

CRISIS AND ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE SERVANT THEOLOGIAN

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There are many crises in our world and not a few in our church, and they all have something in common. Whether they are humanitarian or economic, whether they are threats to democracy or to creation, even when they “only” have to do with ecclesial malpractice and malfeasance, there is a common thread running through them. Each in its own way exploits division and thrives on it, whether between the rich and the poor, or humanity and the rest of the natural world, between citizens and immigrants, or between the relatively safe and the desperate refugee, between laity and clergy. Each thumbs its nose at the common human dignity of all people and our joint responsibility for a secure political order, true human freedom, and a healthy natural world. Somewhere at the back of all these and other challenges, is a potent mixture of greed and lust for power. The real crisis, in fact, is a degradation of the very notion of the human, brought on by the complex mechanism of greed and power whose name today is neoliberalism. We encounter it most directly in the triumph of finance capitalism and the arrival of surveillance capitalism, effective economically through globalization and politically through the deliberate erosion of the democratic process. To borrow a phrase from Jürgen Habermas, we are witnessing “the colonization of the life world by the system.” The crisis, then, is at one and the same time global and intensely personal. The forces unleashed in the world by developments in the mode of capitalism are effectively refashioning the human person and the human community. We theologians need to be in head-on confrontation with this impending apocalypse.

If “neoliberalism” is a word unknown to you, or simply one that you hear without its impinging much upon your life or consciousness, this is testimony to its sinister force. Originally a term developed by Friedrich Hayek, it referred to his belief that all reality could be explained on the model of economic competition. All human activity, he thought could be measured in terms of wealth or value or price. Price in particular was a means to allocate scarce resources, and for its efficient function, the market had to be free and competitive. “The market” for Hayek was not just a term for economic activity, but one that described society as a whole. Hence, he could go on to extrapolate a vision of human beings as creatures who would and should follow their own self-interest in competition for scarce resources. Through this human competition, we would learn who and what is really valuable.

These insights actually go way back before Hayek, many decades, to John Ruskin's prophetic attack on capitalism in his 1860 publication, *Unto This Last*.¹ The opening lines of this book criticize "so-called political economy" for the idea that "an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection."² The social affections, says Ruskin, are thought by the economist to be "accidental and disturbing elements in human nature," while "avarice and the desire of progress are constant elements." Just eliminate the social affections (today we would say "conscience and compassion") and the human being will be understood as "a covetous machine."³ Responding to the narrow vision of the economist, Ruskin allows that luxury is possible in the future, "but luxury at the present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant; the cruelest man living could not sit at his feast, unless he sat blindfold."⁴ And if this brings to mind Marie Antoinette's "let them eat cake," as indeed it should, it might also be reminiscent of the hard-hearted Wilbur Ross's appalling suggestion to furloughed federal workers during the government shutdown over the last Christmas holiday that "they could easily get a loan."

All the ills of our contemporary world are either directly or indirectly related to neoliberalism, the globalized form of free-market capitalism that grew out of the world Ruskin warned us against. The direct ills are those which result from the impoverished understanding of a human being as a consumer seeking to maximize one's own self-interest, inevitably at the expense of others. These would include the perverse fruits of globalization, with the growing gap between rich nations and poor, and between rich and poor individuals. The statistics are so well-known, even here in the U.S. where the richest 1% hold about 38% of all privately held wealth while the bottom 90% have 73.2% of all debt. The richest 1% in the United States now own more wealth than the bottom 90%. Globally, the situation is far worse; 42 individuals hold as much wealth as the poorest 3.7 billion.⁵ Ruskin might not have anticipated statistics like these, but the reduction of human beings to "covetous machines" that he excoriated is their direct ancestor.

Today the bigger problems may turn out to be the indirect consequences of the huge gaps in income, wealth and prosperity across the globe. The reaction to the free market system and the attendant neoliberal ideology most commonly both challenges its excesses and reinforces a sense of its inevitability. We, the securely affluent, have for the most part bought into the cultural and economic benefits of neoliberalism and closed our eyes and minds to the human consequences. Those who have less—and this is most of the world—spend their lives in the struggle to survive those same economic and cultural consequences. Frustration leads often enough to the violent rejection of the economic and political systems that accompany neoliberalism, and we end up with a politics of envy that threatens democratic culture. Look around our world today and

¹ John Ruskin, *Unto This Last: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1885).

² Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, 17.

³ Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, 18-19.

⁴ Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, 138.

⁵ "Reward Work, Not Wealth," Oxfam Briefing Paper, January 22, 2018, https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-reward-work-not-wealth-220118-en.pdf.

we will see the progressive diminishment of true human agency. The forces unleashed by the global market render us seemingly impotent in the face of growing disparities of wealth and power, climate change and a rise in populism and nationalism that may presage a return to forms of authoritarianism or fascism that we thought the twentieth century had eradicated.

A recent call to arms against finance capitalism is contained in an extraordinary work by the distinguished American Protestant theologian, Kathryn Tanner. In her Gifford lectures reworked into book form as *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*⁶ Tanner presents a disturbing phenomenology of life under finance capitalism. Reversing Max Weber's classic account of how Christian beliefs could be compatible with and even formative of capitalism, Tanner proposes a view of Christianity as perhaps the last best hope of the human race struggling *against* the attack on human flourishing represented by this "new" spirit of capitalism. In language that fits so well with the theme that María Pilar Aquino chose for this convention, Tanner argues that in the face of capitalism's pretense to be "all-encompassing," a return to a prophetic form of Christianity shows "the coherence of a whole new world" that can disrupt finance-dominated capitalism's claim to inevitability.⁷

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of surveillance capitalism is even more insidious and challenging than the finance capitalism with which Tanner contends. The worst of the dangers in neoliberalism is that it has become as invisible as the air we breathe and, for the most part, we regard it as "reality." Surveillance capitalism ratchets all of this up a notch to put the freedom of human thought processes under threat. In the words of Roberto Mangabeiro Unger, the normalization of surveillance capitalism "leaves us singing in our chains."⁸ If Hayek and his fellow-travelers imagined that freedom was being a consumer, that this was indeed the meaning of being human, the world of Google and Facebook and others sets out to remove even that freedom. It gathers knowledge about our experience and behavior in order to shape what we take to be our freedom, and sells it to those who want to profit from the chains we do not know are weighing us down. As Shoshana Zuboff puts it in her important book on surveillance capitalism, we are not its customers. Instead, we are its sources of a crucial surplus, "the objects of a technologically advanced and increasingly inescapable raw-material-extraction operation."⁹ Its actual customers are "the enterprises that trade in its markets for future behavior."¹⁰ And in even more sobering language, "our lives are scraped and sold to fund their freedom and our subjugation, their knowledge and our ignorance about what they know."¹¹

⁶ Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

⁷ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 219.

⁸ Robert Mangabeiro Unger, "The Dictatorship of No Alternatives," in *What Should the Left Propose?* (London: Verso, 2006), 4.

⁹ For an exhaustive analysis of this new stage in neoliberalism, see Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2019), 10.

¹⁰ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 10.

¹¹ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 498.

If the crisis brought upon the world by the forces of neoliberalism is one that all human beings need to struggle against in their own way, there is a special role for theology, for the individual theologian and for the collective voice of a learned society such as our own in engaging with the forces of dehumanization, and resisting their effects in the name of the God of love. The challenge to us at this moment in history is to prioritize the need to think and act centrifugally, not merely centripetally. There is and always will be a place for theological reflection upon the forms and structures of our ecclesial life and our intellectual tradition. But today, while the ground of our theology is the gospel, the form that it must take is one of active involvement in what might be a last-ditch struggle for human flourishing in a world that is our home. While I am not in agreement with every detail of Tanner's argument, I share her sense of urgency, and her clear conviction that the profundity of Christian anthropology is the most valuable of resources in defense of the world, human and non-human alike. And I am persuaded that Zuboff has pointed out the worst development of neoliberalism, the one that threatens our humanity most directly. As Oliver Sachs has put it, "What we are seeing—and bringing on ourselves—resembles a neurological catastrophe on a gigantic scale."¹²

