

Presidential Address
REMEMBERING THE REST OF LIFE:
TOWARD A REST-INFLECTED THEOLOGY
OF WORK AND ACTION

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE
Fordham University
Bronx, New York

As we gather on this Sunday morning in Atlanta, we bring to mind and heart all of God’s children who are suffering, at this very moment, amid the injustices and evils and tragedies of our world. From the searing absence around dinner tables of children in Uvalde, Texas or elders in Buffalo, New York; to millions of displaced war, political, and climate refugees; to vulnerable citizens in nations of the Global South deprived of COVID vaccines and medical care easily available to the rich; to the extreme weather, raging fires, melting ice, and rising sea levels signaling climate change; to the racial, economic, cultural and political polarizations fracturing our political and ecclesial communities—we are surrounded by the realities and legacies of wicked problems, bitter conflicts, personal and institutional failures, and suffering. Suffering. Suffering. People are bewildered, hurting, grieving, and weighed down, and it all seems too much too bear. Our many advantages as theologians, educators, and citizens notwithstanding, we, like so many of our neighbors, find our energies, our hope, our agency, and our capacities to understand what’s going on, much less figure out what to do, under great strain.

Far better than can I, esteemed colleagues in this Society—María Pilar Aquino, Paul Lakeland, Shawn Copeland, and Gemma Tulud Cruz, to name just a few—have, at recent annual meetings, lifted up and analyzed these evils, and challenged us to play our parts in responding to them. These scholars emphasize the degraded and degrading anthropologies underlying the consumerism, racism, sexism, and militarism infecting our contemporary neoliberal institutions and culture. They underscore the dominant system’s ideological power to blind us to the extent it has permeated our lifeworlds and seeped into the inner reaches of our individual and collective psyches. As Lakeland observes, “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;” as all-encompassing and inevitable. It offers us a seriously debased version of the human person.”¹ Cruz, Copeland, Aquino, et al. further elaborate the colonialist, racist, and

¹ Paul Lakeland, “Crisis and Engagement: The Role of the Servant Theologian,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 74 (2019): 73.

classist aspects of the crisis Lakeland describes.² Their message is stark: from so many directions—and most acutely for the poor, for the marginalized and for non-elites—human dignity, even human survival, are under serious threat. These sober realities obligate us urgently as theologians, believers, and citizens, “to act courageously in defense of authentic human selfhood and the whole of creation.”³ And to do so, we must “confront the awful reality of the anti-human systems under which we suffer, even as we in some ways benefit from them.”⁴

In the face of this enormity, this urgency, and these stakes, it feels trivial, distracting, and, perhaps even wrong to devote a presidential address to the subject of “rest.” Suffering and injustice call for action, not retreat or complacency. What’s more, we are part of a tiny minority of people on the planet with the means, time, and energy to afford to sit and contemplate a subject like rest. Doesn’t that very privilege obligate us to, instead, de-prioritize leisurely reveries, clamber out of our hammocks or our recliners, and immerse ourselves—in all aspects of our theological work—in the humanizing and transformative labor that so badly needs to be done? Faithfulness to our Christian and human callings, and to preferential solidarity with the world’s vulnerable majorities and our earth, surely call for no less.

No matter how legitimately pandemic-weary we may be feeling, in the riven, blood- and tear-stained world we inhabit today, choosing to fix our theological or practical attention on “rest” can look suspiciously like either an exercise in elitism, a subtle way to succumb to selfishness, an insult to our obligations to our profession and to our communities, or all of these.

Acknowledging the truth of such caveats, in this essay I attempt to build the beginnings of a case for the following thesis: Theologies, ethics, and practices of *work* and *activity* at best fall short, and at worst become dangerously corrupted, unless they are mindfully and properly connected to wellsprings and rhythms of *rest*. Fundamental to survival and well-being, rest is a basic human right.⁵ For Jews and Christians, rest is more—a divine command on par with God’s command to keep and till the earth, and a fecund gift. Our human capacity and need, duty and privilege to work and to act in the world come with an equally fundamental capacity and need, duty and privilege: to rest—for our own good, the common good, and for sake of what Christian scriptures and tradition speak of as the reign and glory of God. Good theologies, ethics, and practices of work and action are mutually dependent upon good theologies, ethics, and practices of rest. Further, from the point of view of Catholic social ethics, to value and practice good rest, and to ensure and protect good rest for others, are essential to the

² Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Theology and (De)Humanizing Work in the Twenty-First Century,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America 75* (2021): 1-17; M. Shawn Copeland, “Panel Presentation – The CTSA at 75: Looking Back, Around and Forward | Paper Three – An Imperative to Act” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America 75* (2021): 27-31; María Pilar Aquino, “Theology Renewing Life: Prophetic Interventions and Enduring Commitments,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America 75* (2021): 62-79.

³ Lakeland, “Crisis and Engagement,” 77.

⁴ Lakeland, “Crisis and Engagement,” 79.

⁵ As is acknowledged in the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70: 30 Articles on 30 Articles - Article 24,” OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/12/universal-declaration-human-rights-70-30-articles-30-articles-article-24>.

work of solidarity and the preferential option for the vulnerable, and for funding the resources we need to combat the powerful anti-human and anti-ecological forces that threaten us today.

Centering a theological ethic of rest does not mean denying the value, importance, and necessity of hard work. Indeed, our profession is replete with people who love and are dedicated to our work, and many of us love *to* work. Christian scripture and tradition support an ethos that esteems engaging in work, under dignified and just conditions, as a *bonum honestum*, as a way humans reflect the divine image, and as an integral part of the earthly life for which God has created us. That being said, in modern Catholic and Christian social thought and practice over the past century-plus, and especially in the United States, attention to work has far outrun attention to rest, to the detriment of the ways we understand and engage in both.⁶

Heightened interest in so-called “work-life balance” in the media and the general public in recent years further intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, issuing in a spate of articles, studies, and social media laments about overwork, rest deprivation, and their relationship to what many regard as an epidemic of anxiety, burnout, depression, and in some cases despair.⁷ Delving into rest-related literature, one finds oneself navigating in a multidisciplinary sea of fascinating historical and contemporary, religious and secular, scholarly and popular writing on the subject. It quickly becomes clear that the intellectual and spiritual waters one might explore are vast, deep, and crisscrossed by many different and enticing currents. In this modest essay, I will seek only to scan a bit of the horizon, take some initial soundings, and set out “navigational buoy markers” at a number of sites meriting more extensive return expeditions.

⁶ Rest does receive some attention in modern Catholic social teaching. Recent examples are John Paul II, *Dies Domini* (May 31, 1998), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini.html; Francis, “General Audience of 12 September 2018” (September 12, 2018), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180912_udienza-generale.html; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2184-2188, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM. Cf., Mark Oppenheimer, “Pope Francis Has a Few Words in Support of Leisure,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/us/pope-francis-has-a-few-words-in-support-of-leisure.html>. For ecumenical, theological discussions of work and rest, see Theology of Work Project, “Balancing Rhythms of Rest and Work (Overview),” [Theologyofwork.org, https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/rest-and-work-overview](https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/rest-and-work-overview).

