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GOD IS HERE:

A THEOLOGY OF PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT

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For the children of Baan Phonsawan

and the women of Aguada

"In the mountains we knew God,

in the city we do not know ourselves."

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beginning, and they have, most abundantly. My mother's particular gift for mending split verb phrases and her steadfast accompaniment in the final stretch were immeasurable grace. My sister, Magdalena Briehl Wells, sustained me in this work with gifts of nourishing food, rest days away from the books, and boundless encouragement. She is a room-maker, through and through. My grandmother, Ruth Miles Briehl, once coaxed a chapter along with the promise of celebratory drinks on the deck. Her home is my favorite place. My in-laws—Gail and David Duba—have been unfailing in their support even as graduate education took us far from home.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without my husband and friend, Jason Duba, whose love has grounded, sheltered, and freed me for this work. Our daughter, Abigail Claire, was born between Chapters Three and Four. She has made room in us for freshest joy and deepest love, and makes our life together a celebration.

Ours is the age of the displaced person. Edward Said expressed it thus, and statistics gathered by the United Nations confirm it. No age has been without its exiles, but "the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rules—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration."[1] Uprooted by war and violence, an unprecedented 65.6 million people worldwide had fled their homes by the end of 2016.[2] Natural disasters—hurricanes, landslides, and earthquakes—have displaced an additional 26.4 million people on average each year since 2008, a number expected to increase in coming years as vulnerable places succumb to the rising tides and temperatures of climate change.[3] In our own country, undocumented people are deported daily, displaced to a "home country" which many do not know or consider home. Others live in fear of deportation, trapped in the precarious invisibility of the in-between.[4] Whatever

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[1] Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2000), 138.

[2] This number surpasses the total population of the United Kingdom. UN High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016," (Geneva: UNHCR, 2016).

[3] Weather-events and other environmental disasters most often displace people internally, that is, within the borders of their home country. Since internally displaced persons (IDPs) do not cross an international border, they are difficult to count and not eligible for the same protections as refugees. See, Michelle Yonetani, "Global Estimates 2015: People Displaced by Disasters," (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2015).

[4] An undocumented migrant from Mexico describes living in the United States without documents as the life of one "already detained" in Deborah Boehm, *Returned: Going and Coming in an Age of Deportation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 149, 31.

the cause of one's displacement, little in the human experience matches the existential desperation of

having *no where to go*.[5]

The human relationship to place is changing, even for those who have never known such

radical displacement. Contemporary life is characterized by hypermobility between increasingly

homogenous places.[6] Communication technologies enable connection irrespective of physical

location, such that neither education nor commerce, neither work nor worship necessarily depend

on bodily presence in shared places.[7] These displaced and highly mobile ways of life fuel our

ecological crisis. Separated from meaningful, reciprocal relationships with places, we commoditize

sands and soils, fracturing plains and removing mountaintops. Within us swells the existential

concern that this planet may soon be *no place* for us.

Displacement raises existential questions—questions about human personhood, meaning,

suffering, and belonging—to which the church is called to give account. What role does place play in

human experience, meaning-making, and identity? Who is the human person uprooted from place or

left to inhabit places stripped or destroyed? Displacement also raises distinctly theological questions

about how God relates to the world. We speak liturgically of God's presence in creation and in the

church, but what can such words mean in such a world as we inhabit—a world divided by borders

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[5] Psychologist Paul Tournier writes about this existential anxiety as it manifests itself in the common and recurrent dream that "a seat cannot be found." Paul Tournier, *A Place for You: Psychology and Religion*, trans. Edwin Hudson (London: SCM Press, 1969), 10.

[6] The term "hypermobility" describes the increased mobility—both frequency of travel and speed of travel—made possible by late modernity's combination of globalization, relatively inexpensive fossil fuels, and technology. It should be acknowledged that the ease, speed, and freedom of movement this term describes is still a privilege belonging to the global few. On hypermobility, see, Alastair Bonnett, *The Geography of Nostalgia: Global and Local Perspectives on Modernity and Loss* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 13.

[7] Even seminaries are turning to online education, and current reports indicate that "being there" in one's own ministerial context and congregational community can bear more fruit than "being there" in the classroom: Sharon L. Miller and Christian Scharen, "Being There: Online Distance Theological Education," *Auburn Studies* No. 23 (Fall 2017).

and secured by barbed wire? How ought we to speak of God's revelatory and redemptive activity in

the ruins of war and the toxic waste of capitalism?

To respond to such questions, the Christian church needs well-developed conceptual

resources for thinking theologically about place and displacement. Presently, however, Christian

theology lacks such resources. The absence of attention to place in Christian theology—and in

modern, western thought more generally—has been well-documented.[8] On the whole, the

arguments go, modern thought and Christian theology have subordinated place to history, creation

to redemption.[9] In this temporal paradigm, creation is viewed as the theater of salvation history,

Christ as the center of history, and redemption as completed in the fullness of time. The conceptual

emphasis on time and history has been so thoroughgoing that the spatial dimension of creaturely life

has been largely forgotten. Even if the situation is not as dire as these declension narratives depict it

(*eg.* "the demise of place"), it is certainly the case that conceptual resources for thinking theologically

about place and its role in human life are underdeveloped.[10]

In the last two decades, theologians have begun to address the lacuna of theological

reflection on place. Spurred, in part, by ecological concerns and the speed of globalization, place has

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[8] For the preeminent account of the absence (even the "demise" and "suppression") of place in modern western thought, see Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Nearly every other philosophical history of place draws on Casey's account, which is widely adopted in the field of place studies, though it is not without critique. (See, for example, Thomas Brockelman, "Lost in Place? On the Virtues and Vices of Edward Casey's Anti-Modernism," *Humanitas* XVI, no. 1 (2003).) On the absence of place in the history of Christian theology, see John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003). Inge's work draws on the historical assessment of Casey with respect to the diagnosis of place's absence, but is the first of its kind in so far as it brings that claim directly into conversation with Christian theology.

[9] Biblical scholar Terence Fretheim, for example, writes with concern about the ways modern theology and biblical studies have "subordinat[ed] creation to redemption" and focused on "history at the expense of nature" in Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), ix.

[10] The language of place's "demise" originates with Casey, but is reiterated by Inge; Jeff Malpas, "The Remembrance of Place," in *Exploring the Work of Edward S. Casey: Giving Voice to Place, Memory, and Imagination*, ed. Azucena Cruz-Pierre and Donald A. Landes (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

become something of a catch word, such that Sigurd Bergmann has gone so far as to propose that theology is undergoing a "spatial turn."[11] John Inge's *A Christian Theology of Place* (2003), for example, surveys the role of place in Scripture and tradition. Others address the intersections of place and spirituality (Bartholomew 2011; Lane 1995, 2001; Sheldrake 2001), place and epistemology (Wynn 2009), and place and covenant (Walter 2013). These works have made important contributions to theological attention to place, but, by and large, depend on the conceptualizations of place developed in other disciplines, especially the work of philosopher Edward Casey.[12] While theology can and ought to engage the insights of other disciplines, it need not receive these insights uncritically. Rather, theologians can make judgments as the appropriateness of such insights, including accounts of phenomena such as place.

I suspect that the influence of Casey's rhetoric regarding the "loss" of place—even the "demise" and "suppression" of place—has influenced the way theologians have approached "place" as something to be recovered, reclaimed, and returned to. The call to "return to place" quickly jumps the tracks, so to speak, from the conceptual to the normative: that is, from a call to return to rigorous thought and attention to place as a category of human experience to a call to return to certain ways of life deeply rooted in places. This rhetoric of return, especially in the normative sense, is problematic in theological discourse when it strictly manifests as a theological celebration of life-giving, knowledge-grounding, God-bespeaking aspects of beautiful places. Accounts of the beauty, power, and epistemic significance of place do not help the church to grapple with the ambiguities and distortions of real places or the sufferings of displacement. Nostalgia will not form a church

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[11] See, Sigurd Bergmann, "Theology in Its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007).

[12] An important exception to this trend is the brief, but important essay by George Tinker, which offers a theology of place through the lens of an American Indian understanding of place and creation. See, George Tinker, "The Full Circle of Liberation: An American Indian Theology of Place," in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David Hallman (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994).

prepared to inhabit the ruins of empire with God's own creativity, hospitality, and redemptive grace.

If the Christian faith is to be lived in and for the sake of this world, it must reckon with the

sufferings wrought by colonialism and its aftermaths, by climate change and the commoditization of

creation. Needed, I argue, is a Christian theology of place and displacement that resists the

temptation to seek God in romanticized places of beauty and power, but instead seeks the God

made known in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This dissertation develops one such

theology of place and displacement.

The Project

This project is a constructive Christian theology that responds to the crisis of displacement in our

world today. It asks how the Christian kerygma can be *good news* in a world such as we inhabit: a

world of displacement and loss of place. In response to this question, it offers to the theological

imagination the leading metaphor of God as Place. This leading metaphor is offered in a

contributive spirit, rather than a competitive one. That is, the image of God as Place is not intended

to supplant other ways of imagining who God is and how God reveals Godself as *for us*. Rather, this

theological project focuses on place and displacement because our current crisis of displacement

asks questions of Christian theology that precedent metaphors, images, and concepts are not

prepared to address.

  This project develops the meaning and assesses the adequacy of the metaphor of God as

Place by way of engagement with the theological symbol system. In terms of method and genre,

then, this project constructs a brief systematic theology. The method and genre of systematic

theology allows me to develop and defend my claim that place and displacement are fruitful

concepts for the theological imagination by setting them in conversation with the central symbols of

the Christian faith. To be clear, by "systematic theology," I do not mean something like a *summa*, an

exhaustive account of the Christian faith, often presented as a theologian's definitive body of thought. Rather, this project is an exercise in systematic theology in two related senses.

First, it is systematic in its regimentation. The project works through a (neither exhaustive nor arbitrary) selection of symbols that together comprise the subject matter of the Christian faith—namely, Trinity, creation, incarnation, the cross, and the church—giving an account of them through the lens of place and displacement. In this way, this project works constructively with and within the symbol system of the Christian faith. Doing so need not constrict the theological imagination nor delimit the mystery of God; rather, systematic theology can regiment—and so free—the theological imagination in much the same way that working within the sonnet form regiments and thereby frees the poetic imagination. Second, this project is systematic in its coherence. This project aims to construct a coherent worldview, a meaningful account of the way things are as a whole. Coherence need not silence or compete with other vocabularies, images, and narratives through which we speak of creaturely life in God's presence. Rather, systematic theology's coherence is a matter of internal consistency and accountability, not comprehensiveness or exclusiveness. It is a practice of intellectual hospitality by which we invite one another to *come and see*, as the Jesus of John's Gospel bids us, to inhabit together a particular world of possibilities.

The result is twofold. First, this project contributes to theological discourse an interpretation of the Christian faith that takes seriously creaturely dependence on, attachments to, and suffering in places. It does so in a way that underwrites neither pantheisms nor nationalisms, but remains centered in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Second, this project contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse of place studies an understanding of place that avoids certain pitfalls common in the existent literature. Particularly, it presents place as a relational and multifaceted phenomenon that is at once social and spatial, universal and particular, experienced and integral to the possibility of experience, while existent views of place tend to emphasize one at the expense of

the other. To the study of place, Christian theology brings its own disciplinary methods and tools, including analogical and symbolic language. In this twofold way, this project sheds light both on Christian theology and on the phenomenon on place itself.

This theology of place will be successful if it demonstrates that my thesis is a plausible one, that, in fact, the analogical concept of place does contribute something significant to our understanding of the central symbols of the Christian faith, and that theological methods and symbols do shed new light on the phenomenon of place itself. To this end, three primary things must happen in the course of the project. (1) First, this project must develop a thick description of the phenomenon of place as integral to creaturely life, including human life. This is the work of Chapter One, in which I develop an analogical concept of place as *a room-making structure of relations*. Place is, on this account, a) first and properly the Triune God who is place, first for Godself and also for creaturely life. Place is also, derivatively, b) the various inhabitable, socio-spatial communities of creaturely life and c) a means of grace by which God reveals Godself as *for us*. The concept of place brings along side it other, related concepts—namely, displacement, making room, noplace, and non-place—which I delineate and distinguish, developing a conceptual vocabulary. Along the way, the chapter tests its concepts against everyday, limit, and countervailing examples.

(2) The project must then demonstrate how this rich, analogical understanding of place can serve as a meaningful and constructive lens for the interpretation of other Christian theological symbols. This is the work of the next four chapters, each of which explores a different symbol by which Christian thought expresses God's presence and activity in creaturely life. Chapter Two takes up the symbol of creation. Creation is the place formed by creaturely life together in God's room-making presence. To be a creature, then, is to be one who receives the gift of place from the God who makes room in Godself for the fullness of creaturely life. Yet, human creatures do not trust God to be good and fitting place for them and so seek to become their own ground, an orientation

that bends them in on themselves. *Incurvatus in se*, human beings form places unfit for the fullness of creaturely life and the place of creation bears the sedimentary layers of human sin. Under the conditions of sin, human beings cannot know God, themselves, or creation aright. Chapter Three takes up the symbol of incarnation, God's self-revelation (which is to say, presence) in Jesus Christ. The incarnation, I argue, is God's act of inhabitation of the place of creation. Inhabitation is a mode of implacement that involves a deep knowledge and love of place, vulnerability to place and its formative relations, and personal investment in place. Inhabiting creation, God in Christ invests Godself in creation and reveals Godself as thoroughly committed to its good, to making it a place again for the fullness of creaturely life in God's presence.

(3) To fulfill its argument, this project must demonstrate that interpreting the symbols of the Christian faith in the paradigm of place contributes meaningfully to an account of God's presence and action in the world in a time of great and growing displacement. That is, it must show that this account of a God made known in and through place is meaningful in the midst of the sufferings of displacement. This is the additional burden of Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four reflects on the symbol of the cross, which evokes the death and resurrection of Christ. Drawing on the work of the preceding chapters, it argues that on the cross, in the grave, and by his resurrection, Christ makes his body place for us, so that—even in the context of displacement—we might stand in and know God's room-making presence. Chapter Five turns to the symbol of the Church. By the gift of the Spirit, the risen Christ makes the church his body and calls it to inhabit the ruins of creation as Christ himself: as a body vulnerable to displacement and to the distortions of place, a body that makes room in creation for the fullness of creaturely life.

The project does not depend, then, on the exclusive role of place in creaturely life or in interpretations of the Christian faith. Other categories such as time, history, and narrative are also important and their role is not supplanted here. Even as I present place as the organizing center of

this system, place does not have the first or final word. It is not—as Jürgen Moltmann wrote of the cross—the "inner criterion" of all Christian theology.[13] (In fact, a theology of place must become a theology of the cross if it is to be a truly Christian theology.) Nor is place—as Kathryn Tanner wrote of Christ—"the key to what God is doing everywhere."[14] (Christ himself must be the key even to a theology of place if it is to be a truly Christian theology.) This project emphasizes place and draws out its potential for contributing to the richness of the theological imagination not because it is more important than other concepts, but because its integral role in human experience has often been overlooked in the history of Christian theology and, at times, even denied. That said, the reasons for the tradition's obfuscation of place are important and not to be dismissed out of hand.

Christianity's Ambivalence toward Place

The Christian theological tradition is deeply ambivalent toward place. On the one hand, the tradition has celebrated places as "seats of relations" between God and human beings—sites where God encounters human beings.[15] On the other hand, places are part of the material world, and, as such, too often have been relegated to the same fate as the body and other earthly attachments: finite things, sites of pain, anchors from which the soul must be loosened if one is to go the pilgrim way. This ambivalence toward place is rooted in the biblical narrative itself but taken further by the influence of western philosophical thought. A theology of place must be responsive to this ambivalence if it not to be summarily dismissed.

Historically and narratively, place plays a significant role in the Christian tradition. Christianity has undeniable historical ties to a concrete and particular geographic region. As a

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[13] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 2, 72.

[14] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), viii.

[15] This phrase is central for Inge, who derives it from Torrance. See, Inge, 57; Thomas F. Torrance, *Time, Space, and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969).

religious movement, it emerged out of the particular geographic and cultural context now broadly called the Middle East. Jesus was born in the City of David (Lk 2:11) and was *of Nazareth*, both of which are claims not only about geography, but also about Jesus' identity, authority, and the particular the challenge he presented to the culture of honor and messianic expectation of his day, as voiced in Nathaniel's question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). As important as the concrete historical places from which the Christian tradition arises and with which the Gospel narratives work, places also play a important metaphorical and mythic role in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. With Eden's primordial garden, we imagine God's intention for creation in terms of verdant, fertile place and the experience of being at home with one another and with God. With Isaiah's Peaceable Kingdom and Revelation's New Jerusalem, we imagine God's redemption of creaturely life in terms of places formed by relations of peace, bounty, and life in God's presence. Agricultural images fill the parables of Jesus, where seed and soil, lilies and birds, wheat and chaff play a mythopoetic role in the theological imagination Jesus cultivates.[16] The metaphorical and mythic role of place in the Scriptures is inseparably connected to the real places and displacements of the communities from which these texts arose. The Genesis image of an Edenic garden, for example, was written in exile and describes God as one who provides for God's exiled people. Revelation's image of the New Jerusalem was written in the context of an oppressive, violent Empire and describes God as one who heals the city—indeed, the whole creation—that God loves. These mythic and metaphoric places arise from concrete contexts, then, and also become ethical visions that shape how people are called to live in their own real places.

However, the Christian tradition also expresses a deep suspicion toward place. This, too, is rooted in the biblical narrative. Cast out from Eden, human life is imagined as a kind of homeless

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[16] On Jesus as myth-maker, see, Amos Wilder, *Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths: Essays on Imagination in the Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

wandering, longing for an impossible return, hoping for a future place of security in God's presence. Abraham's God is expressly not the pagan gods, who are located in sacred places or immobile statues, but a God accessible through faith and revealed in promises fulfilled. The God of Moses is a God who—while promising the gift of land—travels with the people, revealing Godself to be a mobile and journeying God who accompanies the people in their displacement. The God of Jeremiah's prophesy encourages the exilic people to cease longing for their former place and instead to "work for the good of the country to which I have exiled you," bidding them to practice detachment from Jerusalem, to seek God not in their holy, home place, but in the in-between terrain of exile (Jer. 29:6).[17] Place itself seems to have been displaced, or at least decentralized, in these biblical narratives. Place seems to be no longer the seat of encounter with God. Rather, wandering, exile, and diaspora are where people encounter God's presence.

But do these narratives necessitate theological suspicion toward place? Is not the arena of exile itself a place? Is not the wilderness a *here* for those who dwell in and pass through it? To speak in modern terms, are not refugee camps, detention centers, and homeless shelters places in their own right? What has been demoted in biblical narratives, I argue, is not place itself, but certain kinds of places. The biblical narrative undermines the centrality of places of power and privilege. Idyllic gardens, sacred sites of history and memory, centers of religious piety and prominence, places of concentrated wealth and privilege: such places do not have exclusive rights to the presence of God, these narratives insist. The God of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures cannot be walled in or out, will not be kept pristine or protected in so-called sacred places.

The significance of place in the Scriptures is further complicated as Paul and other early missionaries bring the story of Jesus and his resurrection across seas and borders. The Christian faith

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[17] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 107-29.

may have deep roots in its place of origin, but—as these traffickers of the gospel proclaim—the gospel is not bound to a particular land, way of life, or people. Christianity—in Paul's understanding—is to be a universal faith. The Gospel is to be good news for the whole creation. The God of Paul is God not only for the Jews, but for the whole world, not only for Israel, but for the whole creation that God so loves. This understanding of God as cosmically concerned has sometimes been translated into claims about God's universality and omnipresence—that is, God's abstract spatiality—as opposed to God's locatedness in the world of particular places. Instead of in place, this God has been "located" theologically in time, history, and narrative. Thus, the universality of God's presence has been understood as a kind of placelessness, where omnipresence is presence unbound to the particularities of place. One who seeks God is directed, by this account, not to richer engagement with place, but to the celebrated tropes of pilgrimage and longing for a home beyond this place.

But, again, we must ask whether the Scriptures truly call for such a demotion of place or, rather, for the demotion of parochial understandings of place and divine presence. Paul does not speak of a God who is *no where*, a God who despises the concrete and the particular places of the world. Indeed, Paul composes his theology in letters written to specific people, gathered in particular places: to the church in Rome, the house churches of Corinth, et al. And on his journeys, according to Luke, Paul encounters a God who honors and blesses the concrete by making God's presence known in places: on the road to Damascus, at Lydia's house, in a jail cell, and in homes where the faithful gathered for prayer, preaching, and the breaking of bread (Acts 9, 16:13-15, 16-40, 2:45-47). What the Christian Scriptures rightly call suspect, then, is not the concrete particularity of places themselves, but the attempt to lay claim to God's presence exclusively, to bind God's presence to a place as though God were a kind of *genius loci*. Furthermore, they render suspect attempts to abstract

God's presence from the particularities of place—as later images of God as an abstract Unmoved Mover or Watchmaker do—and so to displace God from creation altogether.

When speaking of the Christian tradition's ambivalence toward place, I have been arguing, one must be careful not to paint with too broad a brush. It is not the Scriptures that require a theological suspicion of or rejection of place. Indeed, the Scriptures themselves reflect a deep historical connection with concrete and particular places as well as a narratival and mythopoetic reliance on various placial tropes and images. The ambivalence to place sometimes found in the Christian tradition comes primarily from theological and philosophical understandings of God's omnipresence and universality that abstract God from the concrete particularity of place. The present project aims to articulate a God who is not abstracted from the places of creation, but who conditions, inhabits, and recreates them.

The Dangers of Place

Beyond the Christian tradition's historic ambivalence toward place, there are other dangers in presenting place as a conceptual lens for theological reflection. These dangers are at once theological and conceptual dangers, as well as lived dangers for those who suffer the physical repercussion of thought taken root in the world. After discussing the three leading dangers of a theology of place, I will offer a proposal for how this project aims to address such dangers.

1. Exclusion, Idolatry, and Violence

A theology of place runs the danger of becoming a theology of exclusion, idolatry, and violence.[18] As will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter One, places are not mere locations, but bear meanings,

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[18] The logic of this particular "danger of place" is examined carefully in Jeff Malpas, "Place and Human Being," *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter* 20, no. 3 (2009).

memories, and hopes. They are associated with identities and attachments, both personal and cultural. More poignant still, places are associated with religious significance, holiness and power, and the presence of God, spirits, and ancestors. When places are bound up with identity, meaning, and such ultimate concerns, the communities who are attached to them sometimes become concerned with questions of access, preservation, and purity, questions that themselves seem inevitably to descend into violence and policies and practices of exclusion.

This concern is often presented by way of example, where the conflict between Israeli and Palestinian attachments to the same land is cited as a classic example of the exclusion and violence that ensues when place is made central to a peoples' identity and understanding of divine presence and promise.[19] But one need not look farther than current events in the United States, where white nationalists' use of the Nazi slogan "blood and soil" invokes an ideology of white supremacy and the idealization of a racially homogeneous "homeland" or *Lebensraum*.[20] Wherever walls are built, wherever borders are secured, wherever people suffer "removal" or death in the name of national preservation or purity, place-making becomes an unholy exercise in violence and place itself becomes an idol.[21]

A theology of place must actively resist becoming idolatrous in this way. It must take care—even as it discusses the power of place, the relationship between place and identity, and the presence

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[19] As in, for example, ibid.

[20] Translated into English as "living space," the German concept of *Lebensraum* was coined in 1901 by German geographer Friedrich Ratzel to express "the relations between human society as a spatial (geographic) organization and its physical setting" (71). Ratzel's emphasis was on the geography of the local economy. *Lebensraum* soon became an ideological pillar of Nazism, representing Hitler's program of nationalist expansionism aimed at the creation of an increasingly larger, racially homogenous state whereby new land was acquired by the systematic mass deportation, starvation, and execution of non-Aryan populations, as well as others.

See, Robert E. Dickinson, *The Makers of Modern Geography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 71. Cited in Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 148.

[21] "Removal" is part of the deportation nomenclature of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). See, for example, https://www.ice.gov/removal-statistics/2016.

of God in the real places of creaturely life—to ward against becoming complicit in unholy ideologies that manifest in exclusion and violence and demand the sacrifice of diversity.

2. Valorization of Arrival and Suspicion of Migrants

A theology of place also runs the danger of valorizing arrival in an idealized home-place and regarding with suspicion those who have not "arrived": migrants, exiles, nomadic peoples, and the otherwise displaced.[22] By some accounts, the idea of place has a fundamentally teleological nature, representing an end to movement and the achievement of arrival. Place represents a kind of staying, dwelling, putting down roots. By this account, place and home are treated as analogous, where home is place in its proper and fullest sense. We see this kind of thinking at work in the culturally significant trope of "longing for home," which appears with notable regularity throughout the literature on place under various guises.[23] This is not the account of place developed in this project, but it bears articulating because it is a commonly held view of place, a view underscored and heightened by its application to "heaven" as a kind of eternal place of arrival, homecoming, and ultimate stability and security.

To valorize arrival is to idealize a landed, stable way of being in the world. This way of life has been possible historically only for the landed elite, and is, even today, a form of significant

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[22] The "valorization of arrival" is addressed in Whitney Bauman, *Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 127-35. Bauman's discussion of arrival has been influential to my own recognition of this trope in the literature on place, though his answer to the problem it presents—namely, the development of a "polytheistic nomadic ethic"—seems unnecessarily to implicate monotheism in the problem of the valorization of arrival and the suspicion of (and violence toward) transient people. Neither monotheism nor attachment to place necessarily demands homogeneity or exclusion. As this project will show, a rich concept of place allows for a dynamic array of meanings, identities, memories, and hopes to coexist—indeed to "create soil" together, and for a God who is plurality in unity, unity in plurality, to be the God of both place and displacement.

[23] For one example, the trope takes center stage in Leroy S. Rouner, ed. *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1996).

enfranchisement, privilege, and power. In an American context at least, landownership—especially as idealized in homesteading or "settling" the land—is always already bound up with the history of colonization, specifically, with the systematic removal of Native peoples and the theft of their land. It is also bound up with the slavery of African peoples, upon whose unpaid labor the agrarian economy depended, and with the social and economic disenfranchisements that persist through unjust banking practices and housing discrimination.

In addition to its unspoken reliance on the truths of history named above, a theology that valorizes arrival is problematic on at least two other accounts. First, it can be a form of dishonesty about reality and nostalgia for a way of being in the world that, if it ever existed, is even more rarified now. In a time of mass displacement, climate change, a globalized economy, and population growth, theology cannot afford to imagine place as something to *get back to,* as though the concept represented a return.[24] Rather, a theology of place that speaks to our contemporary situation must conceive of place in a way that does not set it in conceptual or ethical opposition to mobility, dynamism, and diversity. Second, a theology that valorizes arrival can lead to suspicion and even demonization of exiles, migrants, so-called street people, refugees, and other people on the move. When arrival at a lasting, stable place is idealized, those without a continuous home-place are imagined to be threats to a society's stability and identity. Consider, for example, cultural biases and violence against nomadic peoples and migrant workers, against foreigners, refugees, and exiles. When arrival is valorized in a culture, those who journey as a way of life are perceived as

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[24] Preeminent philosopher of place Edward Casey makes much of the trope of "getting back" to place, and has been criticized for what often sounds like an anti-modern sentiment throughout his work. Elsewhere, Louis Dupré writes insightfully about the impossibility of "return" as a theological or ethical goal. The past is not a place. Can a theology of place avoid such backward looking temptations? Can it avoid the trap of hankering for the "place" of the past? Only with a truly theological conception of place, this project wagers. Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009); Brockelman.

incompliant with cultural values (or, to speak contextually, *un-American*). The danger here is not only conceptual, but lived, since conceptual suspicion becomes codified in exclusive policies and violence. In this time of great displacement, a theology of place must resist complicity in ideologies that portray as threatening those without a stable place—whether they come to their mobility by choice, by chance, or by circumstance.

A Christian theology of place always also must be a theology of displacement in which God reveals Godself in exile, among the displaced, on the cross. One way of doing this is to decentralize the home-place—the place of arrival and belonging—by imagining instead what Bauman calls a "polyamory of place," where people can love and identify with a multiplicity of places.[25] While for Bauman a polyamory of place goes hand in hand with a form of polytheism, this is not a necessary move. A Christian theology of place can remain monotheistic without valorizing arrival and the home-place by looking to the God who reveals Godself in and through the multiplicity of creaturely places, including on the road and in exile.

3. Place and Power

The third danger of a theology of place is that it would become a theology of power. There is a very real sense in which, in practice, to identify a set of spatial relations as a "place" is to circumscribe and control it. Historical examples abound in which such place-naming and place-claiming power has underwritten violence, colonialism, and other forms of domination. Consider that the European explorers who "discovered" the Americas presumed that they had landed upon the shores of land unclaimed, land without history or narrative or meaning. Naming the "new world," they presumed to endow it with what they took to be the qualities of place: borders and boundaries, ownership, narratives of discovery and destiny. Consider, again, that the later displacement of Native

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[25] Bauman.

Americans from their places of history, narrative, language, culture, and meaning onto reservations and into boarding schools was an attempt to "place" and so to circumscribe, control, and even to erase them. To identify a place often is bound up with assumptions and usurpations of power. Abuse of the relationship between place and personhood contributes to the logic of colonialism and genocide by which to control a place is to control a people.

But to identify a set of spatial relations is not necessarily a matter of circumscription and control. It also can be a form of recognition, naming, and liberation. When an expanse of grass and water, inhabited by avian life is recognized *as a wetland*, it is recognized as a place, given a name and a dignity, recognized as a *here,* and—in some cases—made eligible for certain protections. When a site of mine waste is recognized *as a superfund site*, it is recognized as an abandoned place of toxicity and given over to the responsibility of the EPA for remediation. The recognition and naming of places is not always about circumscribing who belongs and who is excluded, or about limiting the kinds of activities that are permissible there. To name a place is not always to exert power over it, but to recognize its own power.

Toward a Cruciform Theology of Place

Recognizing these three dangers of taking up place in theological reflection, how ought we to proceed? I propose that the answer lies in what, exactly, we mean by "place" and where, precisely, we look for God's presence and activity in the world of places. In other words, the answer lies in conceptual and methodological clarity.

The dangers discussed above each emerge from a particular understanding of "place" as a) exclusionary with respect to identity attachments, b) idealized with respect to its associations with arrival and homecoming, and c) bound up with claims of power control. Furthermore, it conceives of place as a subset of space—a territory—that can so much as be divided, bordered, expanded.

That is, it conceives of place as something divisible and defendable that *belongs to* certain peoples and identities. While no use of a concept—in this case, "place"—can unmoor itself entirely from the ways that the concept is used by others (especially when that usage has become its "common sense"), one can propose that we understand the *phenomenon* of place differently and so come to describe the concept of place differently. In this project, I propose to do just this.

As mentioned above, this project develops an account of place—not as a territory to be expanded and defended, not as something exclusionary, idealized, or controlled—but as *a room-making structure of relations*. As Jeff Malpas rightly observes, the dangers of place emerge when place is conceived of as something "belonging to us," rather than as something to which we belong.[26] This project conceives of "place" not as a territory one possesses, but a kind of spatial community to which one belongs and in which one participates. This is a non-hierarchical, relational, dynamic image of place. It is a view of place as finite, and yet not bounded, as changing, and yet durable. It is a view of place as participatory and risky, as making room for creaturely life, which includes loss, pain, and death within itself. As mentioned above, I argue in this project that the language of place is analogical, its first and proper meaning belonging to the relationality of the Triune God. In this way, conceptual clarity—particularly regarding what I mean by place and how candidate places are judged as to their placeness and as to their goodness and fittingness for creaturely life—is one way to proceed in light of the aforementioned dangers.

Methodologically, a Christian theology of place must become—in spirit and in method—a theology of the cross. "As a spirit and method of theological thought, *theologia crucis* cannot be stated in a formula," writes Douglas John Hall, a contemporary articulator of the tradition, "It may,

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[26] Malpas, "Place and Human Being."

however, be *recognized* when it is heard or experienced."[27] Absent any doctrinal formula or codified method, I propose that a "cruciform theology" is one recognizably in tune with important others who have worked in this "thin tradition."[28] Collectively, those who work in this tradition can be said a) to locate God's own, chosen place of presence and self-disclosure in the world on the cross of Jesus, and b) to interpret God's (dis)placement on the cross as an affirmation of God's presence in and commitment to creation, especially those who suffer. "For this theological approach," writes Hall, "the cross of Christ is not only Jesus' cross, it is also and simultaneously God's cross."[29] This Christological move reflects Luther's own provocative claims about the "crucified God," the God hidden in suffering.[30]

God is present and revealed, by this account, in places of displacement and suffering. It is by looking to the cross—God's own and as made known in the suffering of the world—that a theology of place can resist becoming a theology of exclusion, violence, idolatry, and power. To this end, the following project speaks of a God who loves and invests Godself in the place of creation and, in so doing, accepts the risks, vulnerabilities, and sufferings of place and displacement.

Theologians who work in this tradition also c) resist temptations to sentimentalize creation, suffering, or the cross, but to make "an extra-ordinary commitment to truth-telling," as Hall interprets Luther's claim that "the theologian of the cross calls things by their proper name," and

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[27] Douglas John Hall, "The Theology of the Cross: A Usable Past," in *Waiting for Gospel: An Appeal to the Dispirited Remnants of Protestant Establishment* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 80, 81.

[28] In addition to Douglas John Hall, "important others" who work in this tradition include: Jürgen Moltmann, Dorothee Soelle, Kazuo Kitamori. For a careful examination of Luther's own articulation of what it is to be a theologian of the cross, see Gerhard O. Forde's *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). It is Moltmann, and Hall after him, who calls it a "thin tradition."

[29] Hall, 81.

[30] Luther speaks of the "crucified God" in the Heidelberg Disputations. See, Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 225.

does not call the good evil or the evil good.[31] It is not the cross and its violence that are good,

Luther argues, but God's hidden presence and redemptive grace therein. A Christian theology of

place, then, does not call good the sufferings of the world—the displacements of peoples, the loss of

habitats, the weather disasters whose sufferings are multiplied by climate change—but does call

good the God who is present there, hidden in the ruins. Likewise, a Christian theology of place must

resist the causes of displacement and the destruction of places: war, economic inequality, profit at

the expense of creation, mobility at the expense of community, and xenophobia. Against a certain

trend in writing about place, a Christian theology of place also must resist tendencies to call good—

to romanticize, sentimentalize—nature itself and human relationships with places, but must remain

honest about the ways that places also entrap and harm. To this end, the following projects attempts

to remain close to human experience, taking both ordinary and extraordinary experiences of places

as material for theological reflection.

Finally, theologians in this tradition d) recognize the perspectival and emplaced nature of all

theology, the absence of an Archimedean point with respect to the knowledge of either creaturely

and divine things, and, thus, resist triumphalism of thought. Theology is always perspectival, and a

theologian is always a theologian in residence. Though not always evident in the text, this project

arises out of my own experiences living in community with Hmong, Lahu, and Karen children

displaced from their mountain villages on the Thai-Myanmar border and with women displaced

from their farms in the Bolivian highlands by a drought in the region. It arises, too, from an

opportunity I had to hear the stories of women who survived genocide and sexualized violence in

Sarajevo and women living in a New York State high security prison. Last, but not least, this project

is influenced by the intentional Christian community and retreat center, located in the subalpine

wilderness of the Cascade Mountains, where I lived for five years. This place is often romanticized

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[31] Hall.

due to the grandeur of its wild beauty and the boldness of the community's commitments to prayer, peacemaking, hospitality, simplicity, and care for the earth. Indeed, for many, this place is sacred ground. At the same time, it is a place that owes its existence to an abandoned copper mine and the village developed around it. This mine flourished during wartime's demand for copper and was abandoned soon after, leaving toxic tailings piles and poisoned run-off, which serve as reminders that even places of extraordinary beauty and hope bear the sedimentary layers of human violence against one another and creation. Today, this toxic site is under remediation, making room for new life there, even as climate change melts the glaciers on which life there depends. Each of these experiences has shaped the way I understand place and the ability of places either to make room for or to undermine human personhood, community, creaturely life, and their mutual flourishing.