I propose that the path we take is one of "spiritual resistance." I make no claim to have invented the phrase. On the contrary, we can encounter it at work in a way analogous to the way we need to employ it, in the approach taken to respond to a devastating human crisis offered by a small group of French Jesuit priests during the Second World War. Their notion of "spiritual resistance" was what they saw to be the only effective mode of engagement with the crisis brought on by the Nazi occupation of France. Their practical courage offers us some clues about how we might move forward as Catholic theologians, individually and collectively, in confronting our own human crisis and, even, contributing to repairing the torn fabric of creation which it is our historical burden to shoulder. I first encountered many of these men in the movement of *la nouvelle théologie* that flourished in France in the 1940s. But I had no idea that behind their fine theological thinking lay clandestine work of enormous courage, conducted in great danger, in the struggle against Nazism.¹³ I could have chosen to focus on other women or men. I think of Simone Weil or Edith Stein or Etty Hillesum, but I chose this group of Jesuits for reasons that I hope will become apparent.

Etienne Fouilloux has commented on this development among these theologians, both the Jesuits and their Dominican counterparts like Congar and Chenu. Dubbing them "servant theologians," Fouilloux adds that each of them was "neither an agent of the magisterium nor a simple seminary professor, not an Anglo-Saxon scholar nor a German academic" but rather "an apostle whose desire to preach the gospel leads him to put his professional skills at the service of the Christian community, the most humble

¹² Oliver Sachs, "The Machine Stops," *The New Yorker*, February 4, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/02/11/the-machine-stops>.

¹³ For a recent discussion of the role of resistance in the work of *la nouvelle théologie* see Jon Kirwan, *An Avant-garde Theological Generation: The Nouvelle Théologie and the French Crisis of Modernity*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

and the most distinguished.”¹⁴ In recent times much the same understanding of our role emerged in the late-lamented Ada María Isasi-Díaz’s notion of the theologian as “the professional insider.”¹⁵ The effective theologian, she thought, is someone rooted in the human world and its challenges, who can bring the special skills she or he has acquired and put them at the service of the community.

When France was overrun by the Nazis in 1940 and then partitioned into an occupied north and so-called Vichy France in the south, French Jesuits in particular responded with a form of resistance that suited perfectly their identity as Christian intellectuals, French patriots and courageous activists. For four years under occupation, they regularly published an anti-Nazi journal. The birth of the *Cahiers du témoignage chrétien*, and later its more popularized cousin, *Courrier française*, was a fearless act of resistance to the crisis brought about for France by the evils of Nazism. The famous opening words of the first issue of the *Cahiers* sounded a call to arms: “*France, prends garde de perdre ton âme.*” Fr. Gaston Fessard, the editor of the distinguished Jesuit journal, *Études*, and the author of this issue, and others like Henri de Lubac further south in Vichy France and, in greater hazard in the occupied north, Yves de Montcheuil, all worked clandestinely and in fear of their lives. De Montcheuil was captured in 1944 and promptly executed by the Nazis, and de Lubac himself recounts a number of narrow escapes from the Gestapo.¹⁶

Publishing the *Cahiers* was, then, an act of what its authors called “spiritual resistance.” De Lubac was particularly clear in his explicit assertion that the *Cahiers* were “in no way a political undertaking.”¹⁷ The insistence that their resistance was not political means that its inspiration did not come from a place on the political spectrum, but grew out of the gospel. Yet the work they did, constantly dodging the Gestapo as they produced their underground journal in the south and smuggled it into the north, clearly sought to protect true humanity and to defend democracy, which meant that it had profound political consequences. There was no doubt in their minds that the evil they had to combat was Nazism, but their cudgels were evangelical and humanistic. One can see this so clearly in the circumstances surrounding Montcheuil’s capture and execution. Montcheuil was paying what he called a “pastoral visit” to a group of the French underground resistance (the so-called *maquis*) when the Gestapo made a surprise attack. Montcheuil had been clear that he would not identify with the *maquis* because, as he said, their methods were often similar to those of the occupying force. He was also devoutly anticommunist, though he recognized that some of their values made them allies in what was a gospel-inspired struggle for justice that aligned itself with no one political group.¹⁸ Though Montcheuil was deeply involved in the *Cahiers*,

¹⁴ Etienne Fouilloux, *Une église en quête de liberté: La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II, 1914-1962* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998) 202.

