; it also comprises a set of social and ecological relationships, reaching back to the land and outward to

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[12] Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 108-109.

[13] Here we would do well to explore the connection between our cultural dissociation from our connection to God through land and our lack of reverence for ancestors. Perhaps we might learn more by listening to Native American peoples' spiritualities which tend to hold a tighter connection between God, ancestors, and place.

[14] We must also recognize at this point that the land where we dwell, as in the case of Israel, is a land taken from earlier inhabitants. Any way forward into a renewed connection to the land must also include a renewed commitment to the aboriginal peoples who frequently live in exile in their own land which we have too often exploited.

other people."[15] It is within this chain, both ecological and cultural, that we must locate our understanding, not only of food and land, but of how we are created to interact with those beyond our local context both geographically and generationally. It should come as no surprise that our dissociation from our physical locatedness has coincided with a sense of spiritual dislocation and ecological risk on a scale that jeopardizes the future health of our own offspring. Once again, the biblical categories of God's covenant point toward a healthier spirituality that rejuvenates our entire way of life.

Describing what he terms the "urban promise," Brueggemann suggests that this version of our dominant cultural mythology of transcendence has failed us. Speaking of the urban promise as a project which has already passed the peak of its potential, he says that it, "concerned human persons who could lead detached, unrooted lives of endless choice and no commitment. It was glamorized around the virtues of mobility and anonymity which seemed so full of promise for freedom and self-actualization. But it has failed. . . . It is now clear that a *sense of place* is a human hunger which the urban promise has not met."[16] His analysis of our need to return to a sense of locatedness within our physical landscape reveals the need for a spirituality rooted in a celebration of the biblical narratives that hold forth our relationship to creation as integral to our relationship with God. We live in a cultural context in which we have commodified our food, culture, and humanity, using the processes of industrialization, commercialization and technological advancement to escape from our human condition of being interdependent with the rest of the created world. Within such a system, healthy human spirituality is no longer seen as humans living in connection to our place in the biological world. Instead, humans, along with the land, become subservient to our own technologies, adapting the

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[15] Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 144.

[16] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*, 4.

biotic community (ourselves included) to fit the schema of an industrial scale, for the sake of driving an economic society predicated on control of inputs for greatest profit.[17] Within this context we are called to participate in the prophetic tradition of covenant renewal as we seek to understand the relationship between human connection with God and how it is bound to our lived interdependence with the specific community of the land in which we are located.

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[17] The injustice is that a model which outsources costs to others is fraudulent and ultimately offers no actual gains in terms of the criteria of causing life to flourish. In this sense, it is myth, not only in our terms of being a dominant shaping narrative, but also in the colloquial sense. That is to say, the economic principles of global capitalism are so far beyond "sustainable" as to fall in the ranks of fairy tales.

Section 2.

Reclaiming our Bodies: Following Jesus into Full Humanity

In a society saturated with the myth of global connectivity, the human body is increasingly seen as something from which we are in need of escape. Nick Bostrom, a philosopher who directs the “Future of Humanity Institute” at the University of Oxford and was named as one of the top 100 global thinkers of 2009 by Foreign Policy Magazine[18], has risen in prominence for promoting the idea that, “technology could allow us to upload human minds onto computers, preserving our every memory for posterity and allowing people to speed up their thoughts by installing faster software.”[19] Bostrom, who has also co-founded an organization known as Humanity+,[20] promotes a vision of humanity that prioritizes the mind over the body in a Platonic dualism that hegemonically elevates those with access to technology over those who lack the means of escaping the reality of their embodiment. This meme of our society’s futuristic hope in technological transcendence points toward our continued dependence on the Platonic and Cartesian categories of hierarchy and dualism of consciousness over/against the body. Raschke and Doughty Raschke consider the impacts of this kind of philosophical legacy as it has been worked out in Western society and Christianity in their work, *The Engendering God*,

> Plato had taught that *philo-sophy* . . . is grounded in desire of the soul to free itself from the entanglements and confusion of sense knowledge and to soar toward the heavenly vision of truth, which is not clouded by bodily appetites, emotions, or everyday illusions.
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> On pagan soil this fundamental doctrine, which has suffused the cultural heritage of the West for thousands of years and has exerted an abiding influence on monastic Christianity, was responsible for much of the intrinsic misogyny of both Greco-Roman

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[18] “The FP Top 100 Global Thinkers” *Foreign Policy,* http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/30/the_fp_top_100_global_thinkers?page=0,30 (accessed December 19, 2009).

[19] Ibid.

[20] “About Us,” http://humanityplus.org/learn/about-us (accessed December 19, 2009).