The perspective of this project is also shaped by my own engagement with Christian theological traditions. The theological imagination is not formed *ex nihilo*, but by engagement with others who already are skilled at theological reflection and construction. Though I do not often engage other theologians directly in the body of this project, their work and influence appears in the footnotes as a kind of substratum, revealing those thinkers who have contributed most to the soil of my own theological imagination. In particular, the reader already may have noticed that my thinking is shaped, though not delimited, by the Lutheran theological tradition. I appeal, for example, to the ideas that *finitum capax infiniti*, that the cross provides the best view on reality, and that sin bends the human being *incurvatus in se* without offering a thoroughgoing defense of these claims except to direct the reader to the works of Luther and those who continue to work within the tradition of his thought. The reason for this is largely strategic: to show the ways that the conceptual lens of place comes to bear on the symbol system of the Christian faith, I need basic accounts of those symbols with which to work. Given my own theological formation and inclination, choosing more or less Lutheran accounts of those symbols makes the most sense.

Another important aspect of this project's perspectival situation is its engagement with Scripture. Theology is not simply or straightforwardly interpretation of Scripture, I take it, but neither ought it fly free from it. Readers will notice, then, that the following project draws on narratives, images, and language of Scripture, not as warrant for my claims, but as an intentional practice of thinking with Scripture, which is to say, thinking with the Church, that community that gathers together around the manger of Scripture seeking the living God.[32] Theology can and should offer language and images that do not arise from Scripture as well, especially as they arise from the lived experience. I am not a biblical scholar and so, like many theologians, depend on the learned exegetical work of others. The perspectival situation of this project, then, is formed by the language and imagery of Scripture, the theological tradition, and lived experiences with displaced peoples, which are privileged in so far as the theology of the cross—our spirit and method—bids us to seek God's self-revelation in the cross of Christ made known in suffering.

What follows, then, is an offering to the theological imagination, a proposal for how things look different when place is taken seriously. We begin by turning to the concept of place itself.

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[32] Luther describes the Scriptures as "the swaddling clothes and manger in which Christ lies" in Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35: Prefaces to the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 236.

PLACE:

AN OFFERING TO THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Introduction

Where are you? This is the question God asks Adam, who, having eaten the fruit of the tree, has

hidden from God, naked and afraid (Gn 3:9).[1] It is the question posed to this human creature who

now recognizes his own freedom and finitude, his own capacity to hide and potential to be lost. It is

a question of place: of location in the garden as well as of relationship to the God who seeks and

finds him. Later in Genesis, an angel of God will come alongside Hagar as she flees her home,

displaced both socially and spatially. They will meet at a spring of water, an oasis in the deadly

desert, where the angel will ask a question known by all who navigate the in-between, all who

migrate, flee, and seek home: "Where have you come from and where are you going?" (16:8). It is a

question of place: as much about location as it is about orientation and belonging, about the

relationships that bind and free her, about memory and hope.[2]

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[1] Biblical citations throughout are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless otherwise noted.

[2] As discussed in the Introduction, this project draws on scriptural narratives, images, and language to two ends. First, I take Scripture to be—at the very least—a source of story, imagery, language that my reader and I share as a kind of cultural commons. Appealing to the stories of Adam and Hagar above, for example, I hope to prompt the recognition that one already has access to a more complex and multifaceted concept of place than one may have been able to articulate. Second, I also take Scripture to be—as Luther wrote—"the swaddling clothes and manger in which Christ lies," a finite, yet capacious word that bears the Word to us. This means, for me, that an appeal to Scripture never can be a simple or straightforward warrant for a theological argument. Scripture can be approached, however, as a kind of narrative place where God makes Godself known to human beings and so is unlike other cultural texts that the reader and I may hold in common. Theology does well, then, to remain near to Scripture and to approach it with a posture of expectation, listening for the ways that it bears Christ—God's own revealed presence—by, for example, revealing the depth of God's love for creation, unmasking and dethroning human sin, and pushing back against the human theological

Questions of place are rarely questions of simple location because the concept of place is rich with significance. Place is "one of the most multi-layered and multipurpose keywords in our language," writes political geographer David Harvey, because it bears a "surfeit of meanings."[3] In everyday speech, the word "place" is used to describe such various phenomena as one's home (*your place or mine?),* a geographical location (*this is the place),* the action of putting something somewhere (*please place your coat on the rack*), one's role in a social system (*her place in the company),* and a sense of fittingness (*that behavior was entirely out of place*). The *Oxford English Dictionary* recognizes eighty distinct ways in which the word place may be used.[4] Some usages, one might observe, seem to be figurative extensions of the literal meaning of the term. Yet, it is not immediately clear how one should distinguish between figurative and literal usages of the concept because the spatial sense of the word is not necessarily more literal than the social, nor is the nominal form necessarily more literal than the verbal. Indeed, the term is so complex and multifaceted that perhaps "no one quite knows what they are talking about when they are talking about place."[5]

For all the complexity of the concept, however, place is also "wrapped in common sense."[6] It is telling, for example, that when I describe this project—this theology of place and displacement—the most common response I receive is not a question about what I mean by

imagination when the noetic effect of sin compromises its capacity to see, know, and speak of God and human life rightly. This is, at least, how this project proposes to approach it.

[3] David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 208.

[4] The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies five general categories of meaning: "I. A (public or residential) square," "II. Senses relating to space or location," "III. Senses relating to position or situation with reference to its occupation or occupant," "IV. Position in some scale, order, or series," and "V. Other usages." These broad categories are then broken down into 19 usages, which are themselves divided into 49 entries. Adding to the complexity of the concept are 19 verbal, nominal, and prepositional phrases, which together signify 31 distinct meanings. All together, then, discounting compound phrases (eg. place-bound, commonplace), the *OED* identifies 80 distinct ways in which the word place may be used.

[5] Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2004), 1.

[6] Cresswell, a leading human geographer, describes place in this way, adding that "this makes it more than slippery as the subject of a book. As we already think we know what it means it is hard to get beyond that common-sense level in order to understand it in a more developed way." The difficulty Cresswell describes applies also to the present project. Ibid.

"place," but a story about a place of particular significance or personal attachment. Talk of place does not strike one as academic jargon, but evokes the landscape of home, the concreteness of a seat at the table, the ordinariness of traveling between *here* and *there*. The very idea of place evokes attachments and relationships, memories, longings, and losses. Place is not an abstract idea—indeed, "place makes a poor abstraction"—but is something concrete and particular in and through which one lives, encounters others, and perceives the world and oneself in relation.[7] Place is something no less complex for also being a matter of everyday experience, no less universal for also being deeply personal.[8]

What is more, place is not only the site of experience and an object of experience, but is also a way of experiencing the world and oneself in meaningful relation. Place is, in this sense, "a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world."[9] Through the lens of place, one sees the world in terms of the body, experience, relationships, attachments, and meaning. It is a way of seeing the world that pushes back against ideas of abstract, homogenous space, against the division and commodification of space, and instead pays attention to the relationships between people and places. This way of seeing the world matters: to think of Damascus as a place—a place of rich history and meaning, of habitat and habitus, of human life and relationship, of culture and ecology—is entirely different than thinking of it as a site in the theater of geopolitics or a set of Euclidean coordinates on which to drop a bomb.[10]As an interpretive lens, then, place is not neutral.

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[7] Clifford Geertz, "Afterword," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 259.

[8] Augustine takes up another slippery, universal-yet-personal subject for a book in his *Confessions*: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know" (XI: 14). Here we find precedent in the Christian tradition for unpacking a complex and multifaceted concept by way of an appeal to common sense and to everyday language, working with the concept's fundamental complexity and even paradoxical nature, and offering the concept so developed to the theological imagination. See, Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Chapter 11.

[9] Cresswell, 11.

[10] Cresswell evokes Baghdad to similar effect. Ibid.

To perceive the world through the lens of place is to perceive it as relational and meaningful, as something to which we belong. The language of place is not mathematics but narrative, not the physics of motion but the lived body itself, which has needs and vulnerabilities. Through the lens of place, then, locales can be judged on the basis of their placeness at all and on the basis of their goodness and fittingness as places, that is, their capacity to fulfill the human need for belonging, shelter, orientation, and meaning.

In this chapter, I argue that the concept of place holds great potential to be a rich and illuminating concept for the theological imagination precisely because it has the capacity to bear multiple layers of signification. Place is "a complex unitary structure," as Jeff Malpas writes, that calls into question the presumed dichotomies between the spatial and the social, the literal and the figurative, the objective and the subjective, and even between being and act, by manifesting each of these characteristics and qualities in a coherent, inhabitable whole.[11] Place has the capacity to do this—to "hold all things together," so to speak—because it is not merely a multipurpose key word of univocal and equivocal significances, but is, I argue, an analogical concept that finds its first and fullest meaning in the Triune God (Col 1:17). Yet, to claim that place is an analogical concept is not to let ourselves off the hook for giving an account of place that makes sense of its complexity as a matter of human experience.

The aim of this chapter is to develop an analogical concept of place that sheds light on the central theological symbols of the Christian faith and on human experience of places. To this end, the chapter unfolds in three parts. Part One contrasts two precedent conceptions of place: place as *limited spatiality* and place as *meaningful locale*. These two ways of conceiving place are common both in the emergent field of place studies and in everyday, non-academic understandings of place, yet I

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[11] Jeff Malpas presents a careful, compelling, and nuanced account of "the differentiated and unitary structure of place," perhaps the most insightful that I have encountered in the literature and my thinking has been enriched by his work: *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

argue that they are insufficient accounts of place for theological reflection. Examining these two ways of conceiving place will clarify what the present project does not mean by place and provide key language for future reference.

Part Two examines place in human experience and develops a catalog of the key characteristics of placeness and an account of the ways that places function in human life. Along the way, this account of place draws on both everyday examples of places as well as experiences of displacement and the loss of place. This section concludes with a working definition of place as *a room-making structure of relations*.

Part Three proposes that place is an analogical concept that finds its first and fullest meaning in God as Trinity. Beginning with an account of the function of analogical language, I describe the mutual, reciprocal, and room-making presence of the Triune God *as place*. In other words, I argue that the Triune God is *the place* from which every other place takes its name. Moreover, God is not only the fullness of place in its formal sense, but also the fullness of *good and fitting place* in its material and normative sense. Creaturely places, then, may be judged as to their *placeness* and as to their *goodness* as places by the God who is place, first and properly. With this analogical understanding of place in play, I raise for consideration two borderline cases—namely, the personal body and the solitary prison cell—asking how they fare as place in light of the God who is place.

The account of place developed in this chapter will be successful if it a) rings true to human experiences and makes sense of relevant examples, b) is well-distinguished from other precedent understandings of the concept, c) brings alongside it a set of related terms that together form a conceptual vocabulary, and d) is thick enough as a concept to be put to use in theological reflection. That said, the account of place developed in this chapter is its first iteration. Its meaning will continue to develop over the course of subsequent chapters, such that one only will have a full grasp

of the meaning and function of place retrospectively, as one looks back at it through the whole symbol system of the Christian faith. With these criteria and this caveat in mind, let us proceed.

I. Precedent Conceptions of Place: Limits and Possibilities

In this section, I offer a simple typology of place: two contrasting approaches to the concept. These two approaches are distinguished from one another by the questions that drive them and, therefore, the work for which their respective conceptualizations of place are suited. By contrasting these two approaches, my goal is not to offer a complete survey of the literature on place, nor to offer detailed discussion of the approaches presented here. Rather, my goal is to sketch a general picture of two ways of thinking about place and to identify both the promise these conceptualizations hold and the problems that arise when they are employed in the service of other kinds of questions. This will prepare the ground for a subsequent discussion about a) the kinds of questions theology asks and b) what makes a conceptualization of place well-suited for theological reflection.

1. *Place as Limited Spatiality: Container and Commodity*

Philosophers and geographers sometimes have conceived of place as a subset of space. Let us call this the "limited spatiality" model. So conceived, place is a discrete and bounded area, realm, or region within infinite, uncontrolled, and unbounded space. Space is taken to be the more basic reality and place a subset of it. By this model, a place is a kind of vessel, container, or room. Geographically speaking, place is a portion of space, bounded or bordered, readily commodified as property. It is the discrete *where* of bodies. According to such views, place is a special kind of object—a determinate thing in the world—having size and location, shape and capacity. For some thinkers, as we will see, place is sensible, while for others it is only intelligible. In both cases, places are determined by their (sensible or intelligible) boundaries, limits, or edges, which allow one to

distinguish between places and to identify whether or not one counts as being "in" a particular place. Indeed, in this view, places are something one can so much as be in. Furthermore, place is conceived as passive, having no (or very limited) particular agency or work. To be in a place, in this view, means simply to be located there as opposed to in some other potential place within the wide expanse of possible space.

Aristotle viewed place in terms of limited spatiality. He conceived of place—*topos*, in his Greek—as a finite, bounded container or vessel for bodies. Place and being belong together, by his account, such that "every body perceptible by sense is in place," and "everything is somewhere and in place."[12] Indeed, Aristotle considered *where* to be one of the ten basic categories of being. By his definition, "the place [of a body] is the innermost motionless boundary of what contains it."[13] The universe is the maximal container of every body, he reasoned, and so the place of a body in the universe is the innermost boundary of the universe as it contains a body. (The universe is, by his account, the "common place of all things."[14]) This boundary limits and encompasses a body, surrounding it with perfect fittingness. Maximally speaking, then, a body's place is the boundary between itself and the universe. But a body also has a first, most intimate place and myriad intermediate places in which it is located. Hence, a fish is in the universe, but it is also in the kindergarten classroom, in its fishbowl, in the water, and in that fish's most intimate place: the thinnest, perfectly enveloping fish-shaped boundary at the limit of its own body. Where the inner boundary of each of these places coincide is the fish's "proper place," the place where it and only it is located. In this way, the proper place of x is the inner limit of the universe with respect to x.

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[12] *Aristotle's Physics*, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), Book IV, 208b27-33.
[13] Ibid., Book IV, 212a20.
[14] Ibid., IV.2 209a32.

There, "the inner limit of x's surroundings marks the beginning of the outside world…is the first thing in which x is."[15]

Aristotle's discussion of place appears in his *Physics* and is developed in service to questions about motion and the possibility of the void. (There can be no void—no "place bereft of body"—because place is defined precisely as a container of bodies. Place and body are concomitant in existence: every body requires place, every place requires a body.[16]) Since Aristotle develops his account of place in service to these specific questions, he does not give an account of the experience or meaning of place. He does not discuss place as the site of events, encounters, or narratives. Nor does he discuss place as having any activity proper to it other than encompassing and limiting, terms which are remarkably passive for Aristotle.[17] Place is a matter of bodies and their locations and movements, which is to say, a matter of mathematics and physics.

Philosophers of the early modern and modern periods also worked with a concept of place as limited spatiality. They did so against the backdrop of a universe more vast and eccentric than previously had been understood. The Copernican revolution spurred a new set of questions about just what it is to be human on a displaced planet in the midst of a cosmic vastness: How ought we to conceive of ourselves as inhabitants of the universe? How does the finite relate to the infinite? Is human reason perspectival or transcendent of place?[18] Because of the nature of their questions, the

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[15] Benjamin Morison, *On Location: Aristotle's Concept of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 142.

[16] *Aristotle's Physics*, Book IV, 208b26.

[17] Samuel Sambursky notes that, while "the notion of 'encompassing' has a definite tinge of activity in the utterances of some Presocratic philosophers," in Aristotle it has "an outspokenly passive character." Samuel Samburksy, *The Concept of Place in Late Neoplatonism: Texts with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), 12.

[18] The shifts of the Copernican revolution—to heliocentric understandings of the cosmos and to the authority of human reason—were "bound up with a self-elevation that frees the thinking subject from any particular place. Such self-elevation, a new freedom, and a new anthropocentrism go together with a new sense of homelessness," writes Karsten Harries. Harries addresses questions of place and placelessness, orientation and disorientation with respect to the thinking subject in the context and legacy of modernity in Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT, 2001), 8.

concepts of place they develop are more a matter of physics and philosophy than geography or

ecology. As for Aristotle, they are more about the possibilities of bodies, movement, and infinite

space than about landscapes, home, or dwelling. The Latin terminology of the modern philosophers

included a conception of space (*spatium*, which distinguished the "properly spatial from the merely

local") and place (*locus*, which simply renamed "the delimited and delimiting role formerly assigned

to *topos*"), as well as site (*situs*, the location of an event).[19] *Locus* and *situs* were understood as

portioned off particularizations of space, which meant that space retained conceptual priority.

Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), for example, conceptualized

space as absolute and homogeneous, a kind of uniform background against which bodies move.[20]

Space is substantive and intelligible, by his account, but not sensible. To understand space, then, one

must "abstract from our senses, and consider things themselves, distinct from what are only sensible

measures of them."[21] Considered in this way, space is not divisible, strictly speaking, but can be

portioned off into places conceptually. A place, then, is a portioned off area of absolute space. As

such, places "cannot be seen, or distinguished from one another by our senses," and can be

described only mathematically.[22] Newton did not conceive of places as having particular identities or

meaning, other than their mathematical value. Place is simply a spatial designator, for Newton,

empty of any resonance or depth of meaning, derivative of absolute space.

Gottfried Leibniz also conceived of place in terms of limited spatiality, but conceived of

space itself differently. Space, on his account, is a "relative being." It is a set of relations between

bodies, such that, without the existence of bodies, there would be no space: "I hold space to be

something merely relative, as time is, […] I hold it to be an order of coexistences, as time is an order

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[19] Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 134.

[20] See Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, ed. F. Cajori, trans. A. Motte (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), I:6.

[21] Ibid., 8.

[22] Ibid.

of successions," he wrote in disagreement with Newton's absolute view of space (1715).[23] There can be no such thing as empty space, in his view, just as there can be no history-less time, time void of events or processes. "Space, taken apart from things," Leibniz writes, "has nothing actual about it," but is, rather, to be conceived as a collection of spatial sites held by bodies in relation to one another.[24] The language of place (*locus*) is notably missing from Leibniz's work, and is replaced by the concept of "site" (*situs*), a spatial designator that has significance only with reference to the bodies or events that take place there (ie. a site is always the site *of something*). While Aristotle and Newton both conceived of place as passive with respect to activity and meaning, Leibniz goes farther, emptying place of ontological reality. Neither space nor site, on his account, have substance, but are fundamentally relational.

Though Aristotle, Newton, and Leibniz differ notably in their conceptualizations of place, each conceive of place as a subset of precedent space. Place, for these thinkers, describes the relationship between bodies and the wider extended expanse. For them, place is most aptly described in the language of physics and mathematics, yet historians and theologians will hear echoes of this understanding of place and space in the Reformation debates about the Eucharist, which raised questions about the capacity of the finite to bear the infinite and about the "proper place"—in which we hear echoes of Aristotle—of the body of the ascended Christ.[25] Geographers

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[23] Leibniz presents his relational theory of space in correspondence with Samuel Clarke, who, for his part, defends the Newtonian theory of absolute space. H. G. Alexander, ed. *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), III.4.

[24] Ibid., V.67.

[25] On the significance of the concept of place and its relation to the body in the Reformation's Eucharistic controversies, see the Marburg Colloquy (1529) between Luther and Zwingli, in which Zwingli challenges Luther to prove "that the body of Christ can be in many places," since, after the Ascension, the body of Christ is in his "proper place" at the right hand of the Father. As the disputation shows, the meaning of place, space, and the body—and the ways in which the three relate to one another—are at stake. The dialogue of the disputation can be found in Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 258.

also hear place conceived as limited spatiality in their own disciplinary language of place as "a portion of geographical space."[26]

The spatial conceptions of place developed by these thinkers contribute something significant to our current discussion of place in a theological context. When place is conceived as a limited spatiality—as a container of bodies or a subdivision of a wider expanse—place is recognized as something bound up with the body. To have or to be a body is to have place. What is more, to be a place is in some way to contain, envelop, and limit a body. Their questions are no less theological for also being a matter of physics: How do finite bodies inhabit infinite space? Can the infinite inhabit the finite? Yet, theologically, the limited spatiality model presents important problems. If place is a container, then the infinite can have no place since it has no limit or boundary that encompasses it. If place is a container, the uncontainable God cannot be found in place and theological attention must be shifted away from place to the omnipresence of the divine in (or as) the whole of infinite space. When space is taken to be the more basic concept, and place conceived as a subdivision of it that contains what is within it, it is easy to see why place has not been perceived as a suitable concept for theological reflection. A theological account of place will need to approach the subject differently. Nevertheless, the limited spatiality model of conceiving place contributes to our discussion going forward by its recognition that place is something intimately bound up with the body, that the body is relationally situated, and that place is something concomitant with being.

2. *Place as a Meaningful Locale*

In contemporary place studies, place is often conceived as *a meaningful locale*. Place, in this second of our two general categories, is primarily a matter of the human response to one's encompassing

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[26] James S. Duncan, "Place," in *The Dictionary of Human Geography, Fourth Edition*, ed. R. J. Johnston, et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 582.

environment. To identify a locale as a place, according to this account, is a matter of subjective experience, a matter of recognizing an environment as bearing meaning, which is to say, memory, value, story, intent, and hope. This conceptualization of place also arises from questions of human experiences of places: What makes a place feel like home? Why does one feel like an "insider" in some places, and like an "outsider" in others? This approach to place has arisen in the last fifty years, primarily in the United States and Europe as globalization, environmental destruction, urban sprawl, and hyper-mobility have begun changing people's relationship to and experience of places and their meaningfulness. Thinkers who conceptualize place in this way—as subjective, experiential, and laden with meaning—work in multiple fields, including human geography and phenomenology.

When human geographer Edward Relph first published *Place and Placelessness* in 1976, he was one of few people working on the concept of place.[27] Since then, others in the field of human geography have contributed to the development of the concept of place as a meaningful locale: notably, Anne Buttimer, Tim Cresswell, David Seamon, and Yi-Fu Tuan. Though diverse in emphasis, these four thinkers share a conception of place as space imbued with meaning, or as meaningful geography. "When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming it is one such way) it becomes a place," writes Cresswell.[28] To

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[27] *Place and Placelessness* (1976) is a substantive revision of Relph's 1973 doctoral dissertation in Geography from the University of Toronto. One of his dissertation readers' own works on the subject would be published a year later: Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977). Tuan previously had written *Topophilia* (1974), of which he writes retrospectively, "I could not at that time find an overarching theme or concept with which to structure my heterogeneous material," and so he returned to questions of the human experience of physical environment in 1977 with the clarifying concept of "place" in mind. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, v.
　　Anne Buttimer, an Irish geographer, was another early thinker of place, although I find no indication that she and Relph were aware of one another's work until much later. See, Anne Buttimer, "Grasping the Dynamism of Lifeworld," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (1976).
[28] Cresswell, 10.

similar effect, Tuan has proposed that "place is above all a territory of meanings."[29] As a discipline, human geography studies places from the perspective of human experience. The language of place is not mathematics or physics, on their account, but embodied experience, feeling, and story. For this reason, many human geographers employ the conceptual tools of phenomenology in their work.

Phenomenology's concern with the "conscious cognition of direct experiences" (Husserl), the body (Merleau-Ponty) and everyday life (Lefebvre) lends itself as a method for studying how human beings experience their environments and imbue them with meaning.[30] Places, on this account, do not exist *a priori*, but are constructed and practiced by human beings as they interact with their environment.[31] Edward Casey, a leading philosopher of place in the phenomenological tradition, writes about place as saturated with meaning. Places receive their meaning both "from below," as people go about their daily lives and interact with their environment, and "from above," as places are planned, named, built, and memorialized. While those place-thinkers of the "limited spatiality" type viewed place as passive, Casey argues that places are active agents in the formation of their own meaning and the meaning of the human lives that inhabit them. Furthermore, he argues

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[29] Edward Relph, "Modernity and the Reclamation of Place," in *Dwelling, Seeing, and Designing: Toward a Phenomenological Ecology*, ed. David Seamon (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 36.

[30] Anne Buttimer describes Husserl's "pure phenomenology" as concerned with the "conscious cognition of direct experience" in her study of the use of phenomenology in place studies: Buttimer, 279.

Phenomenological texts commonly drawn on by geographers and philosophers working on place include: Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. John Moore, 3 vols. (London: Verso, 2002); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2014); De Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1907).

[31] The phenomenological notion of a lifeworld—"the taken-for-granted dynamic of everyday experience that largely happens automatically without conscious attention or deliberate plan"—has been particularly fruitful, giving geographers and philosophers alike a language for speaking about the habits, interactions, and felt-senses that contribute to place-making. This definition of lifeworld is Seamon's summary of Buttimer's use of the term. See, David Seamon, "Grasping the Dynamism of Urban Place: Contributions from the Work of Christopher Alexander, Bill Hillier, and Daniel Kemmis," in *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythms*, ed. Tom Mels (London: Ashgate, 2004).

that places are not static, not "inert, experienced scene[s]," but always in the process of being

formed and transformed as they are imbued with new layers of meaning and memory.[32]

The problem and promise of the view of place *as meaningful locale* is that it predicates place on

subjective meaning-makers. That is, the very possibility of place depends upon those who imbue

space with meaning. This raises such questions regarding whose meanings—that is, whose

experiences, whose narratives, whose lives and bodies—count when it comes to forming places? For

Wallace Stegner—a bioregional writer and theorist—"no place, not even a wild place, is a place until

it has a poet," that is, until it has received "that human attention that at its highest reach we call

poetry."[33] By his account, then, only human lives—and, particularly, those lives who practice poetry

as a form of meaning-making—have the capacity to properly imbue space with meaning and

establish it as place. This account of place serves well the bioregionalist goal of "developing

communities integrated with ecosystems" and bodies of literature that emerge out of that

integration.[34] Applied to a general theory of place, however, Stegner's view is overly restrictive with

respect to whose lives count as place-makers, whose lives have the capacity to give a locale meaning.

Stegner's dictum denies the placeness of locales formed in the absence of human lives, places

formed by creatures who also imbue locales with significance, like nests that birds return to year

after year and fishing grounds along the river to which bears introduce their cubs. Furthermore,

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[32] For a closer examination of place as a dynamic process of meaning-making, see Allan Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74, no. 2 (1984): 279. Cited in Cresswell, 35.

[33] Place studies is a remarkably interdisciplinary field of study, which includes—in addition to philosophers and geographers—literary authors who, in their own way, try to articulate something of place and its meanings in human life. While a survey of such authors is beyond the scope of this project, the reader will notice that the works of essayists, poets, and novelists often make their way into place literature (Malpas looks to Proust, Wynn to Edmund Cusick, and many to Wordsworth). This project also draws on literary works, though with an intentional interest in expanding the diversity of voices who are counted as "having something to say" about place. Nevertheless, Wallace Stegner, "The Sense of Place," in *The Sense of Place* (New York: Random House, 1992), 205.

[34] This description of the purpose of the bioregional literary tradition comes from Stephen Frenkel, as quoted in *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*, ed. Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 16.

when a locale is not recognized as a place—that is, when those who live there, human and otherwise, are not recognized as meaning-makers—both the locale and the lives therein are vulnerable to exploitation because they are not recognized as meaningful places. Place, I proposed in the Introduction to this project, is a value-laden way of perceiving the world and to deny the placeness of a locale is one way of denying its value. Finally, the notion that place isn't a place before it has a poet reinscribes colonialist negations of the reality of places and their histories before the (white) poet writes it into being.[35] If place is to be defined as a meaningful locale, it matters critically whose lives are recognized as having meaning-making—and, thus, place-making—power.

Even if all possible meaning-makers were recognized, however, this view of place does not yet escape the problem of the "place as limited spatiality" view. When place is a locale imbued with meaning, it remains a subset of abstract space, designated not by the presence of bodies (as in the limited spatiality view), but by the occurrence of events and the presence of meaningfulness. Abstract space remains the more basic category of which place is merely a specialized subset. This is problematic for a theological account of place, I am arguing, because God is not a God of abstractions, but of the real, concrete, and particular creation God so loves. A theologically attuned concept of place must be able to bear the paradox of God's presence in the particular, the finite, the bodily, and the relational.

3. *Conclusion*

In this section, I have described two precedent ways in which place has been conceived: as limited spatiality and as meaningful locale. These approaches to place were developed in response to specific disciplinary questions and are articulated in the language of those disciplines. While these conceptualizations of place have done much to advance the field of place studies and may be well

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[35] This is the argument of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner," in *Why I Can't Read Wallave Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

suited to their respective disciplines, they make assumptions about the priority of space and about the sources and standards of meaning that make them insufficient with respect to theological reflection.

A theological conception of place, I propose, must arise from concrete and particular experiences of place in creaturely life, not from the uninhabitable abstraction of absolute space. Furthermore, a theological conception of place ought to offer a way to judge the placeness of proposed places and the *goodness and fittingness* of proposed places in a way that does not undermine the dignity of non-human or marginal places and the lives that dwell therein. This methodological insistence on the priority of the particular and embodied, the significance of lived experience, and the concern for human dignity and flourishing is grounded in the theology of the cross—the "spirit and method" of this project—which suits well this project's intention to develop conceptual resources that can help the church to respond to the great and growing displacements of our day.[36]

The remainder of the chapter articulates a third way of conceptualizing place and its accompanying concepts. Approaching this work, we take with us both the insights and cautions gained through this rough contrast between these two approaches to place. Specifically, we take with us the language of limited spatiality and seek a way to conceptualize place as concrete and particular, given in experience, and not merely a subset of abstract space. Likewise, we take with us the language of meaningfulness and seek to conceptualize place as meaningful and storied, not only personally but also communally, and to do so in a way that recognizes place's capacious ability to hold multiple, even conflicting meanings, and to honor the place-forming, meaning-making power of diverse creaturely lives.

II. Toward a Theological Concept of Place

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[36] An account of the theology of the cross as "spirit and method" (Hall) is found in the Introduction.

A theological concept of place must be capacious enough both to account for the diverse and even contradictory experiences of place in human life and to open out toward knowledge of who God is and how God relates to the world. We now turn our attention squarely to the former—to human, creaturely, incarnate experiences of place. We begin in this way, with a phenomenological appeal to common human experience, because we seek a concept of place that resonates with everyday experience in and through the world of places. If it does not, that is, if the concept of place here developed is incommensurate or discordant with everyday experience of place, then the concept will not be meaningful as a concept for theological reflection.[37] There are dangers, of course, in any appeal to "common" experience, as though human experience of place were not diverse and even contradictory. For this reason, I will intentionally appeal to a wide array of examples, including experiences of place in the context of displacement. At the outset, then, I am developing a concept of place on the basis of ordinary and extraordinary experiences of human life. Yet, the phenomenon of place is itself theologically significant, I wager. Place, as it is experienced in and through the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of human life, opens out toward the mystery of God.

1. The Attributes of Place

Let us begin by inquiring into the attributes of place as a phenomenon in creaturely life. What are those characteristics and qualities that give a locale "placeness"? What distinguishes a place from a mere location? In this section, we move through the basic attributes of place, beginning with an account of the relationship between place and the body. In so doing, we develop a formal account of place, not as a subset of abstract space or as a locale to which meaning has been added, but as a

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[37] On the use of common everyday experience in the analysis of concepts for theological and philosophical reflection, my thinking is indebted to David Tracy who writes about such methodologies in David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 66.

fundamentally relational and meaningful phenomenon, bound up with the body, and integral to creaturely life.

a. Place Co-Arises with Being

To be is always already to be in place. There is no being that is not *somewhere*, standing out in existence. Indeed, even to imagine being without place can trigger in one a particular terror, for to be nowhere at all is to be groundless and unmoored, disoriented and adrift. It is *not to be* at all. Aristotle spoke well when he counted "where" among the ten basic categories of being, one of the attributes that being always already has. So, too, Heidegger was right to speak of human existence as *Dasein*, being-there.[38] And in like fashion, Tillich saw that "existing means above all to have a place among the places of all other beings and to resist the threat of losing one's place and with it existence altogether."[39] Place, these thinkers each observe, is concomitant with being such that there is no being without place.

Imagine an astronaut outside of her spacecraft to repair it. Her tether comes unhooked and she begins to drift away from her vessel into the closest thing to *noplace* one can experience. As she drifts father away, her vessel now out of sight, she loses any meaningful sense of location with respect to anyone or anything else and it becomes apparent that *no place* means *no being*. In so far as her life and body continue to exist, it is because even outer space is not truly *noplace*. Her body is still somewhere, located in the universe, oriented between this planet and that star. It is, however, an

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[38] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). For close reading of Heidegger on place, see Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

Heidegger's writing on being, dwelling, and place influence in multiple meaningful ways the work of the philosophers of place who appear in this project, especially Casey and Malpas. While it is important to acknowledge his impact on their work, and on the field of place studies through them, my own project does not engage his thought directly.

[39] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1963), 315.

experience akin to placelessness for the astronaut because finite creatures with finite senses require

places of a certain scale. In short, one needs a place that is fitting for the body, a place that functions

in certain ways with respect to orienting and sheltering one. I will return to the concept of fittingness

just ahead and the ways that places function in human life in the next section, but for now, let us

take from this example the intimate, if still ill-defined, link between being and place. For our

astronaut—and even for us who imagine ourselves in her situation from our own, more secure,

places—the idea of being without place raises a certain existential threat, a surge of separation

anxiety. Imagining physical placelessness evokes a psychological and emotional sense of *being lost*,

which carries with it the threat of lost *being*, for there is no being without place.

If there is no being without place, should we say that place is a condition for the possibility

of being? To this we must reply both *yes* and *no*. On the one hand, we must say *no* because to affirm

place as the condition for being is to give priority—conceptual, if not also temporal—to place itself.

But this is not so, for just as there is no being without place, so too there is no place without being.

Consider the example of a house. A house is a place formed by the convergence of beams and pipes,

wiring and insulation, furniture and décor. A place, in other words, is a composition of things. A

place is a form of being-together, of multiplicity in unity. It is composed of and conditioned by

beings themselves. Thus, place is not prior to being as its condition, but neither is being prior to

place. Rather, I am arguing that place and being co-arise in experience such that we cannot get

behind either one to the other.[40]

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[40] Co-arising is the same term sometimes used for the central Buddhist philosophical concept of
"dependent origination," which refers to the ontological principle that all phenomena exist in a
relationship of conditional causality with one another. I am using this language differently and non-
technically to describe a peculiar kind of relationship whereby being and place are each the condition
for the other's possibility, such that in experience they always appear already together. Thus, while
the Buddhist concept of dependent origination has to do with the cause and problem of suffering,
the co-arising of place and being of which I speak is part of the goodness and essential relationality
of creation.

Let us remain with our example of the house. Were we to take away the various things that make up the house—the walls, the beams, the pipes, etc.—what would remain? Have we then, gotten behind being to something like place emptied of being? No, for in the absence of the things that together form a house, the place of the house is no longer present. There is no house without walls and roof; no place without the beings that compose it. However, when the house is dismantled, left as a pile of lumber and piping and insulation, we are not left with a pile of things without place. Being always takes place. Absent the place of the house, a different place, composed of different things, comes into view: a construction site, perhaps, and the things that compose it: the cleared and leveled land, the rubble. Beneath and around the construction site, a neighborhood appears; behind and around it, a city, a valley, a watershed. Absent one place, another always appears around one, such that being and place always are given together and neither can be imagined except in their mutual relation.

