APOCALYPTICISM IN A CATHOLIC KEY: LESSONS FROM THOMAS MERTON

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of Karl Rahner, a range of theologians have made a compelling case that theology cannot afford to dismiss popular fascination with "the End-times," nor downplay the apocalyptic tenor of the New Testament itself. Nevertheless in Catholic theology apocalypticism remains something of an oddity, a message in search of a credible form. This essay explores the apocalyptic tenor of Thomas Merton's mature period (1957–68) in order to propose some crucial distinctions between apocalyptic in an authentically "Catholic," "analogical," or "ironic" mode, and other, more dialectical forms of apocalyptic that have long dominated American religious and popular consciousness. Bringing Merton into dialogue with Russian sophiology, William Lynch, Johannes Baptist Metz, and others, the author highlights Merton's contribution to the difficult question of form: that is, how apocalypticism might be communicated in a way that seizes on the historical urgency of the gospel but also refuses to cede to a mythological, dialectical, or dangerously idolatrous imagination.

> At the moment when the world comes undone, disintegrates—is not Christianity overcome by a heavy, tragic sleep? . . . The absolutely new derives from the eschatological return to the sources that *lie ahead*. This is the art of apocalyptic times: "We remember what is to come."[1]

[1]Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*. Trans. Anthony Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994; orig. pub. as *Femme et le salut du monde*, 1949), 128, 130.

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Writing in Paris in 1949, Russian Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov described the atmosphere of post-war Europe as a "time of the catacombs," when the "horsemen of the Apocalypse cover the entire world." In such a world, suggested Evdokimov, "The artist will recover his priesthood only by performing a theophanic sacrament: drawing, sculpting, or singing the Name of God, in which God dwells."[2] The task seemed painfully urgent for many amidst the wreckage of Western Christian civilization, but pointless and even revolting to others: to draw, sculpt, or sing the Name of God. Where was God, after all, when the cattle-cars rolled with their terrible rational efficiency into Auschwitz? Where was Christ when the United States, the world's preeminent "Christian" nation, dropped its "original child bomb"[3] on Hiroshima, instantly incinerating some 80,000 persons, and three days later, when a second fell on Nagasaki, turning another 40,000 persons to dust? "At the moment when the world comes undone," has not Christianity, with its *Christus Victor* narrative, been exposed forever for its "heavy, tragic sleep?"[4] Is Christ the Lord of *this* history?

Yes, offers Evdokimov, but with a piercing qualification that the church has too often forgotten through the centuries, or refused to see: Christ is Lord of history in the manner "of His entry into Jerusalem: in a concealed, *kenotic* matter (behind a veil of humility), which is imperceptible to the senses, but more than visible, and absolutely evident to faith."[5] As Thomas Merton would write, driving home the point less than a decade later, the Christ of our times is "the Christ of the bombed city and of the concentration camp. We have seen Him and we know Him well."[6]

Evdokimov belonged to that generation of Russian thinkers whose worldview was indelibly shaped "in the explosion of terror, blood, and chaos that was the Russian Civil War," and what would soon become, with the rise of Hitler's Third Reich, the twentieth century's darkest legacy. "The essence of total war," as he learned firsthand, "is that it is inescapable."[7] During the German occupation of Paris, Evdokimov's family hid people who were targeted for arrest; after the war they ran a hostel for displaced persons and political refugees. Merton, for his part,

[2]Ibid., 128, 130.

[3]The title of Thomas Merton's unforgettable prose poem on the dropping of the first atomic bomb (*Original Child Bomb* [New York: New Directions, 1962]). The bomb was affectionately named "Little Boy" by its makers; the second they called "Fat Man."

[4]Evdokimov, *Woman*, 128.

[5]Ibid., 120.

[6]Thomas Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness* (New York: New Directions, 1953), 1.

[7]Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Relgious Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1997), 230.

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wrote from the relative solitude and silence of the Kentucky hills; yet he, too, was a kind of "displaced" and "marginal" person, passing his childhood from one place to another between Europe and America with his itinerant parents, orphaned at sixteen, and finally, after not a little wandering, finding his place in the world at Gethsemani. But if monastic life would be for some a refuge from the apocalyptic fury of the age, it clearly would not be so for Merton.

The post-war resonances between Evdokimov and Merton are not accidental, and nowhere is this clearer than in the realm of eschatology. While scholars have long noted Merton's turn to the ironic (and later "macaronic") literary form during the 1960s, much less understood is the degree to which the apparent breakdown of language itself, including the reflexive terms and symbols of Christianity, led Merton not only to experiment with new literary forms, but also, to borrow the words of David Tracy, "to retrieve or recover the *fragmentary forms* in the Christian tradition that have been forgotten, repressed, and neglected by modernity."[8] Specifically, what Merton discovered in his close study of Russian theology and especially in Evdokimov during the late 1950s was not just a typically Orthodox emphasis on "realized eschatology,"[9] but also a striking retrieval of the *apocalyptic* dimension of New Testament faith, a retrieval that Merton would make his own. Indeed, when Merton in 1968 described William Blake's poetic vision as "a total integration of mysticism and prophecy, a return to apocalyptic faith which arises from an intuitive protest against Christianity's estrangement from its own eschatological ground,"[10] he might very well have been describing himself, his own theological mood, in that tumultuous year.

This article has three goals: first, to explore the apocalyptic tenor of Merton's mature period (1957–68), especially in light of Evdokimov's influence; second, to draw some distinctions between apocalyptic in an

[8]Younhee Kim, "David Tracy's Postmodern Reflection on God," *Louvain Studies* 30 (2005): 159–79, at 170; citing Tracy, "Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of Our Times," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1999).

[9]In a journal of March 7, 1964, Merton described realized eschatology as "the transformation of life and of human relations by Christ *now* (rather than an eschatology focused on future cosmic events. . . .) Realized eschatology is the heart of genuine Christian humanism and hence its tremendous importance for the Christian peace effort for example. . . . The preaching of peace by a remnant in an age of war and violence is one of the eschatological characteristics of the life of the Church. By this activity of the Church the work of God is mysteriously accomplished in the world" (Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: The Journals of Thomas Merton, Vol. 5 (1966–1967)*, ed. Robert E. Daggy [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997], 87).

[10]Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: New Directions, 1981), 6.

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authentically "Catholic," "analogical," or "ironic" mode, as I shall call it here,[11] and other, more dialectical forms of apocalyptic that have long dominated American religious and popular consciousness—forms which Merton cautioned his Christian readers against as, in fact, dangerous conflations of biblical eschatology with an idolatrous age; and third, to highlight Merton's contribution to the question of *form* with respect to apocalyptic. The intuition driving this study is that today, no less than fifty years ago, no less than two thousand years ago, theological discourse must be to some extent "the art of apocalyptic times." Yet the kind of apocalyptic we shall have in view here fixes our imagination not so much on "the End" as the locus of God's decisive inbreaking or *apokalypsis* ("unveiling") so much as "the Now," the critical present moment of tension, pregnancy, and possibility upon which the history of divine-human freedom ever hinges.

It was Karl Rahner, of course, who most famously and influentially argued that a meaningful eschatology is one that emerges from the existential circumstances of the Christian community's life now, in the present historical moment.[12] Because knowledge of the future "is an inner moment in the self-understanding of man in his present hour of existence—and *grows out of it*," Rahner argued, eschatological assertions must remain tethered to history, and must not stray beyond appropriate limitations on knowledge of things unseen; apocalypticism must not yield to "phantasy or gnosticism."[13] In the wake of Rahner, and in some cases pressing beyond his epistemic and eschatological modesty, a range of theologians, from Johann Baptist Metz and David Tracy, to Lieven Boeve, John Thiel, and Matthew Ashley, have made a compelling case that Catholic theology cannot afford to dismiss popular fascination with "the End," nor still less, downplay or overlook the apocalyptic tenor of the New Testament itself. Nevertheless, in Catholic circles today apocalyptic remains something of an oddity, a message in search of a credible form.

Merton's mature period, I wish to suggest, especially when placed in dialogue with contemporary thinkers, can not only help us make

[11]Another possible term would be "sophianic" (or "sophiological"), which evokes the Wisdom christology at play implicitly, sometimes explicitly, in what follows. Merton and the Russian sophiologists witness to an apocalypticism conceived under the light of Wisdom.

[12]See Karl Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4: *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 323–46; cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William Dych (1978; reprint, New York: Crossroad, 1992), 431–47.

[13]Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," 331.

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sense of this enigmatic, crisis-driven lens on reality, it can also help Catholic theologians discern the way forward. While Merton's "realized" and robustly incarnational vision shares much with that of Rahner, there is an intensity and historical urgency in Merton's ironic and mystical-poetical *form* and literary style that presses beyond Rahner, or better, more deeply "within" a broadly incarnational spatial-temporal framework, to anticipate the apocalyptic tenor of political and liberation theologies. In other words, Merton's mature period merits closer attention today not only for its apocalyptic content, which is strikingly prescient, but perhaps even more for what it teaches us about the vexatious question of form: that is, *how* apocalypticism might be communicated to a general audience in a way that both seizes on the historical urgency of the Christian "good news," but also refuses to give itself over to a mythological, dialectical, or dangerously idolatrous religious, cultural, or political imagination.