> culture and the later Western church. For Platonic thought implicitly identified the realm of darkness with sexuality and female anatomy.[21]

Christians have long struggled with giving over the biblical emphasis on our embodied humanity to these Platonic tendencies. This is evidenced at least as early as in the writings of Augustine, not only in the doctrine of original sin, but also in the failure to present a robust enough grace that is capable of restoring the goodness of sexuality and embodiment. While Augustine himself suggests that the Platonic philosophers he read did not consider the meaning of the incarnation,[22] he seems to have been too preoccupied with fending off what he saw as the Pelagian heresy to fully develop the implications of the incarnation on the redemption of our own bodies. It is this trend in early Christianity that Justo Gonzalez warns against when he says, "By interpreting the Christian faith in Platonic terms, it was possible that Christians would come to undervalue the present world, which according to the Bible is God's creation. It was also possible that the incarnation, the presence of God in a physical human being, would be pushed to the background."[23] This abandonment of the centrality of the incarnation may be linked with the Manichean influences upon Augustine in his early years and his Platonic views of sexuality which are most certainly connected with his rejection of embodiment in response to his experiences as a youth. In rejecting the reality of his own body, Augustine opens the door to the rejection of the importance of the physical body of Jesus as central in the Christian faith, in favor of a God of the mind. It is toward this problem that we turn, examining a spirituality that takes seriously the incarnation as grounds for our own full embodiment as redeemed human beings.

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[21] Carl A. Raschke and Susan Doughty Raschke, *The Engendering God: Male and Female Faces of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 27.

[22] Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 122.

[23] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity. Volume One: The Early Church to the Reformation* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1984), 319.

By centering the conversation on the person of Christ, we finally come to the heart of why Christian spirituality must be focused locally—Jesus Christ models *kenosis*—becoming human in space and time. In filling up physical and relational space, Jesus participated in the life of a limited geographic location. This aspect of the incarnation cannot be forgotten. While God is active in the world in the creative process (here inferring all three of Moltmann's earlier referenced dimensions of creation), the clearest evidence of God's entrance into creation was God's limitation to the physical and relational bounds of human createdness. The redemption that Jesus brought was not one predicated on or promising escape from the condition of being human. Instead, this redemption is centered on completing the work of creation in us, making us more fully human. This is seen repeatedly in the physical provisions of food and healing in Jesus' ministry, his ethical teachings for the present life, and his spiritual teachings about the inbreaking kingdom of God. For this reason, a faithful Christian spirituality must humbly root us in the embodied experiences of humanity. We must take as our prime example the body of the man, Jesus,[24] who reveals in his physicality the kenotic nature of the triune God in whose image we are created. Such a revelation leaves us undone, because it dismantles our ability to hegemonically attain goodness over or ahead of any other human being—that is to say, in the act of becoming immanent, in Jesus Christ, God modeled the way forward toward human completion, not through transcendence, but through leaning into the creatureliness of our own bodies. In Jesus, God self reveals as the God who steps into a human body instead of away from it and calls us into the fullest expressions of goodness and life within our own engendered and embodied nature.

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[24] Here we recognize that in speaking of the specificity of the male body of Jesus, there is possibility for misogynistic interpretation. The emphasis here is on the humanity and particularity of the body of Jesus, which includes his gender and anatomy. Here the way in which Jesus lives into his gender, and his voluntary solidarity with women throughout the gospel accounts attests to the kind of engendered maleness that Jesus embodies and the equality and value of women's bodily experiences in the world.

Our createdness must be renewed as central to a faithful Christian spirituality for this generation as we face technological advancements that have made possible the destruction of, and escape from, our physical place in this world. Pop leadership writer, Seth Godin, declares that, "Now, the internet eliminates geography."[25] This dangerous myth, along with ever increasing consumptive capitalism, has led to the idea that we live in a global society. Many individuals in USAmerica live under the false impression that they can remain autonomous as a consumer while simultaneously relating from the particular to the global. In fact, we relate in relationship chains from particularity to particularity. None of us is physically or even technologically capable of relating between the individual and the global. Our ability to relate at all comes, not from the mere technicalities of communication, but through our embodied human experience. Yet the myth of global connectivity rends us apart from our local geography, economics, art, language, religion, politics, and family systems, and allows us to "connect" with others in affinity groups, often as a means of escaping the tension of diversity among those with whom we live in proximity. This mythology is dangerous because it contributes not only to the devaluing of place, but of the human body itself. As Terry Eagleton points out about the current state of the global poor who most frequently bear the weight of keeping capitalism afloat,

> They are those who have nothing to give but their bodies. Proletarians and women are thus intimately allied, as indeed they are in the impoverished regions of the world today. The ultimate poverty or loss of being is to be left with nothing but yourself. It is to work directly with your body, like the other animals. And since this is still the condition of millions of men and women on the planet today, it is strange to be told that the proletariat has disappeared.[26]

It is this very lived experience of the global poor which calls us to question the capitalistic project while also proffering a way forward—in embracing what it means to be embodied

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[25] Godin, Seth, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* (New York, NY: Portfolio, 2008), 4.

[26] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2003), 42.

beings. In the bodies of the poor we are faced with a mirror that draws us back into the particularity of our own bodies. We live in a culture which, Eagleton goes on to suggest, "is deeply hostile to the idea of limit, and therefore to human biology. Postmodernism is obsessed by the body and terrified of biology. The body is a wildly popular topic in US cultural studies—but this is the plastic, remouldable, socially constructed body, not the piece of matter that sickens and dies."[27] In response to this attitude, we must develop a spirituality that hinges on the mystery of the Incarnation which lies at the heart of the biblical narrative. Jesus Christ came in specificity into a human body, dependent on Mary's breasts and, later, on food which came out of the body of the earth, to give him life. His teachings, which must govern our understanding of Christian practice, are rooted in the dual command to love God and neighbor. In this command, love for the transcendent cannot be separated from the expression of love which takes place in human relationships, between particular human bodies in physical proximity, and, as the parable of the good Samaritan illustrates, both within and across cultural boundaries.