⁷ A tiny sample of this literature includes, Jonathan Malesic, “Opinion: The Pandemic Reminded Us: We Exist to Do More than Just Work,” *The New York Times*, September 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/09/23/opinion/covid-return-to-work-rto.html>; Charlie Warzel and Anne Helen Petersen, “How to Care Less about Work,” *Atlantic Monthly* (Boston, Mass.: 1993), December 5, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/12/how-care-less-about-work/620902/>; and the works of Cal Newport, e.g., “Why Do We Work Too Much?” *New Yorker*, August 30, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/office-space/why-do-we-work-too-much>; Newport, *A World Without Email: Reimagining Work in an Age of Communication Overload* (New York: Random House/Penguin, 2021).

I. SETTING IMAGINATIVE COORDINATES

I propose that we set our course for this brief exploration of “work and the rest of life” within the imaginative vectors of two texts.

The first text is from the New Testament, Matthew’s gospel chapter 11, verses 28-30. This text, from which the theme of our 2021 CTSA convention—“All you Who Labor...”—was drawn, reads:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt 11:28-30).⁸

Here we see Jesus describe rest not as the cessation of our burdens or our labors, but rather as gift given in the midst of them. His listeners in that agricultural setting would have easily pictured the wood-hewn double yoke commonly used for working teams of oxen in the fields. They knew that in their scriptures, “yoke” could function as a symbol of servility or forced service; but that those same scriptures also spoke of obedience to Covenant law as taking on God’s yoke. These farming people also knew that with a well-crafted yoke and experience, two oxen can become attuned to one another, enabling a collaboration in work that brings a certain companionship and ease, and that increases the power to accomplish it. Plowing is toilsome and exhausting labor—but a skilled driver, a properly fitted yoke, and the right partner can make the burden lighter.⁹

Our second text is a classic of 1960s rhythm & blues music gifted to the world by Otis Redding, a proud son of the state of Georgia and revered figure in the history of “southern soul.” Born in 1941 on a sharecropper’s farm in Jim Crow-era Dawson, Georgia, young Redding and his family later moved to Macon, Georgia where his father worked as a maintenance man and part-time preacher. Over a tragically short but remarkable career, Redding gained fame as a gifted performer who also composed some of the most iconic soul songs of the 1960s, including Aretha Franklin’s signature hit song, “Respect.” It is Redding’s last and most universally recognized song, “Dock of the Bay,” recorded in Memphis in December 1967 just three days before he was killed in a small-plane crash at the age of 26, that will enrich our reflection here. Its lyrics read:

Sittin’ in the morning sun . . . I’ll be sittin’ when the evening comes
Watchin’ the ships roll in . . . And I watch ‘em roll away again

⁸ Holy Bible, NRSV Version. Cf. Nathan Bills, “Matthew 11.28-30: Jesus’ Invitation to (Rest)ored Creation,” *Leaven* 19, no. 2 (2012) <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol19/iss2/6>; Samuele Bacchiocchi, “Matthew 11:28-20: Jesus’ Rest and the Sabbath,” *Andres University Seminary Studies* 33, no. 3 (1984): 289-316.

⁹ See Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, “Yoke,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jewish Virtual Library, Gale Group, 2008), jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yoke; also, Beulah Wood, “Wisdom from and Ancient Implement,” CBE International, March 4, 2016, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/wisdom-ancient-implement>.

Oh I'm just sittin' on the dock of the bay, watchin' the tide roll away
Sittin' on the dock of the bay, wastin' time.

I left my home in Georgia, headin' for the Frisco Bay –
Cause I've had nothin' to live for, look like nothin' gonna come my
way

So, I'm just sittin' on the dock of the bay, watchin' the tide roll away
Sittin' on the dock of the bay, wastin' time

Looks like nothing's gonna change;
Everything seems to remain the same
I can't do what ten people tell me to do,
So I guess I'll remain the same.

Sittin' here resting my bones,
This loneliness won't leave me alone
Listen, two thousand miles I roamed
Just to make this dock my home

Now, I'm just sittin' on the dock of the bay,
Watchin' the tide roll away
Sittin' on the dock of the bay, wastin' time ...¹⁰

Wildly different as these two texts are, together they can help refract for us some of the multiple meanings of rest, both amid and beyond work. If, in the Ignatian spirit of composition of place, we let ourselves sink into the worlds their words paint, we might imagine ourselves in the crowd listening to Jesus, or on the dock, experiencing the sights, the sounds, the smells, the feelings of those places. Neither setting, we might notice, is particularly tranquil: Matthew records Jesus speaking these consoling words in the middle of discourses and pericopes where conflict and antagonism with the powers that be, misunderstandings by friends and followers, and Jesus' own frustrations with it are front and center.¹¹ And while the visual setting of "Dock of the Bay" is beautiful, its lyrics bespeak feelings of melancholy, disappointment, and potential impasse for the singer (a character Redding conjured as a sort of alter-ego during a brief seaside visit amid his whirlwind tour schedule, just as he was on the verge of his greatest popular success). Picturing the singer lingering on the dock, far from his home, we might also remember that in the gaze of a white-dominated society in 1967, this young Black man would be regarded at best with dismissal and more

¹⁰ Otis Redding, "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay," composed by Otis Redding with Steve Cropper, recorded December 1967, YouTube video/audio, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYPKRcBTsFQ> Cf. Stuart Miller, "Inside Otis Redding's Final Masterpiece '(Sittin on) the Dock of the Bay,'" *Rolling Stone*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/inside-otis-reddings-final-masterpiece-sittin-on-the-dock-of-the-bay-122170/>.

¹¹ Bacchiocchi, "Matthew 11:28-20," 291-293.

likely with suspicion; assumed to be and treated as an out-of-place vagrant, a racially-otherized loiterer who is merely taking up space and, indeed, wasting time.

Read together, these two very different, classic texts invite manifold lines of reflection. Here they will help us illuminate truths about rest—rest’s quiet invitation to encounter and to dwell in reality-*la realidad*, both amid and apart from the hubbub and striving of everyday life-*lo cotidiano*; rest’s varied forms and textures; its status as necessity and right for people and for creation; and its healing, whole-ing, subversive, and transformative powers.¹²

II. DESCRIBING REST

Rest refers to moments, states, dimensions of experience or periods of time free of effortful activity or goal-oriented striving. Rest connotes pause, a relaxing, a letting-go, receptivity, being rather than doing.¹³ Tricia Hersey and Gemma Cruz note that rest is always embodied and personal; in rest one integrates or reconnects body and spirit.¹⁴ Though we each rest as individuals, we depend on our communities to provide the conditions, support, and safety we need in order to rest. When we rest, we let our guard down and we are vulnerable; so we cannot and do not rest just anywhere, or with just anyone.