I. Christ "Held Down to Street Level": The Time of No Room

In September of 1959, Merton noted with approval in his journal the following line from Evdokimov's book, *Woman and the Salvation of the World* (1949): "To recognize Christ in those who by appearance struggle against Him, when in reality they struggle against ideas and values which are falsely called Christian, is that not an urgent Christian task?"[14] The notation comes from a chapter entitled "The Church in the World and the Last Things," a theology of history in which Evdokimov counters the apparent victory of evil in the twentieth century ("the human Anti-Christ") with the "positive goal" of history set down at the Council of Chalcedon, namely, "to actualize humanity in the form of 'the fullness of Christ.'" Citing Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24–30), Evdokimov notes "how appearances can be confused with the hidden truth" of Christ's presence in the world. In fact through the eyes of faith, one can discern "a double process in history . . . , a more and more intense dehumanization, on the one hand; and, on the other, the preaching of the Gospel to the entire world, and new forms of holiness."[15] Despite much evidence to the contrary, the love of God

[14]Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: The Journals of Thomas Merton, Vol. 3 (1952–1960)*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 330; Evdokimov, *Woman*, 129.

[15]Evdokimov, *Woman*, 120–21. It is noteworthy that Reinhold Niebuhr, also writing in 1949, cites the parable of the wheat and tares to describe a kind of "double-process" in history: "The perils of freedom rise with its promises, and the perils and promises are inextricably interwoven. . . . Christian faith expects some of the most explicit forms of evil at the end of history" (*Faith and History* [New York: Scribner's Sons, 1949], 233).

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hides in the world "behind a veil of humility," in and through the seeds of life itself, in sexual loving, the beauty of nature, and above all, in simple acts of solidarity, sacrifice, and imperfect human holiness.[16]

In October 1959, Merton cites Evdokimov again, describing his theology as "arresting," noting this line in particular: "Monasticism, apocalypse already realized, shows forth the Christian conscience burning with impatience. . . . Prayer praises God but it is also an apocalyptic manifestation. It hastens events, confronts that which is essential, embraces all times. . . . Its entire destiny is none other than to bear witness to the Last Things."[17] Two years later, in a course on mystical theology given to the young monks at Gethsemani, Merton interjects similarly arresting insights from Evdokimov and his fellow Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky: "In this time of temptation and judgment *theology becomes again a public matter, a universal and catholic mission*. . . . Already we have reached a point where theological silence . . . [is] equal to temptation, to flight before the enemy. . . *It is precisely because we are thrown into the apocalyptic battle that we are called upon to do the job of theologians*. . . . Theology is called not only to judge *but to heal*."[18]

Evdokimov's theology of history clearly struck a deep chord in Merton, an influence that comes to bear in essays throughout the 1960s, as the tenor of his writing more and more reflects a conscience "burning with impatience." Indeed, many of Merton's most penetrating social essays reflect "an apocalyptic feeling for time," the sense that God's presence is constantly "breaking out in unexpected places and, like the resurrection, bringing life from death."[19] In the pattern of William Blake and Flannery O'Connor, Merton employs striking ironic contrasts to unmask or *subvert from within* the "pseudo-apocalyptic" noise of the times, the parade of idols and "pseudo-events" which threatens in fact "to carry out point by point the harlotries of the Apocalypse."[20] Above

[16]Evdokimov's sophianic vision of the natural world, and especially his celebration of *eros* as rooted in the very life of God, cast a severe light on the instrumentalization of nature and of human bodies that Merton saw poisoning modern Western society; more personally, it cast a harsh light on his own youthful relationships with women. The influence comes to bear not only in Merton's explicitly sophiological texts—most notably the prose poem, *Hagia Sophia* (1962)—but also, as I argue here, in his prophetic social essays.

[17]Merton, *Search for Solitude*, 334; also Evdokimov, *Woman*, 245.

[18]Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*: *Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 3*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 2008), 37.

[19]J. Matthew Ashley, "Apocalypticism in Political and Liberation Theology: Toward an Historical *Docta Ignorantia*," *Horizons* 27 (2000): 22–43, at 33.

[20]Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1968), 153. The essays "Rain and the Rhinoceros," "Events and Pseudo-Events: Letter to a Southern Churchman," "Day of a Stranger," and much of the poetry in *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, exemplify what I am calling (following James Alison) Merton's ironic

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all, Merton sets the poverty and humility of Christ, from Nativity to the Cross, against the Promethean climate of the times. In one of his most haunting late essays, "The Time of the End is the Time of No Room," Merton meditates on that almost imperceptible detail in Luke's infancy narrative that when it came time for Mary to deliver her child, "she laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).[21] Throughout the essay Merton counterposes "The Great Joy" of the Incarnation with a world that cannot perceive it, a world that has "no room" left for Joy, precisely because it has *no room left for humanity*.

> Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for Him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because He cannot be at home in it, because He is out of place in it, and yet He must be in it, His place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. . . . They cannot identify with the power structure of a crowded humanity which seeks to project itself outward, anywhere, in a centrifugal flight into the void, to get out there where there is no God, no man, no name, no identity, no weight, no self, nothing but the bright, self-directed, perfectly obedient and infinitely expensive machine.
>
> For those who are stubborn enough, devoted enough to power, there remains this last apocalyptic myth of machinery propagating its own kind in the eschatological wilderness of space—while on earth the bombs make room!
>
> But the others: they remain imprisoned in other hopes, and in more pedestrian despairs, despairs and hopes which are held down to earth, down to street level, and to the pavement only: desire to be at least half-human, to taste a little human joy, to do a fairly decent job of productive work, to come home to the family . . . desires for which there is no room. It is in these that He hides himself, for whom there is no room.[22]

subversion of "pseudo-apocalyptic" events "from within." See James Alison, *On Being Liked* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 12–13.

[21]The essay appears in *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966), a collection of thirteen pieces published between 1958 and 1965, and to my mind, the book that most unforgettably captures Merton's "voice in the wilderness" in an era spinning out of control. The volume's title is presumably a variant on T. S. Eliot's description of poetry as "a raid on the inarticulate," with Merton substituting "the Unspeakable" to emphasize the vocation of the poet (artist; intellectual) to resist the horrors of an age of apocalyptic violence. Cf. Patrick F. O'Connell, "Raids on the Unspeakable," in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, ed. William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen, and Patrick F. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 379.

[22]Merton, *Raids*, 73; compare Evdokimov: "Our overcrowded cities have become frightening deserts of loneliness where Christ and Satan continue their devastating dia-

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Merton gives us nothing here if not a positive (cataphatic) theology of divine *apokalypsis*, though, to be sure, a positively disarming one. At the very least, the essay gives relentless voice to that discomfiting awareness, as Lieven Boeve describes the apocalyptic imagination, that:

> We are no longer in command of things, . . . we have created monsters we can no longer control. Humanity has seriously over-estimated itself, both at the level of planning the perfect society (with the large-scale abuse of human rights as one consequence) and in the implementation of a functionalistic and technological view of the world: the reduction of nature and the environment to that which fulfils our needs and sustains our designs. Paradoxically enough, the desire to control and dominate has led us into a confrontation with the uncontrollable and the indomitable. Apocalypse has become a metaphor for what postmodern thinkers have referred to as the end of the master narratives because of their loss of plausibility.[23]

Quite in contrast to postmodern deconstruction, however, Merton subverts Christian (secular, humanist, political) triumphalism from within Christianity itself by retrieving the more dangerous, and dangerously *political*, aspects of biblical memory, here joining what William Lynch calls the "irony of Christ" to a positive theology of divine kenosis.

Unmasking appearances, Merton draws our attention to Christ's presence in all those who simply yearn for life in its barest ("held down to earth") dimensions, all those who have been *structured out* of the divine-human hierarchy, the privileged festival of earthly and heavenly communion. Surely the identification Merton suggests here *is no mistake*, nor merely a rhetorical construct—unless of course Jesus himself was mistaken, or merely playing with words, in his disarming "Judgment of the Nations" (Matthew 25:31–46), or the command to "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:43–48). Through an ironic intensification of the Nativity, shadowed everywhere in his writings by the looming Cross, Merton reclaims the sacramental dignity of not only history's most forgotten ones, but also the vilified enemy (the "discredited," the

logue; more than ever, it is here that the preaching of St. John must continue 'with its power' (Lk. 1:17)" (Evdokimov, 245). The characterization of modern cities as "deserts of loneliness" resonates with Boris Pasternak's image of modern existence (particularly under communism) as a "reign of numbers." The influence of Pasternak on Merton's literary and theological sensibilities probably cannot be overstated (see his pivotal study of 1959, "The Pasternak Affair," *Disputed Questions* [New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960], 3–67). "In the face of our own almost hopeless alienation," Pasternak is proof that the poet can help us "get back to ourselves before it is too late" (*Literary Essays*, 340).