Places, this example shows, nest within one another. Places contain, overlap, encompass, and hide within other places. It is for this reason that we can affirm both a) that to be is always to be in (some) place and b) that some locales are not properly places. When one finds oneself in a non-place—a locale that does not exhibit the characteristics and functions of place—one is always already nested within a larger place that grounds one. (The grassy median between my house and the street is a non-place, a mere location, but when I stand there, I am meaningfully located in the place of my neighborhood.) To clarify the terminology at work here: one can be in a *non-place*, but one cannot so much as be *noplace,* that absolute void of being of which there is no creaturely experience, the very concept of which presents a certain existential anxiety.[41]

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[41] On the existential anxiety elicited by the concept of the Void, see Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), x-xi.

The first characteristic of place, then, is that it co-arises with being. In the context of creaturely life, being is expressed in and through bodily life. Thus, for creatures, place and the body belong to one another and are not experienced apart from one another. Furthermore, places are characterized by a kind of fittingness or mal-fittingness for the bodies that are implaced therein. That is, contrary to Aristotle's vision, places are not perfectly fitting for the body, formed and delimited by it. Indeed, places can be judged as to their fittingness for the various instantiations of being—and the relations, activities, and events of embodied life.

b. Place is relational

Places are formed, whether organically or by design, by beings joined in spatial and social relation to one another. A place is not, then, a monolithic entity, but a kind of socio-spatial community, a web or structure of relations among things that, together, form something complex and multi-dimensional. In short, place is fundamentally relational.

Consider a prairie—an ecological place. What is a prairie but a congregation of grasses, flowers, insects, and the recurrence of fire and rain? Together, by the transfer of energy, by the decay of past lives into soil, by the work of pollinators and seeds, these creaturely lives form something more than the sum of their parts. They create a place: a complex relational structure inhabitable by other lives. (Note well that here I am using the word "inhabitable" simply to mean that one can so much as *be there* and indwell it, and should not be taken to necessarily designate a positively valued or fitting place. In Chapter Three, I will offer a more precise account of the concept of inhabitation.) Consider, too, a garment factory—a designed and constructed place. What is a factory but a network of machines and oil, human workers, materials in and products out? A factory is not a subset of absolute space, but a complex relational structure formed by things and people and the relations of energy and labor between them. Together, something more than the sum

of its parts is formed, something inhabitable (again, just in the sense that one can be there, within its

structure of relations), something productive, something meaningful. To inhabit this place is not to

stand in a subset of absolute space or even a "meaningful locale," but to enter into a system of labor

and production, to stand out in risk to its dangers. Though a factory is a built environment, the place

of a factory is a kind of (designed, manufactured) ecosystem all its own.

The relationality of places means something different for political geographers. When they

speak of such relationality, they have in mind the kind of thing depicted on maps of the United

States that one finds printed in the backs of airline magazines, maps that show—in arcs of red ink—

all of the flights the airline carrier makes in and out of various airports. The major airports become

densely inked "hubs" where flight paths converge and depart. For some geographers, a place is

essentially just such a hub, a confluence of activity, overlapping moments in space.[42] Places, on this

account, are little more than "networks" of relations, "bundles of space-time trajectories" that are

conceived or imagined as places.[43] A place, so conceived, is not an objective thing in the world, but

is merely a "temporary constellation" that is perceived as a meaningfully place from a certain

perspective, comparable to the way one might see a bear or a drinking gourd in the night sky.[44] Such

constellations are not existent things of substance, but are a way of perceiving and talking about the

relations among things in a meaningful way.

Contrary to such thinking, place, in my account, is something concrete and sensible, even as

it is also relational. Place's relationality is less like the convergences of a flight network, and more

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[42] For example, in the work of Doreen Massey—here summarized by Ash Amin—cities and regions
are described as "nodes that gather flow" and as "relational networks" that "come with no promise
of territorial or systemic integrity, since they are made through the spatiality of flow, juxtaposition,
porosity, and relational connectivity." Her project is primarily epistemological, focusing not on what
a place is, but on how human beings engage in and experience spatial thinking. See, Doreen Massey,
For Space (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 34; Ash Amin, "Regions Unbound:
Towards a New Politics of Place," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B* 86, no. 1 (2004).
[43] Massey, 119.
[44] Ibid., 141.

like an ecosystem: constituted by the relations among beings, which together form something concrete and sensible, something able to be encountered and experienced, something inhabitable by lived bodies. It is like a home: constituted by the relationships between walls and among furniture, between people and pathways and patterns of living, which, together, form something real and inhabitable, a place with a culture and with meaning. A place is a concrete and particular locale to which one can return and welcome others, and from which one can leave. Places, I am arguing, are fundamentally relational and at the same time are concrete and particular things in the world that can be so much as experienced, sensed, inhabited, and abandoned. Place may be a way of experiencing the world, but places then take concrete form and have concrete effects on those who live in and move between them.

c. Places are multiplicity in unity

Implied in the relationality of place is another attribute, namely, multiplicity in unity. Relationship is possible only where a multiplicity of being is present and relationship itself is the formation of a kind of unity among the multiply gathered. Places are formed by the relations between a plurality of diverse bodies, which cohere to form a unitary phenomenon. Neither the multiplicity nor the unity of a place can be reduced one to the other. The unity of place is made possible by its internal plurality; the plurality of being becomes place only in light of its unity. Consider, for example, a public library. Spatially, a library is formed by a diversity of human bodies, books and shelves, walls, carrels, banks of computers, rolling carts. It is formed by various activities: searching and reading, napping and playing, exploring, studying, and creating. It is formed by events: public readings, children's story-time, tax-return assistance. Together the diversity of bodies, activities, and events cohere under the concept and mission of a public library. They hold together, not merely by the walls that form the building, but also by the shared sense of purpose that has gathered these bodies

together in this place. A library, on this account, is a relational multiplicity that is inhabitable as a unified place.

As our example of the public library shows, places cohere in unity. By unity, I mean that the bodies and relations that together compose a place hang together in a way that distinguishes them from other, even neighboring webs of relations. That is, there is something recognizable and distinguishable about a place. But what is the source of their unity? What is it that makes the relations of a place cohere in such a way that they are distinguishable from other webs of relation?

In answer to this question, the view of place as limited spatiality emphasizes the bounded nature of places. It speaks of places as demarcated by limits and borders. I counter, however, that boundaries reveal rather than create the unity of a place. Material boundaries (walls, fences, painted lines) reduce ambiguity about what is inside and outside a given place. Such material boundaries can offer safety (as in the case of "sanctuary" movements, where church walls protect refugees and fugitives), but can also inscribe injustice (as with the practice of "redlining," a method of discriminatory housing and banking practice in which lines are drawn on city maps determining who will receive services and who will not). Other modes of demarcating places are intentionally blurred, gradual, and shifting, allowing for a softness about a place's "edges," but still reveal its unity. A neighborhood block without fenced in yards, for example, communicates a certain neighborliness, a welcoming of relations across (invisible) property lines, which can give a neighborhood a coherent placeness of its own. An urban eatery might design a permeable front to their business by opening up a garage-door style wall, so that seating spills out onto the sidewalk, blurring the boundary between inside and outside, giving the restaurant an invitational appeal. These material boundaries do not create a unitary place, but merely serve to make it recognizable.

Other places—like a woodland or prairie—do not have discrete boundaries, yet they still exhibit multiplicity in unity. Ecosystems are biotic communities of external and internal relations,

distinguishable from one another by the life that takes place (or doesn't) within it. Each consists of different cycles (relations) of nutrients and energy, which have their own constantly negotiated and shifting limits, which may change over time. Hiking in the Cascade mountains, for example, one knows one crosses an avalanche shoot when, somewhat abruptly, the tall, rigid Ponderosa and Lodgepole pines are replaced by tangles of whippy aspen and flexible cottonwoods. Avalanche shoots are not bounded areas, but they cohere as places where the crush of snow and ice has cut down the mountain, year after year, resulting in the flourishing of certain kinds of vegetation (and not others), and thus forming a distinct place within the wider mountainside. In this example, a place's unity does not come from boundaries, but by a formative event (the avalanche) and the relational activity (persistence of life as a biotic community in the aftermath of that event). I will say more just ahead about the specific relational activity that I argue gives place its unitary structure, but for now it is enough to say that the unitary structure of place is formed not by limits, but by its formation around a common, coherent teleologically-oriented activity.

Thus far I have been speaking of the multiplicity of being and relations that form a place internally, but places are also characterized by external multiplicity: that is, by numerical plurality. All places have location. Since location is, by definition, relational—that is, location indicates where one is in relation to other places and other bodies—there can be no singular place.[45] Every place is situated in a world of places, so to speak. In so far as the possibility of a "here" is dependent on

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[45] The distinction between absolute and relative location is a pragmatic one, which allows one to differentiate between two modes of communicating the location of things. In actuality, however, even a so-called absolute location is relational since coordinate position on lines of latitude and longitude communicate location relative to Earth's equator and prime meridian. On this matter, see Gerald R. Pitzl, "Relative Location," in *Encylopedia of Human Geography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2004), 210.

there being so much as a "there," place is necessarily always at least two in number. [46] To be a place, then, is always to be a place among places.

If places are always multiple and nest inside one another, can we speak of maximal place, a place containing all other places? Aristotle wrestled with this question: "Does the outermost sphere (which, as encompassing all lesser spheres, provides a place for them) *itself have a place*? Or is it an *unplaced placer*, not entirely unlike the Unmoved Mover posited at its periphery?"[47] Aristotle determined that, due to the fact that place must be in relation to other places, one cannot speak of a singular, maximal place: "The heavens are not, as a whole, somewhere or in some place," indeed, "the whole is not anywhere."[48] Simplicius, however, had argued otherwise; namely, that one can, in fact, speak of a maximal cosmic place: "there is, in truth, the whole place of the whole universe (*holos topos tou holou kosmou*), but it has its supreme position through the good arrangement in respect of its parts and through its whole good arrangement in respect of its parts."[49] And again: "the essential place of the universe has stored up all the varying places and produces from within itself the proper measure of every position."[50] For Simplicius, to speak of a maximal Place does not undermine the claim that place is relative, and therefore, always multiple, since this maximal Place depends on a "good arrangement" of parts, which is to say, the good arrangement of all the "varying places" nested within it. For Simplicius, the maximal cosmic place is perfectly fitting for itself: parts fit for whole, whole fit for parts, all in good arrangement with one another. Whether Simplicius or

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[46] Casey makes a similar claim and provides a similar example in his discussion of the distinction between time and space, such that "time is one; space is two—at least two." See, Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* 349.

[47] Here Aristotle's question is paraphrased by Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 104. See also, *Aristotle's Physics*, 212b8-9.

[48] *Aristotle's Physics*, 212b8-9.

[49] Simplicius, "Corollaries on Place and Time," in *The Concept of Place in Late Neoplatonism* ed. S. Samburksy and S. Plines (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences adn Humanities, 1971), 61, 64.

[50] Ibid., 64.

Aristotle is ultimately correct on the matter of a maximal place, each takes pains to affirm the relativity, nested nature, and multiplicity of place.

Places, I am proposing, are characterized by multiplicity in two ways. They are constituted by an internal multiplicity of being—of bodies and the socio-spatial relations between them. A place is not, then, a monolithic substance. A single rock does not constitute a place in and of itself, but rocks arranged in a cairn theoretically could, were the other attributes of place also present. Places are also characterized by numerical multiplicity, in so far as a place is always a relational participant in a world of places. Movement between and negotiation of layered, nested, and contested places, then, are part of what it is to live in and through place.[51]

d. Places are Dynamic and Durable

The unitary nature of places does not render them stagnant. Rather, the relationality of places means that they are always changing, being renegotiated and contested. Places are dynamic and have time running through them, such that the same location may be a different place at different times. Like other forms of relationship, places are formed, transformed, and dissolved. They come and go. In human experience, this can be the cause of both celebration and lament, some times all at once. Even as human beings may want their places to change—to reflect changing situations, needs, aesthetics, etc.—human beings also seem to long for a kind of consistency of place—for the

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[51] In some corners of place studies, one hears place and implacement spoken of as though they were alternatives to movement and migration (as though the "implaced life" were one of stasis), when, in fact, the multiplicity of places and their relational webs are that in and through which one moves. And, given their nested character, even firmly rooted forms of implacement (say, a tree's implacement along the riverbank) are always nested in other places, such that one is always more than one place.

childhood home that can be returned to, for the room that can be navigated by memory in the dark, for the walking path and landmarks one knows by heart.[52]

Places are dynamic phenomena, but have sufficient coherence and perdurance such that human beings come to expect a certain lastingness from them. Structures of relations that are too ephemeral are experienced more as events than as places. Consider, for example, an art festival in a city park. Though the rows of booths and artisan wares, and festival attendees together form social and spatial relations that give the event a material structure, it will all be taken down at night's end. Such a "pop-up event" might constitute a place, but one more dynamic than durable, whereas the city park in which the event is nested is perhaps more durable than dynamic, being formed of the same trees and perennials year after year. Where a given place falls along the dynamic-durable continuum contributes to a place's character and ambiance, its meaning, and how one relates to it. One relates to and expects different things of one's (durable) home than one's camping tent. This will be important just ahead when we turn to our discussion of the function of place in human life.

e. Places Make Room

The relational nature of place, its multiplicity in unity, and its dynamism and durability: each of these characteristics finds its fulfillment in the essential activity of place: namely, to make room.[53] Places

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[52] The phenomenon of longing for the constancy of a remembered home has, in particular, been the subject of much reflection. See, for example, Leroy S. Rouner, ed. *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1996).

[53] The concept of "making room," as employed here, derives from the Greek verb *chorein,* meaning "to make room for another," "to give place," and "to receive," and the related noun, *chora,* meaning place, room, land, ground, and region.[53] I have chosen this way of speaking about place's spacious provision for others because it avoids the empty, non-relational, inert connotations of the English "space," by its lexical link to the land and body as well as its implications of purposiveness. The verbal form of the word, *chorein*, means "to make room for another." *Chorein* means literally to make room for someone or something, as when one scoots over on a bench to make room for another to sit. To make room is not to withdraw presence—as though one were fashioning a kind of void for another, which is an intrinsic impossibility since being requires place, not a void—but is to make room *in the midst of presence*. Since place and being co-arise, without presence there would be no room

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make room for act and being. I propose that this is the key to how place becomes a unitary phenomenon out of its essential multiplicity.

Places make room in at least two primary ways. Some places make room by creating an openness or capaciousness within their relational web and material structure. Let us call this *capacious room-making.* This is how buildings make room, namely, by holding open space within the relations of their structural frame and interior design for people and activity to take place there. One can enter into them and move around in the space they create. Capacious room-making is seen outside of the built environment as well. Consider, for example, that a coral reef is also a place of capacious room-making. Within its relational structure—in the dynamic and purduring interchange between warm and cold water, within the corals' own material structure of rooms and corridors—a coral reef makes room for the being and activity of other creaturely lives: for fish and mollusks and oceanic vegetation, for the laying of eggs and for the predator lying-in-wait. Capacious room-making is possible because places are spatially finite: discrete and delimited by some boundary, some recognizable end, edge, or exit. The boundaries of a place and the open structure of its relations contribute to its room-making capacity. This is as true of a building as it is of a coral reef: each is, to some degree porous (having openings and interaction with what is outside its own relational structure) and to some degree bounded, such that one would recognize the difference between being in the building or in the reef and being outside it.

Let us call the second way in which places create room *ingathering.* Some places are formed around a central object or body, the presence of which draws other beings and activities to itself. As it draws others to itself, room is made around the central body, which establishes the area as a

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made, no place established that could be so much as *for another.* The concept of presence will receive fuller treatment in Chapter Two. For now, it is enough to establish that "room," as a characteristic of place, is not empty space, not a void, but is saturated with the presence of the room-makers.

place.[54] When room is made by ingathering, the place formed is often more dynamic than durable since the space it creates depends on the continued ingathering of others to that central body. For example, imagine a street performer playing music on the sidewalk. The sidewalk itself is not ordinarily a place, but when the performer starts to make music, people gather around the musician, creating a place, if a short-lived one. Imagine, too, the way the Islamic call to prayer summons the faithful to orient their bodies in prayer toward the Kaaba in Mecca from wherever they are in the world. This ritual practice of place-making symbolically extends the place of Mecca to the far reaches of the globe and recognizes the whole earth as a place gathered as one in faithful submission. Whether a place offers a limited *capaciousness* or *ingathers* toward a central object or body, places make room for being and for activity.

f. Places bear a sedimentation of meaning

One significant characteristic of place remains: namely, the meaningfulness of places. Places are experienced as non-neutral with respect to meaning. This is owed to the ways places bear histories

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[54] Robert Pogue Harrison describes this *ingathering* characteristic of place through an interpretation of Wallace Stevens' poem "Anecdote of the Jar," which begins:

> I placed a jar in Tennessee,
> And round it was, upon a hill.
> It made the slovenly wilderness
> Surround that hill.
>
> The wilderness rose up to it,
> And sprawled around, no longer wild.
> […]

While Harrison uses this poem to describe place-making as a uniquely human activity—"Places do not occur naturally but are created by human beings through some mark or sign of human presence. […] A wilderness in itself is placeless."—I am giving an account of place that recognizes the place-making activity of non-human creatures and the dignity of non-human places. Even apart from such a human-centered assessment of place, this poem still provides an image of the way a body (in this case the jar) gathers others around itself into relation. This also harkens back to an aspect of place discussed in the introduction to this chapter, namely, that place is not simply an object of experience, but also a way of seeing. See, Robert Progue Harrison, "Hic Jacet," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 350.

and narratives, as well as to the fact that they are relationally constituted. Places are richly constituted and characterized by the sedimentations of meaning that their histories, narratives, and relations bring to them. This is true in both a physical and figurative way.

In a physical sense, places are composed of both the present relations that constitute it, as well as the past relations, events, and meanings that have constituted it in the past. I use the term "sedimentation" to speak of this phenomenon in part to evoke Husserl's use of the term with respect to the ways that the meaning of a concept sediments over time, its contested and diverse history becoming reduced to a convention, but primarily to evoke the ecological phenomenon of sedimentation. Soil—the very ground on which one stands—is a sedimentation of the past, a product of the decomposition of former lives into something rich and complex. Every place one stands is the result of what has come before. Rock and lava, soil and forest floor: all are the product of a long history of sedimentation. Likewise, every place is what it is because of what has come before in that place. A place is characterized by the rich and complex relational and material accretion of the past.

Place is a sedimentation of history and meaning in a figurative sense, too. Places come to bear layers of meaning over time. They become storied and have cultural, communal, and personal significance. Sometimes this sedimentation of meaning reveals the complexity of the past from which it arises; other times, as Husserl's use of the concept emphasizes, this sedimentation obscures this complex, even contradictory history as it becomes a unitary, complex place. Obscured or not, places bear meanings and are not a clean slate. Indeed, a location without a history or meaning, without significance or value, is hardly a place at all. As a simple example, consider the difference between a hundred year old house, thickened (quite literally) with layers of wallpaper and (figuratively) with the memories and lives of all who have lived in it, its garden soil bearing the remains of pets, the roots of well-established trees, etc., and a newly constructed house, where no

one has ever lived, on earth that is freshly tilled and leveled. There may be good reasons to judge either one as better than the other as a potential dwelling, but the old house does bear a thicker sedimentation of meaning and, in that sense, has thicker placeness. Of course, for a person who elects to move into the new house, its lack of sedimentation may make it a good and fitting place, bearing the significance of a fresh start, a home of one's own. However, until that house becomes meaningful to someone, it remains merely a location: a construction site, a piece of real estate, a property with place-potential. Even if the old house bears a negative valuation (its material and figurative accretions could include asbestos and great sadness), it remains a thicker place because of these sedimentary layers of meaning. The meaning that a place carries can be negative or positive, contested, and overlapping with respect to other meanings. But to be a place, formally speaking, it must bear a certain sedimentation of meaningfulness. A more detailed account of the distinction between place formally speaking (placeness) and place materially or normatively speaking (good and fitting place) is forthcoming.

g. Conclusion

In this section, I have been tracing the characteristics of place as they give themselves to be known in everyday human experience. Place, we have seen, a) co-arises with being, such that there is no being without place or place without being. In this way, it is bound up with the body and with experience. b) Places are formed by the social and spatial relations among things that exist. This way of thinking about place proposes that relationality is fundamental to being itself, that being is always being-in-relation, always inclined toward the forming of places. Places involve location, then, not because they are subsets of space (as in the limited spatiality view), but because location is a way of speaking about places in spatial relation to other places. c) Places are instances of a plurality of beings forming something unitary and inhabitable. Fundamentally relational and inseparable from

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the body, d) places are dynamic yet durable, changing over time yet concrete and (at least somewhat) purduring, having histories. e) Most importantly, places make room, either by providing a *capaciousness* or by *ingathering*. In this way, place is not a subdivision of apriori space, but generates and gives space within its relational structure.

As a formal definition of place, then, I propose that place is a *room-making structure of relations*. A place, by this account, is where the characteristics discussed above give themselves to be known in experience. Where some of those characteristics are weakly experienced, a location is thin with respect to placeness. Where they are wholly absent, the location is non-place. Purported places, then, can be conceived as falling along a rough continuum of placeness:

Place ⟵-----*thick-----thin*-----⟶ Non-place[55]

By "thick" and "thin," I mean to evoke the density with which the various characteristics of place are experienced in a given locale.[56] Where they are absent, a place becomes thinner with respect to placeness. To clarify, for those familiar with the conceptual vocabulary of place studies, my use of "non-place" is not to be associated with Relph's "placelessness" or Augé's "nonplace,"

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[55] To similar effect, Relph has proposed this continuum, represented here in truncated form:
PLACE ⟵----PLACE----place----_place_----⟶ placelessness
Relph's continuum is helpful conceptually in so far as it shows that everything to the left of placelessness is still "place" in a formal sense, even as it admits in degrees. His concept of placelessnes, however, is negatively valued such that placenessness is something he thinks one would do well to avoid creating or inhabiting. To remain in the strictly formal account of place, without yet speaking of the "goodness" or "badness" of places, I propose the language of "non-place." Finally, while Relph's continuum is helpful visually, it is difficult to work with in prose because the capitalizations and font variants that distinguish meanings are easily confused with grammatical capitalizations and italics of emphasis. For that reason, I propose the language of thick and thin place. Relph's continuum is found in full and more nuanced form here: Edward Relph, "A Pragmatic Sense of Place and the Future of Places," *Placeness, Place, Placelessness* (2017), http://www.placeness.com/a-pragmatic-sense-of-place-and-the-future-of-places/.
[56] By contrast, I do not mean to evoke the notion from Celtic spirituality of "thin places" as places "where the membrane between the material world and the world of spiritual realities is particularity thin." George MacLeod, founder of the modern Iona Community in Scotland, is anecdotally credited with this definition in Philip Sheldrake, *Living between Two Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1995), 84, see also 7, 55.

both of which bear a negative valuation.[57] To be "non-place," by my account, is not necessarily to

have negative value—to be a bad place—but is simply not to fulfill the definition of a place and,

therefore, to be better described by a term such as location, site, area, or container. (A parking lot,

for example, is a thin place because it is hardly dynamic or meaningful, though it does make a fitting

site for cars. A parking lot that becomes a farmer's market on a Saturday morning is a much thicker

place—dynamic, relational, room-making, etc.). To reiterate something discussed above, when one

finds oneself in a non-place—a locale that does not exhibit the characteristics of place—one is

always already nested within a larger place. One can be in a non-place, then, but one cannot be

noplace, that void of being of which there is no creaturely experience: *no place, no being.* To our

continuum, then, we can add a hard stop between non-place and *noplace*:

$$\text{Place} \leftarrow\text{-----}\textit{thick-----thin-----}\rightarrow \text{Non-place} \mid \textit{Noplace}$$

Despite the presence of a hard stop between non-place and *noplace*, *noplace* belongs mapped onto this

continuum of placeness because it is what appears when the very last characteristic of place (being

itself, existing in relation) is absent.

2. The Functions of Place in Human Life (by way of its Loss)

Places are not static or neutral phenomena in the world. Places function and have value in human

life. One primary way they function is through attachment. "Place attachment" is a widely

recognized, if under-studied phenomenon, which focuses on the home-place as a site of profound

attachment.[58] To be attached to a place is to recognize a relationship between place and personhood

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[57] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995); Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976); Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*

[58] One new and well-conceived contribution to the literature on place attachment sets attachment theory in constructive conversation with theology: Natalia Marandiuc, *The Goodness of Home: Human and Divine Love and the Making of Self* (Oxford: Oxford, 2018). The notion of "place-identity," an

or personal identity. "Knowing who and where are intimately linked," writes Gary Snyder, "There are no limits to the possibilities of the study of *who* and *where*."[59] In order to recognize the ways that place functions in human life with respect to personal attachments, I propose that we look to the effects of the loss of place where one has personal attachment, that is, to displacement. What exactly is lost when one loses the place to which one has personal attachment? What does displacement sever, negate, and bring to ruin? The experience of displacement brings with it a particular set of sorrows and longings. It also illumines a particular understanding of place as not only meaningful—as though meaning were something added on to geographical space or location—but as constitutive of the human experience of self, other, and world.

In this section, I draw on accounts of displacement as a way to understand this function of place in human life and experience. This is, on the one hand, a practical approach to conceptual analysis: the essence and function of a thing sometimes becomes clearest in its loss. But understanding place by way of its loss is also a matter of theological commitment, namely, a kind of preferential option for the perspectives of those who suffer the loss of place and the vulnerabilities of displacement. This preferential option is grounded in the epistemological and ethical norms implied in the theology of the cross, which this project hopes to become, in spirit and method. Epistemologically, this preferential option means taking seriously Luther's understanding that the cross itself—Christ's own and the manifold forms of sin and suffering in our own world—provides

aspect of place-attachment, first found expression in the work of Abbe K. Fabian Harold M. Proshansky, Robert Kaminoff, "Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3 (1983); Abbe K. Fabian Harold M. Proshansky, "The Development of Place Identity in the Child," in *Spaces for Children: The Built Environment and Child Development*, ed. Thomas G. David Carol Simon Weinstein (New York: Plenum Press, 1987); Harold M. Proshansky, "The City and Self-Identity," *Environment and Behavior* 10, no. 2 (1978).

[59] Gary Snyder, "Reinhabitation," in *The Old Ways* (Stanford: City Lights Books, 1977), 65.

the "best view on all reality."[60] We listen to those who suffer the loss of place, then, because there is

epistemic clarity to be found there. Ethically, this preferential option means developing our

phenomenological account of place in a way that recognizes the ambiguities of place and the ways

that the power of place is often used against human and creaturely flourishing. Only by so doing,

can this account of place be serviceable in the development of norms for place-making in view of

the cross, which will be taken up in the final chapter on the Church.[61]

     The account of displacement that follows draws on two kinds of examples: everyday

examples of displacement that arise from common experiences of the contingencies of place and

examples of radical displacement given in testimonies by forcibly displaced people, including

refugees and the recently deported.[62] My hope in doing so is to hold together those displacements

that are a matter of injustice and urgent concern in our world today and those that are a matter of

everyday human, creaturely experience under the conditions of finitude. In general, examples of

displacement illumine three primary aspects of the experience: separation, disorientation, and

exposure. Let us consider each in turn.

a. Displacement separates.

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[60] On the epistemological significance of the theology of the cross, see Mary M. Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

[61] In addition to being a theological commitment, listening to such experiences of place distinguishes this project from other theological projects on place, which tend (on the whole) to approach place and place-attachment as an unambiguous good in human life.

[62] In so doing I draw on the ethnographic work and analysis of sociologist Deborah Boehm, who studies the social and personal effects of deportation, especially on those living in the United States who have been deported to Mexico, and those who live with the fear of deportation. I also draw on the work of theologian H. Jan Holton, who has lived and worked in communities affected by forced displacement in the Congo, South Sudan, and Uganda, as well as in communities of the homeless in the United States, including U.S. soldiers returning from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. See, Deborah Boehm, *Returned: Going and Coming in an Age of Deportation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); M. Jan Holton, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

To be displaced is not to be removed from an implaced existence altogether, but to be relocated in a different, perhaps ill-fitting, unknown, or insecure place. It is to feel "out of place," even as one is still *somewhere,* in the world of places. (In the language developed above, displacement is not to *noplace,* but to some other place, of some degree of thinness or thickness along our formal continuum.) Displacement, then, is first of all a separation—not from place itself—but from one's home-place, which Holton defines well as "the place where most of us first learn to make meaning from the environment around us, to experience a deep sense of belonging, to develop a sense of relative security within place and relationships, and to built lasting relationships with others […]."[63] Home is, she continues, "where our self-identity begins to form."[64] Displacement, then, is more than simple dislocation. Displacement separates one from the place where one has developed meaning, belonging, safety, community, and personal identity.

Displacement separates in multiple ways. Forced migrants and deportees are compelled to leave a place, whether by deteriorating situations of violence, forcible removal, or ecological degradation. The displaced are separated from the place where they have lived, built families and communities and accustomed ways of life. The fragmentation of displaced peoples is social as well as spatial: "families are divided and reconfigured, parents and children live in different nations, partners do their best to maintain relationships that span international borders."[65] Here we call to mind the native Alaskan Iñupiat community of Sarichef Island as well as the I-Kiribati of the Island of Tarawa in the central Pacific, whose ancestral homes are rapidly disappearing due to the rising tides of climate change. As the Iñupiat and the I-Kiribati face the loss of their islands, places richly sedimented with meaning expressed in their respective cultures, legends, ways of life, and the remains of their ancestors, they reflect on their sense of separation, not only from the location itself,

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[63] Holton recognizes that one's primary residence is not always a place of belonging and safety, et al, and addresses such concerns in Holton, 15.
[64] Holton.
[65] Boehm, 2.

but from who they are as a people. For them, place and identity are bound up together: "[this place] is who we are—we are tied to the land and the sea," says one resident of Sarachef Island.[66] Likewise, a resident of Kiribati claims that the island itself "is the most important part of me."[67] For this reason, another says that, "To be part of a nation that might be under the sea, gives me a feeling that I am from nowhere."[68] This is the threat that displacement presents to the human person: to be from *nowhere* is to be no one. The threat of *noplace* is present, it seems, even in displacement to an unfitting place that lacks meaning or personal attachment. Displacement separates, I am suggesting, not only from location, but also from a sense of identity, both personal and communal.

While we tend to think of displacement in terms of forced migrations, displacement also describes the situation of those who—without ever leaving their place—find themselves no longer in the place where they once were because their place has changed around them such that they are no longer in the same place, even though they remain in the same location. On a quotidian scale, this happens as people remain in the same home even as the neighborhood around them changes. On a more radical scale, one can remain in the same home or city as it undergoes an altering event, such as a natural disaster, violent conflict, or colonial occupation. Since a place is always a place in time, one can experience a sense of displacement from *the way things were*. The relationship between the experience of displacement and changing social and spatial relations confirms the dynamism of place. While the dynamic character of places is particularly evident in the built environment, where

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[66] Sarichef Island resident Annie Weyiouanna describes the experience in this way, as reported by Trevor Hughes, "Residents on Remote Alaska Island Fear Climate Change Will Doom Way of Life," *USA Today*, 2 June 2017 2017. For scholarly accounts of the displacements facing the Iñupiat, see, "Climate Change, Displacement, and Community Relocation: Lessons from Alaska," ed. Jeremy Lennard (Norwegian Refugee Council and the Alaska Institute for Justice, May 2017); Robin Bronen, "Climate-Induced Displacement of Alaska Native Communities," (University of Alaska, Fairbanks: Alaska Institute for Justice January 30, 2013).
[67] Brian Reed, "Preparing for Sea Level Rise, Islanders Leave Home," *National Public Radio* (2011), https://www.npr.org/2011/02/17/133681251/preparing-for-sea-level-rise-islanders-leave-home.
[68] Salvatore Cardoni, "Kiribati: Sinking at the Intersection of Climate Change and Faith," *Takepart* (2011), http://www.takepart.com/news/2011/02/16/kiribati-at-the-front-lines-of-climate-change-and-faith.

human beings are always at work forming and transforming their places, landscapes also change. Whether by the slow movement of glaciers, the shifts of tectonic plates, or changes in climate and ecosystem, places do not stay the same, but reflect the dynamic quality of the relations that compose them. The fundamental separation of displacement, then, can be a spatial or a social separation and it also can be the result of changes over time. That displacement can be experienced even without a change of location points to something critical about the experience of place: place is not spatial location with social attributes and meaningfulness added to it, but is fundamentally composed of both social and spatial relations together, such that either a change in social or spatial relations can prompt an experience of displacement.

Accounts of displacement often speak in terms of longing, of homesickness, and of loneliness, each of which speak to an underlying sense of separation, of being cut-off and far away, even when one's displacement has not taken one far in terms of sheer distance. One experiences displacement as "an unhealable rift."[69] In this way, displacement "can disrupt spiritual, psychological, and social flourishing by interrupting the central aspects of home (meaning, belonging, relationship, and sense of security)."[70] Indeed, displacement is a kind of interruption and fragmentation of the felt continuity of one's life and personhood. Displaced, one is separated from sustaining relations, relations that had grounded and oriented one's sense of self.

The experience of displacement as separation confirms that place is something relational. Furthermore, place is something in and through which one comes to know oneself *as relational*, as a self in relation to others and to a world. Place is, moreover, both spatial (a relational *where* for one's body and its movements) and social (a sphere formed by relations among people, creatures, and things). The recognition that displacement is separation from place—not to *noplace* at all, but to

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[69] Here Edward Said speaks specifically of the experience of exile. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2000), 137.
[70] Holton, 11.

some other ill-fitting or not home-like place—confirms the multiple and nested character of place. Places appear in a world of places, as one among many, each having its own identity and character, its own formative relations. In this sense, places also appear to be finite (having limits), concrete, and particular. Finally, since separation from place so often evokes longing and a sense of alienation, places seem to be something to which one belongs, something integral to one's sense of identity, personhood, and belonging in the world. Good and fitting places, then, are places where this belonging, identity, and personhood are well-gathered and grounded, places where the gathered find flourishing in life together. Malfitting places might still gather people and provide a sense of belonging, but do so in a way that undermines life and flourishing, rather than making room for it. Indeed, the island residents referenced above are grappling with the gradual transition of their respective islands from being good and fitting place for the ingathering of their communities to being an inhospitable, uninhabitable place that cannot gather a community and its identity fittingly any longer.

b. Displacement disorients

The experience of displacement causes a fundamental disorientation. Whether one experiences displacement as being adrift, trapped, or lost, one loses the fundamental landmarks by which one knew where one was and who one was. Orienting landmarks can be physical—the mountains to the north, the gridded city streets, the water tower above the fields, or the ocean that surrounds—giving order to one's spatial world and one's movements. The absence of orienting landmarks makes the image of being lost at sea such an icon of displacement. Orientating landmarks also can be social and cultural: a call to prayer that organizes the day, a community well, or a small town Kwik Trip that serves as a gathering place and center of social exchange. Displaced, one loses the cues of place that orient one in time, in community, and in space.