Rest is not work. It can be intertwined with work and with other kinds of effortful activity such as physical exercise, civic action, engaging in hobbies or crafts, communicating face-to-face or through media, and even purposive or nonpurposive “idle activity” like scrolling on one’s phone or surfing the internet. Rest has elements

¹² On the rich connotations of the concepts of *lo cotidiano* and *la realidad*, see, e.g., Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “*Lo Cotidiano*: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology,” *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology*, 10, no. 1 (2002) 5-17. Though space does not permit it here, Latine/x practices of *fiesta* (as well as *siesta*) are an important locus for studying how communities, especially marginalized communities, engage in culture-affirming forms of celebration and social rest, simultaneously creating spaces of embodied resistance to what Tricia Hersey calls “grind culture.” E.g., Lydia Muñoz, “Fiesta: The Act of Resistance,” *ResourceUMC*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/fiesta-the-act-of-resistance>; Roberto Goizueta, “Fiesta: Life in the Subjunctive,” in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, ed. Orland O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 84-99; Gabrielle Hickmon, “How Moving to Spain Changed My Approach to Wellness,” *Domino*, March 23, 2019, 2022, <https://www.domino.com/content/spain-culture-versus-us/>.

¹³ Some of these qualities are invoked as characterizing the state of leisure in philosopher Josef Pieper’s renowned treatise, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press [1952] 2009), at 46-47, *inter alia*. Cf. Mortimer Adler’s related, contemporaneous reflections on work and leisure in, e.g., Mortimer J. Adler, “The Use of Free Time,” *Self-Educated American*, September 19, 2011, <https://selfeducatedamerican.com/2011/09/19/the-use-of-free-time/>; Mortimer J. Adler, n.d. “ADLER ARCHIVE: The Ideas of Work and Leisure – 5,” *Radicalacademy*, <https://radicalacademy.org/adlerworkleisure5.html>

¹⁴ Cruz, “(De)Humanizing Work,” 8-13, provides an insightful treatment of “rest and embodiment” that complements and in many ways exceeds the one I present here; see also Tricia Hersey, “Rest Is Anything That Connects Your Mind and Body,” *The Nap Ministry*, February 21, 2022, <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/2022/02/21/rest-is-anything-that-connects-your-mind-and-body/>.

in common with the receptive, contemplative state of being that philosophers like Joseph Pieper call leisure, but rest and leisure activity are not one and the same.¹⁵

Our orienting texts point to two major ways we experience rest: rest-amid other kinds of activity and rest during time set apart from other kinds of activities.

Rest-amid. This is rest we may not consciously notice, but that we experience and depend upon, most basically in the embodied rhythms of physical activity—the pauses between breaths, between heartbeats, between steps: effort, rest, effort, rest. Whether during sleep or in the thick of strenuous physical activity, these kinds of “rest-amidst it all” are ever-present.

In his recent study, Conor Kelly discusses a different kind of rest-amid, associated with feelings of happiness, that positive psychologists have named “flow.” A state of focus, easy efficacy and engaged repose, flow provides a sense of restfulness in the midst of energy-expending activities. Athletes, artists, surgeons, hobbyists, teachers, speakers, writers, skilled tradespersons, children at play—across an enormous variety of persons, activities, and cultures—all describe the experience of flow in similar ways: as feeling absorbed, present, and “in the zone,” while time, along with any sense of anxiety or arduous striving, often seems to dissolve.¹⁶

Jesus’ words in Matthew 11 about taking up his yoke and receiving rest for our souls point to yet another, spiritual kind of “rest-amid” into which he invites his disciples: a graced restfulness and serenity that can undergird our labors and leaven our spirits even in the midst of toil, trials, and troubles.¹⁷ At the same time, the gospels depict Jesus as also keenly aware of the importance of taking time apart, for prayer, for solitude, and for rest.¹⁸

Rest-apart. This second basic kind of rest, which takes place outside of work and other utilitarian activities, is harkened to in Otis Redding’s images of sitting on the dock of the bay. Rest-apart occurs in times and places when one ceases striving and puts aside work-related activities. Sleep, that primal human need, and physical relaxation are the most obvious examples of this kind of rest, but so are the rest of Sabbath in the Jewish tradition, or time set aside for meditation, for immersing oneself in natural beauty, for simple social gatherings, for celebrations, for worship or for other

¹⁵ In *The Fullness of Free Time: A Theological Account of Leisure and Recreation in the Moral Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), Conor Kelly parses time spent outside of waged labor and unpaid care work into three categories: self-care activities (sleep, grooming, etc.), leisure, and recreation. Building on western philosophy’s long history of reflection on humanly-worthy and enriching leisure, Kelly proposes that authentic leisure has the capacity to evoke what contemporary positive psychologists describe as experiences of “flow.” On “flow,” see, the many works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and colleagues, e.g., *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Basic Books, 1990.)

¹⁶ In contrast to idleness, relaxing, or sleeping, Kelly argues, leisure is engaged, free-time activity whose intrinsic value lies in its capacity to induce flow, and in so doing, to offer a foretaste of the eternal Sabbath of God’s kingdom (see Kelly, *The Fullness of Free Time*, ch 1, esp. 17-22). Leisure as Kelly describes it is not identical with the notion of rest discussed herein, nor is the experience of rest identical with the experience of flow. Flow and leisure contain dimensions of rest, but the category of rest is larger than, and thus not reducible to, either.

¹⁷ This divine gift of “rest for the soul” amid trials is evoked elsewhere in Scriptures, perhaps most familiarly in the well-loved 23rd Psalm.

¹⁸ Some examples are Mt 14:22-23; Lk 5:16; Mk 6:30-32; Mt 14:13; Mk 7:24; Mk 4:35-38.

forms of rest and refreshment apart from the everyday grind. Like Otis Redding's singer, a person engaging in rest-apart can appear to be wasting time, but that assumption betrays a narrowly capitalist or reductively utilitarian perspective.

Within these two broad categories, physician Sandra Dalton-Smith identifies a variety of types of rest that contribute to holistic human well-being.¹⁹ She stresses the importance of learning to recognize and attend to the particular kind of rest-deficit one may be experiencing. If my fatigue is rooted in something other than a physical rest deficit, sleep alone is unlikely to not fully address or relieve it.

Besides **physical rest**, Dalton-Smith discusses six other kinds of rest. These include **mental rest**—taking a break from effortful thinking, or shifting one's concentration to a less taxing, more enjoyable subject. **Sensory rest** is taking one or more of our senses off-line, so to speak, for short periods of time. Resting your eyes, leaving a noisy place for a quiet one, unplugging from the lights and barrage of images on computer and phone screens are examples.²⁰ **Emotional rest** is “the cessation of emotional striving,” experienced when one no longer feels “the need to perform or to meet external expectations.” In emotional rest, I feel free and can allow myself to experience and honor the full gamut of my feelings, including, as in Redding's song, those that are difficult, painful, or sad. As “Dock of the Bay's” lyrics intimate, emotional rest does not preclude undergoing painful or negative emotions; rather, in emotional rest I am able to let my guard down, feel and acknowledge all the feelings, and “be” with the realities they disclose.²¹ **Creative rest** “is the rest we feel when we immerse ourselves in...beauty whether natural or humanly made.” We can access this kind of rest by, for example, spending time “near the ocean or shore or in the forest, looking at beautiful art or listening to beautiful music or performances.²² Considered in these terms, “Dock of the Bay” depicts a person partaking in multiple forms of rest—including physical, emotional, and creative.