¹⁵ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha – In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*, 10th Anniversary Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 87-89.

¹⁶ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund, Communio Books Series (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

¹⁷ De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 52.

¹⁸ See Henri de Lubac, *Three Jesuits Speak: Yves de Montcheuil, Charles Nicolet, Jean Zupan* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987) 30-32.

his death was not directly connected to the journal. Instead, he was erroneously identified with the *maquis* because he saw it to be his priestly responsibility to offer pastoral encouragement to those whose methods he yet did not support.

These struggles in France and the spiritual resistance offered by many provide us with something of a template for thinking about our own contemporary predicament. The impact of Nazi occupation and the threat of surveillance capitalism, in their different ways, represent attacks upon the human soul, deliberate efforts to encourage the abandonment of vital dimensions of human freedom. Had the Nazis not been defeated, Europe and perhaps the world would have entered into a dark age in which the life of the polis would have consisted of isolated individuals and the party to which their lives and fortunes would be hostage. Only by “joining the party” could they enjoy the fruits of the good life. De Lubac and the others clearly realized that the heart of the struggle was for a conception of the human that totalitarianism cannot abide. Moreover, they knew that their own courageous decisions might not in the end affect the outcome. Like many of the central characters in Camus’s novel, *The Plague*, written at least in part as a parable of the struggle against Nazism, they acted in defense of suffering humanity. If Camus does not put it in Christian terms, his claim that the only choice acceptable in face of evil was “to be a man,” is not far from a call to spiritual resistance, even if its gender particularity tells only a partial truth.¹⁹ The Jesuits who published *Témoignage*, along with their many female and male co-conspirators, knew that if they did not stand up to the evil they would be complicit in a world ushered in by a Nazi victory, populated by the “victors” who had abandoned their true freedom for the swastika, and by the enslaved hordes who would service their lives.

The opening issue of *Témoignage* makes very clear what was at stake. Beginning with the headline on the first page, “France, take care of your soul,” the journal declared that the most dangerous thing about the Nazi occupation was not the military might or the violence that was often perpetrated against French citizens, but the ideology that so stealthily entered into the souls of these citizens and seduced them into quietism or even collaboration. Fr. Fessard carefully laid out the three steps by which Nazism had triumphed in Germany and Austria, and then went on to show how this applied to France. The first step in the propaganda was Nazism’s presentation of itself as not only compatible with Christianity but also as its culmination. In the second, Fessard writes, thinking now of Vichy France, if the church were to cooperate with Marshal Petain’s call to “Work, Family and the Fatherland” this was in effect collaboration in the aim of Nazism to rule the world. And finally, step by step, the Christian is led into more and more compromises, by degrees accepting the vision of Nazism for world domination. Of course, the genius of Nazi propaganda was that its spurious intellectual consistency preyed upon the weakness of the human spirit. In the occupied north, one wanted to believe that “life could go on,” while in Vichy it was all too possible to imagine that you were free to continue to be authentically French. But collaboration and cooperation were in reality two forms of spiritual denial.