Displacement also disorients one's sense of oneself, that is, one's identity. Personal identity, scholars of displacement uniformly note, is bound up with places and the relations and habits of living associated with them. The disorienting effects of displacement have been described as an acute "confusion and cloudiness," of not knowing who one is or how to belong in one's new place.[71] "When I walk around here in Mexico," writes one woman in the aftermath of deportation, "I feel very strange, almost dizzy."[72] The chaos and disorientation of displacement can render one "alien"—unknown and strange—even to oneself, such that one can come to feel like "an observer in [one's] own home."[73] All the landmarks of one's identity, all the ways one heretofore has known who one was—one's role in a family or community, one's work, one's language and capacity for self-expression, one's patterns of living—are dismantled or otherwise marginalized, leaving one with a sense of being adrift even from oneself. Since displacement is experienced as disorientation—as fragmentation, chaos, and a sense of being lost or forgotten—place appears to be something that plays an orienting role both spatially and in personal and communal identities.

c. Displacement exposes

"To be forcibly evicted from one's home and neighborhood," human geographer Tuan writes, "is to be stripped of a sheathing, which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world."[74] Tuan's choice of language—"stripped of a sheathing"—indicates the sense of vulnerability and exposure that displacement evokes. Displacement strips one of the protections of community and culture, those social relations in which one knows one's place, purpose, and identity. Displacement exposes one to psychological vulnerabilities, such as depression and loss of

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[71] Sociologist Deborah Boehm writes about the disorientating experience of deportation, especially for children and young adults raised in the United States for whom deportation is displacement to a "home country" to which they have never been. Boehm, 103.
[72] Ibid., 97.
[73] Ibid., 104.
[74] Tuan, *Topophilia*, 99.

agency, as well as to physical vulnerabilities, such as hunger, unemployment, and violence.[75] For all

the strength it takes to leave one's home when necessary, to find what one needs along the way, to

remain vigilant to dangers, displaced people are a vulnerable population, often exploited because

they are stripped of the protective sheathing of community and place.

Since displacement exposes, place appears to play a role in clothing and sheltering people. It

appears to be something so intimately bound up with the human body, personal identity, and

relationships, that when place is ill-fitting or deteriorated in some way, it causes people to experience

insecurity, isolation, and vulnerability. Place, it seems, is not merely one's environment or spatial

context, but something intimately related to one's sense of self and safety. In displacement, it is not

that one is without place, but that one's place does not feel fitting or properly sheltering. In other

words, displacement is the loss of home-place, of good and fitting place. Human life and flourishing

depend on place itself (formally understood), but also on good and fitting places. While

displacement could be relocation to a good and fitting place in theory, the vulnerability of displaced

peoples (owed to their separation from communities of support, economic opportunity, accustomed

ways of life, etc.) means that, more often than not, displacement means relocation in *unfitting places.*

Much more could be said about displacement, but this brief consideration of the separating,

disorienting, and exposing experiences of displacement sufficiently guides our consideration of the

way place functions in human life materially. Place, it seems, draws lives together from a state of

dispersion and creates a unity out of plurality without diminishing difference among the multiple

lives that compose it. Good and fitting places do this in ways that build life-honoring community,

unify around life-giving meanings. In this way, we see place as active rather than passive: gathering,

collecting, and uniting things together into something new. Place also functions in human life by

situating and orienting one in relation to others and the wider world. It positions one both spatially

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[75] Boehm, 2.

and socially, distinguishing one from others while also setting one in relation to them. Good and fitting places orient one well and rightly, toward a true north, a good purpose, while bad places orient one toward false goods, false ends, and moving targets. (Consider how some stores are designed like mazes to keep you inside, buying more, guiding shoppers' attention ever to the next display.) And place functions as a kind of clothing or shelter. Good and fitting places clothe and shelter well, protecting the vulnerabilities of human life and honoring the bodies of creatures, while ill-fitting places clothe and shelter in ways that may stifle, erase, or entrap human life.

d. A Working Account of Place

Over the last three sections, the characteristics and function of place have come into view. Looking to everyday experience, we have seen that place is not a subset of absolute space, but something fundamentally relational. The fundamental relationality of place does not make it a kind of secondary phenomenon—as though one could first *be,* independent of any place, and then enter into place-forming relations. Rather, place and being are found together in experience. One cannot know being apart from place, or place apart from the beings that compose it. What is more, the relationality of being forms something unitary and open, something inseparable from the beings that compose it and also irreducible to them. This complex, unitary structure, to return to Malpas' language, makes room either capaciously or by ingathering. For this reason, I have proposed a formal definition of place as *a room-making structure of relations*, and offered the following continuum:

Place ←-----*thick*-----*thin*-----→ Non-place | *Noplace*

Our discussion of displacement, however, has introduced the need for judgment regarding place. That is, if places are to serve well their gathering, sheltering, and orienting function—that is, if they are to gather *good* community, shelter *appropriately,* and orient one *rightly*—and if they are to ground personhood and identity in healthy ways, then they must be more than "place," formally

speaking. They must also be *good places*. For the sake of simplicity, I propose that we ground the ethical norm for place as Timothy Gorringe does, namely, in life and its flourishing. On the normative judgment of place, he writes, "Theologically what is at issue is always what promotes life and what destroys it."[76] While Gorringe grounds this claim theologically in an appeal to Scripture's witness to a God who reveals Godself in creation, in the law, and in Jesus as a God who desires life for creatures, "life in all its fullness" (Jn. 10:10), it can also be grounded on the basis of human experience, where that which promotes the integrity and flourishing of human life is generally experienced as good, and things that promote the dissolution and constriction of human life are generally avoided. Such judgments are made every day as people assess the fittingness of places for their lives and activities and make decisions about places, from big decisions about where to live, for example, to minute decisions about which seat to take on the bus (the one with more leg room, farther from the person chewing loudly), or tactical decisions about how to survive a malfitting place and find within its relations the best chance of life and flourishing.

Place, Gorringe maintains, is "important for the promotion of fullness of life."[77] Not only is place important *for* the promotion of fullness of life, I would add, but provision for the fullness of life is written into the very meaning of "good place." Good place can be defined as *a structure of relations that makes room for the fullness of life*. A fuller account of "fullness of life" will appear in Chapter Two. For now, let us simply say that fullness of life is life gathered in good community, sheltered appropriately, and oriented rightly.

In addition to our continuum of place, then, we can also map places on a normative continuum of place, where the normative standard of goodness is provision for life's flourishing in creaturely community:

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[76] Timothy J. Gorringe, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 77.
[77] Ibid.

Good place ←-----*fitting-----malfitting-----*→ Distorted place

On the left, we map good places, places that make room for the fullness of creaturely life. The good nature of place is not something added on to the formal structure of place, but an experience of life in and through place. There we might map the loving home, the school where children flourish in wonder and growth, the healthy, thriving ecosystem, the drop-in counseling center where people are received fittingly, just as they are. These are not necessarily places free of conflict or pain, but are places that make room fittingly therein for flourishing, even in the midst of life's finitudes, ambiguities, and complexities. On the right, we map distorted places that deny creaturely dignity and undermine human personhood: immigration detention centers where children are separated from their parents, homes formed by manipulation and violence, cities where laws and their enforcements treat black and brown bodies and lives as if they do not matter. They are places formed of sinful relations, wherein room is made not for life's flourishing but for its distortion and disintegration. A fuller account of sinful relations and how they manifest in place also is forthcoming in Chapter Two. For now it is enough to say that the more distorted a place becomes, the more it not only fails to make room for the flourishing of life, but actively undermines it. In experience, most places are somewhere in the middle, formed of an ambiguous combination of relations that are both good and distorted, making room for life not in its fullness, but partially and imperfectly.

To the far right, even beyond distorted places, we can add what I will call *lived noplace*, unambiguously distorted places actively formed for the systematic annihilation of personhood and negation of creaturely life:

Good place ←-----*neutral place-----*→ Distorted place -----→*Lived noplace*

Lived noplace is not only meaningless, but silences all attempts at meaning-making. It is the aftermath of the nuclear bomb, the planetary wasteland, the torture chamber. It is solitary confinement for months and counting. It is hellish place. *Lived noplace* is the result of place-making power turned

systematically against life and its flourishing, against personhood and meaning. It is *lived* noplace because, unlike the void, such places do exist in our world and must be faced theologically. But it is a lived *noplace* because it is a kind of void with respect to meaning, utter chaos with respect to orientation, and unmooring with respect to personhood.

The normative account of place enables us to speak more clearly about what is at stake in displacement. Human beings form attachments to places of all kinds, that is, to good and distorted places. Displacement, then, is not identical to relocation to a distorted place. Consider, for example, that a child removed from an abusive home and placed in a (safe, welcoming) foster home, may still feel displaced (scattered from the familiar, exposed and vulnerable, disoriented), even though the new home may a "good place" compared to the place that has been left. That said, due to the vulnerability of being dislodged from one's home-place, displacement often lands people in places that do not make room for their lives and flourishing. Displacement is often, though not always, experienced as a threat to personhood and identity, especially since it involves the loss of a place where one's sense of meaning and one's memories were located. When displacement lands people in distorted places and *lived noplaces*—detention centers and prisons, borderlands, refugee camps, in-between places of hiding, waiting, and containment—they may experience their personhood and dignity as under threat both from without (by those who see the inhabitants of *lived noplace* as *non-people*) and from within (since it is difficult to establish new person-grounding attachments and sense of belonging in places that actively undermine and deteriorate identity and meaning-making).

Thus far I have been approaching the question of place from the perspective of human experience. That is, I have been exploring the phenomenon of place as it gives itself to be known in the myriad, nested places of creaturely life. In so doing, I have examined the central characteristics of place (co-arising with being, relational, plurality-in-unity, sedimented with history and meaning, dynamic and durable, room-making), the functions of place in human life (gathering, orienting,

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sheltering), and the ways place is experienced in human life as intimately linked to personhood and belonging. I have proposed a working definition of place as *a room-making structure of relations*—and distinguished between a formal and normative account of place. In so doing, I have introduced the concepts of thick and thin placeness, non-place, good and distorted placeness, *noplace* and *lived noplace* to our growing conceptual vocabulary. I also have discussed the ways in which human beings form attachments to places and often experience their identity and personhood as intimately linked to place, such that displacement is experienced as not merely a matter of relocation, but as a threat to personhood, meaning, and belonging. All of this has been worked out through an engagement with thinkers in the field of place studies and through careful attention to and assessment of everyday experience of places.

What remains, then, is a discussion of how this account of place opens outward toward the mystery of God. How do the everyday places of creaturely life relate to the God who is both present in and yet not contained by any place? How can the concept of place shed new light on our theological symbols, and how do our theological symbols challenge or affirm the concept of place as here developed? It is to the theological dimensions of the concept of place and its conceptual vocabulary that we now turn.

III. The Triune God as Place

Place is not only a complex concept that bears a "surfeit of meanings," but is, I now propose, an analogical concept. By the analogy of attribution, the places of creaturely life are attributed their "placeness" by their analogical relation to the Triune God. The Triune God is place in its first and proper sense. God fulfills both the formal account of place here developed and the normative account of place, such that God is both the fulfillment of placeness itself and the fulfillment of good

place in particular. Before giving an account of the Triune God as place, a word about the analogical functions of language is in order.

1. *The Analogical Functions of Language*

Language functions analogically when a relationship exists between two uses of a word that cannot be categorized as either univocal or equivocal. A word is used univocally when it is given the exact same meaning in two different contexts, as when "wet" is used to describe both the juice-soused kitchen towel and the rain-soaked park bench. In both contexts, to be wet just means to be saturated with moisture. A word is used equivocally when it has an entirely different meaning in two different contexts, as when "bark" is used to describe both the outer crust of a tree and the sound a dog makes. Though they are homophones, they might as well be different words. But what of words that have meanings that are related to one another, but are not equivalently so?

Analogical language functions in multiple ways. For our purposes, the type of most importance is the analogy of attribution. The analogy of attribution affirms an analogous relationship between two applications of a term, where one application is primary and the other secondary and derivative. For example, the term "insightful" may describe both a person and an essay. By the analogy of attribution, the person is properly called "insightful" (since persons are capable of insight) and an essay is called "insightful" derivatively in so far as it reflects the insight of its author (or fulfills its aim of provoking insight in its reader). In other words, an analogical term belongs properly to one analogue and is attributed to the other only to the degree that it reflects the term in its proper sense.

Analogical language, in this sense, is normative; there is a proper and fullest use that can be used to measure the appropriateness of attributing that term to other things. The proper sense of the term is the criterion for judging the appropriateness of derivative applications of the term. Whether

an essay, in fact, should be called insightful, for example, is determined on the basis of how well it lives up to its promise of reflecting or provoking human insight.

In a theological context, the analogy of attribution allows one to use the same language to speak of both God and creaturely life. In such cases, the application of the term to God is the first, proper, and normative meaning of the term. God is the principle analogue. To call God "love," for example, is to make God's own act and being the first and proper meaning of love, while creaturely relations may be called "loving" to the degree that they live up to love as made known in God. Creaturely relations, then, are judged as to their worthiness to bear the name of love by the normative standard of God's own love. When language functions analogically, the derivative uses of the term also evidence dissimilarities to the primary analogue. If love is defined—first and properly—as a matter of God's own act and being, then creaturely relationships are always both like and unlike love.

Although a concept (like love) is properly applied to God and secondarily applied to creaturely relationships, the order of creaturely knowledge and concept use runs in the other direction. That is, in the course of ordinary life creatures experience a variety of love-like relations. These creaturely relations allow us to form the concept of love but do not yet allow us to grasp its first and proper meaning. Once God's own love is made known to creatures in revelation, divine love stands as the normative standard by which all other relations can be judged as like and unlike love. Without the everyday examples of creaturely love-like relationships, however, we would not have the concept of love and would not, then, recognize God's own love *as love* since concept development requires a multiplicity of examples drawn from everyday experiences. [78]

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[78] The insight that one recognizes a concept's first and fullest application only retrospectively is thanks to Kevin Hector's discussion of analogical language in Kevin Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 134.

2. The Triune God as Place

When we speak of place, I am arguing, we speak analogically. By the analogy of attribution, "place"

describes—first and normatively—the relationship proper to God as Trinity and it describes—

secondarily and derivatively—the various places of creaturely life insofar as they reflect or evoke the

place of the Triune God. Yet, though the Triune God is place in its first and fullest sense, we

recognize God *as* place only retrospectively, that is, after we have experienced *placeness* in its various

and diverse finite forms in everyday experience. Furthermore, in so far as the first and fullest sense

of a concept is also the norm by which other uses of the concept are judged, the Triune God is *the*

place that judges to what degree the everyday rooms, structures, fields, and landscapes of creaturely

life can be rightly called places. Any questions, then, that have arisen throughout this chapter

regarding whether specific examples should count as places now find their norm and standard in the

Triune God.

To speak of "God as Trinity" is, I take it, to evoke a central mystery about who God is and

how God gives Godself to be known by human beings. First, to speak of God as Trinity is to evoke

the mystery that God is One God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the

Spirit.[79] All three persons are God, and, yet, the symbol of the Trinity insists that there are not three

Gods, but One. The persons of the Trinity are equal in glory and in power, such that not one person

is subordinate to the others.[80] They are distinct yet not divided, different but not separate.[81] All three

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[79] In this project, I refer to the three persons of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit not without
some regret due to the gendered implications these terms bear. However, the alternative—first
Person, second Person, third Person—is inelegant, obscures the relationality between the three
persons, and suggests a temporal succession within the Godhead. Another alternative—Creator,
Redeemer, Sanctifier—is problematically modalistic and unnecessarily limiting since, for example,
the Spirit not only sanctifies but also creates and redeems, not to mention advocates, intercedes,
vivifies, and makes people into Christ's Body, etc. Father, Son, Spirit language reflects the language
Jesus used to describe his relationship with God as Father and as Spirit. I use the language of Father,
Son, Spirit, then, not to evoke a gender, but to emphasize the relationality of the Triune persons.
[80] Rather than defending these claims about the Trinity, my goal here simply is to articulate what I
take to be the general sense of the symbol of the Trinity as it is used in Christian theological

persons are uncreated and infinite, yet the Son is "begotten" of the Father, and the Spirit "proceeds" from the Father and the Son, which is to say the three persons are not simply differentiated from one another, but relate to one another. To speak of God as Trinity, then, is to point to a mystery— now articulated in the language this project has been using for place—of relationality, of multiplicity-in-unity, unity-in-multiplicity. Neither the multiplicity nor the unity of God precedes the other; as though God were One who subsequently determined to be made known in three persons. Rather, God is a Triunity, and there is no getting behind the relational Triunity of God.

God's triune relationality is often described in the language of *perichoresis*, which comes from the Greek: *peri* (around, with a sense of reciprocity) and *chorein* (to make room for another, as discussed earlier). *Perichoresis* often has been translated into English as "mutual interpenetration," but the roots of the Greek word invite a different kind of image: images of hospitality, receptivity, mutuality in bearing one another.[82] *Perichorisis*, I propose, describes the way in which the members of the Trinity relate to one another by "making room" for one another in the relationality of their mutual presence. Together, the Father and the Son make room for the Spirit, and the Spirit indwells their mutual presence. Together, the Spirit and the Son make room for the Father, and the Father

discourse. That said, a few references to foundational Trinitarian texts will accompany this discussion where they may be of help or have informed my thinking in particular.

The equality of the persons of the Trinity is emphasized in the *Quicunque Vult* (Athanasian Creed), which is unique among the Christian statements of faith in its dual focus on the Trinity and Christology. Its language rejects both subordinationism, whereby the Son and the Spirit are subordinated to the Father, and tritheism by emphasizing the divinity of all three persons of the Trinity. Though not widely used in liturgical practice, it is accepted by the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and some Anglican churches as a confessional statement of faith. Written in the late 5th or early 6th century, the language of the creed echoes Augustine's *On the Trinity*. I appeal to it here as a kind of shorthand for what I take to be basic Western Trinitarian theology.

[81] In *Adversus Praxean*, the 3rd century theologian Tertullian describes the one (*unus*) substance (*substantia*) of God as consisting in three persons (*personas*), which are distinct but not divided (*distincti non divisi*) and different but not separate (*discreti non separati*). These translations are from Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 6th edition ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2017), 304.

[82] As discussed earlier, *chorein* means "to make room for another," and is related to the noun *chora*, translated as place, space, room, countryside, and even womb. See, Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

indwells their mutual presence. Together, the Father and the Spirit make room in their mutual presence for the Son, and the Son dwells therein. By this fully reciprocal, room-making relation, the members of the Trinity form and give place to one another such that the place of the Son just is in the mutual presence of the Father and the Spirit, and so forth. Each member receives place in this way from the other two, while participating in relational place-making on behalf of the other two. As one God in Triunity, then, the Trinity is the place—the room-making relational structure—of God's own life. God is God's own place, given and received, co-arising with God's own being. The concept of place as a relational structure finds its fulfillment in God as a communion of mutual indwelling.

Let us look retrospectively to the characteristics and functions of place discussed above, imagining what it might mean to speak of the Triune God *as place* in its first and fullest sense. Place, I argued above, co-arises with being, such that neither place nor being precedes the other. The co-arising of place and being is fulfilled in God as Trinity. Neither the three persons of the Trinity nor the unity of the Trinity precedes the other, but co-arise such that one cannot get behind the persons of the Trinity to a more essential oneness, nor behind the oneness to a more essential multiplicity. As Trinity, *who God is* (God's being) co-arises with *what God does* (God's activity). There is no gap, so to speak, between God's relating, room-making activity and Godself. The relations internal to Godself—that is, the intra-Trinitarian relations—are not derivative of God's being, as though God first existed and then determined to relate to Godself in this room-making, inhabitory way. Rather, this dynamic and eternal relationality, whereby God makes room for Godself, grounds God's own life, just is God's being. God is God's own place, relationally formed.

The fundamental relationality of place, I also argued above, is both social and spatial in nature. The social and the spatial aspects of place, I argued, are not as readily distinguished from one another as it might first appear. In the context of God as Trinity, the social and spatial relations of

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place are also fulfilled. That the Trinity's relations are social has been argued well by other theologians.[83] But what are we to make of the claim that the Trinity's relations are spatial? Again, we must think of the concept of space as finding its first and fullest meaning in the relations of the Trinity. In human experience, "space" is that wherein bodies—extended, existent things—can so much as be differentiated from one another: near to, but not equal to, or far from, but related to. The relations of the Trinity are properly called spatial because the Trinity exemplifies this mode of differentiation-in-relation. The Father is not the Son, and yet the Father and the Son are who they are in relation to one another. They are distinct persons, yet one God. The Son is not the Spirit, and yet the Spirit and the Son are who they are only in relation to another: distinct, as proceeding one from the other, and yet one God. This is the meaning of "spatial relations"—not that they are concrete and particular bodies in an *a priori* space, not that they are locatable by setting coordinates on the vast abstraction of space. The spatial relations of the Trinity are their differentiation in unity, a differentiation implied in the language of triune personhood of God. For this reason, we can speak of the "structure of relations" of the Trinity as a communion, a differentiation in unity.

As place, the Triune God is a room-making communion, not only with respect to God's activity *ad intra*, but also with respect to God's relational activity *ad extra*. While the persons of the Trinity make room for one another in their mutual presence and so form God as place, the Triune God also makes room in the fullness of God's presence for creation. In this way God's mode of relating internally to Godself is also God's mode of relating to creation: God makes room for another. A fuller account of this room-making activity *ad extra* will be in Chapter Two, in which we

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[83] Diversely and non-comprehensively: Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991); Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM press, 1991); Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

explore the symbol of creation. For now, let it suffice to say that who God is in Godself is who God is toward creatures: a room-making communion, a fitting place for life in God's presence.

The dynamism and durability of place, as well as its bearing of history and meaning, also find fulfillment in the place of the Triune God. Creaturely places are dynamic, changing and adaptive in response to the creaturely lives that form and inhabit them. This dynamism contributes to the durability of places, which sometimes perdure longer than individual creaturely participants. The place of God as Trinity is like—and of course also unlike—this kind of dynamism and durability. The perichoretic relations of the Trinity entail that a certain dynamism is proper to God as Trinity, such that God is not stagnant or inert, but eternally engaged in God's room-making relations. The place of the Triune God is durable—indeed, eternal—and not given to dissolution or decay. As place, God bears all of time and history within Godself. Again, a fuller account of God's bearing creation within Godself will be in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to say that imagining the Triune God as place does not mean that God is not also the God of history, for history unfolds in God's room-making presence.

The mutual relations of the Trinity form the fitting place for each member of the Trinity such that God is God's own place of belonging and shelter, God's own place of receiving and orientation. Indeed, God fulfills the functions of place in Godself. God is not a being dependent on others for grounding, orienting, or sheltering. God grounds, orients, and shelters God's own life. To speak of the place of God as Trinity, then, is to speak of a God who is free. To be free, in this case, is to know the indissolvable communion of home apart from the threat of displacement. It is to have life apart from the threat of *noplace*. Since God is God's own place, God's own ground and orientation and shelter, God is not under the threat of displacement. God's room-making communion endures as Godself and for Godself.

What I have offered here is a cursory account of place as the mode of relationality proper to God as Trinity. This is not the last time I will give an account of God as place in this project. Indeed, the remainder of this project continues to flesh out doctrines of God and creaturely life through the lens of place, to give an account of a God who makes room in the fullness of God's presence for creaturely life. What I have established here is merely our starting point, namely, the claim that place is an analogical concept that finds fulfillment in God as Trinity and is experienced more and less fittingly in the creaturely places of everyday life.

3. *Evaluating Places in View of the Triune God as Fulfillment and Judge*

As discussed earlier, the first and proper meaning of an analogical concept also becomes the norm and measure of other proposed usages of that concept. Since God as Trinity is the first and normative meaning of the concept of place, God as Trinity is the measure by which we can determine whether candidate locales are rightly considered places at all (that is, whether and to what degree they have placeness, formally speaking) and by which we can assess the goodness of a place, normatively speaking. God fulfills the concept of place both formally and normatively. God is place in its thickest, richest sense and is the fulfillment of good place. However, a point of clarity about the use of analogical language is in order.

Since God as Trinity is place in its first and proper sense, there is a way in which all other contenders will fall short of "placeness" and of "good place." Nothing in creaturely life can live up to the fullness of place made known in God as Trinity. This is not yet a matter of "falling short of the glory of God," but is simply a matter of the realities of creaturely life under the conditions of finitude. Yet the bulk of this chapter has been dedicated to a careful analysis of place in creaturely life, and the development of a set of characteristics and functions of place. Place is no less a matter of creaturely experience for also being an attribute of God. Although God as Trinity is the

fulfillment of this concept, the nature of analogical language allows for difference among various

experiences and expressions of "placeness" and goodness with respect to place. That is, analogical

language is precisely not univocal (as though something must be just like God or not be place at all)

nor equivocal (as though "place" means something completely different when used to describe God

as when used to describe creaturely places). Rather, analogical language describes things as like one

another even as they are also unlike one another.

Let us test the limits of the working definition of place and good place by turning to two

borderline cases. Doing so will help to see what is at stake in attributing or declining to attribute

placeness to a thing or locale.

a. Is the Body Itself a Place?

Surely the mother's body is the nascent human being's first place.[84] Even for the postnatal infant,

parental bodies are places: nests of relations between arm and lap fitting for the infant body with

their warmth and organizing rhythms. As a child begins moving, parental bodies become the place

of departure and return, the place that gathers, orients, and shelters. Indeed, human beings make

room for one another, and not only for children. Consider the person who, upon entering a

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[84] The theme of women's bodies as places has a complex and important intellectual history. Aristotle plays with the Greek word *chora* (meaning both space and womb) and applies his container model of place to imagine women's bodies (particularly the womb) as a kind of immobile, limited, intimate surrounder or envelope of the nascent body. His description—of place, body, and womb—has been challenged and refigured by modern philosopher Luce Irigaray, who maintains the basic premise of woman-as-place, but challenges Aristotle's valorization of the womb as a place for another, contending instead that a woman is a dynamic, movable, political and personal place first for herself as a subject.

Other thinkers have troubled the conceptualization of women's bodies as places altogether, arguing that such thinking contributes to a logic of domination and violence; see, for example, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield: Christian Theology and the Global War on Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Nevertheless, one cannot escape the material reality that a child-bearing body is a place for that nascent one. Conceptualizing the maternal body as place does not require that the woman is denied her own subjectivity or political power, however. Indeed, a whole person—a fully empowered subject—can be a place for another.

crowded room for a social hour reception, immediately identifies people he knows and with whom

he feels comfortable. Until he finds his social and spatial footing in the room, this circle of bodies

can be his place, his locus of orientation, his shelter against the crowd of strangers. There, embodied

presence makes room for him, giving him a position from which to speak and listen and meet

others. Indeed, personal bodies can be places whenever their presence makes room for another

embodied self, providing reception, orientation, and shelter.

　　While the body can be a place for another, it never ceases also to be a person. The holism of

being human is such that that body itself cannot be separated from the whole of one's personhood.[85]

In the case of the infant who finds place in a parental body, the parental body is not an object, but a

whole and living subject. The infant nestles into a place that is a person, a place with subjectivity.

Since God as Trinity is just such a place—a place that is also personal—this kind of personal place

reflects well the first and proper sense of place. We can imagine examples in which a personal body

is objectified and depersonalized in its appropriation as a place for another. Looking to the place of

the Trinity, however, we see that recognizing a personal body as a place does not, in and of itself,

objectify. A place can also be a person.

　　Should we say that the body is also a place for oneself, the most intimate *where* of one's own

life?[86] It might seem that the body is where one dwells most essentially. Wherever else one is

implaced in the world, one is always already in one's own skin. But there are two important reasons

why the body is not properly a place for oneself. First, to speak of the body as a place for oneself is

to drive a wedge between the body and the self, as though the body were a kind of place apart from

the self who dwells there. Second, while one's own body can fulfill the functions of a place for

another, it cannot fulfill the functions of place for oneself. One's own body does not gather one in,

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[85] For further discussion of what I am calling "the holism of being human," see Chapter 2.

[86] On the body as a place for oneself, particularity on a woman's body as a place "by herself for herself," see, Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Gillian C. Gill Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 10, 70.

as though one could so much as be dispersed beyond the coherence of one's body. One's own body does not orient one within the world of places. The body does have functions that contribute to bodily orientation (ie. a sense of balance), but this functional capacity is not itself orientation in and to the world of places. One's own body does not shelter one, as though one could be an exposed self without the body. Rather, the personal body lives in and through the world of places that are formed through the relations between bodies, between objects.

The Triune God alone is place for Godself, and so free from dependence on something else to surround and orient and ground the divine life. God alone grounds God's own life. Here creaturely life in creaturely places differs from the life of the Triune God. Creatures depend on the multiplicity of others to make room for them, to give them place. One cannot give oneself the gift of place, but must receive it from the world of places formed of creaturely lives in relation. In this way, the body can and does participate in the world of places, can and does give the gift of place to others, but does not suffice as place for oneself.

b. Is the Solitary Cell a Place?

A cell used for the solitary confinement of incarcerated persons presents a complicated set of questions to our account of place. Such a cell exhibits only some of the basic characteristics and only functions meagerly as a place in human life. A solitary cell is formed of spatial relations, but only minimal social relations. Indeed, it is designed precisely for the purpose of isolating one from social relations. Even the spatial relations of such a prison cell are minimally constituted: stark walls, bed secured to the bare floor, few if any personal effects. Such a cell is surely durable, but not dynamic. Each cell does bear a history—the lives of those who have spent their days therein—but that history is largely invisible to, indeed hidden from, the present occupant who, then, cannot derive meaning

from that history.[87] The walls of the cell do make room for the holding of a human body, but they do not make room for a human being's fuller needs for movement, relationship, activity, and purpose. In short, the small, spare room is extraordinarily "thin" on the continuum of placeness and is much more like a meager container.

What is more, a solitary prison cell is designed to facilitate a sense of displacement. A cell separates rather than gathers into community. Through a small window, one might gain a thin sense of orientation to the wider world of places and activity, but largely the experience of being therein is designed to disorient, and so to unmoor one from a sense of agency. Though it is an enclosure, a cell exposes one to both physical and mental vulnerabilities, rather than clothing and sheltering one. Indeed, the prison cell is designed merely to contain and to separate, not to make room. It functions as a place of displacement. Furthermore, in so far as it is designed expressly to separate, disorient, and expose, and so to unmoor and dehumanize the lives of those who inhabit it, it is a gravely malfitting and distorted place, even a *lived noplace*.[88] Those who retain their sense of personhood and creaturely dignity in such a *lived noplace* do so by receiving vicarious implacement in a wider sphere of place beyond the walls of their confinement, often through some form of writing, reading, or correspondence with a wider audience.[89]

A solitary confinement cell is, then, thin with respect to placeness, formally conceived, and grossly distorted, even to the point of being a *lived noplace*, normatively assessed. Such a cell is not

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[87] It is a testimony to the power of place in human life, and the need for relationality and meaning in one's places that prisoners who have experienced solitary confinement describe the sense of connection and meaning they derive from pacing the same path worn into the cement floor by previous inhabitants. For one such testimony, see Andy Griggs and Melvin Ishmael Johnson, "If the Shu Fits: Voices from Solitary Confinement," (National Religious Campagin Against Torture, 2013).
[88] On the lived noplace of solidary confinement, hear the testimonies offered in *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*, ed. James Ridgeway, Jean Casella, Sarah Shourd (New York: The New Press, 2016).
[89] On the letter from prison and its function in this regard, see W. Clark Gilpin, "The Letter from Prison in Christian History and Theology," *Religion and Culture Web Forum* (2003), https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/012003/Gilpin_Commentary2.pdf.

only malfitting place for the fullness of human life, it is designed for the denigration of human life. Since personhood and identity are tied to place, do we do a dehumanizing injustice to people who inhabit such confines by assessing their location as a *lived noplace*? That is, by assessing such a cell to be a *lived noplace*, do we assess the lives therein to be *no people?* Or do we merely expose the dehumanizing injustice afflicted upon them by those who contain them in such *lived noplaces*? Moreover, by judging such places as malfitting for creaturely life by the normative standard of the God who is Place, do we judge those places as "far from God" or abandoned by God, as though God's presence were found on one end of our continuums only? Not at all, though the reasons for this will be forthcoming in later chapters. For now, it is enough to raise these questions as indications of a) the power held in recognizing or not recognizing locales as places, and b) the power held in recognizing or not recognizing God's presence in relation to places.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by proposing that "place" is a concept rich in possibility and potency for theological reflection. Place is more than mere location, I argued, and is bound up with creaturely existence itself, and with experiences of belonging, orientation, and relationship. Unlike those who have conceptualized place as a matter of "limited spatiality" or "meaningful locale," I have proposed that a place is a *room-making structure of relations*. What is more, I have argued that place is an analogical concept that points first and fully to the mode of relations proper to God as Trinity and, secondarily and derivatively, to the concrete and particular places of creaturely life. As Trinity, God is the place of God's own life. When God fulfills the concept of place, place is a *room-making communion fit for fullness of life*. The three persons of the Trinity make room for one another in their mutual presence, and are, in this way, a relational communion, a multiplicity in unity. By their mutual presence, the persons of the Trinity gather, orient, and shelter one another. In this way, God is at home in

Godself: whole, oriented, and sheltered in and by God's own Triune life. As God's own place, God is not threatened by displacement—by separation, disorientation, or exposure—or trapped in the in-between, but enjoys the full freedom of being God's own place. The mutual relations of God as Trinity make room for the fullness of each person of the Trinity and, in this way, are characterized by abundant hospitality.

In creaturely life, places are concrete and particular locales formed by the social and spatial relations among things, which, together, make room for another. Like the room-making relations of God as Trinity, creaturely places are a multiplicity in unity, characterized by dynamism and durability, by the capacity to bear history and meaning and to make room for another. Unlike God as Trinity, creaturely places co-arise with creaturely beings and so are themselves creaturely. Thus, their dynamism is contingent and limited, their durability finite and given to dissolution and decay. They bear histories and meanings, but such creaturely histories and meanings can conflict with one another. The places of creaturely life, then, are recognizable as places in so far as they open out toward the place of God as Trinity, but fall short of being place in this first and fullest sense. The places of creaturely life gather, orient, and shelter, but imperfectly and contingently, such that creatures indwell the world of places—even their most fitting places—with the ever-present threat of displacement.

The very phenomenon of place comes to look different when it is understood, by the analogy of attribution, as opening outward toward the mystery of who God is. To inhabit a place is not merely to inhabit a portion of space or even a meaningful locale, but to inhabit a relational communion. Place, in this way, is gift, task, and risk for human beings. It is gift because it is experienced as always already given, prepared for one by other lives and relations, including—as we will see in the chapter on creation—by the relational presence of God. It is task because existence implies participation in the webs of relations that form places. One is always already a participant in

places, making room for others, whether fittingly or not. And place is a risk for creatures because to take place is to stand out as an embodied life dependent on the relations of others to sustain, orient, and shelter one. It is to stand out in existential risk. In this way, the very phenomenon of place—this inhabitable communion—is revealed as gift, task, and risk.

The concept of place is rich in possibility for theological reflection, I propose, because it facilitates reflection on the concrete and particular places of creaturely life, in and through which finite creatures live and move in finite vulnerability and dependence, seeking communion, orientation, and shelter in the midst of the very real threats of displacement. At the same time, the concept of place opens outward, pointing to its first and final meaning: who God is in Godself as a Triune communion. As will become evident in the chapters that follow, the concept of place also facilitates reflection on who God is as *for us*: a God who gathers multiplicity into unity, who orients, and shelters creaturely life, a God who makes room in the mutual presence of God's own life for creatures. Taking with us this analogical concept of place, and our reimagining of the Trinity as place, we proceed now to the constructive center of this project: a reimagining of several other symbols that together form the basic content of the Christian faith through the lens of place.