Social rest is finding comfort and solace in our relationships and social connections. Versus the rest-lessness of loneliness, isolation, and superficiality, social

¹⁹ Sandra Dalton-Smith, M.D., *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity* (New York: FaithWords, 2017). This book is representative of a currently popular genre wherein (often women, writing for other women) authors blend research-based and Christian perspectives to address the challenges and gifts of rest. Other examples are Glynnis Whitwer, *Doing Busy Better: Enjoying God's Gifts of Work and Rest* (Ada, MI: Revell, Baker Publishing Group, 2017); Kate H. Rademacher, *Reclaiming Rest: The Promise of Sabbath, Solitude, and Stillness in a Restless World* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021).

²⁰ See Dalton-Smith, *Sacred Rest*, chs. 4, 5, and 9.

²¹ Dalton-Smith, *Sacred Rest*, 58. Some commentators read “Dock of the Bay” as a song that verges on despair; e.g. philosopher Daniel Tarade writes, “This is the story of a scared, lonely person festering within a life devoid of meaning.” Daniel Tarade, “Peak Plaintive: Sittin on the dock of the bay,” LifeTypeStuff, <https://www.lifetypestuff.com/blog/2019/7/9/wpuxw7iwp2ojzw3al3ni7kxn39yly>. But to those familiar with the genres of blues and gospel, Redding's song depicts, rather, a person facing hard realities, acknowledging and lamenting the pain of them, but also affirming his dignity and tapping into hope as he rests on the dock. Cf. the illuminating decolonial, theological treatment of the blues in Rufus Burnett, Jr. *Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues* (Lexington, KY: Fortress Academic, 2018).

²² Dalton-Smith, *Sacred Rest*, 95-96.

rest, Dalton-Smith explains, is about “making space for those relationships that revive you and where you are acknowledged and valued.”²³ Social rest can be experienced in a variety of forms and contexts from intimate relationships in private to large groups or public spaces where one experiences respect, belonging, and ease, as within a familiar faith congregation, or in a public hangout like a bar, a park, or a coffee shop. Finally, Dalton-Smith speaks of **spiritual, or soul rest**, as “the ability to connect beyond the physical and mental and feel a deep sense of belonging, love, acceptance and purpose,” finding sanctuary and healing “in a security and peace” that comes from relationship with the spiritual or the Divine.²⁴ We will examine this kind of rest in more detail in Part IV.

III. THE ECLIPSE OF REST IN LATE-CAPITALIST, CONSUMERIST SOCIETY

Capitalism never rests. Consumer, finance, or surveillance capitalism—all of them run on an endless clock. For good or ill, their disembodied endlessness has infiltrated all of our “lifeworlds,” and all of us. From its beginnings up through the mid-twentieth century, the US labor movement fought to shorten required weekly hours of waged work to free up time for workers and their families.²⁵ In the decades since, not less time at work, but higher salaries to increase consumer buying power became the driving goal.²⁶ This shift is emblematic of the insidious power of neoliberal economic culture to draw us into the interminable restlessness of the “world of total work,” that moral

²³ Dalton-Smith, *Sacred Rest*, 79-80.

²⁴ Dalton-Smith, *Sacred Rest*, 67.

²⁵ The modern fight to reclaim free time for non-elite wage workers has a long history. In 1865, e.g., US labor advocate Ira Steward countered critics’ claims that shorter hours would increase sloth and debauchery among the working classes, arguing that “it is long hours that have a debilitating effect on the nation’s economy and culture,” since people whose lives are consumed with wage-earning tend to be too exhausted to seek outside of work “anything more than will satisfy bodily necessities.” Citing the example of a mechanic who labors fourteen hours a day, Steward asks: “How many newspapers or books can he read? What time has he to visit or receive visits? To take baths? To write letters? To cultivate flowers? To walk with his family? Will he not be quite as likely to vote in opposition to his real interests as a favor? ... What will he most enjoy, works of art, or rum? Will he go to a meeting on Sunday? ... His home means to him his food and his bed.” Steward cited in Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: U.S. Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 104. It is striking how easily Steward’s words can be adapted to describe the effects on workers (both non-elite and professional) of enmeshment in the modern “work-spend-consume” cycle discussed by Schor and others. See Christine Firer Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency: Work, Livelihood and a U.S. Catholic Economic Ethic* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021), chs. 5, 6; Mike Konczal, *Freedom from the Market: America’s Fight to Liberate Itself from the Grip of the Invisible Hand* (New York: The New Press, 2021); also Guðmundur D. Haraldsson and Annie Spratt, “Going Public: Iceland’s Journey to a Shorter Working Week.” *Autonomy.Work.*, 2021, https://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ICELAND_4DW.pdf.

²⁶ For this history, see, e.g., Benjamin K. Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Wages for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); also Hunnicutt, “Monsignor John A. Ryan and the Shorter Hours of Labor: A Forgotten Vision of ‘Genuine’ Progress,” *Catholic Historical Review* 69, no. 3 (1983): 384–402.

theologian Bernard Häring warned about in the early 1960s.²⁷ This is a world where “men are driven from their homes, farms, and families to build the earthly paradise of the workers, of the men without a Sabbath, men who *despite shorter hours and better working conditions* have become men without rest.”²⁸ Three decades later, economist Juliet Schor’s *The Overworked American* described an entrenched economic culture where people’s time and energies had become even more captured by the “squirrel cage” of a work-spend-consume cycle.²⁹

As Gemma Cruz, social theorists like Ulrich Beck, and many others point out, the abstract, 24/7 worlds of finance and mass production/consumerist capitalism are *not* synced to the embodied realities, rhythms, and needs of flesh-and-blood human beings or their communities.³⁰ Certainly, and this bears emphasizing, modern economic systems’ innovation and productivity have made possible survival, health, and better lives for millions of people. But to the extent that we become servants to and reshaped in the image of the market system and its inherent restlessness, our humanity is degraded and threatened. Colonizing our time, encouraging addictive (that is, habituated, unfree, unhealthy, and ultimately dissatisfying) patterns of working and of filling our non-work time, the work-spend-consume culture breeds and sustains a world of total work, and total restlessness.³¹

Maintaining this state of affairs is very profitable for some, but harmful for the majority who are burdened by varied combinations of what researchers track as “time poverty” and “resource poverty.”³² The affluent who benefit from this *status quo* rarely

²⁷ Josef Pieper is credited with coining the phrase “world of total work,” in his treatise on leisure. See, e.g., *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, 78: “More and more, at the present time...the world of work is becoming our entire world; it threatens to engulf us completely, and the demands of the world of work become greater and greater, till at last they make a ‘total’ claim upon the whole human nature.”