There are real parallels between the psychic force of Nazi propaganda and the strength of neoliberalism, in its modern guise as finance capitalism and especially—in

¹⁹ Interestingly, Camus was the editor of another clandestine newspaper, *Combat*, at exactly the same time.

its latest twist—as surveillance capitalism. Like Nazism before it, to get us on board, to “join the party,” so to speak, neoliberalism offers material luxuries and almost unlimited freedom of choice to many, at the cost of poverty and slavery to the rest. But its latest and most sinister form brings us quite close to the brave new world that Orwell prophesied. Even those who seem to benefit may actually be enslaved to the party they have joined, unable to choose any other option because there is no other option to choose. We may have abandoned true freedom, exchanging it for mere freedom of choice. In ignoring climate change and the fate of the earth, we overvalue our freedom to choose from an endless range of goods, perhaps to our eventual annihilation. In allowing democracy to seep away, we undervalue the deeper meaning of human freedom, exchanging it for short term gains in comfort and/or security. Neoliberalism acts on those of us who are not faced with a daily struggle for survival and therefore have the leisure to be aware of crises and maybe the energy to combat them. And by knowing almost everything there is to know about our public lives, it in effect delimits our choices with social media rhetoric that proclaims itself as a new freedom. It offers us a seriously debased vision of the human person, one wrapped up in self and given to immediate gratification. We become covetous machines, and we do not know it, or perhaps we do not care.

Spiritual resistance is not to be contrasted with physical or “real” resistance, as if it were a matter, say, of praying for an end to tyranny. The “spiritual” in spiritual resistance refers to the motivation rather than to the practice. As we can see in the example of *Témoignage chrétien*, de Lubac, de Montcheuil and so many others took their lives in their hands daily. Spiritual resistance is resistance for the sake of the gospel, not out of any ideological or political commitment. The motivation is provided by the end in sight, of human flourishing in a world that we call our home. Since the days of *Témoignage* we theologians have learned to overcome the endemic anthropocentrism of Christian religious thought and to draw all creatures and their good into a picture of human curatorship, not ownership, of the earth. And, sadly, too we have come to realize the global and even perhaps apocalyptic scale of the impending climate catastrophe, something unknown half a century ago. But we have some distance to go yet in exploring the threats to the human that have emerged in the mechanisms of surveillance, even in sufficiently breaking free from The Watcher (perhaps a new name for Satan?) to be able to live our lives in accordance with what I would like to call the three marks of spiritual resistance: humility, realism and action. When you believe in a God of love and you define love as justice, there really is no other course of action, if indeed each individual today or the whole of occupied France back then was “not to lose its soul.”

If our task as theologians is to act courageously in defense of authentic human selfhood and the whole of creation, as church theologians we also need to bring the institution along with us. This requires that the gospel be the test and filter for all our activity, and this in its turn implies that spiritual resistance will require our church to abandon its many confusions over the bifurcated spirit of modernity. There can be no spiritual resistance if we have capitulated to an anti-human culture. The nineteenth century legacy with which we now have to contend reveals a church that has adopted the structures of modernity while rejecting its positive values. Terrified of the onslaught of revolutionary ideas and movements, the papacy of Pius IX simply

dismissed all of modernity, as anyone who is aware of the infamous “Syllabus of Errors” knows only too well. But at precisely the same moment as Vatican I defined the infallibility of the pope in a defiant gesture to the modern world, it also began to establish an ecclesial structure that came to look more and more like any bureaucratic institution of modernity.²⁰ In this, the nineteenth-century church made exactly the wrong decision. If it had been able to discriminate between the two sides of the dialectic of modernity and see the human values that modernity wanted to promote as an expression of the values of Jesus in the gospels, then it would not have adopted the structure it chose as the antidote to what it perceived to be the threat that modernity represented. And this is no unhistorical observation, because there were many in the nineteenth-century church who fought for space for a much more liberal interpretation of Catholicism. If, indeed, Rome had been able to recognize the essential differences between the American and the French Revolution, things might have been very different.

The work of Catholic theology today will have to be one of engagement and spiritual resistance. It will require in relation to the church a thorough relativization of structure to life, to borrow a coupling from Yves Congar, and in relation to society, a challenge to one face of modernity, that of the neoliberal market economy and the political amorality that is its inevitable bedfellow, coupled with the sinister trawling of our lives online in search of data to further enslave us. The challenge will have to come from a Catholicism that foregrounds the gospel and recognizes the close relationship between the genius of Jesus and the genuine human values at the other pole of the dialectic of the Enlightenment. As long as we allow structure to dominate life, the promotion of the gospel will inevitably have something of lip-service about it, because this inversion of values is exactly what the teaching of Jesus rejected. But when we stand up against it, we will be challenging something which presents itself as a benign reality, in the face of whose inevitability we theologians may seem to be whistling in the wind.