CREATION AND THE GOD WHO MAKES ROOM

Introduction

In this project, I am arguing that the symbols of the Christian faith bear new significance when place

is taken seriously. In the previous chapter, I offered to the theological imagination a working

definition of place. A place, I proposed, is a *room-making structure of relations*, the attributes of which

include co-arising with being, dynamism and durability, multiplicity in unity, sedimentation of

meaning, and room-making activity. What is more, I proposed that place is an analogical concept

that refers, first and properly, to the Triune God. God is place, first for Godself and also for

creaturely life. God is *the place* from which every other place takes its name. God fulfills each of the

attributes of place. The relationality and coherence of place are fulfilled by God's own Triune life in

relation, God's own multiplicity in unity. The durability and dynamism of place are fulfilled by God's

eternal perdurance and perichoretic life and movement. And—as we will discuss in more detail in

this chapter—the room-making activity of place is fulfilled in God, who makes capacious room in

the thickness of God's own Triune life for creation. Moreover, God is not only place as such, but is

good and fitting place. God fulfills, in other words, both the formal and normative sense of place.

The Triune God is good and fitting place for the fullness of God's own divine life in freedom and,

as I will argue in this chapter more clearly, God is good and fitting place for the fullness of creaturely

life together.

In this chapter and in each of the three that follow it, I take up a central symbol by which

Christian thought expresses God's presence and activity in places: creation, incarnation, the cross,

and the church. Surely others could be explored, but I have chosen these four because, together,

they offer a sufficient sense of how the central symbols of the Christian faith look different when viewed through the lens of place. I treat these symbols as paradigmatic examples that gesture toward the ways that other symbols of the Christian faith might likewise take on new significance through the lens of place and displacement.[1] To this end, the project takes the form of a brief systematic theology insofar as it submits itself to regimentation by the theological symbol system and strives for a cohesive account of the whole. The conventions of this genre do not obligate me to comprehensiveness, I take it, but to internal consistency of thought and recognition of the ways that the various symbols contribute to and complicate one another. As we will begin to see, this means that my development of the various symbols will be iterative, each chapter resting on and developing further what came before and anticipating what comes after. This chapter, for example, takes up the symbol of creation and, in so doing, reiterates and thickens the preceding account of the Trinity as well as anticipates the incarnation, cross, and church in both explicit and implicit ways. Moreover, each chapter also reiterates, thickens, and complicates our understanding of place, such that the fullest meaning of place only comes into view retrospectively, in light of the whole.

Let us turn, now, to creation. Our task in this chapter is to ask how the symbol of creation looks different when viewed through the lens of the analogical concept of place. God is place, I proposed in the previous chapter, first for Godself and also for creation. What does it mean, this chapter asks, to conceive of creation as that for which God has made room in the place of God's own life? It means that creation, I argue, just is *creaturely life together in the presence of God.* God makes room—good and fitting room—in the fullness of God's presence for creaturely life together. There, in God's Triune presence, creaturely life receives its identity and its meaning. There, in God's Triune

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[1] Indeed, some other central symbols and themes have been explored elsewhere. On pneumatology and place, for example, see Sarah Morice-Brubaker, *The Place of the Spirit: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Location*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 197 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013). On the theme of promise and place, see chapter five, "The Topology of Promise," of Gregory Walter, *Being Promised: Theology, Gift, and Practice* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013).

presence, creaturely life itself forms place: a multiplicity in unity, a diverse congregation of creatures who, in room-making activity, form the place of creation and the manifold places within it, all of which are fulfilled and judged—both formally and normatively—by the God who is good and fitting place for us. The symbol of creation, then, does not refer the theological imagination back in time to something like "the beginning of history" or "God's originating work," nor does it limit theological reflection to the natural world. Creation is a symbol that interprets the whole of reality—all that is, seen and unseen—in light of God's relationship to it. God relates to creaturely life, I am arguing, by giving Godself in Triune presence *as place for the fullness of creaturely life.* Insofar as creation just is *in God's presence,* God's presence saturates the particularities of creaturely life such that there is no ground that is not holy ground.

Holy ground it may be, but creation is also toxic ground. It is the rising oceans and melting ice of climate change. It is borders and barbed wire, walls and sanctions. It is hostility and violence, colonialism, imperialism, and their aftermaths. It is—at least on this planet—in its Anthropocene.[2] A theology of place cannot speak of creation as a place of life in God's presence as though that life were Edenic in wholeness, but must grapple with creation as it is: divided, despoiled, and suffering under the weight of human sin. In its third section—that is, after 1) an account of God as present and after 2) an account of creation as life in God's presence—this chapter will offer 3) an account of the human creature, including human sin. The result of human sin is displacement, the loss of place

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[2] The Anthropocene is a proposed geographical epoch, which demarcates a period of significant human impact on Earth's ecosystems, including its climate and geologic processes. Various start-dates of the Anthropocene have been proposed, including c. 1800 CE (as the beginning of the industrial revolution) and 1945 (the Trinity nuclear test). Though the term has not yet been officially recognized by the International Union of Geological Sciences, it is in the process of ratification, and has already entered both scientific nomenclature and the popular imagination. Though related proposals had been in circulation, atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and biologist E. F. Stoermer proposed the beginning of the Anthropocene in a working paper, which was popularized by a subsequent article in *Nature.* See, Paul Crutzen and E. F. Stoermer, "The Anthropocene," *IGBP Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000); Paul Crutzen, "The Geology of Mankind," *Nature* 415 (2002).

that gathers, shelters, and orients aright. Under the conditions of human sin, we do not know where we are or where to turn. This is so, I will argue, in both a material and theological way; that is, sin creates the conditions for material displacement—the physical loss of fitting place and relocation in thin and distorted places—by distorting human capacities for good place-making and it inhibits the capacity of human beings to recognize and trust the truth about where we are: in God's presence. In this way, this chapter not only gives an account of creation, but also anticipates the need for an account of revelation and redemption. We begin now by turning to the concept of presence.

I. The Presence of God

The argument of this chapter—that God gives Godself as good and fitting place for creation, such that creation is *life together in the presence of God*—requires an account of presence. More specifically, it requires an analogical account of presence. If divine and human expressions and experiences of presence are radically unhinged from one another (that is, if "presence" is used equivocally when applied to God and to creaturely life), then human beings would not be able to experience God's presence *as presence* and it would be impossible for us to know ourselves and our world *as creation*, as I am defining it. On the other hand, divine and human expressions and experiences of presence clearly are not identical with one another (that is, "presence" is not a univocal concept), since neither God's relationship to Godself as Trinity nor God's presence to creation is precisely the same kind of thing we experience as presence with one another. For creation to be experienced as life together *in God's presence*, then, an analogical account of presence is needed. Here I develop one such account. Ultimately, the account of presence developed here will need to do justice 1) to the ways that God is present to Godself as Trinity, 2) to the ways that God is present to creation, and 3) to the ways that human creatures (at least) experience presence in everyday life. In keeping with the method employed in Chapter One's account of place, we turn first to human experience.

1. *Presence in Human Experience*

In what follows, I develop an account of presence on the basis of human experience as *being with and toward another*. Presence, I propose, is a kind of relational orientation in which being is turned outward toward another creature, person, community, or event. Presence, in this sense, is both a formal, ontological posture and a material, lived practice. That is, it describes the formal posture of the human being as a relational creature and it describes a material practice or activity that one can be better or worse at, part-way engaged in, unable to perfect, etc.[3] In this way, the concept of presence speaks at once of both being and act. Presence is a formal part of being human and presence is something human beings do (and sometimes do badly).[4] Presence—this posture and practice of *being with and toward others*—is experienced as a good in human experience to the extent that it is an occasion fit for the fullness of life.[5]

Moreover, presence is not something that one has or does in isolation or in abstraction. One is present *to, with*, or *at* a direct object, another subject, or an event. Metaphorically, one might speak of being present to oneself, but in doing so one has imagined oneself as a kind of other, one toward

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[3] The distinction between the formal and material sense of presence intentionally evokes Brunner's Calvinistic distinction between the image of God in human beings as a formal property (which cannot be taken away or diminished) and the image of God in human beings materially expressed (which is deformed by sin). See, Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 57-61.

[4] What I am saying about presence is not different from more familiar claims about human relationality, where the human being is described as fundamentally and formally relational, and as engaged materially in all manner of relations, sometimes whole-heartedly, sometimes distractedly, sometimes sinfully, etc. See, as one well-conceived example, Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[5] "Fittingness for the fullness of life" was introduced in Chapter One as a way of talking about the normative goodness of places, a claim grounded both theologically (*a la* Timothy Gorringe) and on the basis of experience and everyday judgment's about "good places" The concept will receive fuller treatment later in this chapter, but for now we can understand it most basically as something like "flourishing," where flourishing is importantly related to membership and participation in a wider community and not simply the advancement of one's own individual life.

whom one has determined to orient oneself and one's attentions. In this sense, presence is a posture and practice of relationality. Relationality, of course, comes in many forms: causal and dependent relations, dialectical relations, spatial and social relations, etc. Presence, I will show, is not only a posture and practice of relationality, but it is *the* posture and practice of relationality at stake when we speak about places as fundamentally relational. First, let us develop a more fine-grained sense of presence as the posture and practice of *being with and for another*, by speaking about a few entailments of presence in more detail.

a. Presence involves spatial and temporal proximity.

Presence involves *being there*, which is to say *being with* relevant others in sufficient proximity.[6] To ask, "Were you present at the ribbon-cutting?" is to ask if one was physically in attendance, perhaps near enough to see the activity or at least to feel like a participant in the event. The posture and practice of *being with* implies both contextually relevant spatial and temporal proximity. When a friend telephones during a crisis, for example, one attempts to be present with one's friend by offering one's attention and concern. Yet, as both parties know, their presence with one another is incomplete without physical proximity to one another. Anything less than intimate embodied proximity—perhaps sitting on the stoop together or walking side-by-side—is deficient with respect to the desire for presence. Simulations of presence are made possible by virtual and communication

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[6] "Being there" is a significant concept for Heidegger, who also develops the concept of presence and "presencing." I use the term here in a non-technical, even colloquial way, and do not intend to imply engagement with Heidegger's own use of the term. On Heidegger's use of the concept as taken up thematically in place studies, see, Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

technologies and yet no sound-minded user of such technologies would mistake the remarkable facsimile of presence for the full, embodied presence of another, which requires spatial proximity.[7]

Presence also requires *being with* another in shared time. Visiting my grandparents' cabin on the Kenai River, for example, I might feel a sense of their presence, provoked by discovering my grandfather's pottery or papers bearing my grandmother's distinctive handwriting. Yet, a decade after their deaths, their presence is historical. As discussed in Chapter One, places are formed, in part, by the sedimentation of meanings and history, and in this way, the presence of those long departed is part of the rich meaning that continues to form a place. In this way, my grandparents' lives in that cabin contribute to the sedimentation of the place as I might visit it today. That place bears remnants of their presence, their former *being there* in relation to one another, the river, and the cabin they built together. Indeed, returning to that place is the most proximate I can get to their presence. And yet, without their actual spatial and temporal proximity, without their *being there* in spatial and temporal nearness, their real presence is absent.

One might object to my insistence on the necessity of embodied place-sharing by proposing to acknowledge something like spiritual presence. Indeed, many cultures and religions affirm the very real, non-physical presence of one's ancestors, for example. From the outset, however, this project has insisted that place and being co-arise with one another, and that, for human creatures, being is embodied life. One might also propose to acknowledge mediated presence, whereby texts or art mediate another's presence to one, such that reading the letters of Virginia Woolf, for example, one might have an experience of being present with and toward her, of inclining oneself toward her

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[7] This is not to say that virtual simulations of presence are without their own merit. Consider the ways that far flung people are brought together by virtual presence when physical proximity is unrealistic or unhealthy (such as when one's immune system is suppressed). Proximity, I am offering, is a plastic and contextually determined entailment of presence. On *being with* one another virtually and meaningfully, see, for example, Deanna A. Thompson, *The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016).

story and her life in a meaningful way. One might imagine that, as an author, Woolf inclines toward her audience as she writes, and that her audience—even if it is a wider audience than she first imagined as she penned her letters—inclines back across space and time toward her. None of this is to be denied as a form of the experience of presence. But it is worth wondering how the form of mediation—the words or the paper itself, for example—functions in this example as a kind of stand-in for the one who is absent, such that one is spatially or temporal proximate not to Woolf herself, but to her words set to paper and to her presence sedimented therein. One is present, in a real way, to the words in the spatial and temporal company of which one sits, and—through them—to Woolf in a mediated way. The fullest sense of presence, I am arguing, requires *being there*. Other experiences of presence—virtual, spiritual, memorialized, or mediated—are exactly that: forms of presence, but with a requisite qualifier.

In human experience, spatial proximity enjoys a degree of plasticity. If I can be present to my godson face to face in a game of Go Fish and I can be present cheering for him from the sidelines of the soccer field, fifty yards off, what, then, counts as sufficient nearness in order to count as *being there*? This question brings us to the next entailment of presence, namely, that presence is not simply a matter of *being with* in embodied proximity, but also of *being toward* through orientation and attention.

b. Presence involves orientation and attention.

Imagine that I attend my godson's soccer game, but read an engrossing novel on the sidelines instead of watching, thereby missing all the action, including his great plays. Were someone to ask whether I was present at the game, truthfulness would require me to qualify my response: "I was there, but I wasn't fully present." Presence is a kind of orientation toward something or someone, and—at least for human beings—a kind of attention to it. Like spatial proximity, engagement enjoys

its own measure of plasticity. The degree to which one orients oneself toward and pays attention to a game correlates with the degree to which one is caught up in the action and invested in the outcome. The more attuned one's attention to something, the fuller one's presence with and to it. Presence, then, is not all or nothing, but a matter of degree. For this reason, one might speak of being "truly present" or "fully present" to someone or something, implying that one also could be "mostly" or "somewhat" present, depending on the degree to which one remains engaged with it: oriented toward and attentive to it.

Human attention—and, thus, human presence—has practical limitations, determined by the finite nature and needs of embodied, creaturely life. While well-engaged soccer players can be present to one another across the wide expanse of the field, physically oriented toward one another and attentive to one another's movements, cues, and reactions, a newborn baby requires presence that is intimate, tactile, and encompassing. Moreover, human beings get distracted, redirected, tired, and uncomfortable and so need to shift their orientation and attention. In human experience, then, presence's *being with and toward* relevant others is relative to the body, its senses, its activities, and its finite capacities to be oriented toward and attentive to others.

c. Presence involves knowing and being known.

As a posture and practice, presence facilitates relational knowledge. Relational knowledge is knowledge arising from an encounter between the knower and the known. Presence facilitates first-hand, participatory, and embodied ways of knowing, which involve one's whole person in the activity of knowing. In this way, the kinds of knowledge presence facilitates are antitheses of detached objectivity. One cannot be present—and so engage this way of knowing—without *being there*, with and toward, engaged in a personal encounter. This engagement in a personal encounter is not only a way of knowing, but also a way of being known. To know in this way is also to make

oneself available to be known. For this reason, presence renders the knower vulnerable to the one known, and vice versa. Consider the difference between knowing something by reading about it in the newspaper—the effects of a flood on the residents of that area, for example—and knowing that same thing by traveling to be present in that place, to those people. The difference is not only a matter of additional propositional content (the kinds of factual details that one can pick up in person, for instance) or even a matter of sensory content (the distinct smell of post-flood mildew). The difference is presence itself—the embodied encounter—which entails the vulnerability of the knower to the known. This does not mean, however, that such a way of knowing lacks propositional content. Rather, whatever propositional content is acquired by the knower is acquired through a personal encounter and not apart from it. The possibility of propositional content, that is, is rooted in the encounter and experience itself.

Hiding or withholding presence in some manner—whether by withdrawing from embodied proximity, from attentiveness, from vulnerability, or from self-presentation—inhibits a certain kind of relational knowledge. If I read my novel rather than watch my godson play soccer, I miss out on a certain kind of knowledge of him, given through his engagement with the sport he loves. This is not to suggest that one ought always make oneself present, and therefore known, to another. Again, there are good reasons one might choose to withdraw one's presence in order to limit one's knowing and being known when such relational knowledge would be harmful to one's own or another's well-being. Human beings constantly negotiate how and to what degree we are known through acts of cultivated self-presentation, various degrees of hiding, and taking shelter in the relations of others. We do this because presence—*being there*, oriented toward and attentive to others, and presenting oneself to know and be known—involves vulnerability.

d. Presence involves vulnerability.

As a formal posture, presence involves the inescapable vulnerabilities of existence, of standing out as finite flesh in the world. This is the vulnerability that terrorism exploits: that simply *being there,* being present *anywhere at all*—the market, the mall, the subway, the wedding feast—is risk. As a material practice, presence involves the relational vulnerabilities of orienting oneself wrongly, of having one's attention not returned, of knowing and being known by others. Presence is a kind of "putting oneself out there" in relationship toward others, or of "being put out there" by others or by circumstance. Consider the vulnerability of refugees who present themselves on the border, asking for asylum. Or the vulnerability of one who asks another to marry or asks for forgiveness. In each case, one is present to another and, thereby, extraordinarily vulnerable to that other and to what will transpire. In its creaturely manifestations, then, presence is a kind of nakedness, the vulnerability of one's whole person standing out in existence and in relation.

The vulnerabilities of presence are such that creatures inhabit the formal posture of presence through various material practices. That is, given the vulnerabilities inherent in existence, creatures negotiate the degree and form of their material presence. Human beings (at least) do not always stand out in full presence—near and attentive, known, knowing, and vulnerable—but reserve their fullest presence for relations in which their vulnerabilities are honored and protected, as well as moderate and modify their presence according to their need. Human beings need hiddenness.

By hiddenness, I mean not simply concealment, but also shelter and shade, cover and comfort. Both the givenness and hiddenness of presence can be can be contextual goods insofar as both modes of presence can support life and its flourishing.[8] On a summer day, one can stand out in given presence to the sun, enjoying its rays, and—when one has reached a certain threshold for heat

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[8] The account of hiddeness offered here should not be confused with the feminist theological idea of "hiding" as a form of sin. See, Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising--a Feminist Reader in Religion,* ed. Christ and Plaskow (New York: HarperCollins, 1979).

and UV rays—one can take shade in hidden presence to the sun, still oriented and attentive to its rays, but sheltered from them. Both states can be contextual goods. Hiddenness is not the opposite of presence, then, but a mode of being present *as hidden*. To be present *as hidden* is still a form of vulnerability, for it is a kind of dependence on the presence of others. That is, to hide is to have one's presence sheltered by the presence of others. The vulnerabilities of presence are related to the risks of place, as discussed in Chapter One. What the concept of presence adds to our previous discussion is the recognition that the risks of place are not simply or straightforwardly the risks of context or location—of sheer *being there*—but are the relational risks of being caught up in, dependent on, hurt by, and even complicit with the relations in which one is present.

The vulnerability of presence alerts us to the reality that presence is not always a good. Presence can be partial, coercive, or deceptive. One can be with and toward one who intends to take advantage of the vulnerabilities of presence and to do harm. In human experience, presence is a good insofar as it promotes the fullness of life.

d. Shared presence and communion

Shared presence can be found in conversation among friends as well as in the confrontation of enemies, in folk dancing or in the circling of predators, in the intensity of eye contact or in quiet and companionable parallel work or play. Shared presence—like presence itself—can be for the fullness of life of those who participate in it or for its corrosion. Shared presence can be intimate among a few or more loosely maintained among multitudes. It can be intentionally cultivated or arise spontaneously. What *shared* presence adds to the basic idea of presence is reciprocity: orientation toward one another. Imagine a caregiver who sits attentively with his elderly family member. Even if the elder has dementia and little awareness of what is going on or of who is with him, the caregiver can be present to him. The (good) caregiver is oriented toward the elder, near and attentive, engaged

in an intimate kind of knowing. The caregiver's presence with this person is deeply relational, even if the relationship is largely unidirectional. But, in a moment of lucidity, a clearness might come into the elder's eyes, a moment of recognition occurring. For that moment, the elder and the caregiver may meet eyes and share a touch or a word that communicates a fleeting event of shared presence—of mutual orientation, shared vulnerability, and reciprocal knowledge. It is the mutual meeting of persons, no matter how fleetingly. Shared presence need not be good or fitting. If—in a different situation—an elder were to come into such a moment of recognition to meet eyes not with a good caregiver, but with one who had betrayed or harmed him, they still would share a moment of mutual presence, but it would be charged and characterized entirely differently.

Of all the varieties and valuations of shared presence, of all the forms in which presence is experienced, undergone, and engaged in human life, let us attend to one kind in particular: communion. Communion is full, free, and mutual presence that occasions the fullness of creaturely life. Communion is, to use Bonhoeffer's phrase, *life together*, in the best and richest sense.[9] In ecological contexts, communion is symbiosis: mutually beneficial life together that binds one to another. In human contexts, communion must be experienced as freedom—even when such freedom involves a commitment that binds one to another—in order to be experienced as fitting for the fullness of human life. Such communion may be found in good fellowship, friendship, and community. Communion's distinctiveness as a form of shared presence is found in the personal investment that participants make in its formation. In this way, communion is characterized by gift—the gift of oneself, in the act of presence, to others—and by shared vulnerability. Communion is formed, for example, in the taking of marriage vows, where whole persons are oriented to and attentive to one another, sharing presence not only with one another but also with all who have gathered as witnesses. It is formed in communal singing, where participants put forth their voices,

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[9] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1954).

with and toward other, in the creation of something new. The mutual presence of voices—and the lived bodies that produce them—meet and bear one another, harmonies creating music that is more than the sum of its parts.

Communion is not necessarily an easy, joyous, or harmonious experience, however. Communion can take place at deathbeds in shared loss and lament. The practice of keening is the practice of just this kind of mutual presence, where lament well-voiced is part of the fullness of life together. Communion can be uncomfortable, even painful, but it is experienced as a good in so far as it is commensurate with the fullness of life, even in the face of life's limits and ambiguities and even in its depths. Communion may be formed, for example, by those who participate in "truth and reconciliation" talks or restorative justice conversations as they gather together in relevant nearness, orient themselves toward one another and attend to one another by listening and bearing witness to difficult truths. Such conversations may be deeply painful, but they also make room—figuratively and literally—for healing, restoration of trust, and a new future together.

When communion is full and sufficiently durable—that is, trustworthy, purduring, or thick with participants—communion can be a place of good hiding. To return to our example of communal singing, consider that when communal song is durable, in this sense—well-carried by the multitude of voices—a few participants who do not know the song or whose voices break can find themselves carried along by the others—hidden, even sheltered, so to speak—in the greater communion of song. Communion can offer good hiddenness to creaturely vulnerability, a kind of shelter that protects and surrounds one's need. Communion, then, is life together—fully given, freely entered, mutually shared—and is an occasion for the fullness of creaturely life, including receipt of the grace of hiddenness in the trustworthy communion of others.

e. Place, presence, and communion

A place is a *room-making structure of relations*, characterized by multiplicity in unity, dynamism and durability, and sedimented with meaning. Relations between creatures become "structural" in this way when they take the form of shared presence. Since shared presence involves relevant, bodily proximity as orientation toward and attention to one another, shared presence is not something amorphous, spiritual, or abstract. It is not something vague or slippery. Shared presence forms a kind of structure that is bounded yet open, dynamic yet durable, coherent yet formed of multiplicity. When this structure of shared presence *makes room*—that is, generates space—fit for other bodies and events, other beings and activities, it becomes place.

Let us return to the example of a house from Chapter One. A house is a room-making structure of relations, a place. In Chapter One, I described this structure of relations as a matter of multiplicity in unity and engaged in room-making. The multiplicity of things that compose a house—a convergence of beams and pipes, wiring and insulation, furniture and décor, as well as inhabitants and their habitus together—become a unity by their relevant proximity to one another and by their meaningful orientation toward and engagement with one another. There are, of course, relevant differences between the ways that persons are present with one another and the way that beams and pipes are present with one another, but each is relationally oriented after its own kind. Walls that do not connect or pipes that are not engaged with one another in a way that permits the reliable flow of water in and sewer out would not a house make. A place, in other words, is a composition of things, a form of being-together characterized by mutual orientation and mutual collaboration for the sake of making room.

Communion forms a particular kind of good place. Good place, I proposed in Chapter One, can be defined as *a structure of relations that makes room for the fullness of life*. "Fullness of life" will receive more detailed treatment just ahead, but I had proposed in the last chapter that fullness of life is characterized by "flourish[ing], openly, in freedom," such that life is sustained, according to its need.

Communion is full, free, and mutual presence that occasions the fullness of creaturely life. When communion becomes *room* making, that is, when it has a structure and capaciousness or an ingathering function, it is a particular kind of good place. Room-making communion is place founded on relations of mutuality and reciprocity, on the full and free engagement of its participants. A room-making communion bears the character and atmosphere generated by such mutuality and goodness. It is sedimented by this freedom-in-mutual-relation, such that to be in that place is to receive place characterized by this freedom, this fullness of presence, this atmosphere of mutuality.

Imagine, as an example of goodness of place, a lively elementary school classroom where each element in the room is oriented toward and involved in the cultivation of wonder, curiosity, learning, and friendship. From the size of the furniture to the colors of the walls to the books and supplies on the shelves, from the teacher and her expert presiding over the room, the day, and the children: each participant in the room is oriented toward and engaged in making room fittingly for the fullness of learning and growth among children. A different elementary school classroom—one where wonder is squelched and education is rote, where children are treated as tokens or problems and not as persons—would not be a room-making communion, but, perhaps simply a place of shared presence, perhaps oriented toward test-taking or some other less fitting end. Yet another classroom might be experienced as more like a non-place, a site or container for children.

Conclusion

This section has developed an account of presence on the basis of human experience. Presence, I proposed, is *being with and toward another*. It is a kind of relational orientation toward another that includes both nearness and attention. It is both a formal posture of the human being and a material practice or activity that can be engaged to various degrees and in various ways. Presence itself is experienced as a good in human experience to the extent that it is an occasion for life's flourishing.

As finite creatures, presence is a way of knowing and being known and, as such, involves vulnerability. In light of this vulnerability, human creatures (at least) negotiate the degree to which and way in which we are present to various others and events, and balance *given presence* with *hidden presence*. Hiding is a form of presence, in which one withdraws or limits ones engaged presence and takes shelter in the presence of others. Hiding, too, is a contextual good that can be good and fitting for creaturely life. One particular form of good presence is communion. Communion is shared presence—*life together*—that is characterized by full, free, and fitting mutual presence. When communion becomes place, by taking material structure and orienting its relations toward making room for someone or something, it forms a particular kind of good place, characterized by the very freedom, mutuality, and fittingness that characterizes its formative relations.

2. *The Trinity: God as present to Godself*

Thus far, I have been speaking of presence as a creaturely phenomenon. But presence, like place, is an analogical concept that describes, first and properly, God's mode of relationality. God is present, first to Godself as Trinity and also to creation. As we will see, God's presence to Godself as Trinity is the basis of God's presence to creatures. In this section, we turn our attention to God as present to Godself. What follows is not an argument *that* God is present to Godself, but an account of what such a claim entails according to the understanding of presence developed here. An argument *that* God is present to Godself would require (1) an account of God's revelation of Godself as present to creaturely life and (2) an account of a God who "is who He is in His works," such that we can conclude that (3) God's revelation of Godself as present to creaturely life can be for us trustworthy warrant for claims about who God is as Trinity. [10] Such an argument cannot be offered here because

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[10]Barth's famous maxim—"God is who He is in His works," and "In light of what he is in his works it is no longer an open question what he is in himself"—can be found in Karl Barth, *Church*

I have not yet given an account of revelation (i.e. incarnational presence). What follows, then, is an account of the Triune God as present to Godself which *anticipates* this revelation and—because God's revelation reveals who God is in Godself—takes for granted that God's *being present* to creation in Christ really does reveal the reality and mystery of God's presence to Godself as Trinity.

We turn to the question of what is entailed by God's presence to Godself, assuming that "presence," as it applies to God, is recognizable to human beings as presence by fulfilling the concept of presence, even as it also judges creaturely occasions of presence.[11] In brief, God's presence to Godself entails that God is relational in Godself and that God's relationality is characterized by nearness, attention, self-presentation and vulnerability to Godself. Moreover, in so far as God is fully present to Godself, God is also fully known by Godself. God is, in Godself, the knower and the known, given and beheld. God is not only the fulfillment of presence, but the fulfillment of full, free, and mutual presence, befitting the fullness and perfection of God's own life. God is in Godself the fulfillment of fullest presence and perfect communion. In other words, God fulfills not only the formal account of presence offered here—God as *with and toward Godself*—but also fulfills the goodness of mutual presence as divine communion. To a discussion of each of these claims, let us proceed.

a. That God is present to Godself means, first of all, that God is relational in Godself. The symbol of Trinity speaks of God as relational. The symbol recognizes the richness and complexity of God's presence. Accounts of God as relational find early expression in the writings of the Cappadocian fathers, and continue to find new expression today. While relational accounts of

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Dogmatics, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight, vol. II.1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 260.

[11] This project continues to draw on the insight that the primary analogue of an analogical concept both fulfills and judges other applications of the term as developed in Kevin Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

the Trinity are neither monolithic nor without important dissenters in both historical and contemporary thought, the relationality of God has seen such widespread attention that it can be considered a purduring theme of Christian theologies.[12] I will not offer here an argument in support of the claim that God is relational; rather, for such arguments, I direct the reader to Trinitarian thought in the history of Christian theology, especially in the 20th century, a period in which accounts of the Trinity as a relational community flourished.[13]

I am using the term "relational" to describe the Triune God in both act and being. God is relational in Godself (God's being as Trinity) and God is relational in God's activity (first God's activity in Godself as Trinity and, on that basis, in God's activity toward creatures). The most basic of God's relations are the intra-Trinitarian relations among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In God, neither the Trinitarian persons nor the Trinitarian relations have priority, one over the other. One does not precede the other, either temporally or logically. God's being (as one God in three persons) is God's act (triune relationality), and vice versa. When I say that God is relational, then, I am speaking simultaneously about who God is and about God's activity of going along as Godself relationally.

An iteration of this same argument arose in Chapter One with respect to the claim that the Triune God is Place. In creaturely experience, a place is a kind of phenomenon that holds together what is often perceived as oppositional or dichotomous, in this case, being and act. A place is itself a kind of entity (being) and a kind of event (activity)—it is a "thing" in the world, but it is also a

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[12] On the development of Trinitarian theologies, beginning with the writings of the church fathers and moving into contemporary perspectives, including the development of explicitly relational Trinitarian thought, see *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[13] See, for examples, John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), chapter II, part 1; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bomiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. I.I (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010); Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Continuum, 1986).

dynamic and relationally formed event, identifiable *as place* insofar as it functions as such. What is more, place (that entity-event) co-arises with being, such that beings are always already in place and place is never found apart from being. We see these characteristics of place fulfilled by God as Trinity. The Triune personhood and unity of the Trinity co-arises, such that one cannot get behind the persons of the Trinity to a more essential oneness, nor behind the oneness of God to a more essential multiplicity. Who God is co-arises with what God does, such that, as Place, there is no gap between God's relating, room-making activity and Godself. Returning to this argument now, with the concept of presence at our disposal, we can amend the argument accordingly. God is relational—fully present in Godself to Godself—and this relationality is not a secondary activity of God, but is just who God is.

b. God is fully present to Godself: near and attentive.

The Trinity's temporal nearness, I wager, poses no intellectual stumbling block. How ever one conceptualizes divine eternality—as without beginning or end in time, or as beyond the category of time altogether—members of the Trinity are contemporaneous with one another, even simultaneous, in act and being. That is to say, they do not come before or after one another sequentially, as though they were successive modes or masks of the one God.[14] Rather, the three persons of the Trinity are coeternal and coequal, even as the Father relates to the Son by begetting and the Spirit by proceeding. The persons of the Trinity are never differentiated from one another by time, but enjoy temporal nearness to one another, even in their distinction from one another.

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[14] To think of the Trinity as temporally sequential would amount to a form of Sebellianism, a modelistic heresy, in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are viewed as modes or states of God, as described by the poor analogy of water's three states. Just as water cannot be both ice and steam simultaneously, this analogy suggests, the three persons of the Trinity do not exist as contemporaries, but as temporally successive modes or states.

God's presence to Godself also entails that God enjoys spatial nearness with Godself. This may present a stumbling block for the theological imagination because we are not accustomed to thinking of God as spatial.[15] The concept of "spatiality" refers to the state of affairs in which bodies are both differentiated from and related to one another. Moreover, it is that which makes movement possible. In this sense, spatiality is the opposite of punctuality, which does not admit distinction within it. While the Triune God is not a multiplicity of beings or bodies, the Trinity also is not punctuality, not without distinction. In a manner befitting God's own triunity of personhood, then, I am arguing that God is multiplicity-in-relation. The relations of the Trinity can be properly called spatial because the Trinity admits distinction within its unity. The Father is not the Son, and yet the Father and the Son are who they are in relation to one another. They are distinct persons who can so much as be present to one another. What is more, as the biblical witness to the Son's incarnation notes, the Father and the Son are not only present to one another, but the Father can so much as beget, send, commission, be pleased with, and even abandon the Son. The Son can know, pray to, trust, and cry out to the Father. Indeed, Christ can pray that his disciples would "be one" in the way that he and the Father are one only because oneness does not necessitate punctuality or absolute identification (Jn. 17:21). The Son is not the Spirit, and yet the Spirit and the Son are who they are only in relation to another: distinct and yet one God. The Spirit can so much as "proceed from" the Son only in so far as the Godhead is not indistinct punctuality, not a mathematical point or a monistic simplicity. What is more, the Spirit can so much as descend on Christ—the Son, incarnate—at his baptism, flow like living water from Christ's creative center to renew the whole creation, and spread like flame upon the heads of the disciples at the Pentecost because the Spirit

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[15] The argument for God's spatiality has precedent in Barth, for whom spatiality is a matter of God's perfection as omnipresent. "If God does not possess space" as an attribute, he writes, "[God] cannot be conceived as the One who is triune." See, Barth, II.1, 468.

and the Son have a relationship that admits movement, which itself requires spatiality.[16] As One in Trinitarian relation, God is spatial in so far as God has relational multiplicity, distinction, and movement within Godself.

Thus far, the argument that God is spatial has required an emphasis on the distinctions of personhood within God. But God's presence to Godself as Trinity entails that, even in the distinction of personhood, God is spatially *near* to Godself. That is, God's spatiality does not require that God is, in some way, at a distance from Godself, alienated or with God's back turned, so to speak, on Godself. Rather, through the revelation of Godself in Christ, God reveals the intimate nearness of Father and the Son, the Son and the Spirit. (The biblical witness offers less about the relationship between the Father and the Spirit, but that is because it is the Son who is made known in revelation. But, in so far as God's act of self-revelation in the Son really does reveal God's being, we can see the way the nearness of the Son's relationship with Father and Spirit reveals what is true of each relationship, in its own way, within the Triune God.) Again, God's nearness to Godself seems to involve a kind of plasticity and dynamism, a kind of movement, such that the Father's begetting, the Son's becoming flesh, and the Spirit's proceeding each manifest, rather than contradict, the relational nearness of one to the other. God's own freedom—freedom to be God *as Father*, and *as Son,* and *as Spirit*, each in that person's own manner of being God—does not contradict God's nearness to Godself. God is the one for whom freedom is found not in going afar, but in remaining near.