²⁸ Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. II: Special Moral Theology, trans. Edwin G. Kaiser (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963), 325, emphasis supplied. Discussing Sunday/Sabbath observance, he writes, “Without the sacred time of repose and worship man becomes a mere slave of work (325).”

²⁹ Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

³⁰ See Cruz, “(De)Humanizing Work,” esp. 1-7; and the works of Ulrich Beck, e.g., *Brave New World of Work*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge, UK: Policy Press, 2000), esp. chs. 3, 5. Beck’s analysis of “risk society” adds social theoretical insight to Cruz’s helpful treatment of the “precarariat.”

³¹ Cf., Nicole Marie Shippen, *Decolonizing Time* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.) For extended critiques of consumerism’s negative effects by Catholic theologians, see e.g., John Kavanaugh, SJ, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: 25th Anniversary ed.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006); Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Culture in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004); David Cloutier, *The Vice of Luxury: Economic Excess in a Consumer Age* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015); Firer Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, ch. 6.

³² S. Eries, Rania Antonopoulos, Thomas Masterson, Ajit Zacharias, Roberto Donadi, Paola Lorenzana, and Celina Hernández, “The Interlocking of Time and Income Deficits: Revisiting Poverty Measurement, Informing Policy Responses,” [levyinstitute.org](https://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/rpr_12_12.pdf), 2012, https://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/rpr_12_12.pdf. See also, Ajit Zacharias, “How Time Deficits and Hidden Poverty Undermine the Sustainable Development Goals,” *Policy Notes* 4 (2017), Levy

resist it; we are too busy “singing in our chains.”³³ Non-elites, and especially the poor and marginalized, have their hands full grappling with wearying, often soul-crushing degrees of both time and resource poverty. And those who do question or flout the restlessness regime are likely to pay consequences, as they will be neither understood nor rewarded by the powers that be. For addressing this apparent impasse, the wisdom and practices of religious traditions can offer important resources.

IV. SPIRITUAL REST AND SABBATH REST IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Historically and today, spiritual and religious traditions offer visions and practices of work and rest that resist, challenge, and offer alternatives to the rest-less and dehumanizing “worlds of total work” inflicted upon Israel in ancient Egypt, or upon enslaved African Americans, or upon people in the concentration and work camps and gulags of the twentieth century, or upon sweat-shop laborers in factories of the global supply chain.³⁴

The centrality of Sabbath-keeping in Jewish law and practice is one remarkable and instructive example.³⁵ As my colleague Sarit Kattan Gribetz has shown, over centuries, Jews’ engagement in social and religious ordering of time has served to shape and maintain both their communal identity, and their communal difference from the non-Jewish world.³⁶ Keeping Sabbath serves both these functions, and has much to teach us about better ways of working and resting.

For both Jews and Christians, Sabbath rest and worship follow God’s example and command. In observing Sabbath, God’s people celebrate and participate in God’s crowning creation—the rest, *menuha*, understood as “tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose”—of the seventh day; and they remember God’s redemptive and liberative action on their history and lives.³⁷ On the Sabbath Jews are also to extend that liberative

Institute.org, <https://www.levyinstitute.org/publications/how-time-deficits-and-hidden-poverty-undermine-the-sustainable-development-goals>. Cf., Claire Wolfteich, “Time Poverty, Women’s Labor, and Catholic Social Teaching: A Practical Theological Exploration.” *Journal of Moral Theology*, 2, no. 2 (June 2013): 40-59.

³³ Lakeland, “Crisis and Engagement,” 73, quoting Robert Mangabeiro Unger, “The Dictatorship of No Alternatives,” in *What Should the Left Propose?* (London: Verso, 2006), 4.

³⁴ Among many horrific historical examples of the degradation of human beings, the exploitation of their work, and the theft of their rest and restfulness, see the especially chilling eye-witness account of Charles Ball, who as an enslaved person experienced first-hand the installation and operation of the terror-based “gang work” system, designed to eke out maximum labor and profits from enslaved African American plantation workers in the early-nineteenth century US South. In Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), ch. 4.

³⁵ Many thanks to my Fordham Theology colleague Sarit Kattan Gribetz for generously sharing with me resources, ideas, and wisdom drawn from her studies of time, Sabbath, and rest in Judaism.

³⁶ Sarit Kattan Gribetz, *Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

³⁷ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 22-23. In this modern classic, Heschel notes that the term, *menuha*, also appears in Psalm 23, v. 2, “He leads me beside the restful waters” (23).

rest and freedom to servants and employees, neighbors and strangers, animals and the natural world.

Jewish scholar Eitan Fishbane centers this “rest-apart” in his description of Shabbat as a weekly recollection of *shalom*, the wholeness and redemption of the world. Sabbath, as Abraham Heschel writes, is about finding holiness in time. In the space of *menuha* created by Sabbath, “we intuit the interconnected unity of God, nature, and person.”³⁸ As we rest, we know that “people suffer in our home cities and in distant regions of the world.” And though the pain of poverty and the scourge of injustice “do not disappear with the lighting of the Sabbath candles,” Fishbane continues, “Shabbat does open up a vision of a world redeemed; we taste the dream of an earth blessed with perfection, an ideal that we can work toward again with renewed strength in the week to come. The wholeness and illumination of Shabbat call us to raise up the brokenness of this world and all who are driven low by its pain.”³⁹

Writer Donna Schaper, taking a different tack, envisages Sabbath as also “rest-amid.” For Schaper, the “sense of Sabbath” resides in any moment that actively includes the presence of God or Spirit. In our everyday lives, this Sabbath sense is accessible especially through “rituals that have the potential of unifying our fragmented days and time. Rituals keep time from becoming all of the same anxious pace and piece. . . . We ritualize time so that it can become expansive.” Amid daily and weekly activities, such rituals—which may be as simple and mundane as the practices of cooking and gathering for a family meal, or the habit among traditional Jewish women of hanging out their wash on Monday mornings—can provide enriching and reliable moments for grounding, community, and restfulness.⁴⁰

For millennia, Jewish Sabbath-keeping rituals have borne a wisdom that Harvard Business School researchers are now rediscovering and documenting in today’s workplaces: people work and do better when their jobs include regular, *predictable and required* times away from work.⁴¹ Sabbath-keeping also witnesses to a truth that privileged elites may too easily forget: creating space and time for rest takes work! Susanna Heschel, daughter of the renowned Rabbi Abraham Heschel, describes the flurry of work and preparation in her parents’ home each Friday that preceded the pause and rest that descended as her mother kindled the Shabbat candles.⁴² Observing this predictable, required time of cessation took planning, advance labor, and discipline. For observant Jews living in non-majority-Jewish cultures, keeping Shabbat also

³⁸ Heschel, *The Sabbath*.

³⁹ Eitan Fishbane, “The Sabbath Soul: Mystical Reflections on the Transformative Power of Holy Time,” *Spirituality and Practice*, at <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/22117>. Cf. Fishbane, *The Sabbath Soul* (New York: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2012).