The globalization provided by the internet is problematic in that it connects diverse locales in a way that initially exposes us to a broad range of ideas and cultures, but it does not stop there. Like all technologies, it is not neutral in that its form dictates specific usage. The internet allows for interconnectivity networks, with many paths leading to or through a controlled number of corporate gateways which fuel a homogenizing capitalistic enterprise. To the extent that it contains a broad field of virtual space, the internet maintains diversity, but it does so in a way that leads users into insular conversations with affinity groups that are rooted in a shared interest, but not a shared context. This virtual system—of cyber-space—is a distortion of actual life lived in geographic space where we are constantly coming up against other people and biological factors that are unexpected, which keep us growing and adapting, and that expand

[27] Ibid., 185-186.

our understanding of the world within the limits of our own physical plane. Our gospel must be one that takes seriously the human body in terms of both biology and culture. Elaborating on the ways in which the myths of globalization and our misuse of technology have led into our oppression of other people's bodies, Eaglton writes,

> Regarding some of our fellow humans as inhuman requires a fair degree of cultural sophistication. It means having literally to disregard the testimony of our senses. . . . There is another sense in which culture can interpose itself between human bodies, known as technology. Technology is an extension of our bodies which can blunt their capacity to feel for one another. It is simple to destroy others at long range, but not when you have to listen to the screams. . . . Marx considered that by turning even our senses into commodities, capitalism had plundered us of our bodies.[28]

Thus we see that through technological means, while we may have surpassed the geographical barrier of the horizon, we have not succeeded in achieving the mythic global connectivity that we purport to have attained. Instead, we have managed to feel somehow connected without the difficulty of looking into the eyes of the global workers we exploit, feeling the fever of the child unable to pay the royalties for our medically patented cures, or seeing the erosion caused by monoculture exports on the land once used to provide indigenous families with their daily food.

As we move forward with a spirituality based in the biblical narratives of the covenant of God with Israel concerning its locatedness in the land, we take seriously our createdness and embodiment in relationship with God as revealed in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Faced with the advent of a mythic story of technologically empowered globalization, biblical theology is called upon to offer a mythic narrative rooted in our understanding of our createdness and centered on the pivotal revelation that our renewed humanity comes through the humanity of Jesus. Further, it demands a carefully integrated eschatology which rests on a renewal of all creation that is consistent with how we understand the Trinitarian God in relationship to the world from creation to the consummation of the world. Through following Jesus as the model of

[28] Ibid., 156.

what our humanity should look like we are guided into a spirituality that cultivates our living in the world as created beings who are attendant to the specific places and people that form the community of neighbors with whom we live out the greatest commandment.

Section 3.

Diverse Particularity and the Redemption of All Creation: The Holy Spirit's Work at Babel, Pentecost and Beyond

If eschatological redemption is rooted in God's redeeming presence within our local context, then in our world today, we must wrestle with the plurality and dynamic flux of that context. And it is here that we stumble again into the question of the Trinitarian nature of God. Our doctrine of Trinity attempts to clarify how God maintains individuality and union within Godself. While the life of the world is no mere reflection of God's inner life, the life we are invited to in Christ is the reconciled and recreated life of the world as it is eschatologically. This kind of life is then, in some way, sourced within the life of God. Essential to our ability to hold onto diversity within the unity of a local community, is our ability, theologically, to hold an understanding of God who, within Godself, does not annihilate the other in relationship. In reconciliation with the world, God completes the createdness of the world, rather than absorbing or homogenizing the life of the world into Godself. Indeed, Trinitarian perichoresis and the kenosis of God in the incarnation reveal, not just the otherness of God which we cannot grasp, but a model for how we may imperfectly lean into the kinds of communal life that allow us to live in shared space with others who are not like us, and to do so in a way that increases rather than diminishes the value, glory, and life of the other. Our life in the ecological dimension as created beings demands diversity and interdependence with others. All biological life has shown us that no life exists in isolation, but instead in interdependent relationships with other organisms. If we take seriously the conversation between the specific revelation of the Trinitarian God in the person of Jesus Christ and an ecological understanding of the necessity of diversity for life to flourish, this seems to stipulate that for holistic human health there is need for

plurality within communal life. More broadly, it seems apparent from the biblical narrative that the Trinitarian God inherently designs plurality into both creation and ultimate redemption.

Because humans exist spatially within a geographic plane of being, we are limited at least in part, as Leon Kass would suggest, by the horizon—that is to say, we are by our very created form beings capable of observing and desiring along lines of sight.[29] We function in the world within limited physical planes and, by virtue of our physical limitations, are not capable of dealing with unlimited plurality. For this reason we become overwhelmed at the options we face in the range of choices[30] presented by a capitalistic system of consumerism and in the technologically expanded horizon afforded us through fueled travel and telecommunications. Through encountering radical plurality, this capitalist economic system has positively served us by widening the pathways for people to explore meaningfully diverse cultural and individual understandings of spirituality, sexuality, gender, and culture. However, rapidly increasing plurality has also given rise to fundamentalism, both religiously and politically, which seeks to assert some brand of static orthodoxy ahead of a dynamic and dialogical engagement of God, place, and community.