God is not like a theater attendee who, though spatially and temporally *there*, is asleep or daydreaming of being *anywhere but here*. God is not like one who reads novels on the sidelines of the soccer match. The persons of the Trinity are not disengaged with one another, going through the motions of perichoretic relationality without paying attention to the eternal encounter of this

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[16] See, John 1:29-33, 7:37-39 (proleptically), Acts 2: 1-13.

relationality. Rather, the persons of the Trinity orient themselves toward and attend to one another with a wakefulness and attunement. The Father attends to the Son by eternally begetting, that is, by orienting Godself as Father toward and for the fullness and flourishing of the Son's own life. The Son attends to the Father by eternally glorifying, revealing, and imaging the Father's begetting love, making the Son's own life a Magnificat after its own kind. The Spirit attends to the Father and to the Son by bearing witness to the Father's begetting love and the Son's glorifying image. The Father and the Son attend to the Spirit by sending and receiving, pouring out and calling forth. Each member of the Trinity is awake and aware to the other such that the whole of the divine life takes place within the active and attentive presence of every member of that life. In this way, we can speak of God as fully present to Godself in both nearness and attention.

The nearness and attentiveness enjoyed by the Trinity are fully mutual. Whereas human presence can be one-sided (as with the elder and his caregiver in the earlier example), God's presence to Godself is fully mutual. The members of the Trinity are coequal and non-coercive in their presence one to another. This mutual presence—this gift of the whole person—is the meaning of good and perfect communion. As Trinity, God is a good and perfect communion: life in mutual presence, freely and fully given, and fitting for the flourishing of God's own Triune life. The mutuality of God's inter-Trinitarian presence means that the members of the Trinity are not characterized by their opposition to or competition with one another, but by the perfect communion formed by their mutual presence with one another.[17] Moreover, communion does not entail the dissolution of distinction between the members of the Trinity. Indeed, communion requires distinction in order to be communion, for if each were dissolved into the other there would

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[17] Ian McFarland puts it just this way when he writes, "Trinitarian relationships are not properly characterized as relations of *opposition*: that the Father is the source of the Son and Spirit does not mean that the Son and Spirit are defined in contrast with the Father (or with each other), since their production is precisely the repetition of the Father's own life, yet in a different manner." Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 51.

be no communion, but only simplicity. Rather, divine communion is God's being together with

Godself, divine multiplicity in unity.[18]

c. The communion of the Trinity "makes room."

Perichorisis, I proposed in Chapter One, describes the way in which the members of the Trinity

relate to one another by making room for one another in the relationality of their mutual presence.

The word "perichorisis" is formed from the same Greek "*chorein*," to make room for another, with

which this project has been speaking of place's room-making capacity. By making room within their

relational structure, places generate space, I argued in Chapter One.[19] The persons of the Trinity

make room for one another within the communion of their mutual presence. The mutual presence

of the Father and the Son makes room for the Spirit, and the Spirit indwells their communion. The

mutual presence of the Spirit and the Son make room for the Father, and the Father indwells their

communion. The mutual presence of the Spirit and the Father make room for the Son, and the Son

indwells their communion. By this fully reciprocal, room-making web of relations, the members of

the Trinity make room for—indeed, give place to—one another.

What is more, the room made for each person of the Trinity is *fitting* for that one. It is room

fit for the fullness of God's life as Father, Son, and Spirit. The communion formed by the Father

and the Spirit does not constrict or circumscribe the Son, does not set up boundaries around the

Sonship or otherwise limit the Son. Rather, the mutual presence of the Father and the Spirit is fit for

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[18] Barth describes divine communion in this way in the course of his argument for the spatiality of God. Were God not spatial, by which he means relational and distinct, God could not be "together with Himself." For Barth, divine spatiality is a perfection of divine freedom. Barth, II.1, 440-90.

[19] To reiterate from Chapter One, the proposal that place generates space distinguishes the account of place developed here from precedent conceptualizations of place as a subset of space and as a meaningful locale, both of which take for granted the priority of space. This project speaks of "room," rather than space because the spaciousness generated by place is not abstract and homogenous, as space is often conceived, but is *for something or someone,* having fittingness, character, and a situatedness with respect to the social and spatial relations that generate it.

the fullness of the Son's life: fully Son, fully God. Likewise, the room-making communion formed by the Father and the Son does not constrict or circumscribe the Spirit or its movement, but makes fitting room for the fullness and freedom of the Spirit as Spirit. Together, by their mutual presence the Son and the Spirit make fitting room for the Father, room which glorifies and enthrones. This final iteration may perplex the imagination, if one is accustomed to thinking of the Father as, in a sense, the foundational expression of God, from whom the other two proceed or are begotten. But the persons of the Triune God are not sequential, but coeternal and coequal. Each receives the gift of room-making communion (which is to say, *place*) in which the fullness of the divine life in three persons is lived at fullest reach. God makes fitting room for Godself and is, in this way, free. As God is place in its first and proper sense, so God is presence, fullness of life, and freedom in its fullest sense. The meaning of "fullness of life" in creaturely experience is measured by the God who knows, makes room for, and enjoys such fullness of life: life in which the fullness of God's triune personhood is gathered, sheltered, and oriented in freedom.

d. As Trinity, God is self-giving, known, and vulnerable.

Presence is the presentation of one's whole being, and so involves a kind of vulnerability: vulnerability to hurt and harm, to rejection and betrayal. Giving one's whole self *as present,* one faces the risks of standing out in a kind of existential nakedness before another. In Triune relation, God presents the fullness of God's triune personhood freely and as a gift. The fullness of God's presence to Godself as Trinity entails God's own vulnerability to Godself, though this vulnerability is different than the vulnerability between creatures since the Trinitarian persons are not finite and so not an existential risk to one another, nor are they oriented toward one another with any other impulse than the perfect will to beget, glorify, and witness the fullness of one another's divine life.

There is no competition in their relationship; their dance is not the circling dance of predators. Yet, wholly present to Godself as Trinity, God is vulnerable to Godself in at least two ways.

The first is the vulnerability of being known. Standing out in *given* presence, God knows Godself fully. There is no aspect of the divine life—Sonship or Fatherhood, for example—that is not fully known by the other members of the Trinity. While in creaturely experience, self-presentation both veils and unveils, within the divine life self-giving is entire: nothing of God remains hidden from God. What is known by the Father, is known by the Son. What is witnessed and borne by the Spirit, is witnessed and borne by the Father. Each person of the Trinity knows, participates in, and experiences the life of the other two not *as though* it were its own, but *as its own*. Thus, intra-Trinitarian presence is a mutual self-giving, an immediate encounter—and therefore a perfect revelation—of Godself to Godself. Even as God's presence to Godself is fully *given* presence, so too, there is a way in which God's presence is also *hidden* presence. Again, God does not hide *from* Godself, but God does hide *in* Godself, such that the Triune relations shelter each of the divine persons well and fittingly. To God is attributable not only the good of fullest presence given as gift, but also the good of *being received*—welcomed and sheltered—in good and fitting place.

Knowing Godself completely entails vulnerability when God knows suffering. The word vulnerability comes from the Latin verb *vulnerare*, to wound. Each person of the Trinity is vulnerable to the wounds each bear. What wounds the Son wounds the Father and the Spirit. This is the vulnerability of Divine love: not that one person would harm another, but that person suffers the others' wounds and is pained by the others' sorrows. What the Father loves, the Son and the Spirit also love, each accordingly. What the Son undergoes for love, the Father the Spirit also undergo—not identically, but relationally. (Just how the Father and the Spirit "undergo" the cross will be discussed in Chapter Four, but it is important here to say that they do, in a real way, undergo it.) The creaturely suffering that the Spirit witnesses, testifies to, and bears as an intercessor, the Father and

the Son also receive and bear in their own ways. The source of this suffering is not internal to the life of the Trinity, but is brought into the Triune life by creation. A fuller understanding of how, exactly, the members of the Trinity come to bear such suffering and wounds will be possible only after a consideration of God *as present to creation*, to which we now turn.

Conclusion

In Part I, I have been exploring what it means to speak of God's presence. To this end, I developed an account of presence in everyday experience. Presence, I proposed, is a matter of nearness and attention, a matter of self-presentation, vulnerability, and knowledge. When presence is shared community is formed. When that community makes room for others—its relations taking spatial and not only social form, becoming a material structure—place is formed. As a reiteration and thickening of the concept of place developed in Chapter One, then, this section has offered that place is a kind of room-making structure of relations, and that structure of relations can be understood as a kind of community of mutual presence.

In order to speak about God as present in and to creaturely life, we needed first to establish the ways that the category of "presence" can be used with reference to God at all. The analogical concept of presence is fulfilled in the Triune God, I proposed. Formally speaking, then, presence is the intra-personal, relational dynamic of God's Trinitarian life. Moreover, God not only fulfills presence in its formal sense, but also in a substantive sense; that is, God is not only presence, but the full, free, and fitting mutual presence of persons. God is perfect, room-making communion. God's presence to Godself as Trinity entails perfect nearness, full attention, vulnerability, and knowledge. Receiving the gift of fitting place for the fullness of God's triune life in God's triune presence, God is wholly at home in Godself and wholly free as Godself. It is in this way that God is place—good

and fitting place—for Godself. We are now in a position to turn to an account of God's presence as fitting place for creation.

II. Creation as Life in God's Presence

This chapter set out to explore the symbol of creation through the interpretive lens of place. We began with an account of presence in general, and of God's presence to Godself in particular, as a way to prepare the ground, so to speak, for a discussion of creaturely life. In so doing, we have already intimated a basic claim about creation: namely, that it does not stand on its own—either as a theological symbol or as a matter of ecological reality—but is borne by the God in whose presence it arises and by whose attention and orientation it is sustained. In this section, I argue explicitly that God's presence to Godself as Trinity makes room for creaturely life. Creation is *life together in the presence of God*. After establishing this formal claim about creation, I go on to explore creation as a place itself, that is, as a web of relations among creatures characterized by relational presence, dynamism, and durability, the sedimentation of meaning and memory, and by room-making capacity. I then turn to the human creature in particular, asking what the essentially implaced character of human life contributes to its theological meaning. I conclude with an account of sin, of human life curled in on itself in distrust of God.

1. *The Presence of God as the Place of Creation*

As God is in Godself, God wills to be *for another*. This basic dictum of Trinitarian theology, recalled above, turns our attention from intra-Trinitarian presence to God's presence *ad extra*. God wills to be for creaturely life what God is in and for Godself: namely, *good and fitting place*, room held open for the fullness of life. God wills to give Godself as place for the gathering, sheltering, and orientation of creaturely life. To this end, the Triune God makes room in the communion of God's presence for

what is not God, that is, for creaturely life, and so gives Godself *as good and fitting place* for creatures. Creation "takes place," so to speak, in the thickness of God's presence to Godself.

The idea of a spatial relationship between God and creation is not new. Jürgen Moltmann, for example, maintains that God creates room for creation within Godself by way of God's own self-limitation or *zimzum,* a concept that he derives from the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition. God creates the world, on this account, in the space created when God withdraws God's presence. Thus, creation "is fashioned *in* the emptiness God ceded for it through his creative resolve."[20] Creation, then, "does not exist in 'the absolute space' of the divine Being; it exists in the space God yielded up for it through his creative resolve."[21] That is, he argues that God makes room for creation by withdrawing or contracting God's presence, leaving a God-forsaken void in which creation may take place. Though both Moltmann and I use the language of "making room," our arguments are importantly different. Creation does not take place in room created by God's withdrawn presence, on my account, but in the thickness of the Triune communion. The room held open for creation is not God-forsaken, but God-saturated, such that God is in, through, and under creaturely life, while also being distinct from it. Creation receives room in the thick communion that is God's very life in relation. In this sense, God's activity as Creator is—first of all—not an act of speech or of forming out of mud, not an act of power or of artistry, but an act of hospitality. God makes room in the thick center of God's own triune presence and holds it open in welcome.

Several implications arise from the affirmation of God's presence as creation's place. The first implication regards a new dimension of placeness itself, one not yet available to us during our strictly phenomenological exploration of the concept of place in Chapter One. Places, I argued in Chapter One, are sedimented with meaning and with history. Now we see that the most

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[20] See, Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 156.
[21] Ibid.

fundamental meaning-endowing relations of creation are the mutual relations of the Trinity. These relations stand behind, under, and around every creaturely life, every creaturely relation, every creaturely place. The Trinitarian communion is the soil, so to speak, from which every creaturely life arises, through which every creaturely life moves and grows, and into which every creaturely life dies. God's own presence given in hospitality is the irreducible meaning and the deep-down memory of every place and every creaturely life therein. No place in all of creation is God-forsaken, for God has not withdrawn or ceded God's presence, but made God's presence hospitable to creaturely life.

The second implication regards the meaning of divine omnipresence. The Trinitarian life is everywhere present to creaturely life in so far as the presence of God just is the place of creation. The presence of God is the place where creaturely life unfolds, where creaturely relations occur. Nothing creaturely exists outside the presence of God because the divine presence is itself the place of creaturely life. As the Psalmist attests, one cannot flee God's presence (Ps. 139:7) because there is no *being* apart from the place of God's presence. The place of creaturely life is in the presence of God. [22] As place for us, God's presence is not a "limited spatiality" or an empty container that provides the encompassing boundaries or limits of creation, but is a dynamic, perichoretic web of relations. God's presence encompasses not as a boundary, but as a living communion in and through which creatures live and move and have their being. Nor is God's presence one among many

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[22] To be clear, the claims that the place of creaturely life is in the presence of God and that nothing creaturely exists outside of God's presence should not be confused with Spinoza's monistic argument that nothing can be outside of or separate from God because God is the only substance and an infinite totality. Creaturely life is not "in" God as a matter of containment, self-same substance, necessity, or determinism. Rather, creaturely life is in God's presence, which is to say that God is near to, yet distinguished from creaturely life, oriented toward and attentive to creaturely life, vulnerable to and knowledgeable of creaturely life. There creaturely life is given room to *be fully creaturely*.

Spinoza's dictum that "whatever is, is in God and nothing can exist or be conceived without God," as well as his argument that creaturely life "follows form the necessity of the nature of God" is found in Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza's Ethics and De Intellectus Emendatione* (London: Dent, 1941), 11, 23, 24.

possible "meaningful locales," the meaningfulness of which derives from human subjects imbuing them with meaning. Rather, God's presence saturates creation with Godself, who is the meaning, the goodness, the "dearest freshness deep down" of every place and every life within it.[23]

The third implication concerns the nature of God's activity with respect to creation. God's room-making activity is not limited to originating creation, but is continuous activity on God's part. That is, God does not simply make room for creation in a one-time moment of expansiveness, but holds open God's hospitality as a matter of God's persistently acting as God is in Godself, namely, a room-making communion. Recall, too, that one of the characteristics of place is dynamism. Since places are relational, they are continually being formed and transformed by the relations that compose them. As relations change, so, too, do the places they form. Trinitarian relations may not change in the way that creaturely relations do, but God's relationship with Godself is dynamic. God's nearness and attention to Godself does not grow stagnant, but is a matter of dynamic presencing, of evergreen curiosity and attention. Creation takes place within the continually renewing, self-giving mutual presence of the Trinity. In this way, creation's future is bound up with God's own future, and—faithfully present to creation as God is faithfully present to Godself—God continues to "let there be" creaturely life and place by continually holding open room within God's own life for creation's continuance and development.

Thus far, I have proposed that the presence of God is—first and properly—a matter of God's presence to Godself as Trinity. God is a room-making communion, first to Godself, but also, as an act of hospitality, toward creaturely life. God holds open a capacious room in the center of God's own Triune life for creaturely life. Into this room held open in the mode of anticipation and possibility, God creates creatures and sets them into relation with one another, that is, into *life together*

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[23] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," in *Selected Poetry*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

as creaturely communion. Creaturely life, then, is good and fitting for communion both with one another and with God.

2. *The Place of Creation*

We turn now to a discussion of the place of creation. What is this place for which God has made room? Creation, I proposed in the introduction, is creaturely life together in God's presence. We have attended already to the "in God's presence" part of this definition, and now we turn to the question of creation as "creaturely life together." To clarify, when I speak of "creation," I mean to evoke *all that God has made*, that is, the cosmic totality, seen and unseen, known and unknown. Since creaturely thought is perspectival, there is a tendency in speaking about creation to reduce it to the planet on which we live. This is to be expected since, for all but the rare cosmonaut, Earth and "the view from here" is the sum total of our experience of creation. Thus, creation is not synonymous with Earth, but with *all of creaturely life* together in God's presence, and at the same time, the perspectival nature of creaturely life allows us to speak of creation not in the abstract, but as it is experienced *from here*.

A place, as defined in Chapter One, is a room-making structure of relations. To speak of creation as a place, then, is to describe creation as fundamentally relational. We are not accustomed to thinking of creation in this way. Generally, I take it, we think of creation as a kind of entity, a thing, a planetary surface or stage upon which life and history occur. This is the case, for example, in Calvin's famous description of creation as the *theatrum gloriae Dei*. Theologically, we tend to think more about what happens in creation—that is, more about the events of the fall, revelation, incarnation, et al—than about creation itself. But the litany of creation presented by Genesis 1 (and other such poetic celebrations found in the Hebrew Bible [cf. Job 38, Psalm 104]) directs the theological imagination to perceive of creation not as an inert entity, but as a dynamic web of

creaturely life set in dynamic and durable relation to one another. As such, creation itself—and not merely what happens in creation—is, as the God of Genesis declares again and again, good, very good.

Creation's goodness is in its being—first of all—relational. Creaturely life does not occur in isolation or abstraction, but is set in relationship. The great hymn of Genesis celebrates the essential relationality of creation: light set in relationship to darkness; land set in relationship to water; beasts, birds, and human beings all in dynamic relationship to one another. Traditionally, so much interpretive attention has been given to the temporal progression of the first Genesis creation account—the rhythmic pattern of days, the inaugural Sabbath rest—that we often overlook the ways that it describes a God at work building a world, fashioning ecosystems resplendent with life in relation. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible as a whole celebrates creation as "a spiderweb of a world," according to Terence Fretheim, who continues, "Interrelatedness is basic to this community of God's creatures. Each created entity is in symbiotic relationship with every other and in such a way that any act reverberates out and affects the whole, shaking this web with various degrees of intensity."[24] In contemporary language, creation is ecological place and, as such, points to the way in which every place—even built environments—are little ecologies of their own, little systems and structures of things in relation and interdependence.

Creation is creatures-in-relation all the way down. Molten iron and liquid rock, minerals and fossils and soils: our planet, for one, is composed of creatures, each one a distinct body that exists in relation to others, together composing core and mantle, crust and biome. I am using the word "creatures" expansively, including within its scope both the inanimate and the animate products of God's creative activity. To describe creation as "creaturely life together," is not, then, to limit

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[24] Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 19.

creation to what are traditionally called creatures: animals primarily, maybe plants. Nor is it to limit "life" to that which has breath. Everything that exists is a creature of God, and, together, all creatures live, where "to have life" is to exist in relation. (This is not to say that distinctions cannot or should not be made between animate and inanimate life, between sentient and non-sentient life, but that there is no reason—at this most basic level of a doctrine of creation—to distinguish between creatures, all of whom are "in it together," so to speak, with respect to God's presence.) This is important because it undermines the anthropocentric (and biocentric) assumption that the planet itself is an inert stage, a kind of venue established in advance of its main event, whether that be understood theologically in terms of the coming of Christ or evolutionarily in terms of the emergence of human beings. Rather, creation is creaturely life brought into being by God's creativity and arising in relationship—even in communion—with one another in the relational presence of God.

Creation, like all places, involves an intrinsic multiplicity and diversity. The diversity of creation is its glory and our cause for awe: that through God's creativity should come such biodiversity, such chemistry and fission and evolution. As places nest within places, so ecosystems and watersheds, coral reefs and jungle swamps and arid deserts all find their place within the place of creation. Yet, for all its diversity, creation also coheres as a place, hangs together in a unity that makes it recognizable to us as a place. As discussed above, the unity of creation does not come from its being bounded or bordered, enclosed by God's presence. Nor does the unity of the ecosystems within creation come from their being bounded or bordered. Indeed, the very idea of a border is antithetical to creation's wholeness and intrinsic relationality. Though the psalmist may praise the good order of God's creation by celebrating the way God "set a boundary" for the seas (Ps. 104:9), we know that waters ebb and flow, crash and withdraw, even flood as a matter of water's nature. The meeting ground of water and land is no boundary at all, but a negotiated relationship between

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two creatures, which together form a place of encounter, a place called shore or beach or caves. Rather, the unity of creation—its cohesion—comes from its being the place of gathering, of shelter, and of orientation in God's presence. Creaturely life together can be called "creation"—that is, recognized and named as a single place—because all of creaturely life shares in common its home in the God who holds all things together.

Creation's unity also comes from its own room-making activity. Creaturely life in relation becomes *place*—concrete and particular, inhabitable place—when it makes room in its web of relations for something or someone. Ecosystems do this as a matter of course insofar as they do not remain merely webs of relations, but become habitat for one another and for other creaturely lives who pass through. In this way, creatures receive the gift of place from one another, as well as participate in the task of forming place for others. As a whole, creation itself receives its unity by its room-making activity on behalf of creaturely life. Creation not only makes room for creaturely life together, but makes room *fittingly* for the fullness of creaturely life. Creation, in other words, is not only place, but good place for creaturely life.

3. *Creation as Fit for the Fullness of Creaturely Life*

Creation is a place fit for the fullness of creaturely life. As we will see, this statement points to creation's goodness as the fitting place for the fullness of creaturely life in God's presence and it anticipates creation's goodness as the fitting place for the Son's own inhabitory presence in the incarnation, a theme to which we will return in the next chapter. Let us turn now to an account of just what is meant by the "fullness of creaturely life."

Fullness of life is, first and finally, what God enjoys in Godself. When the Father and the Son together make room for the Spirit, they make room for the fullness of the Spirit's life *as Spirit*. They make room for the Spirit to be Spirit without containment, constriction, or contradiction. For

the Spirit, this might mean something like the freedom to blow where it wills, to descend and proceed, to inspire and indwell. Likewise, when the Son and the Spirit together make room for the Father, they make room for the fullness of the Father's life *as Father*. They make room for the Father to be Father without parallel or compromise: room for the expansiveness of the Father's love and for the extravagance of the Father's mercy. And when the Father and the Spirit together make room for the Son, they make room for the fullness of the Son's life as Word from the beginning, as Word incarnate, as Christ crucified and raised. (An account of the Trinity as making room for the wounds and the death of Christ is forthcoming in Chapter Five, which attends to the symbol of the cross.)

Making room for creation, God gives to creatures what God enjoys in Godself: room for the fullness of life. God holds open room in God's triune presence not only for creaturely life, but for the *fullness* of such life, after its own kind. God makes room for creatures *as creatures*, and not only as creatures generically, but *as each creaturely life* in its particularity, its personhood, and its given goodness. God makes room for creaturely finitude and creaturely freedom, both of which are part of creation's essential goodness. God makes room for creaturely relationality and interdependence, which are also part of creation's goodness. Most essentially, God makes room for creaturely life to know life together *in God's presence*. For creatures, this is the most essential meaning of "fullness of life," namely, life together in God's presence: life as communion in communion. To be together in God's presence is a way of knowing and being known by one another (finitely) and by God (perfectly), of standing out in vulnerability with one another and with God, and of finding good shelter in the presence of one another and of God. Fullness of life is the posture of one in worship, which is—for human creatures—"our humanity at full stretch."[25] Indeed, fullness of creaturely life is

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[25] Theologian Don Saliers describes Christian worship as "requiring our humanity at full stretch," which recalls Irenaeus' famously paraphrased dictum that "the glory of God is a human being fully alive." Don Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 28; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*.

life lived as worship. It is life received as gift, given as task, and accepted as risk. It is life in the posture of one who knows one's life to be held in God's presence and sustained by God's presence.

By fullness of "creaturely life," I mean to gesture to the whole range of creaturely lives and the whole range of possibilities for creaturely life: each after its own kind and good in its own way. Fullness of creaturely life, then, looks different for a tadpole than it does for the water in which it swims. Even the grass of the field stands out in relation to God and to other creatures in the fullness of its brief life. For creatures, fullness of life is fundamentally relational. The question of just what constitutes the fullness of life for nonhuman creatures, including non-sentient and even inanimate creatures would be a project all its own.[26] For our purposes, suffice it to say that even glacial ice and columnar basalt stand out in existence as themselves, full bodied in their relational participation with other creatures. Indeed, they can do no other. The fullness of creaturely life is, for all creatures—animate or not—a matter of standing out in relational presence with creaturely others and with the God in whose presence they stand out at full stretch.

The term "fullness of life" reflects the Johannine *zoē*, often translated as "abundant life." The Jesus of John's Gospel speaks of the gift of such life as his good purpose and promise: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (10:10). The word translated here as "abundant" (*perisson*) speaks of an abounding overflow (as when, after the multitudes were fed, the disciples gathered up what remained, over and above what was needed—*perisseusanta*—and found their baskets filled to overflowing [6:12]). What is more, for John, abundant life has to do with knowing God: "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"(17:3). Present to creation as its place, God gives Godself to be known by creatures, such

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[26] Indeed this question has generated instructive scholarship already. Within the context of questions of place and space, see, David G. Horrell, "Nonhuman Flourishing? The Liberation of Creation and an Ecological Reading of Paul," in *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Gorringe*, ed. Mike Higton, Christopher Rowland, and Jeremy Law (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011).

that creation is the place of God's revelation. Creation is the place fit for the fullness of life, for it is here that God gives Godself to be known. Finally, abundant life is, in a real way, already eternal life (*zoē aionion*), for life together in God's presence—life lived as worship—is the life that does not end. To speak of creation as the place of fullness of life in God's presence is, then, to speak of both God's originating desire for creation and the ultimate fulfillment of it.

This account of "fullness of life" is related to, but is not identical with "fulfilled life," as Moltmann speaks of it. It is related in so far as both accounts are theological interpretations of the Johannine concept. Yet, for Moltmann, what makes a life a "fulfilled life" is God's blessing, shining upon one as God's countenance and evoking joy.[27] Insofar as he is claiming that God's countenance is God's nearness and attention—in the language of this project, God's presence—then Moltmann's account is consistent with what I am describing here. However, his use of the language "fulfilled life" evokes, for this reader at least, a sense of contentment and completion, as though one is looking back on one's life and deeming it fulfilled. The image of "fullness of life," as I am using it, is meant to describe life in the middle and incomplete. Fullness of life is life in its unfolding, evolving, growing, and becoming. Fullness of life is not something one possesses or achieves (a "fulfilled life"), but something one undergoes. What is more, in so far as fullness of life is life in the posture of worship—being at "full stretch"—it may provoke or be provoked by joy, as Moltmann suggests, but it may also be the posture of one in lament, one laid bare in the vulnerability of being known, the heart wrenched open in grief or guilt. Fullness of life—as will be made clearer in the chapter on the cross—includes creaturely suffering, loss, and death. Fullness of life is not antithetical to finitude or negated by sorrow, but is the full range of creaturely experience held in God's presence.

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[27] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 88.

To the question posed at the end of the last section—what is the source of creation's unity within its multiplicity?—we can now reply that creation coheres as a unified place by its good room-making purpose: to be the place for the fullness of creaturely life in God's presence. Creatures, then, share a kind of natural vocation. Creaturely lives are brought into being in relationship with one another so that together we might form place—creation itself and the myriad particular places within it—that makes room for one another to know God and the fullness of life in God's presence. Creatures are called to give the gift of place to one another, to engage in the task of place-making on behalf of one another, and to stand out in vulnerability with and before one another. We are called to gather, shelter, and orient one another well in and to God's presence as our fitting home. This is possible only because God has already made room for us in God's own presence, hidden us in the shelter of God's own life, and set us into place-forming relation with one another. We make room, so to speak, because God has first made room for us (cf. 1 Jn 4:19).

Conclusion

In this section, I have been arguing that creation is the good and fitting place of creaturely life together in God's presence. It is a place in God's presence because God has made room in God's own Triune communion for creaturely life. Creaturely life in God's presence is—from the very beginning—set in relation, forming an ecological web of relations. As life together, creation is itself a kind of creaturely room-making communion. The multiplicity and diversity of creaturely life finds unity and cohesion in its good purpose, its natural vocation, which is to form place for one another, to become good soil upon which each creaturely life can stand out before God and other creatures.

III. Place and the Human Creature

To the preceding discussion of creaturely life as *in God's presence*, we now turn to the human creature in particular. What does fullness of life look like for the human being? What is the gift, task, and risk of being human in creation and in God's presence? I will organize my answer to these questions in two sections, the first answers the questions from the perspective of being (that is, what it is to be human in particular) and the second answers the questions from the perspective of act (that is, to what vocation the human being is called). The goal of this section is not to provide a thoroughgoing theological anthropology, but rather to describe the human being as seen through the lens of place in general, and through the lens of creation *as place of life in God's presence* in particular.

1. *The Holism of Being Human*

Through the lens of place, the human being is a living, creaturely body—one that changes and grows in various ways, one that can be wounded and sometimes healed, one that needs nourishment, rest, and water in right proportion, one that—suddenly or eventually—weakens, tires, and dies. To be a human being is to stand out in the world of places as frail flesh, as a living body that could be otherwise than living. In this, the human being is a creature. Everything that has been discussed above about creaturely life obtains with respect to the human creature in particular. To be human is to live, together with other creatures, in God's presence and so by God's hospitality and love.

To claim that the human being is a particular kind of creature—a living body—is not a matter of great controversy, yet theological reflection tends to move quickly past this basic anthropological claim, eager to elaborate on human distinction and excellence, human likeness to God and orientation to eschatological communion. This is evidenced by the trend in modern systematic theologies to locate theological anthropology in a doctrinal "home" other than the

doctrine of creation, where it had been located traditionally.[28] (Barth and Rahner, for example, position their anthropologies under the banner of Christology, while Pannenberg and Zizioulas tuck theirs inside their eschatologies and doctrines of the Trinity, respectively.) Though such relocations have led to important and interesting anthropological insights, the trend overall leads to the conceptual displacement of the human being from creation as a whole and from its own embodied creatureliness in particular. Therefore, to begin this section with the claim about human creatureliness is notable not because it is a matter of controversy, but because of the relative rarity of remaining with this creaturely focus for extended reflection.

Beginning with the embodied, relational creatureliness of the human being preserves the integrity of the human being. It is as a whole creature—a living, personal body—that the human being stands in relation to other creatures. It is as a whole creature that the human being inhabits the presence of God. While the human being is a complex creature, the human being does not have a component part—the soul, the will, or the "supernatural existential" (Rahner)—that makes the human a uniquely "religious" being or the consummate creature. Rather, the human being as a whole living body is fit for life in God's presence, God's triune communion. It is the whole human being who stands out in existence and it is—as we shall see ahead—the whole human being who falls into sin.[29] When the human being suffers, it is not only the body or the mind or the spirit that suffers, but the human being as a whole who suffers. The particular suffering of displacement, for

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[28] For a fuller discussion of various "doctrinal homes" of theological anthropology, and their respective implications, see David Kelsey, "The Human Creature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. Kathryn Tanner, John Webster, Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 122-24.

[29] Here the real meaning of "total depravity" comes into view. Sin does not belong to one or another part of the human being. Sin is not the fall of the will, or of the soul, or of the body in particular. Sin is a matter of the whole, integrated human being, standing in relation to other creatures, to the whole of creation, to one another, and to God. "Total depravity," then, does not mean that the human being is without goodness, but that human sinfulness is not isolated to a particular part of human reality. Even sin is a holistic human reality.

example, is not only a matter of the body's being out of place, but is a totalizing experience wherein the whole human being experiences disorientation and vulnerability. When the human being knows fullness of life, it is not the body or the mind or the spirit that knows this fullness, but the human being as a whole who stands "at full stretch" in God's presence. The particular experience of being "at full stretch" in worship, for example, is not only a matter of spiritual attention, but is the posture of the human being as a whole and in community oriented to God. It is, in other words, a matter of presence, which is, as I offered earlier in concert with Frei, equivalent to the whole human being.

The essential wholeness of the human creature is important for a theology of place because it means that the human being is always already imbedded in place. Yet much of modern theological anthropology implies otherwise, imagining the human being floating in abstraction from the real places of human life.[30] Mind and language allow human beings to imagine ourselves in a place where we are not, and seem almost to allow us to transcend place. Listening to an excellent storyteller, one's awareness of one's actual location may drop away as one feels that one is "there," with the characters of the story. And the human mind's great powers of self-protection sometimes manifest as dissociation from one's own body and place. Whether speaking of traumatic dissociation or imaginative adventure, the ability to suppress one's immediate awareness of body and place is a powerful human capacity. Still, the wholeness of the human being insists that even in such states, one's living body is always in place, and vulnerably so. This remains true when speaking theologically of the human person. The human creature does not "stand before God"—in worship, in judgment, or in mercy—except as one standing here or there, at home or on the road, at table or at work.

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[30] Liberation theologies and other contextual theologies have offered an important counter-narrative, re-placing theological accounts of the human being in the socio-political contexts of lived experience in real places. Still, much of liberation theology is framed in the paradigm of time, rather than place, and seems to imagine the human as inhabiting moments of history more than places. See, for example, the strong emphasis on history in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salavation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

Neither divine judgment nor reconciliation happens in a spiritual courtroom or in an imagined

interior castle of the soul, but each happens as whole human beings inhabit and move between the

various places of creation.

Not only is the human being a whole creature, but the human being also is an essentially

relational creature. The essential relationality of the human being has been advanced (and critiqued)

by numerous theologians, a trend linked in important ways to relational accounts of the Trinity.[31]

What is new here is the proposal that the relationality of the human being is not only a matter of

social relationships (with creaturely others and with God), but also a matter of place (which is itself

relational, first as Trinity and also as creation).

The fullness of human life, then, is always a fullness experienced in and through place. It is

human life at full stretch in God's presence, a gift made possible by the hospitality of God. It is

human life at full stretch in relationship to other creatures, who together form and inhabit creaturely

places. Human life at full stretch is both finite and free, where finitude is a matter of relational

dependence and vulnerability, and freedom is—in imitation of the Triune God—a posture and

practice of hospitality and a full investment of oneself in the concrete particularities of creaturely life

in place. In this way, fullness of life is not life abstracted from the concrete particularities of place,

but is, in fact, given only in and through place. Fullness of life is, then, experienced in and through

the body, through relationship, and through a sense of fittingness of place. I turn now to a fuller

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[31] Notable examples include, David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001); McFadyen; Emilie M. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton, eds., *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

Notable critiques of the relational model of human personhood include, from ethical and psychological perspectives respectively, Harriet A. Harris, "Should We Say That Personhood Is Relational?," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (1998); Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

exploration of the meaning of the fullness of creaturely life for human beings under the rubric of implacement as gift, task, and risk.

2. *Creation as Gift, Task, and Risk*

Embodied and whole, human beings indwell God's presence in and through creation. Places nest within one another, even overlap one another—as discussed in Chapter One—and so it is that human beings do not necessarily perceive ourselves as indwelling "creation" as a whole—especially where creation is more than Earth itself, but the cosmic totality of all that God has made—but live our lives in and through the particular places of creation: this city and that office complex, this county park and that airport terminal, this pedestrian route and that *mercado*. We move between and traverse places, but everywhere place appears before and under and around us as *given*. This is the case whether one considers the most particular places one inhabits or creation as a whole. Since place and the body co-arise, and since there is no being without place, creation is experienced—first of all—as gift.