⁴⁰ Donna Schaper, “Sabbath Sense: A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked,” *Spirituality & Practice*, book excerpt, at <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/18225>. Cf. Schaper, *Sabbath Sense*, (New York: Innisfree Press, 1997).

⁴¹ Leslie A. Perlow and Jessica L. Porter, “Making Time off Predictable—and Required,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 1, 2009, <https://hbr.org/2009/10/making-time-off-predictable-and-required>.

⁴² Susannah Heschel, “Introduction,” in Heschel, *The Sabbath*, vii-ix. She goes on to describe the contrasting mood and peace of Shabbat time, where a spirit of *menuha* – “a restfulness [of body and soul] that is also a celebration” was practiced (xiv).

requires the willingness to be different. Through Shabbat and other religious festivals, Jews sustain and celebrate their communal identity and difference. They also resist, challenge, and place boundaries around today's "24/7-on" treatment of time.

Christians, too, are enjoined to observe the tradition of Sabbath, and for centuries have done so by partaking in communal worship and rest from work on Sundays, the day of Jesus' Easter resurrection. Today, however, at least for a majority of US Christians, this commandment seems to have dropped off the decalogue tablets. Pushing against this trend, Christian theologian David Jensen promotes Sabbath rest as a humanizing spiritual practice. He writes: "Israel's sabbath laws codify that people do not live for work, but from God's life." As the pattern of God's work in Genesis 1–2 shows, "good rest comes . . . where time is set aside, away from work, for no purposeful activity other than to rest and enjoy the world, one's companions, and the God who makes all things new." Importantly, taking Sabbath time "frees us from false dependence on our own work. We can rest and say that we have worked enough, in the end, because God is already at work for us."⁴³ Agreeing, Norman Witzka highlights nurturing relationships and "delight" as two important ways of partaking in Sabbath rest. He links the latter to Genesis 1–2, where YHWH completes and culminates creation on the seventh day, by bringing into being the Sabbath, and delighting in all that has been made.⁴⁴

Sabbath points us back to Dalton-Smith's final form of rest, spiritual or soul rest. Soul rest "replaces striving when our identity is secure," Glynnis Whitwer writes.⁴⁵ "Spiritual rest is a deep sense of confidence and trust," a resting in God. "Soul rest is not circumstantial, nor does it need to be renewed. Rather, soul rest . . . is rooted in faith and confidence that we are deeply and unconditionally loved . . . and held safe." We rest when, even in the face of fears and insecurities, "we fully trust we are safe in the hands of God."⁴⁶

Strikingly, Thomistic theology etches this condition of spiritual rest and repose into the very design of the human soul, in Aquinas's treatment of *complacentia*. Brian Traska recalls Frederick Crowe's famous analysis of Thomas on two types of love. The first is receptive—"complacency in the good"—resting, accepting, and delighting in the good that is. The second is active "concern for the good"—desiring and moving toward the good. The Latin phrase, *complacentia boni*, resting in the good, points to the starting point, as well as the terminus, for all of our loves and strivings: first, we rest; then we seek; then we rest. Thomas's treatment of *complacentia* also affirms a human predisposition for the deep rest in God to which spiritual rest refers.⁴⁷

⁴³ David Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006), 63.

⁴⁴ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, foreword by Wendell Berry (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006). Wirzba, a Christian theologian, draws liberally upon Heschel's work.

⁴⁵ Whitwer, *Doing Busy Better*, 187.

⁴⁶ Whitwer, *Doing Busy Better*, 67, citing Rom 8:38-39.

⁴⁷ Brian Traska, "Can Mindfulness Make You A Better Lover?" *Lonergan Institute Blog*, July 18, 2018, accessed at <https://bclonergan.org/can-mindfulness-make-you-a-better-lover-part-one-of-a-four-part-series/>; Frederick E. Crowe, SJ, "Complacency and Concern in the Thought of St. Thomas," *Theological Studies* 20, no. 1 (1959), 1-39. Cf. St Philip's Seminary,

On the level of practice, putting rest into our days and weeks opens up time and space for the slower, more intuitive reflection and patient “waiting for reality to reveal itself” that are constitutive of the contemplative and spiritual—and I would add, scholarly—life.⁴⁸ In this regard, Francis Clooney, in his 2003 CTSA plenary address, describes the work of comparative theology as, at bottom, learning new ways of *seeing*, by plying a form of theologizing that is “based on insight and instinct, prolonged attentiveness, beauty, and bliss, going broad by going deep.” On this path of learning to see, Clooney continues, “we learn to let go,” and “we see ourselves anew.”⁴⁹ Zen teacher and Christian theologian Ruben Habito writes eloquently of the right-brained approach of Zen, and on meditation and deep silence.⁵⁰ As a range of spiritual traditions attest, in times and postures of rest, the fertile, humanizing processes of imagination, insight, understanding, and wisdom have space to germinate and grow.

V. REST AS RESISTANCE, HEALING, AND EMPOWERMENT

As Jewish Sabbath-keeping shows, prioritizing rest-amid and rest-apart from work is also a way of practicing spiritual and practical resistance to anti-human and anti-God forces afoot in one’s world.⁵¹ When we rest, and foster rest and restfulness within and around us, we engage in an ancient and powerful human strategy for surviving, opposing, and strengthening our capacities to subvert the necrophilic forces that threaten all around.

This insight is at the center of the work of Atlanta-based artist, womanist theologian, and founder of the Rest is Resistance/Nap Ministry, Tricia Hersey.⁵² Hersey, who began this work while studying at Emory’s Candler Divinity School, has drawn on Black, Afrofuturist, womanist, and theological sources to create what she calls the “Rest is Resistance” movement. Hersey’s “rest is resistance manifesto”

“Complacent Love and the Role of the Holy Spirit in Creation,” *St Philip’s Seminary*, June 23, 2017, <https://oratory-toronto.org/map-year/2017/06/23/complacent-love-role-holy-spirit-creation/>.

⁴⁸ Douglas E. Christie, “Wasting Time Conscientiously,” *Oneing* 10, no. 1, *Unveiled*, posted May 22, 2022., <https://cac.org/news/wasting-time-conscientiously-by-douglas-e-christie-oneing-unveiled/>.

⁴⁹ Francis X. Clooney, SJ, “Learning to See: Comparative Practice and the Widening of Theological Vision,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 58 (2003): 5.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Ruben L. F. Habito, “Be Still and Know: A Zen Reading of a Biblical Saying,” *Tricycle Magazine*, (Spring 2017), <https://tricycle.org/magazine/pure-of-heart/>; Habito, *Be Still and Know: Zen and the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017). Cf. “How to Relax,” *Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation*, <https://thichnhatanhfoundation.org/relax>.

⁵¹ Heschel speaks in this regard of Sabbath as a powerful, regular practice of stepping back from immersion in “technical civilization,” thereby to attain a degree of detachment and freedom in relation to its dominant systems. “To set aside one day a week for freedom...a day of... detachment, of independence..., a day on which we stop worshiping the idols of a technical civilization, a day in which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow man and the forces of nature – is there any other institution that holds out more hope for [human] progress than the Sabbath?” Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 28.