[23]Lieven Boeve, "God Interrupts History: Apocalypticism as an Indispensable Theological Conceptual Strategy," *Louvain Studies* 26 (2001): 195–216, at 199.

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"tortured," the "exterminated"), even those persons and nations whose actions appear to merit the full onslaught of our "justice."

Throughout the 1960s Merton rebelled against what he called the "cold saints of the new age," whose conception of "justice" left no room for the possibility of mercy, reconciliation, and authentic peace between persons, communities, and nations. As he wrote in the Cold War essay "Atlas and the Fatman," in the nuclear age, the reign of numbers, they "count with their machine the bitter, methodical sacrifices they are making in the Fatman's memory, and stand in line before his tomb. Sacrifice is counted in drops of blood, [and] minutes are counted like Aztecs walking a man to his death with his heart out on top of a bad pyramid: such is order and justice. Such is the beauty of system."[24] Here, a thousand present-day images assault the mind: human "pyramids" and cages at Abu Ghraib; the bullet-riddled tenements of the South Bronx; the systemic racism and segregation crippling public schools and health care facilities across the United States; the shocking inhumanity of the federal prison system; untold miles of fence being raised at the Mexican border. Yet we remain, as Merton implies, tragically "asleep," even while images of horror multiply across our flat-paneled TV screens, and catastrophes, as Johann Baptist Metz observes, "are reported on the radio in between pieces of music."[25] Such is the beauty of order and justice, the beauty of anonymity, in the reign of numbers.

The point to emphasize here is that Merton's heightened temporal concern is not for himself or his "own kind" but for the sufferings of others, all those whose hope remains, as it were, radically unrealized, "held down to street level."[26] Like the Russian thinkers before him, Merton's turn to apocalyptic is motivated by an urgent sense of solidarity, intensifying our awareness of the critical present moment for those whose need is most desperate, who have no power or "presence" whatsoever

[24]Merton, *Raids*, 91–107, at 105.

[25]Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 170. On Metz's shift from "a focus on the incarnation as the proper doctrinal locus in which to work out the autonomy proper to the world" to an apocalyptic eschatology, which underscores "the God who can interrupt history, who sets bounds to history," see J. Matthew Ashley, "Johann Baptist Metz" (hereafter "JBM"), in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2003), 241–55, at 250–51; also idem, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1998).

[26]Merton, *Raids*, 73. Biblical *memoria*, writes Metz, "always takes into account the suffering of others, the suffering of strangers." Respecting "the authority of those who suffer" and articulating the suffering of others "is the presupposition of all claims to truth. Even those made by theology" (Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley [New York: Paulist, 1998], 134; on apocalyptic as a recovery of an Israelite or biblical sense of history, see ibid., 63–69; 81–85).

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on the world stage—"empty forms, human specters, swirling aimlessly through their cities, *all wishing they had never been born*."[27] Even the earth, as thinkers like Sergei Bulgakov foresaw a century ago, "suffering and awaiting its liberation,"[28] now merits an urgent place in Christian eschatology. The irony of God's incarnation in Christ, and Christ crucified, teaches us that these striking juxtapositions joining God with the suffering world, even to the point of identity, are no mistake.

Some five decades later, Merton's prescient description of "The Time of the End" can hardly be dismissed as literary hyperbole. Anticipating the concerns of political, liberation, and environmentalist theologies, Merton denounces in starkest terms a global situation in which scientific, economic, and instrumental rationality, largely a product of Western industrial capitalism, was threatening to wipe out the very memory of more ancient and holistic ways of wisdom, and increasingly dictating the shape of life everywhere on the planet. In such a world the presence of Christ—the eros and Humanity of God—will be ever more hidden, interruptive, and ironic, because *personhood itself* is becoming ever more hidden, interruptive, ironic.

> The primordial blessing, "increase and multiply," has suddenly become a hemorrhage of terror. We are numbered in billions, and massed together, marshalled, numbered, marched here and there, taxed, drilled, armed, worked to the point of insensibility, dazed by information, drugged by entertainment, surfeited with everything, nauseated with the human race and with ourselves, nauseated with life.
>
> As the end approaches, there is no room for nature. The cities crowd it off the face of the earth. As the end approaches, there is no room for quiet. There is no room for solitude. There is no room for thought. There is no room for attention, for the awareness of our state. In the time of the ultimate end, there is no room for man.[29]

At the same time, Merton makes clear his conviction that scientific or technical-economic rationality is not wholly to blame for the sweep-

[27]Merton, *Raids*, 71.

[28]Cited in Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, 138.

[29]Merton, *Raids*, 70. In anticipation of our discussion below of form in apocalyptic discourse, it is fascinating to compare Merton's "The Time of the End" with the recent film *Children of Men* (Universal, 2006), released, not incidentally, on Christmas Day by Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuaron. By contrast to innumerable Hollywood films, where apocalyptic is dangerously *untethered to memory*, Cuaron gives us—uncannily like Merton's essay—an apocalyptic rendering of the New Testament birth narratives, evoked in hidden details throughout the film. Like Merton's prose poetry, Cuaron's filmic vision of apocalypse aims to *wake us up* to the gift of life, not least the life of the despised "other." Both texts offer highly credible, mystical-political, and disarmingly nonsentimental interpretations of the Nativity; both, I have found, can be brought into very fruitful conversation with undergraduate and graduate students.

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ing alienation and depersonalization of life in contemporary society. What passes for *theological wisdom* in modern Western Christianity has been of little help in cultivating a more holistic spirituality of sanity, harmony, and balance: "Those that lament the fact that there is no room for God must also be called to account for this. Have they perhaps added to the general crush by preaching a solid marble God that makes man alien to himself, a God that settles himself grimly like an implacable object in the inner heart of man and drives man out of himself in despair? The time of the end is the time of demons who occupy the heart (pretending to be gods) so that man himself finds no room for himself in himself."[30]

There are clear echoes here of Merton's meditations on Prometheus, "the prophet and contemplative that is required by the atomic age,"[31] who has made for himself a pantheon of small and jealous gods. Imagining that he must fight the gods for his spiritual and material freedom—that he must "steal fire from heaven"—Prometheus' life is a never-ending struggle between "heroism and despair." His gods, however, will "eventually devour him."[32] It is precisely in this archetypal complex of bad science *and* bad theology—"the time of massed armies, 'wars and rumors of wars,' of huge crowds moving this way and that, of 'men withering away for fear,' of . . . technicians planning grandiose acts of destruction"[33]—that Merton seeks "some new possibility, some other opening for the Christian consciousness today."[34] Much of Merton's last decade, including, I believe, his much-discussed "turn to the East," may be interpreted in terms of the struggle for which he remains a vivid symbol today, namely, "to be human in this most inhuman of ages, to guard the image of man for it is the image of God."[35]

II. The Ironic Imagination

> [His] protest is . . . the protest of life itself, of humanity itself, of love, speaking not with theories and programs but simply affirming itself and asking to be judged on its own merits.[36]

[30]Merton, *Raids*, 71.

[31]Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961), 27.

[32]Thomas Merton, *The Behavior of Titans* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 15.

[33]Merton, *Raids*, 67.

[34]Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 30. At the end of this essay ("The New Consciousness"), Merton lays out a kind of charter for *any* approach—philosophical, literary, theological, scientific—that would seek to address the "great needs" of humanity today. This is a critical passage in Merton's late writings, reflecting his extraordinary attunement to the wisdom of other traditions and to the signs of the times.

[35]Merton, *Raids*, 6; citing Berdyaev.

[36]Merton, "The Pasternak Affair," *Disputed Questions*, 11.

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At this point I wish to step back and propose a kind of heuristic framework for situating the place of apocalyptic in Catholic theology, and do so by borrowing from William Lynch's reflections on the ironic imagination.[37] Above all I wish to draw some crucial distinctions between apocalyptic as we have been exploring it here, i.e., in an authentically Catholic, analogical, or ironic mode, and two other prevalent forms: first, a "Dionysian" vision of the end times, that is, a tribal, sectarian or nationalist eschatology which threatens everyone outside its enclosed universe of meaning with violence; and second, a "dialectical" or broadly "Protestant" form, which tends to visualize "the End" in sharply dualistic terms as a sheer *deus ex machina*—that is, if we do not destroy ourselves, then God, or divinity masked as Satan or the "Anti-Christ," certainly will.