The world of today is one of a struggle between fundamentalisms and movements for liberation. The fundamentalisms may be secular or religious, identifiable wherever their proponents proclaim them as the one way. When Margaret Thatcher asserted that there was “no alternative” to the free market she was as clearly a fundamentalist as any dogmatic Marxist of a previous era, or one of today’s ugly mouthpieces of white supremacy or narrow nationalisms. When Catholics proclaim Catholicism as the *only* ultimate account of the nature of things, they are being as fundamentalist as a biblical literalist or a hardline Muslim jihadist. But what is not always so apparent is that liberationist movements are frequently not as emancipatory as they may imagine themselves to be. They work only when they are coupled with an endgame that is defined by something other than opposition to the oppressions that they rightly resist. This is as true in the secular world as in that of religion. Moreover, the ultimate objective of liberation needs to be not a parallel political or economic structure, but the underlying stability that would come from an understanding of what it is to be human that might provide the impetus for the recreation of structures. The bishops at Medellín

²⁰ See Joseph Komonchak, “Modernity and the Structure of Roman Catholicism,” *Cristianismo nella Storia* 18 (1997), 353-385, esp. 381-385.

in 1968 put it so well in their document on justice when they said that “the uniqueness of the Christian message does not so much consist in the affirmation of the necessity for structural change, as it does in an insistence on the conversion of men and women which will in turn bring about this change. We will not have a new continent without new and reformed structures, but, above all, there will be no new continent without new people, who know how to be truly free and responsible according to the light of the Gospel.”²¹ And this, of course, was exactly the stance of Yves de Montcheuil and the logic of spiritual resistance.

For many decades progressive religious movements around the world have learned from and espoused the cause of liberation from all forms of oppression, but today this is simply not enough. Freedom *from* was never enough, and freedom *for* has always been ill-defined. The need to re-create the human world is a result of our increasing but all-too-late awareness that the threat to democratic life and the threat to the earth is the most profound challenge to our common humanity. Moreover, “humanity” itself as a concept must also be re-imagined. If neoliberalism is determined on an effective reduction of our true humanity, Catholicism’s creaky espousal of fixed conceptions of human nature is an entirely inadequate response to the threat. Every instance of appeals to “human nature” in response to ethical challenges fails to find justification in the teaching of Jesus and fails to find much if any approval among most of those continuing to adhere to the Catholic tradition, especially the younger ones among them. “I’m spiritual but not religious” is an expression of frustration at the same time as it is a gauntlet thrown down in front of the church, and in an especial way at the feet of us theologians. It is, to borrow from Marx, both a sign of distress and a cry of distress. But what are we going to do about it?

I am persuaded that our task as theologians and ethicists is to be on the front line of the struggle against the twin evils of excessive individualism and the tyranny of neoliberalism, and as I think about this, I am drawn back one more time to the example of Henri de Lubac and Yves de Montcheuil. They fought an evil at risk of their lives, and one of them paid the ultimate price. We are called to fight an evil that threatens our souls if we do not resist it, on behalf of those countless millions whose physical survival is at stake. Gustavo Gutiérrez defines poverty as “proximity to death.” When we ignore that reality, when we live in a virtual Paris under enemy occupation and try to carry on as usual, which requires a measure of collaboration with evil, or we inhabit a virtual Vichy, persuading ourselves that our cowardice is for the best, we do indeed endanger our souls. Theology may at times be beautiful or elegant or both, but today it must also be dangerous, because the defense of true humanity in a world which is our home has to confront the awful reality of the anti-human systems under which we suffer, even as we in some ways benefit from them.