⁵² See Minneapolis Museum of Arts Talk, “Rest as a Portal For Healing,” by Tricia Hersey, Nov. 14, 2020, accessed at <https://vimeo.com/48370876>; “The Nap Ministry,” <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>; Tricia Hersey, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* (New York, Hachette/Little, Brown, 2022).

centers on four tenets: 1) Rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy. 2) Our bodies are a site of liberation. 3) Naps, rest, and sleep provide a healing portal to imagine, invent and heal. Hersey speaks of sleep and daydreaming as creating a Third Space (a notion that has some intriguing resonances with the physical “third places” being promoted among urban planners and civil-society advocates today)⁵³ where healing spiritual connections with ourselves, our ancestors, and communities (evocative of Christians’ belief in the spiritual bonds among the living and dead of the communion of saints) can take place, and new, utopic/alternative visions and imaginations can gestate and be birthed. 4) In her final tenet, Hersey is explicit about her movement’s concern to honor and make reparations for the rest—and space to dream—stolen from African-American ancestors: “Our Dream Space has been stolen and we want it back. We will reclaim it through rest.” Referencing the work of M. Shawn Copeland, Hersey asks: “How do we care for our own bodies as sacred? How do we cooperate to craft a world in which all bodies can thrive?”⁵⁴ For Hersey, this requires what bell hooks calls a “meticulous love practice” grounded in community-care (versus individualist, commodified, self-care) and rest. “Exhaustion,” she concludes, “will not save us. To imagine a new world that centers liberation, rest must be our foundation to invent, restore, imagine and build.”⁵⁵

Hersey’s movement focuses on the many powers of “rest-apart,” including rest’s ability to nurture and replenish vision and energies vital to the fights against economic and racial injustice, and the fight for social transformation. She identifies a key locus for this work in popular social movements, wherein the experiences and determination of people at the grassroots witness to the presence and power of “rest-amid” struggles for a better world. Prodded by a holy restlessness for justice and peace, and immersed in the messiness and difficulties of efforts to attain them, Hersey invites change-seekers to find their fortitude and strength in community- and spiritually-grounded rest, both apart from and amid their strivings.

A beautiful example of this, recounted by Martin Luther King, Jr., concerns Mother Pollard, one of the elders of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, during the bus boycott of 1955 and 1956. This elderly, “poor and uneducated” Black woman deeply impressed the young King as “amazingly intelligent and...understanding of the meaning of the movement,” and she became a valued source of love and inspiration for him. Though in her seventies, Mother Pollard walked to work daily during the bus boycott. Despite her advanced years, she refused to take the bus and was adamant that she would continue to walk to see change happen, explaining, poignantly, to Rev. King, “My feet is tired, but my soul is rested.”⁵⁶

⁵³ On the critical social value of “third places,” see Ray Oldenberg, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Hatchett Books, 1999), chs. 1, 2. Among other benefits, these third places offer spaces where “social rest” among neighbors and strangers can be enjoyed.

⁵⁴ Hersey, “A Portal for Healing,” citing M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing History: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Hersey, “Rest as A Portal for Healing.” Cf. Leah Fleming and Tiffany Griffith, “From a Historic Perspective, Rest Can Be a Form of Resistance,” *Georgia Public Broadcasting*, October 8, 2021, <https://www.gpb.org/news/2021/10/08/historic-perspective-rest-can-be-form-of-resistance>.

⁵⁶ Recounted in Martin Luther King, Jr. *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, [1963] 2010), 130-131.

One other deeply valuable form of the rest that resists, heals, and empowers merits marking for further exploration: humor, and its attendant laughter. In *Mortal Blessings*, a memoir of her mother's last days, Angela Alaimo O'Donnell reflects on humor and the comic as sacramental conduits to transcendence.⁵⁷ Laughter provides a peculiar, embodied and enspirited moment of "rest-amid" that refreshes by simultaneously taking us out of the moment, and grounding us in reality.⁵⁸ We laugh at the unexpected, the absurd, the incongruent, or at surprising, often paradoxical recognitions about what is true. Members of subordinated groups laugh at the folly of their supposed superiors. O'Donnell speaks of "redeeming laughter" as also signaling eschatological hope.

Humor...allows us to suspend the rules of the ordinary world, if only temporarily, since it takes us out of ourselves and our current situation...and enables us to glimpse a consoling vision that delights. The humor may be momentary, but it highlights an "other reality," a world beyond our current troubles that is not yet but is promised.⁵⁹

In sharing humor and laughter, even amid the stress and sadness of their mother's imminent death, O'Donnell and her sisters enjoyed blessed moments of release, enjoyment, and rest. In a similar vein, Anita Houck rightly argues the merit of retrieving for our day the Aristotelian and Thomistic virtue of *eutrapelia*, the virtue of playfulness and good humor. When practiced well, *eutrapelia* can encourage social bonds, bolster other virtues, refresh imaginations, and, amid the ups and downs of life, witness to and purvey soul-rest.⁶⁰

VI. THE GIFTS AND POWERS OF A REST-GROUNDED THEOLOGICAL ETHIC OF WORK

Properly understood and practiced, amid our labors and outside of them, rest bears a host of life-enhancing powers.

First, rest *connects* our embodied and enspirited selves, and reconnects us to others, to the earth, and to the Divine.

Second, by empowering us to *stop* and *step back* from absorption in the mundane and the *status quo*, resting creates sites and moments of *freedom*, and times and spaces where *reality*, in its beauty and its ugliness, can be received, contemplated, and

⁵⁷ Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, *Mortal Blessings: A Sacramental Farewell* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2014), ch. 4. I thank my Fordham colleague for her generosity in sharing her work, and these passages.

⁵⁸ This "grounding" is intimated in humor's etymological root, *humus*, meaning soil or earth; the words "human" and "humility" share this same root. O'Donnell, *Mortal Blessings*, 68, referencing Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 191.

⁵⁹ O'Donnell, *Mortal Blessings*, 68, referencing Peter Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Everyday Life* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

⁶⁰ Anita Houck, "The Play of Work: Virtue Discourses of Work and Vocation." Paper Presented at the 75th Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America (Virtual Meeting), June 12, 2021.

honestly faced. This includes the often painful but healing power to face, to take a long, loving look at, and to come to terms with our own reality.⁶¹ For writer bell hooks, doing this is an indispensable step on the journey toward a living a justice-seeking life rooted in genuine love.

Acknowledging the truth of our reality, both individual and collective, is a necessary stage for personal and political growth. This is usually the most painful stage in the process of learning to love—the one many of us seek to avoid. (Yet) once we choose love, we instinctively possess the inner resources to confront that pain. Moving through the pain to the other side we find the joy, the freedom of spirit that a love ethic brings.⁶²

Third, as Tricia Hersey attests, rest bestows the gift of space and time *to daydream, to imagine, and to dream*, capacities that are critically necessary for shaking off the torpor of “the way things are” and envisioning, inventing, and enacting creative responses to the many deep crises of our time.⁶³

Fourth, because to rest requires community-care, it nurtures our power *to allow ourselves to be vulnerable and cared for*; and in replenishing our body-spirits rest deepens another significant power, the power *to suffer and to endure* when suffering and enduring are justly called for, because we realize we are loved, and that we are not alone.