In perhaps his best-known and most mature work, *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination*, Lynch contrasts the "ironies of contempt" that polarize public discourse with a different kind of irony, one that resists the "absolutizing instinct"[38] of one's own commitments, restores authentic hope, and makes possible the movement of faith in a pluralistic world. The logic of such an irony is not neatly linear, Lynch suggests, but works through struggle and suffering to reconcile the fact that "our great dionysian desires can only be 'realized' or made real by subjection to the limitation and poverty or 'smallness' of actual human lives."[39] The irony of Christian realism, as we might call it here, tempers the soaring idealism of a "Dionysian" or triumphal faith, bringing our relationship with Christ and the church "down" or "back" into non-destructive contact with our ordinary lives.[40] Such an irony—for Lynch, the fruit of a thoughtful Christian (Catholic) education—functions in three ways, or stages.

First, irony helps us to see through or unmask appearances, especially magnificent and absolutized appearances—what Lynch calls "the

[37]The following discussion is much indebted to John Kane's monograph on Lynch, *Passion, Polarization, and Imagination: William F. Lynch, SJ, and a Spirituality for Public Life* (unpublished, 2009), especially Chapter V, cited below with permission of the author.

[38]By the "absolutizing instinct" Lynch means the instinct in human beings that tends to "make absolutes out of everything it touches and to pour floods of fantasy into the world about it. . . . [It is] a world of false hopes which counterfeits the reality of hope. . . . [It] magnifies. In its presence each thing loses its true perspective and its true edges. The good becomes tremendously good, the evil becomes the absolutely evil, the grey becomes the black or white, the complicated . . . becomes, in desperation, the completely simple" (William Lynch, *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* [Baltimore: Helicon, 1965], 105–8).

[39]Kane V, 35–36.

[40]Ibid.

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larger line" of history and human personality—and so come to what is actually real. Second, irony is characterized by the "*unexpected coexistence, to the point of identity, of certain contraries*."[41] Indeed, "the shock of irony (and of recognition) comes not only from uniting" apparent opposites, Lynch notes, "but also from seeing that the act of uniting them is not a mistake."[42] Whereas the irony of contempt so prevalent in public discourse absolutizes and identifies with one side or pole of pluriform reality, the challenge of a deeper irony "is to see through *that* magnificent deception in order gradually to learn that these contraries not only can but must be held together (be 'realized' or embodied) in one human life and in any decently humane culture."[43] But irony presses still further. It is not enough to observe that irony helps us to remain sane and human by keeping "a very close relationship and friendship" between the contrary parts of ourselves. Most important (and here is the third stage), "we must come to understand that it is precisely the weaker and smaller part of ourselves [what Lynch calls 'the smaller line'] that is the only path to the greater and larger part."[44] And not only to "understand," of course, in an abstract way, but to allow ourselves to be so moved by it that we risk embracing and actually living through the "smaller line."[45]

Thus a mature or educated irony understands that it is only by recognizing and suffering our ignorance that we find ourselves on the path to a deeper truth and wisdom; only by tasting illness and mortality that we can truly begin to live as compassionate human beings; only by embracing our own poverty that we are able to embrace those whom we call "the poor"; and only by passing through the many smaller deaths in our lives that we may face the final death in peace. Here, of course, Lynch not only evokes the teachings of Jesus but also his life and the nature of his very being in the world *as Christ*, "the poor man who is the Incarnation of God; the messiah born in a stable; the king who entered Jerusalem on a donkey; the teacher who embraced lepers, ate with sinners, and proclaimed freedom for prisoners; the imprisoned and executed one who was raised and exalted as Lord. It is *this* 'unexpected co-existence, to the point of identity, of certain contraries,' *this*

[41]Lynch, *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1973), 84; (emphasis original).

[42]Ibid., 85.

[43]Kane V, 40. Like Evdokimov and Niebuhr, Lynch cites the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mt. 13:24–30) to underline the point: "It seems to be the teaching of Christ that good and bad must stay together until the final judgment. Imagine the horror of separating out the good in this life" (Lynch, *Images of Hope*, 93).

[44]Kane V, 41.

[45]Ibid.

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particular passage through 'the smaller line' of an actual life with all its limitation, its poverty, and its suffering and death, that allows Lynch to speak of 'the irony of Christ,' and to assert that 'the irony of Christ is Christ himself.'"[46] He writes:

> The irony of Christ is unique. It involves mastery of the world, spiritual freedom. . .; it works through death and weakness; it therefore dethrones every other pretentious idea and establishes the movement through the human condition, and the total human condition (not the human condition of the beautiful people) as the way. Weakness becomes one of the great forms of power. Age, sickness, and death lose their power over man and take on another form of power.[47]

Lynch's distinction between an educated Christian irony and the irony of contempt can help us to draw some crucial distinctions between apocalyptic in a Catholic or analogical mode and the two other types mentioned above, namely a "Dionysian," sectarian, or nationalist eschatology which tends to underwrite violence against all those it deems "Other", and a "dialectical" or broadly "Protestant" form, which visualizes "the End," however it may be envisioned to come about, as a sheer *deus ex machina*, i.e., as the manifestation of God's overpowering will and absolute sovereignty over history. By contrast to these two (admittedly much over-simplified) forms, we are now prepared to characterize apocalyptic in an authentically Catholic or analogical mode as the dramatic exposure of the pain and urgency of the present historical moment *through an ironic intensification of history's "smaller line."* Such an intensification is not, I hasten to add, merely a "rhetorical" or "literary" strategy, but seeks to unveil the deepest (i.e., theological) truth of things in the present historical moment.[48]

[46]Ibid., 42.

[47]Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 101. Is this, we may ask, the strange "power of powerlessness" that so perplexed Nicodemus, which could not be "understood," still less "realized," until he had seen it play out not only in Jesus' enigmatic words but in the horrific manner of his death? Comparing John 3:1–21 to John 19:38–42, the transformation of Nicodemus suggested in the latter (and in so few words) is unexpected, and disarmingly poignant.

[48]David Tracy describes apocalyptic as a "*corrective* genre signalized by principles of intensification and negations"; it is evoked "in times of crisis" as a challenge "of the sheer intensity of the 'pain of the negative' in the cross needed as an intrinsic moment in any adequate theology of incarnation. . . ." (David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* [New York: Crossroad, 1981], 265–66). Ashley describes Metz's appeal to apocalypticism as "a rhetorical device to inspire hope and creative political action" ("JBM," 252). I take Ashley to mean "rhetorical" in the sense that it "does not . . . culminate in an attempt to calculate the time and events of the last day" (ibid.); yet it is not "merely" rhetorical, I take Ashley to mean, in the sense that

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In the midst of great social suffering and crisis, where is God to be found? The ironic imagination unmasks appearances, answering: God is with the poorest, the humblest, with those in greatest need. In theological terms we call this the "preferential option for the poor"; in literary terms, Merton calls it "the protest of life itself, of humanity itself, of love" in the reign of numbers. But irony presses further, daring to announce in uncompromisingly positive (cataphatic) terms the coexistence, to the point of identity, of certain contraries: Behold, God is in *your enemy*, the one who represents everything you fear, the one you hate and wish to kill, perhaps even in the name of "God," or some other "humane" ideal. Here the shock of irony comes, as Lynch observes, in the "realization" that the union of once incompatible contraries (God/enemy) is *not a mistake*, nor merely rhetorical. In mystical-political terms this is the realization of humanity's essential oneness, embodied ethically in the way of nonviolence, or *satyagraha*, the power unleashed by living out the truth of our essential kinship in God, the God who dwells beyond all boundaries.

But this brings us to the third and most difficult stage of irony, which is the recognition of the coexistence of opposites in everyone, above all, in ourselves. The irony of Christian realism leads to profound humility, the recognition that our "own interior and poor humanity" is both sinful and inviolably sacred; every person is both a sinner and a potential saint, but we cannot attain to the latter, Lynch insists, without passing through the former. That is, we shall never be capable of loving our neighbor, the poor, much less the unknown stranger until we have first learned to love "our own interior and poor humanity." This is, in a word, *poverty of spirit*—for Merton, the very heart of Christian spirituality, ethics, and the wellspring of solidarity. For those whose desire has been educated by the irony of Christ "will not only have learned to acknowledge and live with their own poverty, but their internalized sense of poverty will also turn outwards towards the poor of the world."[49] In other words, an ironic sense of our selves, of our shared vulnerability and need in the greater community of persons and things, "should become politically productive."[50]

Metz aims to retrieve the biblical sense of God as the one "who can interrupt history, who sets bounds to history," and further, as the one who "has a very fresh and living memory of the smallest and most forgotten" (las Casas). Significantly, both Metz and Merton appeal to the same authority when speaking from this nettlesome divine perspective: the authority of *those who suffer*, engendering what Metz calls a "mysticism of open eyes" (Ashley, "JBM," 252; Metz, *A Passion for God*, 133–35).

[49]Kane V, 45.

[50]Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 161.