Letty Russell offers an interpretation of the story of the tower of Babel which sheds light on our own struggle with technologically mediated transcendence and the hegemony of global capitalism. She writes that,

> In the Babel story the scattering of peoples and the confusion of language are God's response to those who seek to triumph over others by means of domination. In building their tower to heaven they tried to consolidate their power and become like God,

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[29] Leon R. Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 69-70.

[30] Many of the "choices" provided by the capitalist system are pseudo choices, such as between brands of the same product, stories with the same plotlines, and manufactured foods all containing derivatives of the same plant. These pseudo choices ultimately distract us from the dangerous truth that this system is incredibly efficient at eliminating local diversity through the mass production, distribution, and marketing of standardized goods.

controlling all the people by means of a single language and political structure."[31]

If we take seriously Kass' argument for limitation of humans by the geographic horizon, the tower building of Babel can be seen as a pursuit of Godlike transcendence over/against the command of Genesis chapter 1 to fill and curate the earth. Brenda Salter McNeil has suggested that the heart of this first commandment of scripture is reiterated in God's response to Babel—that is, God's original intention for humanity involved the extensive migration and adaptations to local geography and ecologies that would lead to diversity and plurality of cultures. In the Babel story, when humanity rebelled by seeking to unite human culture through the technological transcendence of tower building and urbanization, God intervened to bless humanity with the confusion of language that would lead to the fulfillment of God's initial plan.[32] In similar ways we too have sought, through technological means to transcend geography and unite humanity under global capitalism. Russell warns that the lesson of Babel is still relevant in our own situation, saying,

> This message of the importance of diversity is doubly important for us today as we watch the growing domination of the world by North American imperialism and one economic system, and by a growing requirement that people learn English in order to be included in the global economic outreach of the United States.[33]

The similarities to Babel are striking as we consider the devastating impact of global capitalism on the diverse expressions of both culture and ecology worldwide. In the face of such homogenization, we seek to renew a Spirituality that embraces the diversity and local specificity thematically present in the first command, the blessing of Babel, and the day of Pentecost.

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[31] Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, ed. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 55.

[32] Brenda Salter McNeil, "Keynote Address Humanity Through Community: Healing the Racial Divide" (lecture, Mars Hill Graduate School, Seattle, WA, November 12, 2009).

[33] Letty M Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 56.

Through the biblical narratives of both Babel and Pentecost we see the perennial movement of God's Spirit ever outward into the world, moving to reconcile all of creation to God in Christ. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit spread the good news of God in the plural specificity that encompassed multiple cultures, languages, genders, ethnicities, and ways of living out the kingdom of God that are still unfolding in the world. Together all peoples, by living into the specificities, of both place and their own bodies, lean into the eschatological vision of Pentecost—pointing toward the ultimate day when all creation will be brought into its full redemption—that is to say, into its fullest expression of the diversity of God's good creation. Russell describes the work of the Spirit at Pentecost as a reworking of the project of Babel. She says,

> Acts 2:6 says that 'each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.' It does not say that people no longer had their own languages and customs but that they could understand one another. This is a very different kind of world from the one envisioned by the builders at Babel, and in it the unity comes, not by building a tower of domination or uniformity, but through communication…The Spirit does not so much create the structures and procedures, but rather breaks open structures that confine and separate people so that they can welcome difference and the challenges and opportunities for new understanding that difference brings.[34]

This work of the Spirit of God, breaking open human structures and working within and across various cultural expressions gives us hope for a way forward. In this Trinitarian spirituality, we relate to the Creating God of the covenant through lives rooted in the specificity of local community and place, and in following Christ, we understand true love of God as commingled in loving our neighbor in and through our shared embodiment. Out of this interplay, we are enabled by the Holy Spirit in the complex and blessed task of cultivating local expressions of culture and faith while following the way of the Spirit in extending the radical hospitality of Christ that allows us to love even our enemies. Out of the rootedness of our location and the specificity of

[34] Ibid., 60-61.

our own embodiment, we are able to relate, not to every particularity, or even the world as a whole—as the myth of globalization would tell us—but to the particularities of those who cross our own horizons with their own culturally located and embodied expressions of humanity. The gift of specificity of cultural diversity opens us up to follow the Spirit outward into the world as we practice radical hospitality and reconciliation. At the same time, the gift of Babel and Pentecost is also that the Holy Spirit is leading us back into relationship with the Trinitarian dance in which we follow God's covenant with our ancestors in pursuit of locatedness in the land, and we follow Christ into deeply embracing our humanity through our embodiment. Commenting on the function of diverse cultures to guide the task of relocalization, food activist, Michael Pollan suggests that, "We think of culture as a set of beliefs and practices to help mediate our relationship to other people, but of course culture—at least before the rise of modern science—has also played a critical role in helping to mediate people's relationship to nature."[35] While Pollan testifies to the connection of culture and agriculture, he also testifies to the movement of the Holy Spirit leading us, through the diversity of culture, into the created world in ways that lead to the further redemption and completion of our humanity in relationship to God through Jesus Christ. This is the end toward which a Trinitarian spirituality, rooted in the biblical narrative points: the eschatological movement toward communion of humanity and all creation in all of its diversity with the Triune God. Out of this framework we may begin to ask: what are the communal practices which a faithful Christian spirituality offers to help us live out a radical and prophetic relocalization of communities, to honor the bodies of all humans, and to develop economic, political, and social structures that encourage plurality and local diversity across the globe?