Creation is experienced as a more or less trustworthy gift: an existential structure that one can rely on to bear one up, to continue out before one, to precede one in movement. When one steps out one's front door, a world of places opens out before one. And should one place erode or come to ruin, should one house burn or one empire fall, another place appears around one to bear one up. One is not—even in the rubble and ruin of a beloved place—abandoned to *no place* at all. Even in displacement, even in the desert of exile or the wilderness of an unfamiliar city, one is not no place at all. Even in displacement, one can seek and find relations that can gather, shelter, and orient one, if only tenuously and imperfectly. What is more, the symbol of creation expresses the trust that behind every concrete and particular place is the place of God's presence, the roominess in which creation itself has life and being.

Since human beings receive the gift of place most immanently from other creaturely lives and ultimately from God, human life is characterized by finitude. Through the lens of place, finitude is not simply a matter of temporal brevity, but is also a matter of embodied dependence, vulnerability, and limitation. Dependence, vulnerability, and limitation are part of the created goodness of being a living body in place, gathered, sheltered, and oriented by the grace of other lives. They are part of the created goodness of human life in ecosystems, in relationships of symbiosis and competition, and in creaturely collaboration and community. Human beings are perhaps particularly dependent and vulnerable in this way because we depend on a remarkably intricate web of relations to support us. The creation story of Genesis 1 celebrates the human being, not as the crown of creation, but as an earthling placed in the dependent care of the whole web of creaturely life. Human life is neither self-made nor self-sustaining, but dependent on the rest of creation for hospitality and provision.

Place—creation as a whole and the particular places with in it—is experienced by human beings in and through the body. One experiences place not from some Archimedean point outside of creation, but as one located in place through the body. (Even if one stands "outside" a particular place's boundaries in order to observe it—peeping in a window, say, or watching from a high tower—one still does so *from somewhere* in the world of places. And with respect to creation, there is no getting outside of creation in order to perceive it from a God's-eye view, so to speak, for creation just is the sum total of all that God has made.) This means that human experience of creation—no matter how objective one might try to be, using the tools and methodologies of science—is always perspectival, with reference to one's own living body. The body, as Ricoeur writes, is the "absolute here, the landmark for any there."[32] The nearness or distance of a place or object is measured with

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[32] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. David Pellauer Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 149.

respect to the body and the body's capacity to fill, navigate, and relate to it through the senses. There is a natural—and not yet sinful—way in which one comes to perceive oneself as the center of one's experience and even as the center of creation, the one for whom everything was made, the one for whom everything was given. In a good and natural way, this means that one knows oneself as a recipient of the gift of place, indeed, the gift of creation as gathering, sheltering, and orienting one.

Human beings experience creation not only as gift, but also as task. Since we experience ourselves as a kind of perspectival center of every place, we also experience our own presence as formative of the places we inhabit. If place gathers, shelters, and orients, then one's own presence in a place gives direction and purpose to the relations of that place. Just as the anthropologist cannot study a culture without, in some way, influencing it by her presence, so the embodied person cannot be present in a place without, in some way, contributing to the social and spatial relations of that place. What is more, in imitation of God's own room-making hospitality, human beings experience creation as a place-making task—not only for ourselves, but also on behalf of others. Insofar as human beings image our Creator, it is not by what we are, but by how we orient ourselves toward others. We reflect the orientation of our Creator when we make room for other creaturely lives at full stretch, embodying and extending God's own hospitality through the relational formation of good and fitting places others. Human beings cannot, as finite creatures, make room for others in the same perichoretic fashion that God does. Presence, relationality, and room-making are not univocal with respect to human beings and God, but analogical, such that when human beings make room for one another and for other creatures to stand out in fullness of life, we reflect something of God's own abundant hospitality.

Human beings do this well when we use our own embodied lives and relations, and our human creativity and ingenuity to from places that gather, shelter, and orient others fittingly. Human beings build homes for shelter, but also for hospitality. We build cities for civic life together, for

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culture, and for community. Our place-making task is not only manifest in what we build, but in what we design and restore, what we gather and welcome, what we open outward and let be. Human beings engage in the task of place-making not only though the built environment, but also through the more or less subtle arrangement of things into places that provide for the gathering, sheltering, and orienting needs of one another and other creatures. Arranging chairs into a circle, one creates a place for conversation or discussion by orienting the participants to one another and providing each body and voice a place in the composition of the whole. Protecting wilderness areas with appropriate legal measures that put limits on human presence and involvement therein, human beings make room for other creaturely lives and their needs for habitat, movement, and non-interference. From the large-scale projects of place-making to the quotidian tasks of setting the table, human beings engage in place-making with and for one another and with and for other creatures.

Receiving place as a gift and task, human beings also experience it as risk. As discussed above, the gifted nature of place implies human dependence, finitude, and vulnerability, which is to say, risk. Hospitality in particular is inherently risky.[33] When human beings engage in hospitality, making room for creaturely lives in our own places and relations, we open up ourselves to potential harms, breaches of trust or the norms of hospitality. We face creaturely limitations: finite resources, dynamics of power, the balance of needs. What is more, human beings change places by being in them, which means that when hospitality is extended one must be prepared for the guest to influence and change the very place where the guest has been welcomed. Making room for others, one faces the real risk of one's own displacement—in small and significant ways—such that one might find oneself once again on the receiving end of place. Moreover, to invest oneself in the particularities of place—and in the place of creation as a whole—is in a very real way to give oneself

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[33] On the real risks of hospitality as a human practice, see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), especially chapter 7.

up to death. Yet, investment in what is creaturely is the death that brings life, for to commit oneself—one's living body and one's personhood—in the finite places of creation is to cast oneself in trust upon the presence of God.

Conclusion

This brief turn to the human being has highlighted two aspects of being human through the lens of place, namely, the holism of being human and the gift, task, and risk of implacement. Though I have highlighted these two facets of being human in the context of our discussion of the symbol of creation, there is a way in which this whole project deals with questions of the human being in place and in displacement. Into the rest of this project, then, we can take with us the reminder that human experience, including human experience of suffering and of salvation, of oneself, of creaturely others, and of God is always experience in and through places. Human relational knowledge—again, of oneself, creaturely others, and God—is knowledge that is given through presence in shared places. Human personhood is not something that floats above place, but something given and grounded in place—both in the finite places of creaturely life, and—ultimately and securely—in God's own triune presence. The goodness of human life is its fittingness for God's presence and its dependence on the whole web of relations, the whole ecological community of creation. Fullness of human life, then, is not something to be sought outside of this gift, this task, and the risk of place. Indeed, human life is and is only to be found as life in the fullness of God's presence and in the thick web of creaturely community. Indeed, to image God is to invest one's personhood in room-making community, to be *life together* in risky hospitality.

IV. Creation in Ruin

The account of creation developed thus far is one of ecological integrity and relationality, one of essential hospitality and communion among creatures in imitation of the God whose presence is place for them. Yet, a theological account of creation must make sense of the reality of the places in and through which we live, the webs of relations among creaturely lives as they exist and present themselves to us, even—and perhaps especially—as those lives, relations, and places seem to obscure the fact of their being *in God's presence*.[34] The world in which we live seems a far cry from the ecological integrity of room-making relations and does not seem to make room for the fullness of creaturely life. If some creaturely lives seem to flourish, it is while others suffer. Place becomes an occasion for violence, conflict, and colonial power. It is used as a means for containment, a site of resources, and an idolatrous marker of identity. Borders are built to keep out the displaced and the migratory, and secured to identify them as *other*. Creaturely lives are driven into diminishing habitats and, where no fitting place remains, into extinction. Even when "fullness of life" is understood to include finitude and death, even natural predation in the course of an ecologically balanced web of relations, surely it stands in normative opposition to the kinds of creaturely exploitation that characterize life in the many places of our world.

That there is a mismatch between creation as intended and desired by God and creation as the world in which we live is the meaning of "the fall," in the language of the theological symbol system. The fall is the result of human sin, but has implications for the whole of creation since human beings have become extraordinarily formative participants in the relational web of creatures that together form creation. In this section, then, I give an account of human sin and of the place of creation under the conditions of sin.

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[34] Or, as Willie Jennings has similarly maintained, "Belief in creation has to refer to current real-world places or it refers to nothing." Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 85.

To be a creature is to be one who receives the gift of place, first and finally, from the God who makes room for creaturely life in the mutual presence of God as Trinity. In this, to be a particularly human creature is no different. Human beings—like all creatures—receive the gift of place, most essentially from God and also from other creatures. Whether we live in an urban center or in the rural countryside, we receive the gift of place from those creaturely lives—animate and inanimate—that together make room for us in the web of their relations. Needing place to so much as be at all, human life is utterly dependent on the community of creatures who form the web of our world, of our town or city, our neighborhood, our home. As a whole, creation is itself ultimately dependent on the God who is place, first for Godself as Trinity and also for creaturely life. Creatures depend on God's faithfulness and persistence in *being God*, that is, in continuing to be *place for creaturely life*, and not only that, but *good and fitting place for the fullness of creaturely life*. To be a human creature is to be implaced and so to be dependent on God's goodness and hospitality toward us.

But human creatures do not trust God's goodness and hospitality. We do not trust God's faithfulness in being place at all, let alone being good and fitting place for creaturely lives. We do not trust God's sustaining gift of room in God's own presence for the fullness of creaturely life. This is human sin: distrust in God and in God's faithfulness toward us.[35] Human beings distrust God to be and to give good place for our lives—to gather, to shelter, and to orient well—and so reject the giver and the gift of place. Distrusting God's goodness to be fitting place for the fullness of one's life, we also reject the risk of place, refusing to stand out in vulnerability and trust. All that is left for human beings, then, is the task of place, a task now laced with anxiety. In a posture of distrust, we

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[35] The account of sin developed here is rooted in Luther's notion of human incurvature, which is itself shaped by Augustine. I have chosen this framework for thinking about sin because it is a fundamentally relational account of sin, which makes it well-suited for thinking about the effects of sin in place as relationally formed. That said, I do not offer here a thoroughgoing engagement with Luther on the questions and consequences of sin, but simply use his thought as a well-suited starting point.

take on the task of place in a limited way: attending primarily to the task of making place for ourselves (and perhaps those in our immediate sphere of concern) and not for the manifold other creaturely lives with and for whom we ought to engage in the task of place-making. In this way, distrust in God's gift of Godself as fitting place curves us inward on ourselves in a self-defeating attempt to establish place for ourselves. Luther's striking spatial metaphor of "curvature" as the posture of sin evokes an image of the human being bent unnaturally inward, contorted and constricted, gaze fixed on one's own center. This inward curving posture restricts the human being's capacity to enter fully into relationship with creaturely others and with God. This, in turn, distorts the human capacity to make good and fitting place—for ourselves, for other human beings, and for other creatures. We cannot form truly hospitable places, places that gather creatures together in community and in communion, places that shelter well the vulnerabilities of each, places that orient attention toward neighbor and need.

The result of human sin is displacement, the loss of place that gathers, shelters, and orients aright. Displaced by the conditions of human sin, we do not know who we are or where to turn. This is so, I will argue, in both a material and theological way; that is, sin creates the conditions for material displacement—the physical loss of fitting place—and it inhibits the capacity of (at least) human beings to recognize and trust where we are: that is, in God's presence. In this way, the effect of sin is both relational and noetic.

With respect to the relational effect of sin, curvature constricts the human person's capacity to be fully present with others. As a matter of their finitude, and not yet as a matter of sin, human beings cannot enter into fullness of presence in precisely the same way that God does in Godself. Human attentions always are divided, to some degree, and human proximity always is relative and being negotiated. That said, human beings are made for a certain kind of mutual presence, for the capacity really to be with and to attend to one another in meaningful, if also finite, ways. We are

fashioned for room-making hospitality in imitation of the God who made them, and the goodness

of that imitation does not require a kind of perichoretic indwelling (as it is for the Trinity), but a kind

of place-making practice. Human beings are place-makers. Under the conditions of sin, however, we

are curved in on ourselves and cannot, therefore, attend well to others. Gaze fixed inward, the

human being is not oriented toward other creaturely lives and cannot enter readily into communion

with them. Without attention to or orientation toward others, we can neither recognize the need of

our creaturely neighbors nor make room fitting room for creaturely others to enter in, to receive

place, and to find refuge. Curled inward by sin, we perceive other creatures primarily in terms of

what they contribute to the formation of our own place, be it the raw material of the earth itself, the

lives and bodies of other creatures, or the labor of other human beings.

What is more, turned in on ourselves, human beings cannot perceive rightly *where* we are,

With respect to the noetic effect of sin, curvature constricts the human being's ability to

perceive and know rightly. Sin harms our knowledge of creaturely life. When knowledge is a matter

of mutual presence, it entails the vulnerability of the knower and the known to one another. This

kind of knowledge is mutual and non-coercive, preserving the wholeness of all participants. Under

the conditions of sin, however, we deny our creaturely vulnerability out of distrust—of God and of

the goodness of creaturely life. Human beings imagine themselves to be other than creaturely, other

than dependent. We cultivate ways of knowing that do not involve bodily vulnerability. Rather, we

imagine ourselves possessors of knowledge, rather than participants in shared knowledge. We

imagine ourselves to be not creatures of place, but only agents of history. Without mutuality of

presence and shared vulnerability, knowledge of creation becomes a matter of power over other

creatures, and not mutuality. Curved inward, we cannot perceive ourselves aright *as creation*, nor

perceive the goodness of creaturely life as given in dependence and vulnerability.

What is more, turned in on ourselves, human beings cannot perceive rightly *where* we are,

that is, in God's presence. In an original state of uprightness and trust in God, human beings might

have known themselves as *in God's presence* by the witness of "the things God has made" (Rom 1:20). But curved inward by sin, human beings do not know the things God has made rightly nor the God who might have been made plain to us in, through, and under creation. Turned inward, we cannot see or recognize our own lives, other creaturely lives, or the place of earth itself *as creation*, that is, *as creaturely life in God's presence*. Instead, we perceive ourselves as living in a world, a world we ourselves have fashioned, a world that is all task and not gift, a world where dependence and risk are limitations to be overcome and not part of the goodness of human life. Unable to recognize just *where* we are, we also cannot perceive rightly *who* we are: those for whom God has made room in God's own presence.

Unable to recognize where or who we are, human beings misunderstand just what "fullness of life" looks like for human creatures. Human life "at full stretch"—the practice and posture of one in worship—soon becomes conceived as human life without restraint, expansive and consuming. This is not freedom, but bondage. And it is not only bondage of the will, but the bondage of the whole human being. For, despite our inability to recognize the fact, we remain whole creatures, embodied and implaced, dependent and vulnerable. The self-promoting places we create do not, in fact, spell out our freedom but our finality. Creation—made now in our own distorted image—is not a place of room-making communion, but a place in ruin and—if the worst predictions are true—a place that is fast becoming *no place* for us.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered an account of creation through the lens of place. Creation just is life together in God's presence. Desiring to be for others what God is in Godself, God makes room in God's own triune relations for creaturely life. God not only gives Godself in the mode of possibility, as room for creation. God creates creaturely life in relation. In imitation of the God in whose

presence we live, creatures give themselves to one another as present: proximate and attentive, oriented toward one another. When this presence is mutual, they form a communion: the gift of their whole selves, by which they know and are known by one another.

There is room in creation for the fullness of creaturely life in God's presence, room for creatures—in their finitude and in their dependent vulnerability—to live in God's presence at full stretch. Fullness of life is a posture and practice, creaturely being and act, whereby one lives present to the room-making God who is first present to creation. This practice orients one's life toward God and creaturely neighbor in presence, toward communion, and freed for the work of making room. Were it not for sin's incurvature, human beings would know where we are and who we are: in God's presence as creatures for whom God has made room.

But sin, we have seen, curves the human being inward, cutting off the capacity to enter into room-making relations with one another. Curved inward, human creatures are near, but not attentive and so unable to form room-making communion. Curved inward, human creatures cannot form good place, fit for and hospitable to the diversity of creaturely life. We use other creatures for our own ends, form places fit only for ourselves, and construct *incurvatus* places that erode communion, wall out diversity, and—ultimately—imprison ourselves. When the human creature is *incurvatus*, the whole creation suffers and falls to ruin. In this state of sin, human creatures cannot recognize the truth: that even in rubble and ruin, even in violence and in despair, creaturely life still takes place in the presence of God. God remains near, attentive, and oriented to creaturely life, and remains invested in realizing fullness of life for creatures in God's presence. In order to make Godself known *as present*, to help human beings see the depth of God's commitment to creaturely life, and to restore creaturely relations to the fullness for which we were created, revelation is needed. It is to God's incarnate presence—by which God gives Godself to be known anew—that the next chapter turns.

INCARNATION AND THE GOD WHO INHABITS

"Verbum car hic factum est."

The Word was made flesh here.[1]

Introduction

The incarnation finds us in the ruins of creation. It is here, in the place that sin has wrought, that God gives Godself to be known to creatures. It is here, in places divided and plundered, in the shadows of empire and the toxic waste of sin, that God reveals the fullness of who God is and the redemptive work of God's great room-making love for creaturely life.

In this project, I have been arguing that Christian theology looks different when its central symbols are interpreted anew through the conceptual lens of place. In this chapter, I turn to the symbol of the incarnation. The meaning and mystery of the incarnation take on new significance, I argue, through the lens of place. As a point of clarity, when I speak of "incarnation," I have in mind what might be called the Christmas and Epiphany aspects of the incarnation. (The Good Friday and Easter aspects of the incarnation will be taken up in the next chapter, which interprets the symbol of the cross, and the Pentecost and post-resurrection aspects will be taken up in the fifth chapter, which interprets the symbol of the church.) Through the lens of place, I am arguing, the incarnation—even in its Christmas and Epiphany aspects—is already both revelatory and redemptive. Even before the cross, even before the resurrection, God's inhabitory presence in creation already is making all things new. This argument is theologically significant in so far as it

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[1] So reads the inscription found on the altar in the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth.

situates both revelation and redemption squarely in place, in what is experienced in and through the body and creaturely life together, and it attends to the ways that place itself receives and participates in God's revelatory and redemptive activity.

To explore in depth the ways in which the incarnation is both revelatory and redemptive and the ways in which place receives and participates in this activity of God, this chapter unfolds in three major parts. Part One focuses on the incarnation as God's act of *sheer implacement* in creation. "Sheer implacement," as I am using the phrase, is the simple fact of *being here*, present in the flesh. It is the kind of implacement that is concomitant with being human. It is the sheer fact of existing in and through creation as a kind of maximal place and in and through the various, particular nested places within it. Sheer implacement does not yet have content or value attached to it. God's sheer implacement in creation already reveals, I will argue, God's full and free acceptance of the gifts, tasks, and risks of implacement.

In Part Two, I argue that the God made flesh in Jesus is not only a God of sheer implacement, but is also a God of *inhabitation*. Inhabitation, as I will discuss in greater detail, is the *mode* of God's implacement, a mode that has content and value attached to it. Inhabitation is *abiding presence*, presence that entails deep knowledge, love, and personal commitment. It involves binding one's personhood to place, such that inhabitation is a personal investiture of oneself in a place. To speak of a God who not only is implaced, but who *inhabits* creation is to speak of a God who deeply knows and loves creation, who assumes the risks of love, and who wholly commits Godself to the good of creation. Moreover, by God's incarnation and inhabitation, God makes room in a creation formed by human sin for the fullness of creaturely life, embodied and implaced in Christ Jesus.

In Part Three, I draw on the claims of the preceding sections—that the incarnation is God's implacement in creation and that God's mode of implacement is inhabitory presence—and ask what this means for our understanding of God's revelatory and redemptive work in creation. I ask, in

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other words, how conceiving of the incarnation through this placial lens helps us see anew a God who is *for us*.

Before beginning, a word about the basic Christological framework with which I am working. As with the symbol of the Trinity, I do not offer here an argument for the importance of the symbol of the incarnation itself or an argument for understanding Jesus *as* the Christ. Rather, this chapter works constructively with what I take to be basic Christological affirmations, including the affirmation that Jesus Christ is the one in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19). This chapter works with, rather than argues for, the central aspects of Nicene Christology, which affirms that Christ is the incarnation of God the Son, co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father, born of Mary by the power of the Spirit. As such, Christ is fully human and fully God. Moreover, in what follows, I sometimes refer to Christ as "God incarnate," rather than specifying "God the Son incarnate." This is possible because the Son is true God, but should not be interpreted as meaning that the Trinity as a whole has become incarnate, nor that the Father or the Spirit have become incarnate. I speak of Christ as "God incarnate" not to sidestep or obscure which Trinitarian person is incarnate, but for three important rhetorical reasons: first, to emphasize that Christ is "fully God" even as he is also "fully human," (two natures, one person); second, to reduce the use of gendered language with respect to God; and, third—and most importantly—to emphasize that what is revealed of God in Christ is a revelation of the fullness of who God is as Trinity and not only a revelation of the Son in distinction. This is a matter of the trustworthiness of the incarnation as revelation. The incarnation of the Son really is revelation of God in fullness. Neither the will of the Father for creation nor the work of the Spirit in creation is other than what is seen and heard in the incarnation of the Son in Christ Jesus. With this clarification in place, we proceed.

I. The Sheer Implacement of God

The Christian symbol of the incarnation points to the mystery that "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14). The phrase "lived among us" means, in the Greek, that the Word has pitched a tent, set up a dwelling-place.[2] This image of the Word living among the people recalls the ancient Israelite understanding of God's indwelling presence in the tabernacle and Temple: real places of holy habitation.[3] To take flesh—that is, to become creaturely in body and in being—is always already to take place. It is to co-arise with place and to receive place as gift, task, and risk. The mystery of the incarnation, I am proposing in this section, is as much about God's implacement in creation as it is about God's act of becoming flesh itself. Martin Luther, with reference to Bernard of Clairvaux, described three miracles of the incarnation: that God should take human flesh in this child, that Mary should conceive, and that Mary had the faith to believe that this mystery would be accomplished in her.[4] In a sense, I am proposing a fourth miracle of the incarnation: that God in Christ should take place in creation.

In this Part One, I explore the meaning and mystery of God's implacement. Again, I am speaking here of the simple and sheer fact of implacement, without yet attributing any posture or content to that implacement, that is, without yet considering the particular content—words, actions, or events—of Jesus's life. That God is *implaced here,* standing out as creaturely in the world of places, itself warrants theological consideration. To this end, let us begin by recapitulating and expanding arguments made in Chapters One ("Place") and Two ("Creation") regarding implacement. In particular, I review arguments about implacement as concomitant with bodily life and, therefore, experienced as gift and task. I then add an account of the non-neutrality of place, and allow that

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[2] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I-Xii,* The Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 76.

[3] The Prologue to John's Gospel, likely an early Christian hymn and poetic summary of Johannine theology, speaks of the flesh of Jesus Christ as "the localization of God's presence on earth." Ibid., 20f, 33.

[4] Martin Luther, *Christmas Book,* trans. Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1948), 22-23.

account to shed new light on previous arguments about place as experienced as risk. This review and

expansion of arguments regarding implacement will prepare the ground for a subsequent discussion

of the incarnation as a matter of implacement.

1. *Implacement in Experience*

Throughout this project, I have maintained that embodiment implies implacement. From its

embryonic days, the human body is always somewhere, embedded in place. Indeed, Edward Casey is

right in affirming that "once bodies are found or even are merely posited, they *require* places in which

to exist."[5] To speak theologically of the human being in abstraction from place is nonsensical.[6] Place

and the body belong to one another and cooperate in the formation of one another. In Chapter

One, I argued that place and the body co-arise in human experience. That is, since there is no body

without place, and no place without body, one cannot be said to be "prior" to the other in

experience.[7]

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[5] Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 13.

[6] Abstraction—thinking about a thing independently of its concrete accompaniments—is not always inappropriate, of course. Indeed, there are occasions when considering the human body in abstraction from place is not only appropriate, but important, as in the case of a medical diagram that isolates a certain system of the body for educational purposes. Practices of abstraction become problematic, however, when they become the habitual way of considering a thing, such that a person or culture chronically forgets that the thing actually exists in the context of concrete accompaniments. This has sometimes happened in theological accounts of human life; namely, that we have so habitually considered the human in abstraction from place, that we have forgotten, and sometimes denied, its essential embeddedness.

[7] Here I have diverged from Edward Casey's assessment. Casey argues in concert with Aristotle, and with Archytas before him, that place is "prior to all things." Place is the indispensable condition for all things: "The point is that place, by virtue of its unencompassability by anything other than itself, is at once the limit and condition of all that exists." Yet, as developed in Chapter One, places themselves are composed of bodies and the relations between them. (There would be no place called "prairie" without the bodies of grasses, the sedimentary layers of soil, the regularity of both rain and fire, the exchange of nutrients, etc.) The presence of bodies and their relations constitute place and give a place its particular characteristics. For this reason, I argued in Chapter One, place and bodies co-arise. Casey, 15.

Not only does embodiment imply implacement, but implacement is experienced in and through the body. One experiences place not from an Archimedean point, but as one embedded through the body in the world of places. One cannot experience any place at all except *from somewhere* in the world of places. Consider, for example that even Ralph Waldo Emerson's iconic vision of himself as "a transparent eyeball," pure perceiving "I" that sees all—his image of human transcendence in perception, thought, and spirit—occurs as an event of insight in a quiet wood where he stands "on the bare ground."[8] Even human experiences of "placelessness" and transcendence are given in and through the body in place. For Emerson, implacement on the bare ground of the woods is experienced as a *good* because he experiences there a sense of fittingness, such that being present there is an experience of fullness of life, for him. Yet, implacement may also be experienced as unfitting when, for example, one does not feel safe or sheltered in one's body there. One experiences a place differently depending on whether one is there freely or forcibly, tenuously or securely, fittingly or mal-fittingly, briefly or continuously. Embodiment implies implacement, I am proposing, and implacement is an embodied experience, for good and for ill.

a. Implacement as Gift and Task

Since the body and place co-arise, place is experienced—first of all—as a gift. Place is experienced as a gift, not because it always is fitting for one, but because it always appears before (and under and around) one *as given*, as the material context for one's embodied life. What is more, implacement is generally experienced as a trustworthy gift: an existential structure one can rely on to bear one up and precede out before one in movement. When one place erodes or is dismantled around one another appears to bear one up. This does not mean that the loss of a particular place does not provoke grief or suffering; indeed, this is the very real suffering of displacement, as discussed in

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[8] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Organic Anthology*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 24.

Chapter One. Rather, place itself—that structure of relations in and through which embodied life exists—is trustworthy because in the loss of a particular place one is not abandoned to *noplace*. Penultimately, creation itself is the place of creaturely life together, and, ultimately, creaturely life is together in the place that is formed by the mutual presence of the Triune God, a place formed by the fullness and freedom of God's communion, held open as gift to creaturely life. God's full and free gift of God's presence held open in hospitality is the root of the trust-worthiness of place.

The embodied, relational nature of place means that place is experienced not merely as a given, as something formed entirely by others. A body in place also contributes to the formation of its place through its implacement. Even when one's place is not a choice, one is still involved in the place where one is. The prisoner, the child, the compulsory attendee: none has chosen his or her particular implacement, and yet each, by his or her embodied presence is a participant in the relations that form it. Even one who wishes to refuse participation in the conventional or expected relations of a place—for example, one who takes a knee while the rest of the stadium stands, turns flag-ward, and places hand on heart for the national anthem—participates in, and indeed alters, the relations of that place, in that moment, by the act of embodied conscientious objection. Indeed, embodied acts of noncompliance are powerful modes of resistance to the dynamics of a place precisely because places are formed and transformed by the lived bodies that compose them. In this sense, implacement is experienced not only as gift, but also as a task.

As a task, implacement can be engaged passively or intentionally, with various motives, through various activities. What one cannot do is opt out of place-making relations altogether, for to do so would be to opt out of relationality altogether, which is not a possibility given that creatureliness just is being in relation. Sheer implacement already is participatory.

b. The Non-neutrality and Risk of Implacement

Places, I have maintained, are concrete and particular, which means that one is never simply in place generically, but always is implaced in one place or another (or one place and others, given the nested nature of places). Particular places are formed by particular structures of relations, particular presences. They bear particular meanings and degrees of power through the relations that form them, through their storied pasts, through the socio-cultural significance ascribed to them (e.g. their purpose and value, culturally understood), and through their participation in various economies and political systems.

In addition to being non-neutral, places are not equal in meaning or power. Consider the way such assessments of the non-neutrality of places appear in common parlance. For example, one might speak of certain places as central or peripheral, denoting how important or unimportant they are politically, socially, or economically. For every so-called central place, there are myriad "shadow places"—to use Val Plumwood's term—that contribute to the construction and maintenance of the central place.[9] These shadow places are the sources of the raw materials necessary for the up-building of the central place, as well as the dumping grounds for the waste generated by the central place. While a city's shadow places once included only the surrounding forest and quarries, as well as landfills and down-river sewage build-ups, in a time of globalization a city has far-flung shadow places that supply cheap goods and labor and serve as dumping grounds for all manner of waste. In more conventional terms, we speak of "fly-over" states, "sacrifice zones," and "waysides," terms that describe places as unimportant, not identified with power, or valued only for their utility in

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[9] Plumwood describes shadow places as "all those places that produce or are affected by the commodities you consume, places consumers don't know about, don't want to know about, and in a commodity regime don't ever need to know about or take responsibility for. These places remote from self, that we don't have to know about but whose degradation we as commodity consumers are indirectly responsible for, are the shadow places of the consumer self." Val Plumwood, "Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 44 (2008).

providing the material support for one's life or the greater economic system.[10] In addition to the

language of center-periphery, we also speak of having friends in high (and low) places, referring to

the power or authority of those places and their inhabitants. We speak of places as public or private,

ascribing different, even gendered, power to each.[11] To speak of someone or something as being an

"insider" rather than an "outsider" is also to ascribe a certain kind of social power, a power related

to place and one's ability to function fluidly in a place among other "insiders."[12]

Since places are neither neutral nor equal, neither is implacement. To be implaced is always

already to be situated in relations, stories, and systems. What is more, since implacement is

participatory, to be situated in these stories and systems is to be a participant in the non-neutrality of

a place. It is to be involved—even culpable—in the stories and systems of that place. It is to

contribute, in some way, to the meaning and power of a place.

The non-equality of implacement means that, though all implaced bodies participate in the

formation of place, authorized formative power is not distributed in equal measure. Some have more

authority, responsibility, power, and concrete ability to form places than others. In a home, for

example, adults have the power and authority to arrange the furniture, not children—though

children have their own, less authorized ways of "rearranging" the place. In a communal place—

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[10] The term sacrifice zones, "comes from 'National Sacrifice Zones,' the Orwellian term coined by government officials to designate areas dangerously contaminated by the mining and processing of uranium into nuclear weapons," writes Stephen Lerner, who uses the term in his own book to include a "broader array of fence line communities or hotspots of chemical pollution" where people live near or on land polluted by manufacturing or military activity. See, Lerner's introduction to Stephen Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 2, 3.

[11] In a landmark essay of second-wave feminism entitled "Women, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo argues that the very distinction between public and private places—by which she means places of politics and places of domesticity—inscribes patriarchy onto place. Other thinkers propose different mappings of economic and political power with respect to gender, as well as different responses to the injustices inscribed therein; see, Michael Warner, "Public/Private," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*, eds. Gilbert Herdt and Catharine R. Stimpson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 253.

[12] Relph writes about the experience of "existential insideness/outsideness" with respect to place and power, in Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976).

such as a workplace kitchen—formative place-shaping power is often distributed on the basis of seniority, such that those who have been there longest have more authority. Others may be given formative power by virtue of their office or expertise: the head chef designs the menus, the master gardener plots the gardens, the teacher lays out the classroom, the engineer and urban designer plan the streetscape. But, as emphasized in Chapter One, a place is not merely a context—a kitchen, a garden, a classroom, a streetscape—but a web of relations that involves atmosphere, activity, and culture. Though the chef, gardener, teacher, and engineer may have a certain kind of privileged power, line cooks and porters in the kitchen, visitors to the garden, students in the classroom, and commuters on the street have their own participatory role in the formation of their respective places.

A place also may be powerfully formed by those *in absentia*. This is often the case when place-forming power is held by those with capital—be they people, governments, or corporations. Though a tenant lives in a place, for example, a landlord has particular power over that place, and thus over the lives of its residents. Tenants may arrange and re-arrange the furniture, even paint the walls, but the owner of a property has power to fundamentally change (or fail to change) it, to sell or not to sell it. A related spatial power dynamic is repeated on a macro scale in places of military occupation or colonialism, where residents may form places at the scale of the day-to-day, but do not have formative power over their place at the political or economic level. The power to shape place is a significant form of personal and cultural enfranchisement, and to be deprived of such power is to be deprived of this significant form of agency befitting embodied subjects.

Implacement is experienced not only as gift and task, but also as a risk. It is a risk in at least two ways. First, it is a risk because one is vulnerable to the power dynamics inscribed in a place and its relations. One inhabits relations of power and meaning formed by others, relations that may not have one's wellbeing in mind. A garment factory, for example, is a place designed for maximal production and corporate profit, not for workers' health, wellbeing, or socio-economic thriving.

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Implacement in such a factory is participatory, but exploitatively so. Likewise, city streets are generally designed for the efficient flow of vehicle traffic without due regard for pedestrians. Place-forming power, in these cases, has been given to vehicles and the economies they support. When pedestrians attempt to navigate such streets they may find themselves exposed to danger, prevented from access, or, at the very least, overwhelmed by the task of traversing such an unfitting place. Privilege allows one to limit one's exposure to places that are not fit, places that expose one to certain risks. Those with less privilege may be unable to escape places where they are vulnerable, places formed for the privileged bodies and relations of others.

Second, implacement is a risk because, for place-forming agents, implacement carries with it a kind of complicity. Since implacement is participatory, to be somewhere is to be involved in its relations, even if to varying degrees. When a place is formed by unjust or broken relations to be there is to be complicit in the injustices that form that place. "Complicity," in this case, can, but does not necessarily mean that one is an active, engaged doer of unjust acts (as in, "being at fault" for such acts), but simply that one's life depends upon, is borne up by and folded together with (*complicare*) the unjust relations that form one's place. In theological terms, what I am describing is a spatial form of social or structural sin. If a place is a room-making structure of relations, that structure itself also can be characterized by sin, such that—in one way or another—those who are present in that structure participate in it. Those living in the United States, for example, cannot opt-out of the historical and continual injustices of racism and colonialism that form this place. To be here is to be participatory in these relations—whether as one made vulnerable by these relations and/or as one whose life is borne up by these relations. There is no being neutral here. The pertinent question, then, is not *whether* one participates in a place's relations, but how, to what end, and to whose benefit.

Embodiment entails participatory implacement, I have been showing, but even sheer implacement is not a neutral state of affairs. While the lived body cannot be otherwise than in place, *where one is* (and even *where one is from* and *where one is going*) associates one with certain culturally and materially inscribed meanings, empowerments, and disempowerments, privileges, risks, and vulnerabilities. What does it mean, then, to affirm that, in Christ, God has become incarnate and taken on the gift, task, and risk of implacement, and has entered into its dynamics of power and vulnerability? It is to these questions that we now turn.

2. *The Sheer Implacement of God in Christ*

The symbol of the incarnation points to the mystery that, in Christ Jesus, God is present and implaced. To be fully and freely present, I argued in Chapter Two, is to give the gift of one's whole person to another. Christ is God's presence in creaturely form: the gift of Godself, God's whole personhood as Son, given fully and freely to creation. Whereas God always has been present to creation in a mode of spatiality, nearness, and attention befitting Godself as Trinity, in Christ God is present to creation in a mode of spatiality, nearness, and attention befitting creaturely life.