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It is precisely this mature or educated form of Christian irony—critical of the social order yet also relentlessly self-critical—that Merton employs to such devastating effect in his mature period, and weaves into an apocalyptic key. Rather than dismissing biblical eschatology as simply mythical, primitive or quaint, Merton retrieves and intensifies the most dangerous mystical-political aspects of New Testament *anamnesis* in order to force a confrontation with "The End," revealed, after all, to be irrupting into time and space "Now," in the seeds of the critical present moment—and precisely in those persons and places where we least expect to find divine presence, and the re-birth of hope, breaking into the world. To say it another way, from the point of view of biblical apocalyptic "the time of the end" is *now*, because now is the pregnant and pivotal *time of decision* for human beings in the unfolding of salvation history. And it is with the poor that the church discovers God's "presence," God's "present moment," most intensely realized.

Merton's last decade, then, gives testimony to the marriage of mystical theology and poetics fired with apocalyptic prophecy. Its central christological theme is that of Christ, the Wisdom and power of God, who enters history, and enters history *still*, "behind a veil of humility," judging every Promethean vision of reality, every false or "pseudo-apocalyptic" grand narrative, in light of a deeper truth, no less real because hidden: Hope springs forth again, like a mustard seed, from the most hidden and unpromising materials—acts of mercy, sacrifice, creativity, and solidarity, the beauty of nature, the wonder of children, the dance of sexual loving. Such are the unlikely sacraments of God's own power, hope, and presence breaking into history.

This brings us back to the sacramental "priesthood" of the artist, poet, preacher, liturgist, catechist, and indeed, the theologian. In a world that doubts the possibility of real contact with God, the iconographer's task, says Evdokimov, is nothing less than prophetic: she "creates the transcendental and attests to its presence": "A little dust of this world, a board, a few colors, a few lines—and there is beauty. . . . *a vision of things which cannot be seen.*"[51] Likewise, the poet "attuned to the beginning of things" helps us remember that "beauty is the fulfillment of truth, and that moment when 'all is fulfilled' is always marked by glory."[52] Just so, sacred music can stir in us again "the voice of Christ,"[53] the imprisoned and everywhere *muted* (bombed, starved,

[51]Evdokimov, *Woman*, 130.

[52]Ibid, 129.

[53]"In Mozart's *Mass*, one hears the voice of Christ; the solemnity of the music attains the liturgical value of a Presence. Mozart's *Mass* is an icon written in sound" (ibid., 132).

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forgotten) sophianic child. "The Kingdom of God is accessible only through the chaos of this world. It is not an alien transplant, but rather the revelation of the hidden depth of this very world."[54]

Indeed, for a theology shaped by a sacramental and analogical imagination, to sing "the Name of God" is at once to sing the "glory" of creation and "spiritual freedom" of the human person in whom God consummately dwells (Psalm 8; Matthew 5:1–16). No less than in biblical times, the problem of God in our times is the problem of humanity. Yet the question persists: *how* exactly shall the pilgrim people of God—our artists, catechists, and theologians, themselves racked with trepidation, guilt, and foreboding—speak "the Name of God" in an age of apocalyptic fury?[55] How especially to "draw, sculpt, or sing the Name of God" in a world overrun by noise, competing symbol-systems, and the fury of religious fundamentalisms and violence? Merton, as ever, was deeply attuned to a problem that dogs the church as much today, if not more, than it did four decades ago:

> The great question then is how *do* we communicate with the modern world? If in fact communication has been reduced to pseudo-communication, to the celebration of pseudo-events and the irate clashing of incompatible myth-systems, how are we to avoid falling into this predicament? How are we to avoid the common obsession with pseudo-events in order to construct what seems to us to be a credible idol? It is a nasty question, but it needs to be considered, for in it is contained the mystery of the evil of our time.[56]

Certainly as the contemporary of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Viet Nam and the Watts riots, Merton might have been excused had he chosen, like so many other Christian intellectuals of the modern period, to curtail the Biblical and eschatological sensibilities of his monastic inheritance, and to embrace a rigorous apophaticism or agnosticism of word and speech. It seems to me that he chose rather the opposite path.[57] In

[54]Ibid, 128.

[55]Thus the audacity of Evdokimov's insistence, even in the shadow of Auschwitz, on affirming the "positive goal" of history set down at Chalcedon, i.e. "to actualize humanity in the form of 'the fullness of Christ'" (ibid., 120).

[56]Merton, *Faith and Violence*, 163. Compare Evdokimov, who describes the breakdown of meaningful communication in Christianity, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, as "more distressing than the first Tower of Babel": "[W]hat we now have is no longer the confusion of tongues, but the confusion of minds—the impossibility of hearing each other speak the same language. The world is withdrawing into itself, and will perhaps hear the voice of Christ no more. Christianity is withdrawing into itself, and no longer has any impact on history" (Evdokimov, *Woman*, 128).

[57]I resist the inclination to characterize Merton too rigorously as an apophatic theologian. This would overlook the degree to which his mature work in fact reflects a posi-

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any case, the narrow question to which we now turn is that of *form* in apocalyptic discourse, closely related to the question of intelligibility. In an age and culture run wild not only with apocalyptic fascination but also the technological means to "realize" that fascination in evermore terrifying ways, how can Catholic theology, by contrast, keep its feet sensibly "on the ground" where it belongs, that is to say, where Jesus himself spent his time and energy, vastly intensifying God's communicative dance with persons, with human history, and with the rhythms of the natural world? In short, what kinds of expressive forms or genres might be capable of keeping Christian apocalyptic *held down to earth, down to street level*?[58]

Merton himself was famously open to the revelatory potential of many artistic and literary genres, whether explicitly religious or not; here we consider just three: liturgy, poetry, and film. Note immediately that for Merton the potential efficacy of such forms to reverberate within us, that is, to awaken dormant seeds of hope, depends upon our active attunement, our responsive participation. None, in short, implies any kind of magic.

III. Apocalyptic: A Message in Search of a Form

> What has for centuries raised man above the beast is not the cudgel but an inward music; the irresistible power of unarmed truth, the powerful attraction of its example. It has always been assumed that the most important things in the Gospels are the ethical maxims and commandments. But for me the most important thing is that Christ speaks in parables taken from life, that He explains the truth in terms of everyday reality. The idea that underlies this is that communion between mortals is immortal, and that the whole of life is symbolic because it is meaningful.[59]

Jesus of Nazareth narrated his apocalyptic "vision of things which cannot be seen" in part by invoking the Jewish memory of Sophia: *Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I*

tive theology of divine-human presence, a lyrical (if increasingly ironic) vision of the world redeemed in Christ/Spirit/Sophia.

[58]For a provocative discussion of the tensions and pitfalls facing Catholic theologians with respect to a more vigorous exercise of the eschatological imagination, especially in the wake of Rahner, see John Thiel, "For What May We Hope? Thoughts on the Eschatological Imagination," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 517–41.

[59]From Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, cited by Merton in *Disputed Questions*, 16–17.

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will give you rest.[60] Surrounded by crowds of the "burdened" and marginalized in an oppressive reign of numbers—"sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34)—Jesus announced in word and deed a different kind of existence for human beings: the reign of God, a reign of compassion, forgiveness, and sacrificial love for neighbor, where all are welcome and cared for as children of one Father. There was music in his words, to be sure, but there was also discord, urgency, and danger. "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt 24:27); "As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes'" (Luke 19:41–42). In enigmatic parables he warned that the wise ones are those who stay awake, for no one knows "neither the day nor the hour" (Matt 25:13).[61]

Liturgical Anamnesis: "Watching in the Night"

And so it is today, Merton suggests, for the church gathered around the world on Easter Vigil, when the new fire of the Paschal Candle is lit, and when, through the medium of the liturgy, "the Word Himself, uncreated Truth, enters into our spirits and becomes our theology."[62] In this feast of light, hope flames out "like shook foil" from the roots of the earth itself, *natura naturans*, not as a last desperate cry before a violent end, but rather as the silent herald of new birth and new creation, a hush-filled remembrance of what was, is, and will be: *Resurrection!* Giving witness to what he believed to be the same wellspring of divine *memoria* and hope that enflamed the Hebrew prophets and which found consummate voice in Jesus of Nazareth, Merton narrates the birth

[60]Matt. 11:28; cf. Sir. 51:23–26. Biblical scholars have long recognized the Hebrew Wisdom foundations of New Testament Christology, and almost certainly of Jesus' self-identity. Amid an enormous body of literature, James D. G. Dunn provides a balanced overview of the issues and texts at play in his *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 163–212; and idem, "Jesus: Teacher of Wisdom or Wisdom Incarnate?," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, ed., Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 75–92. The relationship between wisdom and apocalypticism is a frequent theme of biblical scholar John J. Collins. See his study and related essays in e.g., *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

[61]In an essay pivotal to his mature period, Merton links the wisdom of Jesus and the Hebrew Scriptures with the "obscure" wisdom of Herakleitos, a pre-Socratic philosopher whose enigmatic "fragments" captured Merton's imagination. See Thomas Merton, *The Behavior of Titans*, 75–106, here at 96, 103.