[35] Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food,* 133.

PART II

APPLICATIONS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Section 1

Prophetic, Sacramental, and Liturgical Dimensions of Ecclesial Life

As we move to applying a Trinitarian spirituality within the specific practices of local communities, we begin to wrestle with how to shape a community into a place where all are welcome, while also holding to the belief that there is something distinctively formational about walking with community in the way of Jesus. To grapple with this tension, Sallie McFague offers a helpful metaphor for the life of the church in which she suggests that the church functions both sacramentally and prophetically in the world; both offering the gift of grace and calling the world to repentance.[36] She suggests that, given our current ecological crisis, the world now needs the church to claim its prophetic role in leading toward a healthy relationship between humanity and the earth.[37] McFague's categories highlight two essential functions of the church in the world: first, the prophetic—with the tradition of renewing our covenant relationship with Yahweh[38]—and second, the sacramental—where our eschatological hope of God's encompassing grace is administered in the world through our participation with the Holy Spirit. But missing from this conception of the life of the church is our identity formation through following Jesus Christ. This last category is perhaps the hardest to codify, specifically because of the nature of both the incarnation and spiritual formation through liturgy. In the incarnation God

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[36] Sally McFague, "Cities, Climate Change, and Christianity: Religion and Sustainable Urbanism" (Ann O'Hara Graff Lecture, Seattle University, Seattle, WA, April 27, 2009).

[37] Ibid.

[38] The prophetic genre of covenant lawsuit epitomizes this role of the prophet in their calling Israel to return to their relationship with Yahweh. Walter Brueggemann suggests that the covenant, established with Moses and mediated through the prophets, concerns relational faithfulness to God and living out that faithfulness through enacted societal justice within the human community. This can be understood as appropriate relationship with God in terms of land (which we have identified with food) and offspring, with particular care given to provision for the poor and outsiders. (Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997], *645*.)

takes on humanity in specificity, and so too, liturgy—quite literally taken as the work of the people—is the work of specificity as we contextually understand and proclaim what is good news in a particular community context. For this reason, our shared history and shared hope which bind us to all Christians holds us in communion with all believers, while the particularity of our liturgical rhythms are being contextualized to the places and communities where we live. What holds us together is our identification with Jesus and our discipline of following Jesus in the way of living devotedly in our context in order to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God in specificity within our local communities.

Taking these three dimensions of ecclesial life, it is we unite them into a holistic vision of the church in relationship with the world. Thus, the church that functions prophetically to call society to repentance, at the same time sacramentally extends grace and the hope of an eschatological vision of redemption, while also liturgically providing a way forward into forming a shared communal life. In this relationship, the work of embodying specificity within the liturgical rhythms—which serves to form the identity of Christians—serves as a prophetic sign-act for the surrounding social systems. The relationship between these functions of the church within this vision of Trinitarian spirituality forms Christians who are oriented to the biblical narratives of God, the land, their bodies and community in a way that extends grace to the world while prophetically living out the gospel in opposition to the dominating myths of global capitalism.

As we seek to discern faithful expressions of the gospel and ways of being human in response to our cultural situation, we affirm that, "The body is the most palpable sign we have of the givenness of human existence. It is not something we get to choose."[39] By identifying with Jesus Christ through the process of communal formation in liturgy, we live into the bodies we

[39] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory,* 166.

have been given. In response to a system of capitalism that commodifies the human body, cultures, and the earth, we are recalling specificity—to guide people through prophetic example and liturgical rhythms into ways of life that root them in the specificity of their own bodies and place in a way that connects them to local communities. At the same time, we find ourselves dependent on the Spirit of God to lead us into intercultural exchanges in which we gain clarity on what it means to increase our love of both God and neighbor. We increase our own capacity for such faithfulness through ongoing cultivation of spirituality within a given place, while increasing our ability to hold difference through the recognition that other places necessarily demand other contextualizations, and thus engagement is built neither on conformity nor ignoring actual differences.

For this reason, as we create liturgical practices which will shape the identity of believers in a way that is powerful enough to be distinguishable from oppressive myths of globalization, we hope to learn to live in our own bodies and to carefully read our local context and understand what gospel looks like in the specific place in which we are located. Thus the precursor to developing liturgical practices within a local community is the development of what Heather Flores, a food and biodiversity activist, describes as "looking deep." This is a practice of slowing ourselves down and learning to see the life processes that are happening at work all around us. Flores writes:

> Looking deep also means using all our senses. You should look with your eyes, but also listen, taste, touch, and smell your surroundings. Practice looking deep into a garden, into the woods, into a handful of soil, and at your community. Look in every direction: up, down, under, behind, around, through, and at different times of the day. Write down what you see. Deeper, use your spiritual sense—your intuition—and make note of what your instinct sees…Look deep at each level to create a fractal-like sense of what you see. Look past the obvious, check your assumptions, and use all your senses.[40]

[40] Heather C. Flores, *Food Not Lawns: How to Turn Your Yard into a Garden and Your Neighborhood into a Community* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2006), 28.