Finally, by renewing and sustaining our energies for love, work, and action for the common good, practicing rest-amid and rest-apart grants us the *power to resist and persist* in the long-haul labors needed to transform unjust and oppressive ideologies, systems and institutions.

In speaking of the manifold gifts and powers that pertain to rest, we ought not be naïve. There is no doubt that like our work, our rest can become corrupted. When our resting falls prey to vicious, exploitative, or commodifying dynamics, it can deteriorate into self-centered indolence, self-destructive patterns of behavior, or various forms of *acedia*/restlessness. Warnings that focusing on rest or spiritual practices can lead to withdrawal from social engagement, and thereby, acquiescence in unjust systems of power, are frequently on the lips of modern social critics, and these warnings should not be lightly dismissed. This is why understanding and practicing authentic rest is an ongoing project, and why, as we work to succeed at rest we need the guidance of wise and critically-aware teachers, mentors, and communities.

⁶¹ Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” Church (Winter 1989), https://www.alliesonthejourney.com/uploads/7/4/7/4/74742015/burghardt__contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf.

⁶² bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins), “Love as the Practice of Freedom,” UU College of Social Justice. May 2016, <https://uucsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/bell-hooks-Love-as-the-Practice-of-Freedom.pdf>.

⁶³ Cf. María Pilar Aquino’s discussion of the function of utopias in, “Theology Renewing Life.”

VII. CONCLUSION

As our brief voyage comes to an end, let me throw out one final buoy marker. Given rest's necessity, its power, and its serious state of disrepair, I believe it is important for we theologians and our institutions practice, model, promote, and support legible and compelling alternatives to the always-on, humanly- and ecologically-destructive patterns that so often pervade relationships to work and rest in the United States today.

"It was in college," recalls writer Glynnis Whitwer, "that I realized my work was never done." Holding down two jobs, relishing the always-more of learning, reading, and extracurriculars, for this energetic, talented, "do-er," "something took hold of me in college that I hadn't experienced before and became the foundation for a way of life where I was constantly driven to do more," and "I didn't dare stop working."⁶⁴ What Whitwer describes is not what we hope we are teaching or modeling for our students; but I wonder. In his 2021 CTSA presentation on "Sabbath Slowness," Craig Sanders underlined this need for us to intentionally craft ways of being and modeling something different, both in our labors as educators and church workers, and in our formative relations with family members and peers.⁶⁵ We know from experience, though, that in each of these roles, our salutary vocationally-focused commitments to the good work that needs doing are vulnerable—perhaps uniquely vulnerable—to being co-opted into driving our own versions of a "world of total work." The rest-lessness regime we need to challenge is thus not only cultural and systemic; a version of it is also ingrained in our own psyches. The down side of this hyper-committed work life is evinced in one academic colleague's tweeted weekend lament: "That Sunday morning realization that your teaching is a mostly full-time job, your service load is mostly a full-time job, your research and writing are mostly full-time jobs, and your existence will be frantic half-assing and triage until you drop dead from exhaustion."⁶⁶ In the face of the potential endlessness of all the good work to be done, how do we better understand, incorporate and advocate for good rest, not as a grudging accommodation to our finitude, but as an essential human, societal, and spiritual good?

In each person's life and work there will arise what Whitwer calls necessary "seasons of overcommitment."⁶⁷ But when busyness, overcommitment, and lack of Sabbath time become a job description or way of life, we risk being transmogrified from human beings—who were not created to never stop—to de-humanized images of the very system of total work and total restlessness that it is our mission, as theologians, as educators—especially in the liberal arts—as citizens, and as people of faith, to stand against. When we fail to resist, and acquiesce to the power of a dehumanizing *status quo*, we not only harm ourselves. We also create scandalous ripple effects; for this is what others, including students like Glynnis Whitwer, will see and may learn to

⁶⁴ Whitwer, *Doing Busy Better*, 26.

⁶⁵ Craig Sanders, "The Liberating Power of Sabbath Slowness," Paper presented at the 75th Annual Convention of the CTSA (Virtual Meeting), June 12, 2021.

⁶⁶ Julia Azari (@julia_azari), "That Sunday morning realization..." Twitter tweet, October 10, 2021, https://twitter.com/julia_azari/status/1447195594741661703?lang=bg. Azari fails to mention one further "mostly full-time job" we all hold—doing the unpaid work of the household, family, and neighborhood spheres.

⁶⁷ Whitwer, *Doing Busy Better*, 30.

emulate. As individuals, and in our relationships and work, how do we “order our days aright?” (Ps 90:12)⁶⁸ How do we become champions and practitioners of a *habitus* of rest-amid work, and rhythms of rest outside of work? And how, as Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos asks, might Catholic educational institutions draw on the rich heritages of their founders and faith traditions to guide our graduates toward lives of discernment in which “work has the possibility of being part of, and not all of, how they imagine the good life?”⁶⁹

To move in this direction we need, first, to seriously embrace the essential value and generative, transformative power of rest. We need to see and acknowledge that, far from trivial distractions, practicing rest, and taking up the task of ensuring good rest for all, are critical to the survival and vitality of every single person, and likewise of every single sphere of human relationship and activity, from the familial, cultural, and civic to the ecclesial, political, and economic. In seeking conversion to a better theology and ethics of rest, we need to look to and learn from people, enterprises, and communities who do, intentionally and successfully, prioritize and engage in healthy patterns of rest and work. And we need to develop the persistent, at times disruptive, countercultural practice of foregrounding rest and its many humanizing facets, especially in our work-related thinking, choices, and activities.

As someone who is all-too-frequently Exhibit A for “rest ethic fail” myself, I know that many members of this Society are much wiser and better prepared to respond to these challenges than am I. Going forward, however, I hope to take my cues from Jesus of Nazareth and Otis Redding. Amid work, I am going to seek a lighter, more Gospel- and soul-rested yoke. And apart from work, I am going to take to heart a 1960s’ soul song’s—also gospel-based—invitation and exhortation to find my dock of the bay and to sit, watch the tide roll away, rest my bones, and—in all the best, most grace-filled and re-empowering senses—waste time. I hope to honor and work to make possible the same for our most burdened and tired neighbors, near at hand and across the globe. I hope the same for you.

⁶⁸ Psalm 90:12, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.” The phrase in Hebrew “can be translated as ‘count your days,’ suggesting that our days on this earth are limited, and therefore that we should gain wisdom and live well accordingly. ‘Days’ here can mean both individual days and also ‘life.’” Sarit Kattan Gribetz, personal correspondence, June 16, 2022.

⁶⁹ Catherine Punsalan-Manlimosas quoted in Anita Houck, “Resisting Your Bliss: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theology, Vocation, and Work,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 75 (2021): 102.