[62]Merton, *The New Man*, 241.

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of Wisdom in the Christian community that gathers before the tomb of Jesus, "watching in the night":

> The first voice that speaks in the silent night is the cold flint. Out of the flint springs fire. The fire, making no sound, is the most eloquent preacher on this night that calls for no other sermon than liturgical action and mystery. That spark from cold rock, reminds us that the strength, the life of God, is always deeply buried in the substance of all things. It reminds me that He has power to raise up children of Abraham even from the stones. . . .
>
> The fire that springs from the stone speaks, then, of his reality springing from the alienated coldness of our dead hearts, of our souls that have forgotten themselves, that have been exiled from themselves and from their God—and have lost their way in death. But there is nothing lost that God cannot find again. Nothing dead that cannot live again in the presence of His Spirit. No heart so dark, so hopeless, that it cannot be enlightened and brought back to itself, warmed back to the life of charity.[63]

There is "nothing lost that God cannot find again," no heart so cold that it cannot be "warmed back to the life of charity"—these words sum up well the climate of mercy, hope, and imminent expectation (i.e., *apokalypsis*) that Merton finds springing forth vividly and unpredictably, from the most unpromising materials, in the pages of the New Testament.

Echoing cosmic and kenotic christology from St. Paul to Irenaeus and Scotus, Merton avers that the "time of the end" has already been inaugurated by the coming of the Word made flesh. "The restoration of the whole world in Christ . . . is envisaged not as a future prospect but as a present *fact*. The 'last things' are already present and realized in a hidden manner."[64] "But this means," as Patrick O'Connell observes in his lucid discussion of Merton's eschatology, "that the 'crisis' of accepting or rejecting the inbreaking of the reign of God demands decision and commitment in this present. To live in the 'end time' is to be required to align oneself for or against the new era; the 'judgment' is something that takes place here and now."[65] It is in this sense of imminent decision and judgment that realized eschatology (or apocalyptic, in its intensified form) emerges for Merton as "the heart of genuine Christian humanism" and the heart of his own commitment "to issues

[63]Ibid. 238, 241–42.

[64]Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 63–64.

[65]Patrick F. O'Connell, "Eschatology," in *Merton Encyclopedia*, 140.

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of peace, racial reconciliation, and justice for the poor in the last decade of his life."[66]

Indeed, Merton takes his cues with respect to history and time from what he calls the "eschatological secret"[67] pervading the whole of Scripture, the same secret hidden in our lives today. For Merton it is the present moment—always embodied, historical, personal, communal—in which the past and future acts of God are both "realized" and "prefigured," and thus the present moment in which the Christian community must "stay awake" for the signs of redemption. Liturgy plays a crucial role in this vigilance, for it is through the living symbols of the tradition that we are drawn into participation with God's love poured out for us now, just as it was "in the beginning," and shall be consummately in the Reign of God yet to come. This is why the liturgy "would have us constantly go back to the beginning and work our way down to *what we are* through the types and figures which foreshadowed the whole Christ . . . , the Jesus Who died on Calvary and Who lives in us, Who dies in us that others may live in Him."[68]

Poetry as Prophecy: "The Flowering of Ordinary Possibilities"

In distinct but analogous ways to liturgical *anamnesis*, Merton also believed that poetry plays a crucial role in breaking through hard-bought defenses, and awakening in human beings the hidden call of grace. In "Message to Poets," an essay written for a gathering of Latin American poets in Mexico in 1964, Merton insists that poetry is not "word-magic"—a claim he will stake for theology in other contexts. In an age of mass society, it is neither the poet nor the theologian "who devoutly believes in the 'magic of words," insists Merton, it is rather "the businessman, the propagandist, the politician."[69] For the poet "there is precisely no magic," but "only life in all its unpredictability and all its freedom." The poet's task is not to manipulate the imagination, nor like the advertising specialist to "appeal mindlessly to the vulnerable will." The poet's task is "to seize upon reality in its moment of highest expectation and tension toward the new. This tension is discovered not in hypnotic elation but in the light of everyday existence." In this way, Merton avers, poetry serves as a form of *prophecy*, by which he means not prediction but giving voice to "the flowering of ordinary possibilities" that are "hidden in everyday life" in order to harvest

[66]Ibid.

[67]See the luminous passage on Julian of Norwich in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 211–12.

[68]Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness*, 37 (emphasis added).

[69]Merton, *Raids*, 159.

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"fruits of hope that have never been seen before."[70] I can think of no better definition of apocalyptic than what Merton provides here, a notion of apocalyptic forged, we might say, under the light of Wisdom.

There is, in other words, Merton insists, "another kind of justice than the justice of number, which can neither forgive nor be forgiven. There is another kind of mercy than the mercy of Law which knows no absolution."[71] And here his mystical-poetical theology gives over to the clear music of Wisdom-Sophia, sounding not a little like Jesus on the plains, urging us to open our eyes and *see* the glory of God in the beauty of the world, and in one another:

> There is a justice of newborn worlds which cannot be counted. There is a mercy of individual things that spring into being without reason. They are just without reason, and their mercy is without explanation. . . . Every plant that stands in the light of the sun is a saint and an outlaw. Every tree that brings forth blossoms without the command of man is powerful in the sight of God. Every star that man has not counted is a world of sanity and perfection. Every blade of grass is an angel singing in a shower of glory. . . .
>
> You fool, it is life that makes you dance: have you forgotten? Come out of the smoke, the world is tossing in its sleep, the sun is up, the land is bursting in the silence of dawn.[72]

For Merton and the Russian theologians, God's presence (Sophia) is not "out there" but inheres in the creation; because She is universally accessible (albeit hidden), the eschatological hope She awakens (*intensifies*) is not merely tribal or "contextual" but is seen as reaching out to the whole of humanity, indeed, rising up from the roots of the earth itself, *natura naturans*. Her message never overpowers human subjectivity, but is always conditional, inviting and awaiting a human response. It is this invitation to wake up, to participate in the drama of creation's redemption and transfiguration, which the poet, as prophet, offers to the human community.

[70]Ibid., 159–60.

[71]From "Atlas and the Fatman," *Raids*, 106; cf. "The Climate of Mercy," in Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 203–19.

[72]Merton, *Raids*, 106. Merton's mature christology is best characterized as a thoroughgoing Wisdom christology, a kenotic christology of Presence realized most sublimely in the 1962 prose poem, *Hagia Sophia* (see Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009]; idem, "'Something Breaks Through a Little': The Marriage of Zen and Sophia in the Life of Thomas Merton, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 28 [2008]: 67–89).

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Filmic Imagination: "To Read the Gospel with Eyes Wide Open"

We would be remiss here, finally, if we failed to consider that form of apocalyptic which arguably shapes the imaginations of more people today than any other artistic medium in the world, namely, that of popular film. In an age when Hollywood and other purveyors of mass media saturate the popular imagination with mind-rattling visions of the "Apocalypse," it is important to pay attention when a film gets it right—that is, when a film aims not to stupefy our consciousness into ever higher degrees of paralysis or hair-trigger fear (and subsequently, into the mass "liturgy" of war) or, alternately, seeks to nurture our seemingly unflappable faith in the salvific power of machines,[73] but seeks rather, as Merton describes the poetical vocation, to "seize upon reality in its moment of highest expectation and tension toward the new." In other words, as much as the medium of film contributes massively not only to the consumer culture's spectator mentality, but also to harmful conceptions of apocalyptic, it is also capable of *waking us up* to "the flowering of possibilities" hidden in everyday life, and stirring in us seeds of hope "that have never been seen before."[74]

In an earlier note I referenced an example of one such film, Alfonso Cuaron's *Children of Men*, which bears striking resonances with Merton's "The Time of the End." But it will be illuminating here to consider Merton's response to a controversial film of his own day, a film which he praised for its evocation of the more unsettling aspects of the New Testament. In an essay on the Bible written in 1966 for *Time-Life*, he writes:

> Take, for example, the case of the Italian Marxist Pasolini and his extraordinary response to the Gospel of St. Matthew . . . The value of the film lay in its extraordinary sincerity and authenticity. To begin with, it was obviously made on a very small budget indeed—somewhere out in the rocks of a very poor part of Italy. The cast were not professional actors but just "people"—most of them poor and some of them

[73]Boeve writes: "Movies that exploit biblical images of pending destruction and of the ultimate struggle between good and evil are reaping in the box-office dollars," citing as examples *Apocalypse Now*, *Independence Day*, *End of Days*, *Armageddon*, and *Judge Dredd* (Boeve, "God Inturrupts History," 197). The film *Transformers* (2007), wildly popular with young boys, is just one of a burgeoning class of films reflecting the strange fluidity in pop culture between technology and theological anthropology—calling to mind the ominous words of Psalm 115: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. . . Their makers shall be like them, all who trust in them." Or, as Merton wrote in 1965, "The machines are meditating on the most arbitrary and rudimentary of essences, punched into IBM cards, defining you and me forever without appeal" (*Dancing in the Water of Life*, 201). Cf. Metz, *A Passion for God*, 80, on the robot as "successor to the person."