Where Flores writes this in application to both ecology and local communities, Kristen Johnson Ingram further develops this idea of looking carefully at the particularity and complexity of our location and community, writing, "To pray with your eyes means seeing intentionally, seeing what's around you with new vision, and looking for things and events you've never noticed or witnessed before. . . . God uses my eye to form my spirit."[41] Indeed, as Ingram describes it, through learning to live purposefully within our own bodies, in careful observation of our location and communities, the Holy Spirit is forming our understanding and leading us into seeing the way forward in the work of crafting spiritual practices for local liturgical life that are in rhythm with where the story of God intersects the specificity of the place and community in which we live.

[41] Kristen Johnson Ingram, *Beyond Words: 15 Ways of Doing Prayer* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004), 46-47; 51.

Section 2

Following the Spirit into Local Places: Developing Spiritual Practices for Local Economics, Food Systems, and Social Justice

If we are to create a liturgical life which has the power to form communal identity in a Trinitarian spirituality while simultaneously serving as a prophetic alternative to the myths of global capitalism, the work must indeed be *the work of the people*. Such a task is taken on by the members of local communities who are rooted within their local landscape and context. For this reason, rarely do articulations of liturgical practices which do not arise from within a particular community appropriately address the specific needs of that place and community. A liturgical life that is birthed from the Trinitarian spirituality which we have articulated will be an indigenous expression of engagement with God, place, and local community in a way that is open to encounter with others without systematizing a liturgical program to export or impose upon other communities and contexts. As Daniel Deffenbaugh suggests, in unwending ourselves from the myths of global capitalism handed down to us in the West, we would do well to listen to the theological methods of our brothers and sisters from the global south:

> Theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo, Enrique Dussell, and others have very effectively exposed the shortcomings of a European theological tradition that thinks globally. A 'one-size-fits-all theology,' they suggest, serves only to discount the unique spiritual needs of a particular community, undermining an appreciation for its diversity and singularity[42]

By listening carefully to the process by which others have lived specifically into their context in a way that is faithful to the biblical narratives, we can glean insight into the work necessary for us to learn how to look deeply into our own context and create liturgical rhythms of a scale and specificity to serve our own communities and landscapes.

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[42] Daniel G. Deffenbaugh, *Learning the Language of the Fields: Tilling and Keeping as Christian Vocation* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2006), 134.

Yet there are certain pervasive societal norms which will be faced in unique ways within each local community within a Western industrial setting. But what constitutes faithful local practices of theologically shaped Christian land use, urbanism, and technology adoption? A Christianity that hopes to bring good news that increases the love of God and neighbor must grapple with the globalizing structure of the kind of capitalism which enables much of our systemic and cultural oppression and sin. Wendell Berry articulates the false hope of this economic system when he explains the rationale of globalizing the scale of markets and production,

> The theory is that under the rule of international, supposedly free trade, products will naturally flow from the places where they can be best produced to the places where they are most needed. This theory assumes the long-term safety and sustainability of massive international transport, for which there are no guarantees, just as there are no guarantees that products will be produced in the best way or to the advantage of the workers who produce them or that they will reach or can be afforded by the people who need them.[43]

As Berry subtly highlights, our complicity with the program of global capitalism aligns us with oppressive systems that suppress local culture, economy, food production, and industry—not only in our neighborhoods, but globally. Put more plainly, Christians who proclaim gospel while working for and passing money along to oppressive global conglomerates contradict their proclamation with their economic and political actions, thus testifying that their loyalty of economic solidarity lies not with those for whom they proclaim freedom, but with those to whom they turn for both daily bread and cultural identity. Ellen Davis accurately describes the combined social and ecological impacts when she writes, “Ecological damage is correlated with and compounded by social costs: the steady and widespread deterioration of rural communities around the world, and unsustainable swelling of cities, especially in South Asia and Africa, due

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[43] Wendell Berry, “Conserving Communities” in *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 14.

to the influx of farmers who have lost their land and livelihood."[44] Within this context, Christian repentance calls us to radically take seriously the task of valuing and making the self directly interdependent locally with those to whom we seek to bring the gospel.

Such a task cannot source itself in humanistic optimism or individual consumerism, but instead it must draw from a rootedness in the scriptural traditions of both prophetic living and eschatological hope. In order to begin confronting the hollowness of industrial desire, we must replace it with a renewal of desire for something more holistic and complete. Fritjof Capra offers helpful insight into understanding the workings of our current system of global capitalism, saying that, "Any realistic discussion of changing the game must begin with the recognition that, although globalization is an emergent phenomenon, the current form of economic globalization has been consciously designed and *can* be reshaped."[45] With the understanding that things can be changed, Christians seeking to root themselves in biblical narratives as their orienting myths are reconsidering the interplay between our economic participation and our spiritual life. From within a Trinitarian vision which roots us in our location, our bodies, and a commitment to diverse communities, we can develop economic alternatives which focus on restoring cultural, ecological, and food health through the specificity of local communities, a task that can only take place on a local scale, through cultivation and local cultural practices that encourage the ferment of healthy systems.