If the biggest danger of neoliberalism today is that it is out of control, what can we theologians do? If the system is beyond the capacity of the human community to end it, just as our increasing suspicion is that the time at which we could have had some impact on the growing effects of climate change is now past, how should we act? When liberation theologians were accused of reducing salvation to human liberation they

²¹ Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), “Justice” (September 6, 1968), 3, available at <http://theolibrary.shc.edu/resources/medjust.htm>.

responded with this insight: the struggle against the evils of the present day, the effort to bring about the reign of God in history, is not to be confused with salvation. Salvation comes to us when we enter the struggle for the values of the reign of God in history, knowing full well that the struggle will never end this side of the eschaton. Salvation comes to us when we act in weakness, when the virtue of humility leads us into the practice of kenosis. Salvation, we might say, is the personal and ecclesial transformation that occurs when we engage in spiritual resistance.

What we are called to as individuals and as a society is the same spiritual resistance that inspired *Témoignage*. Like Fessard and de Montcheuil and de Lubac, our actions will be spiritual rather than political because they grow from the gospel, but they will have enormous political consequences. De Lubac's efforts were in defiance of the local Jesuit provincial superior in Vichy France, who wanted his brothers not to rock the boat of Vichy. But de Lubac recognized that there are higher priorities than the preservation of the system. Vichy fell and *Témoignage* succeeded, though it was costly for some. De Lubac's work demonstrates that even for a Jesuit vowed to obedience, obedience to the gospel is a higher priority. Our loyalty to the church we love requires us to call it to account, so that the deeper crises of our times will be marked by our engagement and resistance, and not by acts of collaboration.

How are we, then, to engage Google and Amazon and the others? Calling them out as seemingly benign behemoths will neither be enough nor sufficiently subtle. Their influence is overwhelming, but because it is here to stay, the challenge is to turn that influence to the service of the human community. Both Zuboff and in the previous generation, Jane Jacobs in her fine book, *Dark Age Ahead*,²² recognize that the response to the colonization of the lifeworld is neither to destroy nor succumb to the system, but to turn it to human account. Perhaps, after all, as a society of theologians we should be at work both centripetally and centrifugally, though the centripetal is always at the service of the centrifugal. The church does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of the gospel. Our work internal to the church needs to be to harness our energies to the task of persuading our church to embrace the kind of simplicity of life and accompaniment of the poor that Pope Francis calls for in *Laudato Si'*. Externally, the same identifications with poverty and simplicity serve not simply as persuasive speech, as they might within the ecclesial community, but better as sacramental symbolism. And of course, there is a clear connection between these two, since our success in mounting a sustained Bergoglian attack upon the church's embrace of the tactics of modernity would lead us into a prophetic, heads-on encounter with all that is "against nature." The defense of the human is a heads-on confrontation with the anti-human effects of social media. And we cannot wage this war on our iPads. We may not have our *Témoignage*, but we have our journals and our popular magazines and even our blogs and our podcasts. How many of us are writing for them out of a sense of urgency in defense of the truly human? Can we make the connections between surveillance capitalism and the despoliation of God's creation? Can we also put pressure upon our universities and colleges and seminaries, which are so vulnerable to the blandishments

²² Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (New York: Random House, 2004).

of big business and social media?²³ Like the struggle against climate change, the amelioration of the effects of social media's harnessing to the imperatives of financial capitalism cannot wait.

I am happy to be delivering this address at the end of a wonderful convention devoted to the theme that "another world is possible." I hope these words have been a contribution to this theme, but I want to add one final thought. Another world is surely possible, but as Lee Cormie has written, the shifting shapes and the pace of change also mean that "another world is inevitable."²⁴ When we know that another world is inevitable, this may be either a warning or an opportunity. If we doze, we will wake up to 1984. But if we are awake to the knowledge that another world is inevitable, then hope is rekindled for the work that we have to do to ensure that the other world that is possible is one of human flourishing as caretakers of a planet that is our home.

²³ For the impact upon, and the role in, all these movements see William Egginton, *The Splintering of the American Mind: Identity Politics, Inequality, and Community on Today's College Campuses* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

²⁴ Lee Cormie, "Another World is Inevitable...but which Other World?," in *The Movement of Movements, Part 2: Rethinking our Dance*, ed. Jai Sen (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018), 527-601.