[74]Merton, *Raids*, 159–60.

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> Communists. Pasolini himself played St. Peter, and his mother the Virgin Mary. The result was a kind of cinematic passion play, with a visual authenticity approaching the Florentine or Sienese painting of the 15th century (though without the color). The contrast with the vulgar and lavish artificiality of Hollywood was, to say the least, impressive.[75]

Merton continues, now coming to the (apocalyptic) heart of things:

> Many Christians who saw the film criticized it, not because it was unfaithful to the Gospel, but because it presented a picture of Christ that frightened them. The Christ of Pasolini, young, dark, splendidly aloof, dreadfully serious, was obviously not the sweet, indulgent Jesus of late nineteenth century Church art. . . .
>
> The Christ of Pasolini was not indulgent, he was demanding. He was not soft, he was unyielding. On certain points one felt he could be almost merciless. The fact that so many Christians could be shocked by this is itself shocking, for this picture of Christ obviously rested on a very real and open-minded reading of St. Matthew! The only Gospel that is tougher is perhaps Mark's. Have we forgotten that love can be demanding, exacting, unyielding? Especially when it encounters indifference to the sufferings of others and a disposition to cheat and exploit them without mercy? (cf. Matthew 5:7; 21: 31–46).[76]

Merton then turns from the film's explicit theological content to consider the interpretive *process* by which Pasolini and his troupe of untrained actors "had all personally *discovered* the Gospel of Matthew in making the film." They could not have attained such a convincing interpretation of the Gospel, he suggests, "had they been used to, perhaps tired of, a routine and trifling exposure to the Bible. It was new to them, and in their reading of Matthew, their interpretation of it, they had to take up a definite position in regard to its message." It was precisely their risk in taking "a definite stand in regard to who Christ was," their willingness to draw "a certain connection between the modern world and the message of Christ," that rendered their interpretation, Merton observes, "*highly credible*, . . . all the more impressive because it tended to by-pass theology and accept Christ and the disciples in all their human reality—as portrayed in the eminently human literary

[75]Thomas Merton, *Opening the Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1970), 39; referencing *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Hollywood, CA: Hollywood Home Theatre, 1964) by the Italian filmmaker and avowed atheist Pier Paolo Passolini. Merton had seen the film in October of 1966 during an extended stay in Louisville for medical tests. See Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton, Vol. 6 (1966–1967)*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 151.

[76]Merton, *Opening the Bible*, 40.

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work which is the Gospel of Matthew." In short, no matter what one might think of Pasolini's interpretation of Christ, the film merits praise, says Merton, because its makers "became involved in the Gospel, acting out this story, and identifying themselves personally with the apostles." This fact alone ought to empower believers—those "used to, perhaps tired of, a routine and trifling exposure to the Bible"—to "recover some of the sense of urgency, freshness and renewal which is essential if we are to continue with the same kind of self-discovery. For it was evident that the men who went through the experience of making such a movie arrived at a new self-discovery by identifying themselves with the disciples of the Son of Man."[77]

Once again Merton offers a critical signpost for an apocalypticism which draws its spirit authentically from the climate of the New Testament: it will confront believers and unbelievers alike not only with the question of God's engagement in history, but even more urgently, *our own*: Shall we risk identifying ourselves as "disciples of the Son of Man"? "In other words," Merton concludes, "any serious reading of the Bible means personal involvement in it, not simply mental agreement with abstract propositions. And involvement is dangerous, because it lays one open to unforeseen conclusions. That is why we prefer if possible to remain uninvolved."[78]

Nearly ten years earlier, and in a similarly prophetic vein, Merton concluded his important study of Boris Pasternak with a lament, and an open question: "For twenty centuries we have called ourselves Christians, without even beginning to understand one tenth of the Gospel. We have been taking Caesar for God and God for Caesar. Now that 'charity is growing cold' and we stand facing the smoky dawn of an apocalyptic era, Pasternak reminds us that there is only one source of truth, but that it is not sufficient to know the source is there—we must go and drink from it, as he has done. Do we have the courage to do so? For obviously . . . to read the Gospel with eyes wide open may be a perilous thing!"[79]

IV. Conclusion: Living in the Fullness of Time

> History is not a matter of inexorable scientific laws, it is a new creation, a work of God in and through man: but this theandric work is unthinkable not only without man's desire but also without his ini-

[77]Ibid., 41–43.
[78]Ibid., 43.
[79]Merton, *Disputed Questions*, 67. It should be clear at this point that Merton was no biblical literalist, but sought to discern "the theological content of the Bible" in the context of the "atmosphere of proclamation and liturgy [in which] the sacred texts themselves took shape" (*Love and Living*, 223).

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> tiative. Christ has planted in the world the seeds of something altogether new, but they do not grow by themselves. Hence history has never yet really had a chance to become a Christian creation. For the world to be changed, man himself must begin to change it, he must take the initiative, he must step forth and make a new kind of history. The change begins within himself.[80]

By the late 1960s Merton was about as far from a naïve or sentimental conception of faith, hope, or love that any Christian intellectual could reasonably be.[81] And yet we should not underestimate the hold that the Bible had on Merton's imagination, nor the hope that he invested in biblical revelation to the end of his life. The power and pregnancy of Biblical symbols lay precisely in their capacity to recover human identity, to "[open] the believer's inner eye, the eye of the heart, to the realization that he must come to be centered in God because that, in fact, is where his center is."[82] What apocalyptic does for Christian spirituality is to open "the eyes of the heart," as it were, to *wake us up* from our spiritual, social, and political slumber, retrieving the sense of sacred identity, urgency, and responsibility for history that is so characteristic, as Metz reminds us, of Jewish biblical faith. Above all, apocalyptic awakens and intensifies our awareness of the suffering of others.

But *how* exactly should Christian apocalyptic deem to "wake us up"? By intensifying (with Metz, and others) our belief in the divine prerogative and power to "interrupt" history—and in the meantime, by intensifying the theodicy question: "What is God waiting for?" Or rather, by intensifying (with Rahner, Merton, and others) our belief in and experience of Immanuel, God with us here and now, not only in the new creation and new humanity wagered by God in Jesus Christ—a wager that incarnational theology extends beyond the community of Jesus' followers to the *humanum* as such—but also, to be sure, our belief in God's presence and solidarity, through Jesus, with victims on the cross? To Metz, it would seem, the latter option, while worthy enough, risks "*too much* of a response, soothing the eschatological questioning of God," and discounting the terrible loneliness, in fact, of so much human suffering.[83] In accenting one side or the other, much depends, of course, on

[80]Merton, *Disputed Questions*, 65.

[81]"[The] crude symbolism of violence has gained its power precisely from the fact that the symbolism of love has been so terribly debased, cheapened, and dehumanized" (*Love and Living*, 64). "Not only are we idolaters, but we are likely to carry out point by point the harlotries of the Apocalypse. And if we do, we will do so innocently, decently, with clean hands, for the blood of the victims is always shed somewhere else!" (*Faith and Violence*, 153).

[82]Merton, *Love and Living*, 75.

[83]See Metz, "Theology as Theodicy?," in A *Passion for God*, 54–71, at 69. The point recalls Metz's famous statement about the difference between his theology and his

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how one interprets the eschatological "promises" laid out in the whole of Scripture, and behind that, on one's elemental notions of "revelation" and "prophecy." More narrowly, everything depends, it would seem, on our conception of divine power.

For Merton, attuned with the Russian sophiologists before him, the apocalyptic climate of the New Testament, right up to the "Come, Lord Jesus!" which closes the book of Revelation, proffers not some magical prognosis of an absolute future to be determined solely by the sovereignty of God, an "End" of all things which simply overpowers human subjectivity. Rather, the prophetic word of God, even that which comes from the lips of Jesus, is always *conditional*, hinging on the human response which has yet to be completed. In other words, like all prophecy, apocalyptic "should not be handled as an oracle or manifesto of the Absolute Word"; in the mouths of the prophets, the divine Word is "a *human word* . . . inviting a human response."[84] The eschatological tension, the decisive "Yes" or "No" required of the human community, remains. Apocalypticism in a Catholic key serves to underscore the centrality of human reception of the Gospel.