We have already intimated the connection between localizing the scale of economics and participating in local food production. L. Shannon Jung describes how members of a society that has given itself over to industrial and technological commodification may enter into practical

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[44] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 23.

[45] Fritjof Capra, *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 211.

acts of repentance, saying, “we need to locate and prioritize our authentic hungers so that we might learn how to live together in a way that respects each other and the rest of the natural world. That sort of respect and appreciation can be thought of as an impulse toward worshiping God. The world of eating is one ground-level experience that can open onto these vistas.”[46] Here Jung reveals the connection between our desires for good food and our deep need to cultivate desire for a way of life that leads to integrated health of humans, communities, and the land. For a culture like ours, in which food has become another commodity separated from health, community, and the ecological network in which we live, cultivating desire through gardening and cooking may be some of our most meaningful expressions of repentance.[47] We must ask the question of how we may integrate technology and cultural wisdom in ways that move us forward into a harmonized vision of human life integrated into our local communities. Such a vision calls for repentance through the cultivation of desire for renewed cultural expressions and practices that reflect theologically coherent approach to how we live in the world. This desire for holistic understanding is one which is interconnected with our desire around food and relationships, a desire frequently played upon by agents of our industrial economy. In order to reclaim these desires for the renewal of local food systems we are beginning to articulate an understanding of repentance in terms of the cultural dimensions surrounding our food production and eating.

This call for relocalization of economics and participation in local food production certainly prioritizes dimensions of sustainability that favor the scale of life in smaller rural communities. Philip Sheldrake helps us to consider what it means to apply this kind of spirituality in light of the reality of ever growing urban populations, saying, “We could turn our

[46] L. Shannon Jung, *Food For Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 14.

[47] Ibid., 112-114.

backs on the city in pursuit of a rural idyll. However, apart from the logistical impossibility for the majority of such a massive social reversal, the danger is that unless we solve the problem of alienation at some other level we simply carry it with us to another place."[48] Faced with the reality of urbanism and a society that has been liturgically formed through ongoing litanies of corporate global capitalism, we must imaginatively enter into what it means to apply a Trinitarian spirituality in rural, suburban, and urban settings. Describing the difficulty of localization within an urban, built environment, Sheldrake continues, "If what we build is an antithesis of human proportion, we should not be surprised that the lack of either intimacy or glory radically undermines the image of the divine at the heart of human living."[49] Yet, even in the middle of our cities there are possibilities of building relationships between place and community. In her memoir, *Take this Bread*, Sara Miles describes how her participation in sharing food within an urban context expanded her understanding of communion,

> It reconciled, if only for a minute, all of God's creation, revealing that, without exception, we were members of one body, God's body, in endless diversity. The feast showed us how to re-member what had been dis-membered by human attempts to separate and divide, judge and cast out, select or punish. At that Table, sharing food, we were brought into that ongoing work of making creation whole.[50]

It is this reconciliation that takes place, whether in urban or rural settings, around shared food, which comes, at least in some way out of a shared land that unites us together across dividing lines. The urban setting will always offer greater human diversity than the rural, and yet, when it does so at the expense of the biotic diversity that roots us to place, the end result may look more like capitalist forces of homogenization and fragmentation rather than community. Into this

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[48] Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God,* Trinity and Truth Series, ed. Stephen Sykes (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1998), 194.

[49] Ibid., 195.

[50] Sara Miles, *Take this Bread: The Spiritual Memoir of a Twenty-first-century Christian* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 76-77.

dynamic, Miles again offers a hopeful and prophetic direction through the ongoing liturgical commitment to shared meals: "To feed the hungry with the excess of an unfair system: to make bread of injustice. It was like the Bible verses that instructed people how to leave food for gleaners: 'When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back and get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.'"[51] It is this prophetic re-imagination of our current systems that offers a way forward for the Church in our local communities.

Through creative acts of economic subversion and participation in growing and sharing food locally, we begin to exercise the kind of deep looking that leads us to see the injustices in our own neighborhood, as well as the insight into our own local place and community to cultivate liturgical rhythms that will instigate changes that bring about justice. In essence, relocalization is about beating our swords into plowshares. Here the possibilities are as diverse as the many places in which local communities find themselves. Community Supported Agriculture, guerrilla gardening, interrupting the waste stream from industrial agriculture in order to stock foodbanks, and learning to cook with neighbors are all possibilities open to imaginative congregations whether in urban or rural settings. In an era of global corporations and global activism, building access to local food production has been too frequently ignored in the efforts (both legitimate and illegitimate) to raise awareness of the global poor. But the prophetic vision of God's covenant has always included in it provision of food for the poor of our own neighborhoods. By creating a liturgical life in which we slow down and look deeply into our own landscapes and begin to help local economics and food systems flourish, we actually free ourselves from dependence on oppressive forms of capitalism, reducing the need for the global poor to grow export crops, and returning to them their land traditionally used to produce

[51] Ibid., 149.

indigenous sustenance crops. In this way, we see that by focusing on our own locale, it is possible to increase our awareness of and commitment to our own neighbors who are in need while simultaneously reducing our role in global oppression—trusting that the same Spirit of God who is at work leading us toward our redemption is also at work in local settings around the globe, guiding *each* local community into indigenous patterns of relationship between God, the earth, and community.