It would seem to follow that any temptation to conceive of "the End" as a definitive overpowering of natural and human autonomy by sheer divine "interruption" should be resisted as contrary to the doctrine of the Incarnation and the thoroughgoing Christian humanism that flows from it—as difficult (and intellectually unfashionable) as the shocking optimism of this doctrinal trajectory is to maintain. While it is not hard, on this point, to critique the cruder and more blatantly dialectical or Manichaen expressions of apocalypticism in American religious and popular culture, it is more difficult to discern, within a Catholic analogical framework, how to appropriate Metz's striking emphasis on divine interruption and bounded time. While Merton would certainly agree with Metz that "modernity has covered over the temporality of human existence,"[85] for Merton, much as for Rahner, the decisive eschatological event (or divine interruption) has already occurred—and still occurs but fails to be perceived—through In-

beloved teacher Rahner's: "Some day Rahner will die, and he will be greeted by God the Father with this question: 'My dear great Karl Rahner, what have you done to the apocalyptics of my son?'" To which Rahner replies: "You may be right, you may be right; *but*, how are you going to get this across?" (Ashley, *Interruptions*, 251, n.58, citing a study by Mary Maher). Ashley elegantly frames Rahner's and Metz's differences in terms of the four "weeks" of St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* (ibid, pp. 187–91).

[84]Sergei Bulgakov, cited in Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 339; the present study is deeply indebted to Valliere's masterful reading of Russian sophiology.

[85]Ashley, "JBM," 251.

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carnation and divinization, the self-emptying of God in divine-human form and creation's potential "realization" of it, by means of a certain divinely empowered autonomy.

There is certainly the risk here of collapsing ("soothing") the necessary tension between the now and not yet into a *too*-realized vision of things. Yet by contrast to Metz's emphasis on bounded time, Merton insists—quite credibly I think—that the restoration of sanity and wholeness (individual and societal; spiritual and material) must begin with a recovery of that sense of history and time cultivated in the world's ancient wisdom traditions: namely, its "fullness," "depth," "ripeness," or "pregnancy." Indeed, with his expansive retrieval of the Christian mystical tradition and theology of contemplation, not to mention his reception of both the non-Christian and Christian East, Merton has arguably done more than any other modern Catholic writer to persuade seekers everywhere that a foretaste of heavenly life is not only possible "here below," but positively asked of us, and made ever possible by the Spirit in whom "we live, move, and have our being." (Acts 17:28).[86] In any case, it seems to me that Metz, who is so appreciative of Rahner's accent on the theological dignity of ordinary human life, would agree with Merton that Catholic theology must not go the way of setting the historical-prophetic and metaphysical-mystical trajectories of the tradition in exclusionary opposition. Indeed, the great strength of the Catholic imagination resides in the attempt "to show where the two ideas really seek to express the same kind of consciousness or at least to approach it, in varying ways."[87] As Ashley astutely notes of the varying emphases in Metz's own career, "there is more than one way to make a theology 'eschatalogical.'"[88]

What Merton's retrieval and development of apocalypticism makes most disarmingly clear is that any pretension to identify God's will and agency with history's "larger line"—i.e., the reign of numbers, of nation-states and ideologies squaring off against each other; the realm of machines and grand economic systems and catastrophic climate change, unleashed, in fact, by a tragic convergence of human causes[89]—should be vigorously resisted by Christian theology as a dangerous conflation of

[86]See, e.g., *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 39, where Merton laments that the "obsession with doctrinal formulas, juridical order and ritual exactitude has often made people forget that the heart of Catholicism, too, is a *living experience* of unity in Christ which far transcends all conceptual formulations. What too often has been overlooked, in consequence, is that Catholicism is the taste and experience of eternal life."

[87]See *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 15–32, at 25.

[88]Ashley, "JBM," 250.

[89]For a scathing critique of theodicies proclaimed by religious leaders after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, see Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), 178–201.

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biblical eschatology with an idolatrous age.[90] By contrast, a critical signifier of apocalypticism in a Catholic key is that it will seek to intensify our consciousness of God's life-giving presence *in the smaller line*, where the Spirit renews and beckons all life (back) into being—into fully becoming itself—in the pregnancy and possibility of each new moment.

In sum, from the perspective of Catholic eschatology history remains radically *open*, hinging on the critical present moment of human freedom and its receptivity (or lack) to the horizon of grace. Far from every nationalist, tribal, or otherwise dialectical conception of God's relationship to the world, the Catholic analogical imagination insists that the offer of grace and spiritual freedom is always and everywhere present, even, we must dare to believe, in the most desolate of places, where all light, love, and hope—where all *humanity*—appears to be utterly extinguished. To say it more precisely, and with deepest respect for the theodicy question, it is at the point where the analogical imagination ruptures, as in Auschwitz, or present-day Darfur—where all analogy between God and the world is rendered horrific and absurd—that the irony of Christ and Christ crucified *intervenes from within*, as it were, to mediate and intensify (I do not say "answer") faith's most difficult question: whether we have the eyes to see, the faith to shoulder, the contradictions of hope in a sinful, though still hallowed, world.[91]

Finally, to say that history remains "open" is not, I think, to condemn history *necessarily* to endlessly more of the same, or ourselves, as Metz puts it so trenchantly, to an "evolutionistically-tinged apathy," a kind of "weariness with being a subject."[92] Nor is it to banish from Christian spirituality the vision and hope of a definitive End inaugu-

[90]In a prefatory note to "The Time of the End," Merton writes: "We live in an age of two superimposed eschatologies, that of secular anxieties and hopes, and that of revealed fulfillment. Sometimes the first is merely mistaken for the second, sometimes it results from complete despair of the second. In point of fact the pathological *fear of the violent end* which, when sufficiently aroused, actually becomes a thinly disguised *hope for the violent end*, provides something of the climate of confusion and despair in which the more profound hopes of Biblical eschatology are realized—for everyone is forced to confront the *possibility*, and to accept or reject them. This definitive confrontation is precisely what Biblical eschatology announces to us" (*Raids*, 65).

[91]The theodicy question clearly represents the greatest challenge to the intelligibility of a thoroughgoing incarnational (Wisdom) theology, and its correlative in a robust doctrine of divinization or theosis. Hence the insistence of political and liberation theologies on the corrective role of the *memoria passionis*, "the sheer intensity of the 'pain of the negative' . . . needed as an intrinsic moment in any adequate theology of incarnation" (Tracy, n. 48 above). Or, as Ashley writes, citing Bonaventure and summing up the inner "logic" of a spirituality of liberation, "There is no other path but through the burning love of the Crucified," where reason must finally be surrendered "by an act of reason" itself (Ashley, "Apocalypticism in Political and Liberation Theology," 41). Cf. Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness*, 117–24.

[92]Metz, *A Passion for God*, 105; for Metz's most cogent discussion of "the myth of an evolutionistically unbounded time," of time "as an empty continuum . . . which domi-

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rated by God, the one who definitively "bounds" and "grounds" all things in space and time. It *is* to insist, in continuity with the doctrine (the *experience*, the "Good News") of Incarnation, that the Parousia will not destroy or reverse history and what is accomplished in freedom, but rather will fulfill it, and bring all that is forged in love and in grace to completion. "The Last Judgment," as Merton writes, "will be the final consummation and revelation of the 'Mystery' . . . that is being accomplished in secret beneath the surface of human history. . . explaining everything that was not clear, showing how all things worked together for the good of Christ and fulfilled in the purposes of the Father."[93] Or, as Evdokimov envisions the last days, "Into the New Jerusalem 'the nations . . . shall bring glory and honor' (Revelation 21:24). They will not enter empty-handed."[94]

With the Incarnation, Bulgakov professes, "the secret Love that bears the whole project of history" has been wagered "*in a new way*, in human beings and through human beings."[95] "Eschatology," writes Merton, "is not *finis* and punishment, the winding up of accounts and the closing of books: it is the final beginning, the definitive birth into a new creation. It is not the last gasp of exhausted possibilities but the first taste of all that is beyond conceiving as actual."[96] The whole climate of the New Testament witnesses to "the flowering of ordinary possibilities" that are "hidden in everyday life." It remains for human beings, in every new generation, to harvest the "fruits of hope that have never been seen before." The question is: *Can we believe it*? "The absolutely new derives from the eschatological return to the sources that *lie ahead*. This is the art of apocalyptic times: 'We remember what is to come.'"[97]

nates modernity's background," see "Theology versus Polymythicism: A Short Apology for Biblical Monotheism" (idem., 72–91).

[93]Thomas Merton, *The Living Bread* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), 152–53. Cf. Rahner: "The *whole* is a drama, and the stage itself is also part of it. It is a dialogue between spiritual and divinized creatures and God, a dialogue and a drama which has already reached its irreversible climax in Christ" (*Foundations*, 446).

[94]Evdokimov, *Woman*, 132.

[95]Cited in Valliere, 343–44.

[96]Merton, *Raids*, 75.

[97]Evdokimov, *Woman*, 130. In remembering the cross of Jesus, we realize (darkly) "what is to come" for ourselves, if we follow. In remembering the resurrection, we realize (joyfully) that even now we can taste and see "something of the glory of Kingdom" which is to come. "Thus contemplation and eschatology are one, in Christian faith and in surrender to Christ. They complete each other and intensify each other" (Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 182).

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