CONCLUSION

In recognizing that our lives are often oriented to a myth of globalization that entwines us in a system that has commodified our land, our bodies, and the diverse expressions of life around the globe, we seek to reclaim a theology that roots us in relationship, through the biblical narrative, with the Triune God. Out of this theology, we hope to develop a spirituality that centers our relationship with God in the covenant which ties us to the land and our human families, to lead us into embracing our createdness as humans by identifying our own nature through the humanity of Jesus Christ, and to follow the Holy Spirit out of our pursuit of Babel-like projects of homogenization in order to embrace Pentecost's gift of diverse specificity that points toward our eschatological hope for the redemption of all creation. We recognize that spiritual practices that create a context for life to flourish within the place and community where we live, are leading us into a radical healing process to pull ourselves away, not only from the modernistic way of caring for the soul, but the modern way of life and its dual impact on both soul and soil. Finding our place in the Spirit's work of redeeming creation allows us to reorient our lives around what it means to be embodied humans. Through such a reorientation we can engage in a renewed vision of rootedness that leads to the flourishing of diverse physical, cultural, and spiritual life. The hardest work is in learning to see in new ways, becoming familiar with how the human soul works in relationship with the earth, and finding ways to intensify this through careful cultivation. Much like the process of converting industrial agricultural land over to locally scaled organic methods, there is a long process of detoxification as we mourn the loss of life and diversity that has come as a result of our poor management. From here we are slowly regaining the sight to recognize and cultivate that with which we have been gifted by the Holy Spirit in our own particular locatedness. This kind of sight comes as we begin to listen to and

live into our own bodies while we follow Jesus in the way of celebrating what it means to be human in this world.

Out of this matrix of Trinitarian spirituality, we can engage as communities in the work of creating liturgical practices which orient our lives toward the kingdom of God. In the process, our communal life also speaks prophetically to the oppressive systems of global capitalism that have for too long shaped our imaginations through myths of globalization that dislocate us from our own bodies, places, and communities. This task, while not something that can be prescribed outside of the context of each local community, necessarily involves the two categories of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel—that is to say, locally contextual liturgical practices are about the work of developing sustainable local productivity of land and food systems that support the ongoing life of our local families and communities in a way that orients us to celebrating local diversity and being aware of those who need care within our own local contexts. In this way, the task of relocalization is centered not merely on staving off ecological disaster or raging against an economic system that is exploitative, but on orienting human communities into the particularity of their place and their relationship with God.

POSTSCRIPT

Since beginning to read and explore issues around our food production, Jocelyn and I have started gardening in a local community garden, shopping at local farmer's markets, and subscribing to a Community Supported Agriculture farm share. These changes have helped us to slow down, look deeply into our local ecosystem, and connect our bodies with the earth in a way that enriches our souls. What I did not realize at the time was that these were, in fact, spiritual practices and they were—not accidentally—forming my understanding of what it means to live faithfully in a society shaped with the myths and structures of global capitalism. As I have explored the biblical narratives in order to articulate a Trinitarian theology and spirituality, it has become clear that this connection between our bodies, the land, and the specificities of local communities is central to how I am coming to understand faithful Christian practice and my own vocation. Moreover, I am finding more each day that our hopes and dreams for our future community when we return to the Southeastern U.S. are not ours alone. The work we hope to do around local food systems, economies, and faith communities is already being done by many people.

Returning to the story of Hagar in the desert, we see that by the end of the passage, she names God, saying, "I have now seen the One who sees me."[52] I want to believe in the redemption of my body, my community, and the place in which I live, but too frequently my imagination fails. I do not open myself to the hard road of redemption and faithfulness in one place, with one community. The myth of globalization that the biblical narrative competes with says that I am transcendent, that I can "unfriend" someone without pain, and that there are limitless "resources" at my disposal (either by denial of finitude, or simply switching to a different type of "resource" to consume). But the guiding myth of a Trinitarian spirituality tells

[52] Genesis 16:13 (TNIV).

me otherwise. I look carefully at my life as I have engaged these ideas, and I see possibility and hope within a community shaped more by the biblical narratives than the USAmerican myth of globalization. When I feel that this work is impossible, I frequently find that it is because I am allowing myself to see it through the kaleidoscopic vision proffered by the myth of globalization. I think that I am fighting alone against a global system. When I allow myself to be human sized, and cry out for help, I find that I am not alone. God comes to me in the wilderness, frequently in the form of other sojourners, reminding me that I am seen and in this way I too can see those before me in the community in which I exist. Our ability to participate with the Holy Spirit in the change we hope for lies solidly in a communal encounter with God through the testimony of our own bodies, our land, and our diverse expressions of humanity. I am grateful that in this orienting myth, the God of the biblical narratives is the God who sees me, and allows us all to see deeply into the places and communities in which we are rooted.

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