In this section, we turn to the question of God's implacement in the concreteness and particularities of creation. To recall, in this Part One, we are still attending to the sheer fact of God's implacement, as implied by God's *becoming flesh*. To put this in Christological terms, we are attending here to the sheer mystery of God in creation, of the infinite at home in the finite, and not yet looking to the specific postures or practices of Jesus' life and ministry or to the particularities of his social and spatial relationships, except in so far as they are demanded by an account of sheer implacement. (To be in place at all is always to be in a particular place, so even sheer implacement is never generic, but already a particular implacement *here* or *there*. Thus, even in talking discretely about God implaced in creation, we already must speak of God in Christ implaced in Nazareth, at Jacob's

well, in the home of Zacchaeus, etc.) To this end, let us turn first to the potent center of the

incarnational mystery—that God the Son was born of Mary—listening for the ways that the lens of

place and implacement casts new light on the theological material. Then, we will turn to a broader

discussion of Christ as God's acceptance of the gift, task, and risk of creaturely implacement.

a. *Mary as Theotopos*

The nascent Christ's first place was the lived body of his mother.[13] In so far as Christ is truly God

incarnate, very God "took place" in creation in and through the lived body of Mary. This was no

"ectopic" pregnancy: God, in Christ, was neither out of place nor misplaced, but implanted fittingly

in Mary's womb.[14] In this, Mary and Jesus were no different from other mother-child pairs. But, in

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[13] The holistic language of the "lived body," introduced in Chapter Two, enables us now to speak of God taking place not in Mary's body as a kind of vessel or container, but in her lived body as a place that is a person, an agent and subject.

[14] The claim that, in Christ, God is implanted in Mary's womb, as well as the claim above that, in Christ, God is "implaced in Nazareth, at Jacob's well, in the home of Zacchaeus," as well as relevant others found particularly in this chapter and the next, are warranted by an appeal to the *communicatio idiomatum:* the communion of characteristics of the two natures (divine and human) in the one person of Christ. This Christological concept, advanced by Luther, proposes that Christ's human characteristics and experiences can be attributed to the whole person of Christ and that his divine characteristics and experiences can be attributed to his whole person, such that, without confusing the two distinct natures, the characteristics of both are fully attributable to the person of Christ. In so far as the one person of Christ is both fully God and fully human, we can, therefore, speak of "God in Christ crucified" or "God-incarnate born of Mary."

The *communicatio idiomatum* is, in fact, a significant theological presupposition of this project. It is the basis for conceiving of the creaturely as sufficiently capacious to bear the infinite, of Mary as sufficiently capacious to bear God-incarnate, of the words of Scripture as sufficiently capacious to bear the Word of God, of the church and its sacraments as sufficiently capacious to bear the real presence of Christ's resurrection life. Of course, only when "sufficiently capacious" is understood not according to an Aristotelian model of place as limited spatiality (limited capaciousness), but according to a relational understanding of the room-making capacity of place and presence, does this make sense at all.

On the *communicatio idiomatum,* in general, see *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 622-23. On the *communicatio idiomatum* as a foundational warrant for many particular aspects of Luther's own theology, especially his claims about the relationship between Word and human words of scripture, see, Johann Anselm Steiger, "The Communicatio Idiomatum as the Axle and Motor of Luther's Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000).

so far as this child was God-incarnate, Mary became the place where the mutual presence of God

and her own embodied yes-saying together made room for new life within her. *Theotokos* indeed, but

also *Theotopos:* the one who was place for God in creation.

Conceiving of Mary as a place—indeed, as a fitting place—for God in Christ is not to render

her a passive vessel or container. Indeed, such an image does not align with the understanding of

place as understood in this project. A place, I have been arguing, is a room-making structure of

relations. A personal body can be a place in two ways, I discussed in Chapter One: either by making

capacious room in the body's own structure of relations—the way a mother's body does in

childbearing, for example—or by making room by *ingathering,* drawing others to oneself and the

surrounding area—the way a street performer gathers a crowd and so demarcates a spontaneous

theater on the sidewalk. What is more, a person can be a place for others without risk of

objectification when that person participates relationally in his or her own formation as such.[15]

What made Mary a fitting place for God's incarnate presence? (Or, as Mary herself asked,

"How will this be?" [Lk 1:34].) What makes any finite creature fit to bear the infinite God? Not her

placial or social location: "Even in her own town of Nazareth she was not the daughter of one of

the chief rulers, but a poor and plain citizen's daughter, whom none looked up to or esteemed,"

comments Luther on Mary's position.[16] Not her particular virtue, as idealized accounts of Mary

contend. Indeed, nothing about Mary herself made her fitting. Rather, God's presence as Spirit alone

made Mary fit to be God's first and most essential place in creation. As the angel of Luke's Gospel

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[15] For example, imagine that a group of siblings playing tag has determined that their father should be the "base," a kind of spatial "King's X" where one is safe and exempt from being tagged. If the children have determined this without their father's consent or involvement, then they are using his body as an object or spatial site. If, on the other hand, their father is playing the game with them— having agreed to be the base and gathering them in with his arms as they come running—then he is a place who is also a person, having retained his subjectivity in the game and participating in his *being place* by ingathering.

[16] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol 21: The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 301.

announces, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Because of this, your child will be holy. He will be called son of God" (Lk 1:35). It is well-recognized among biblical scholars that this description of the Spirit "overshadowing" and "coming over" alludes to the cloud of God's presence in the Exodus as well as God's presence after the resurrection.[17] God's presence as Spirit is a room-making presence: wherever it goes, there room is made for the fullness of creaturely life.

The Spirit's room-making activity in the life of Mary should not be interpreted apart from a) Mary's own subjectivity and agency expressed in her yes-saying, and b) Mary's song (Lk 1:46-55) as a socio-political proclamation of the ways that the hierarchies of place would be transformed through God's incarnate presence. Let us consider each in turn. Mary's yes—her willingness to bear God in the world—means that Mary participates in the creative activity of making room for God in the world. Near and attentive to one another, God and Mary were mutually present to one another in the moment of her yes-saying. Yet Mary's capacity to say *yes* was itself a matter of the Spirit's own room-making work in her through faith. When the angel of Luke's gospel describes to Mary what will take place, she responds first, "Here am I,"—or, "Behold"—"the servant of the Lord" (Lk 1:38).[18] Whether translated "Here am I" or "Behold," the language is of self-presentation. Mary makes herself fully present, gives the gift of her whole self to this possibility. In this moment of yes-saying, Mary affirms that who she is and where she is are intimately linked: a servant in God's presence, one for whom God has made room, one in whom God will make room for new life. Mary continues, saying, "let it be," an affirmation of her reciprocal presence, her willingness to participate in what the Spirit is doing. This is her *fiat,* her creative participation in the event of the incarnation.

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[17] See, for example, Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J.Harrington, Sacra Pagina, Vol 3 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 38.

[18] The NRSV renders it "Here I am," while "Behold" is preferred by the RSV, as well as by Johnson's own translation.

By the Spirit's presence and Mary's *fiat,* place and being co-arise in the room held open by their mutual presence in the center of her life. In this moment, Mary is a living icon of the Trinity as Place. Co-arising in the lived body of Mary, the mutual presence of human nature and divine nature arise in communion. The mutual presence of divinity and humanity, these two natures, in the church's language, form a communion: full, free, and mutual presence. The person of Christ is this communion: fully God, fully human. Christ is not a mingled mixture of the two natures, but is both divinity and humanity in communion with one another—that is to say, in full, free, and mutual presence—as one person. The person of Christ is this communion of characteristics.[19]

The nested nature of place is now important. As the Trinity continues to hold open room within the mutual presence of God's own Triune life for the place of creation (creaturely life together), the Spirit and the Son also enter into the midst of creaturely life. The Spirit makes room with Mary for the implacement of the Son. Within the body of Mary, divinity and humanity— natures after their own kind—are present as communion in the one person of Christ. What is more, Christ is implaced in the womb of Mary, but is also—by virtue of her own implacement—nested within the sociopolitical world in which she herself dwells, within creation as a whole, and within the mutual presence of God as Trinity. Since place is not a matter of containment, but of relationship, this perichoretic dynamic is not a paradox of capacity. It does, however, signal the beginning of something new: implanted in the womb of Mary, God indwells God's own presence in a new way.

When God indwells God's own presence in this new way, the old order of places cannot stand. The spatial hierarchies of inside and outside, above and below are confounded. Center and

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[19] Or, as the *Book of Concord* describes this great mystery of the Christian faith: "No communion of characteristics could exist or persist if this personal union or communion of the natures in the person of Christ were not real. Next to the article of the Holy Trinity this is the greatest mystery in heaven and on earth. […] What a communion of the divine nature that must be concerning which the Apostle says that 'in Christ the fullness of the deity dwells bodily [Col. 2:9], in such a way that God and this human being are a single person! […] In Christ there are and remain two distinct natures, unchanged and unmixed in their natural essences and characteristics, and because these two natures exist as only one single person…" *The Book of Concord*, 622.

periphery are drawn into one another.[20] Shadow places are brought into light. The manger becomes the throne. The paradox of God's indwelling God's own presence, of being both Host of and Guest in creation, is the paradox of the finite bearing the infinite. This confounding of social and spatial relations is a change first in the life of God, but also reverberates into the life of the world.

In the *Magnificat*, Mary proclaims this reversal of human spatial sensibilities (Lk 1:46-55). Mary's song proclaims that the high will be made low, the outside brought inside, the finite fit to bear the infinite. While the language of "high" and "low" must be considered spatial metaphors of value in the sense of the "highness" of God's "throne," rather than a literal statement about the location of God's inhabitation, the placial language of the Magnificat is not all metaphorical. It pertains to the real world of places and power. Mary's song proclaims an anticipated and hoped for change to the world of places. The incarnation and implacement of God in the world, her song proclaims, will overturn the long-sedimented meanings of places. Outside, marginal, and unclean places will become central places of God's presence and liberating work. Consolidations of power will be scattered.

An account of Mary as the first place of God in the world also requires attention to the placial contexts of Mary's life and proclamation. Mary is encountered by the angel in Nazareth, "an unimportant village in Galilee," and, after some time has passed, travels to "a Judean town in the hill country," equally unimportant, small, and rural, to visit her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:26, 39). Mary is herself implaced under Roman occupation, made migratory by the Emperor's degree for a census, and displaced by Herod's violent search. The presence of God—usually associated with the central

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[20] Nicholas of Cusa's encouragement pertains: "You must make use of your imagination as much as possible," he bids, "and enfold the center with the poles" (2.11.161). In so doing, he thinks, we can begin to imagine a God "whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere" (2.11.161). While what I have described of God as room-making communion is more dynamic and relational than Cusa's "infinite sphere," insofar as his language disrupts and complicates the usual spatial distinctions, it is an aid to imagining a God who indwells God's own life, inhabits the room held open within God's presence. Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Larence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 161.

place of the Temple—transgresses human geographies of power by entering into the place of a woman's body and into the places where her lived body was itself implaced. Her lived body, itself unimportant by virtue of its placement and movement in and through peripheral places, has become a tabernacle of its own kind: the off-center, journeying, displaced place of God's presence in creation. Yet, it is in and through this place—this person—that creation has become *fit* for the fullness of God's own life as Son.

Already at the moment of Mary's yes-saying, then, creation has been transformed by the incarnation. While God's own life as Trinity always has been *good and fitting place for creaturely life together*, and while creation itself always has been the place of *creaturely life together in God's presence*, now creation itself has been rendered *good and fitting place for God's incarnate presence*. This transformation of place begins with the womb of Mary, but, because of the nested nature of places, reverberates out to the whole creation. The particularity of Christ's implacement in one body, one mother, one place bears meaning for the whole creation. Creaturely life together is now fit for God's fully and freely given presence. Creaturely life together can be good and fitting room for the God's own incarnate life, by the power of the Spirit working therein through faith. This is true *even before the ministry of Jesus*, even before the healing and feeding and the teaching. This is true *even before the cross and resurrection*, even before the power of sin is loosed. If this is not yet redemption in the traditional sense—liberation from the bonds of sin—it is still a soteriologically potent act of God. Already, we see ways in which the sheer implacement of God is both revelation and redemption. God's implacement in Mary reveals a God who is not content to be present to creation as ambient Place, the atmosphere of God's presence, but who wills to be present with and among creatures.

b. *Implaced in creation, Christ accepts the gift, task, and risk of place.*

When the symbol of the incarnation is conceived not only as a matter of *becoming flesh,* but also as a matter of God's implacement in creation, certain implications of the incarnation are brought to the foreground. In particular, we see more clearly how the incarnation entails God's acceptance of the gift, task, and risk of creaturely place.

God in Christ receives the gift of creaturely place, the gift of entering into, standing upon, and taking shelter in the presence of creatures and their structures of relations. Mary, as has been discussed, is Christ's first place in creation, a place given to him as a full and free gift by her *yes* to the Spirit's room-making presence. Born into the world of places, Christ receives the gift of concrete and particular places: places nested, contested, and overlapping, places fitting and malfitting for his own creaturely life. Consider, for example, that God in Christ receives the gift of Palestine's distinct geological formations—the hills of Galilee, the Jordan valley, the desert wilderness—structures of relations formed by weather and element, by animals, vegetation, stone, and minerals, by the presence and absence of water. In Christ, God is guest in a built environment formed by human communities over generations: homes and synagogues, roads between towns and city streets, wells and other gathering places. Incarnate in Christ, God drinks the water of wells that others have dug, walks roads both leveled and rutted by others, is welcomed into the homes others create and tend. Throughout the Gospels, we see Christ accepting the hospitality of others, eating at tables that others have set. Incarnate and implaced, God receives the places of Christ's particular and concrete life as gift without ceasing also to be the God who is the ultimate source and ground of this gift.

To be clear: I am not proposing that it is the specificity of Palestine and its myriad nested places that is at stake here. What is at stake is this: that 1) God became fully human in Christ Jesus, and that 2) being human is being creaturely, a lived body, and so always already being implaced. Moreover, 3) places are always concrete and particular, experienced perspectivally in and through the body such that to be incarnate as one fully human means that God "took place" in concrete and

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particular places, which afforded God not only the "morning knowledge" of creation that God has

always had by virtue of God's presence with and toward creation, but also the "evening knowledge"

of creation as lived in and through the body.[21] It is not, then, the specificity of Palestine or the

specificity of Mary and Martha's home or Jacob's well that is at stake here, but the mystery of

God—in whose presence creation as a whole receives the gift of place—receiving the gift of

concrete and particular place in creation. What is at stake is the mystery of God—Host of all

creation—coming into the presence of creaturely life *as guest*. God does not receive the gift of

creation in the abstract, nor the gift of place as an idea or ideal, but receives the gift of particular

places, formed by particular lives in relation, and sedimented with particular histories and meanings.

God in Christ not only receives the gift of place, but also participates in the task of place-

making. As Trinity, God has participated in the task of place-making with respect to creation as a

whole since the foundations of the world—and in eternal place-making perichorisis with respect to

God's own life as Trinity—but now God engages in the labor and art of place-making as one

incarnate. At a most basic (though no less miraculous) level, consider that Jesus' implacement in

Mary changed not only the shape of her lived-body as place (pushing aside organs, stretching

muscles), but permanently altered her own genetic composition. This is not particular to the life of

Jesus, but is part of creaturely reality. We are always already changing our places just by our presence

there, for good and for fill.

In the incarnation, God in Christ also accepts the risk of implacement. The risk of

implacement is at least twofold: vulnerability and culpability. First, the risk of implacement is the

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[21] The expressions "morning" and "evening" knowledge come from Augustine, who used them to describe (according to Aquinas' explanation) the knowledge of the angels, where "morning knowledge" describes "the angel's knowledge of things in their primordial beginning, namely as they exist the Word; and 'evening knowledge' their knowledge of created reality as existing in its own nature." See, Saint Augustine, "The Literal Meaning of Genesis," in *On Genesis*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), Book IV; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), Ia q.58, a. 6.

existential risk of standing out as a lived body in place. By the incarnation, God in Christ accepts the vulnerability of embodiment and implacement: getting lost, becoming thirsty, bodily pain, harm, and death. Most significantly, God in Christ accepts the risks of malfittingness of place. In the place of the Trinity, the Son has known only perfect fittingness of place. The Son has known the goodness of being sheltered well in the presence of Godself as Father and Spirit, of indwelling room that is fit for the fullness of the Son's divine life. Implaced in creation, the incarnate God now moves in and among places that constrain and contain, places malformed by sin, and places sedimented by idolatries and injustices, by social and spatial orders that do not orient aright to neighbor or stranger. Earlier, I claimed that creation is made, by Mary's yes and the Spirit's room-making power in her through faith, fitting place for the presence of God. Yet, now we see the way in which this is so. Creation is fitting place for the presence of God because it is fitting place for the redemptive activity of God. In so far as God's redeeming activity is who God is—that is, in so far as God's act toward us is God's being in Godself—creation's fitness for God's redeeming activity is creation's fitness for God. Moreover, God's redeeming activity is God's room-making and place-making activity. God made room for creaturely life in God's presence as an act of creation and now, in Christ, God makes room for creaturely life together in God's presence as an act of redemption. These are not two acts, but one ongoing act of faithful presence: *being with and toward creaturely life,* for the sake of its fullness. When God in Christ accepts the risk of implaced vulnerability, God accepts the malfittingness of creation *as the fitting place* for God's redeeming, room-making activity, and activity that is commensurate with God's own presence.

The second risk of implacement is the risk of culpability. To be implaced is to be a participant in the relations of a place, I have argued above. Since places are not neutral, but charged with various forms of power and vulnerability, to be implaced, then, is in a sense to be culpable. Incarnate and implaced, Christ enters into the relational dynamics of place, including into the non-

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neutrality of the world of places. Christ does not stand aloof from the power dynamics of place. Christ does not preserve himself from vulnerability to these relations. Christ does not decline involvement in the sedimentations of power and weakness anchored in places, but—by becoming incarnate—is implaced in the power relations of place. Christ's is a participatory presence. There is a sense, then, in which Christ's implacement does not only render him vulnerable to place, but also culpable in the non-neutrality of places, where "culpability" is understood as being borne up by and folded together with the unjust, malfitting relations that form one's place in its present dynamism and in its historical sedimentations.

Consider that the maleness of Jesus afforded him the commensurate privileges of the patriarchal society of his day.[22] He moved in and through places formed by such place-forming social and spatial relations, relations that contemporary readers of the Gospels may perceive as unbefitting the fullness of creaturely life. In the way that I have defined it, then, Jesus is culpable in this place's malfittingness by being implaced in, entangled with, and a beneficiary of it. This is not to say that Jesus was an active agent in the promotion of such patriarchy (indeed, biblical scholars have helped us to appreciate the significant ways he undermined certain cultural expectations of gender in his day), but that his own life was borne up by and enfolded with it. He had the privilege of reading and teaching in the synagogue, for example, and of engaging in public discourse.

One way to approach this particular issue of Christ's implacement in such contexts is to provide a model by which one can distinguish between the essence of revelation and the accidents of history.[23] Such approaches depend, however, on the establishment of something like an

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[22] On patriarchy as a Christological issue, and on the trouble with distinctions between revelatory essence and historical accident, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1983); *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*, 2nd ed. (New York: T&T Clark Cornerstones, 2015).

[23] An example of such a model is Patricia Wilson-Kastner's proposal that the maleness of Jesus is one of the accidental aspects of the concreteness of the incarnation and is neither decisive nor normative. See, Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

Archimedean point from which we can so much as make that distinction—a vantage point from which we can see clearly what is essence and what is accident.[24] The conceptual lens of place complicates this possibility in two ways. First, the conceptual lens of place insists that *we,* as interpreters of the Gospels and makers of theological distinctions, are always already implaced in our own places, and so do not have access to an Archimedean point of view from which to make such distinctions. Second, even as revelation, Christ is no Archimedean point from which we can distinguish between the essence of revelation and the accidents of history. Christ's implacement is what makes Christ revelation. Disentangled from place and from its accidents—especially its *incurvatus* "accidents"—Christ would not be incarnate, would not be creaturely, and would not be God "with us." Rather than attempt to distinguish between the essence of revelation and the accidents of history—and so to free God from culpability in the dynamics and relations of malfitting places—the conceptual lens of place and its claims about implacement prompt a recognition of Christ's culpability in those relations. Again, this is not the same as saying that God condones the sinful relations that form malfitting places, but that Christ' incarnation and implacement entail his location in and through such places and, in so far as he benefited from them, his culpability in them.

The theological question, then, is not how to free Christ from entanglements in sin's malformation of places, but how Christ frees us from the same. Christ assumes implacement for the

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1983). On the underlying modern question of "distinguishing between kernel and husk," between essential revelation and historical accident, with respect to Jesus and his message, see Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders, 2nd ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908).
[24] For example, Wilson-Kastner proposes that something like "universal human wholeness" is one such vantage point from which to make such distinctions. For critiques of Wilson-Kastner's proposed vantage point in particular, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 115-44, esp. 16-18; Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 97-99; Ellen K. Wondera, *Humanity Has Been a Holy Thing: Toward a Contemporary Feminist Christology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 217. For a critique of presuming the possibility of such vantages altogether, see Schüssler Fiorenza's Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins.*

sake of revelation and redemption.[25] Christ assumes even the risks of vulnerability and culpability in malformed places so that Christ can make room there for God's *given and hidden* presence (revelation) and for the fullness of creaturely life together in God's presence (redemption). To see how Christ does this double work requires attention not only to Christ's implacement, but also to the *mode* of God's implacement. That is, Christ reveals and redeems not only by being implaced, but also by the *mode* of Christ's implacement. It is to the question of God's mode of implacement in Christ and its significance for both revelation and redemption that we now turn.

II. The Deep Inhabitation of God

God is not content, in Christ, merely to be implaced. God is not satisfied merely to skim the surface of this place, to visit creation as one with better places to be. In Christ, God *inhabits* creation. Inhabitation is the material posture and practice of abiding, of dwelling deeply in a place, of making it one's home. It is a way of life in which one gives oneself to a place wholly and makes the good of that place one's own good. It is a way of living in and through place that recognizes one's personhood as intimately tied to place, such that one is not merely *there*—sheer implacement—but *invested there*. Inhabitation is a form of fidelity to place. This fidelity is lived through a set of reliable, though non-exclusive practices, which together form a way of life that is recognizably called *inhabitory*. These practices, I propose in this section, are seen in fullest form in the incarnation.

Inhabitation, I am proposing, is the mode of God's implacement in creation, which is the basis of both revelation and redemption. Inhabitation is the material posture and practice of God in Christ toward the gift, task, and risk of being implaced in creation. In Christ, God not only is implaced in creation—that is, located in its structure of relations—but also inhabits creation, which

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[25] Indeed, in 4th century theologian Gregory of Nazianzus' dictum, "What Christ has not assumed he has not healed, but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved." Gregory of Nazianzus, "Epistula 101.32," in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward Rochie Hardy, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia Westminster Press, 1954), 218.

is to say, makes creation God's home. By the mystery of the incarnation, God inhabits creation and binds God's personhood to it. To make this argument, let us begin by turning to the concept of inhabitation itself.

1. *Inhabitation as a posture and practice of implacement*

Inhabitation of place takes for granted, but is more than, implacement. While implacement is a condition of embodied existence, inhabitation of place is an intentional practice of making a place one's home and developing there a sense of personal attachment.[26] To inhabit a place is, as Daniel Kemmis writes, "to dwell there in a practiced way, in a way which relies on certain regular, trusted, habits of behavior."[27] In what follows, I give a brief account of four aspects of inhabitation as a way of life. These aspects can be practiced in various ways, and are not meant to constitute a comprehensive or normative account of inhabitation, but a way of sketching what it looks like to make a place one's home, one's place of personal attachment and intimate belonging. Such attachment develops over time, I propose, through the cultivation of deep knowledge of a place, affection for it, and personal commitment to it, including the acceptance of personal risk. Let us briefly discuss these aspects of inhabitation.

 Inhabitation involves deep knowledge of a place. To inhabit a place, one must know where one is. In light of the rich conceptualization of place developed in this project, knowing where one is is not a matter of location alone, but is a matter of deep knowledge of and attunement to the relations that

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[26] The theme of inhabitation is a common point of connection between literary circles, especially among bioregionalist writers, and the interdisciplinary conversations of place studies. It is also a predominant theme, even when the precise word is not used, in post-colonial writing about inhabiting places in the aftermaths of displacement and disenfranchisement, see, for example, Gary Snyder, "Reinhabitation," in *The Old Ways* (Stanford: City Lights Books, 1977); Barry Lopez, *The Rediscovery of North America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

[27] Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 79; Timothy J. Gorringe, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

form one's place. This requires not only knowledge of the givenness of place—how it gives itself to be known on the surface of things—but also an awareness of and attunement to the deep-down structures of relations that may not be evident on the surface. Developing such attunement may involve practices of attention to the stories and histories, myths and legends that give a place its significance both in the wider culture and to those who live there. It may involve immersion in the dynamics of culture and ways of life that are practiced in that place. It does not necessarily involve the adoption of those ways of life or cultural norms, but a kind of fluency in them such that one knows who one is in relation to them and how to operate in and through the place as formed by them.

Inhabitation involves an affective tie to a place. To inhabit a place is to have an affective relationship with that place, such that one feels a bond with that place. This is certainly the case with one's home-place. Humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan calls this affective bond with a place *topophilia*.[28] While *topophilia* literally means "love of place," Tuan uses it to describe the whole range "of human being's affective ties with the material environment."[29] Others in the field, including Edward Relph, concur that human affective ties to place can even include antipathies, including "apprehension, dislike, revulsion, even fear of places."[30] Regardless of the particular affective response a place elicits, inhabitation involves the cultivation of an affective *tie* to place. It is this tie that gives one a sense of home and belonging. An affective tie to place makes that place a part of oneself, and oneself a part of that place. Inhabitation, then, is not only a matter of deep attunement to a place as *given* to one, but a sense of kinship with a place.

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[28] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 4. According to Edward Relph, the term actually first appears in W. H. Auden's introduction to *Slick but not Streamlined*, a book by English poet John Betjeman, where Auden wrote that Betjeman's poetry had the potential to help "American poets to take topophilia seriously." See, Edward Relph, "Topophilia and Topophils," http://www.placeness.com/topophilia-and-topophils.

[29] Tuan, 93.

[30] Relph, "Topophilia and Topophils".

Inhabitation involves personal commitment to or investment in a place. To inhabit a place is to invest oneself in it personally, to commit oneself to it by involving oneself in its structure of relations in active, rather than simply passive ways. It is to bind one's own good to the good of that place, one's own future to the future of that place. Consider, for example, a story that is told in my own home region, which is relevantly near to the Hanford Site in Washington State, a now-decommissioned nuclear production plant built in 1943 as part of the Manhattan Project. When a meeting was held to determine appropriate signage to demarcate the toxic site, such that people generations upon generations into the future would be able to recognize the site as toxic, no mater how language and landscape evolve, a man from the Yakama Tribe addressed those gathered, saying that such signage would not be necessary because, "we will tell them." In so saying, this man expressed the inhabitory commitments of his people to this place, even in its toxicity, such that their good and their future are importantly bound to the good and future of this place. To inhabit a place is to bind one's own life to a place by entangling oneself in the web of relations that compose it. It is to make place a part of oneself and oneself a part of a place. One can imagine, of course, *bad* ways of investing oneself in a place, ways that contribute not to the fullness of life therein, but to its degradation. (Indeed, many workers at Hanford invested their whole lives and their highest ingenuities in a project that now leaks death into the Columbia River watershed.) The goodness of inhabitation, then, as a practice of implacement is measured by its contribution to the fullness of creaturely life therein.

All in all, inhabitation is a form of presence—of nearness and attention, of orientation and vulnerability toward a place and its formative relations. It is a posture and practice of presence in, with, and through place as a way of life. It is a way of knowing and giving oneself to be known. It is a commitment to place through the investment of oneself—one's whole lived being—in a place. In the idea of inhabitation, then, several concepts developed throughout this project intersect. Inhabitation is *good* inhabitation when the communion so formed is oriented toward the fullness of

creaturely life together. In this way, good inhabitation is also transformative of place for the sake of life. This might mean working for the welfare of one's place, interceding on behalf of its inhabitants, giving voice to the needs of creaturely lives and relations that compose it. It might mean actively, openly or subversively, transforming or reforming a place, allowing it to become something new.

Consider the lunch counter sit-ins of the American Civil Rights Movement. Under Jim Crow, many eating establishments had been designated—in whole or in part—as "white only" places. By law and in practice these places were formed by segregation and underlying narratives of white supremacy. Though the law authorized business owners to form such segregated places, civil rights activists subverted that unjust law and place-formation with new relations: relations of dignity, equality, and full humanity. With their lived bodies, they did the inhabitory work of forming and transforming places. Over time, and with the power of a movement behind them, their acts of embodied, relational place-reformation led to an end to such segregation, at least in its current form. This is a paradigmatic example of inhabitation that transforms, inhabitation that arises from deep knowledge, love, and personal commitment and is practiced for the sake of making room for new life and fullest humanity.

2. *The God Who Inhabits*

In Christ, God not only is implaced in creation, but also inhabits it. Good inhabitation, I am proposing, is the mode of God's incarnate presence in creation. In this section, I offer an account of how the symbol of the incarnation looks different when we imagine God not only taking flesh, not only being implaced in a sheer sense, but implaced in the mode of deep inhabitation. Imagined as inhabitation, we will see the way the incarnation itself does soteriological work, even if it does not complete it. But first, let us look more closely at what is implied in the claim that God inhabits.

Incarnate in Christ, God attunes God's presence to creation and to the sedimentations of this place. In this way, God cultivates deep, evening knowledge of creation, knowledge possible only by inhabiting creaturely life from the ground up. As the Triune God who is place for creation, God already had morning knowledge of creation—indeed, *is* morning knowledge of creation, *is* the Word through whom all things were made—as represented in classical theological terms as the omniscience afforded by omnipresence. Since creation just is creaturely life together in God's own presence, nothing in creation is outside of the presence or the knowledge of God. Yet, the symbol of the incarnation points to the mystery that God has chosen to know creation in a new way in Christ. In Christ, God's knowledge of creation becomes perspectival, personal, and procedural. God comes into knowledge through God's own creaturely presence in place as Jesus. Standing here, on the bare ground, God in Christ Jesus comes into the knowledge of how creation's layers of sedimentation rise up to meet one in the givenness of particular place.

God's cultivation of inhabitory knowledge of creation reveals something important about who God is. Namely, it reveals that, though it would be within God's power to do so, God has opted not to engage in destructive ways of knowing, that is, ways of knowing that objectivize, commoditize, and destroy the known. God has chosen to know creatures by being in relationship with them, and not only relationship, but constructive, good place-forming relationship. God is not present in creation, then, as one exploring for oil or scouting for recruits, not as one on a reconnaissance mission. These ways of knowing extract and commoditize the known. Nor does God enter into creation with academic detachment, studying a place and its formative relations without becoming involved or invested. Rather, God reveals Godself to be a God of relationship, a God who chooses to know creatures as we long to be known: by one near, attentive, disarmed, and receptive, one who does not make the known objects of knowledge, but joins with the known in mutual presence. In short, God reveals Godself to be one for whom knowledge of creation is a

mode of relation, a part of mutual presence between God and creatures, in which God also gives Godself to be known.

God's inhabitation of creation is not a matter of knowledge alone, however. Inhabitation also entails an affective attachment to place, a kind of *topophilia*. *Topophilia* is a love that binds one to a place with a sense of fittingness, a sense of being at home. It is not a strictly emotional phenomenon, but is experienced in and through the body, its movements and senses. *Topophilia* may be experienced as a familiar scent that elicits a memory, as a scene fills one with a sense of home, as an act of physical exertion gives one a sense of capacity with respect to what the place requires. By God's incarnation, God expresses this kind of love for creation, a peculiar love that only can be experienced through incarnate, inhabitory presence. While God always has loved creation as its Creator, by inhabiting creation God has given Godself to what God loves.

In Christ, God invests Godself as Son in creation. God binds God's personhood as Son to creation. The inhabitation of the Son in creation entails the Son's full and personal commitment to creation, the casting of the Son into the relational structures of creation and at their mercy. In this way, Christ Jesus humbles himself by his inhabitation of the humus, and is obedient, not only to the will of God, but to the laws and vicissitudes of nature. God as Son makes Godself vulnerable to creation and what takes place there. In the next chapter, we will turn directly to the symbol of the cross, which is the symbol by which we can speak most clearly about the risks of such inhabitation: suffering, death, and the grave.

God's inhabitation of creation is already transformative grace for creation. It is grace both as a matter of sedimentation and in the mode of promise. By God's inhabitation of creation, God has made Godself—God's incarnate presence—a formative part of the sedimentation of creation. Creation's deepest meaning and memory, its truest aspect, is God's incarnate presence. From now on—from the moment of the incarnation—creation *is the place* where God has been at home, the

place where the fullness of God has been pleased to dwell in Christ. Creation itself is no longer simply creaturely life in God's presence, but creaturely life formed by God's inhabitory presence. It is place fit for God. Even as creaturely relations themselves bend inward in sin, collapse under their own *incurvatus* weight, God's inhabitory presence remains the single most formative relation of creation. This identity is grace for creation. Whatever else befalls this place because of sin, it always will have been the place of God's inhabitory indwelling in Jesus, the place where God is "at home among mortals" (Rev 3:21).

God's inhabitation of creation is also transformative grace in the mode of promise. Since God has bound God's personhood to creation—that is, made creation itself a formative place in the identity of the Son, so to speak—and since God' has invested Godself wholly in creation by making it a home proper to God, God's future and the future of creation are bound up together. That is *who* God is (as Son) and *where* God is (creation) are intimately linked, not only now, but also into the future. God has bound God's personhood as Son to creation as a kind of inhabitory promise. What befalls creation will befall the Son. What creation suffers, the Son will suffer. Moreover, what the Son suffers the Father and the Spirit also undergo in their own way.

When we imagine the incarnation as God's revelatory and redeeming act of presence in the mode of inhabitation, new light is shed on the biblical witness to this incarnation. Let us turn now to three paradigmatic scenes from the Gospel of Luke, in order to explore in more concrete terms the significance of inhabitation as hermeneutical lens. In these three brief scenes, the Gospel writer presents a Christ who, in my terms, inhabits creation through the particularities of wilderness, synagogue, and home: three places sedimented with meaning, in and through which Christ reveals a God who knows and loves creation, who commits Godself wholly to creation, and who makes room in creation for the fullness of creaturely life.

The wilderness is a place richly sedimented with the prophetic tradition. There, Moses and Elijah fasted, there the people of Israel journeyed for forty years. "Wilderness" may be a literary trope for the Gospel writer, but it can function as such because it is also a concrete and particular place whose meaning is lived and experienced by those who venture in, who there come to identify with the prophetic tradition of Israel. Going into the wilderness, Jesus takes that place—and its historical and cultural significance—into his personhood and into the story of who he is. In the wilderness, Jesus encounters Satan, representative of those powers of evil that contradict and undermine the fullness of creaturely life, that blind creatures to the truth about who they are: creatures for whom God has made good and fitting room. Satan confronts Jesus with three temptations, all of which, according to one interpreter, "bear upon the same fundamental issue: the way in which the Son of God will go about his messianic mission."[31] Or, in the language of this project, the mode in which God in Christ will practice implacement for the sake of the world and its life. This scene follows immediately on the heels of his baptism and offers the reader a first glimpse of who Jesus is and how he will undertake his ministry. In the wilderness, Satan tempts Jesus with a mode of implacement that would secure Jesus' place in the world through status and power. He offers to Jesus place-controlling authority from a position removed from the risks of place. Here, Jesus must decide the mode of his implacement.

First, the hungry Jesus is offered the opportunity to eat if only he will use his divine power on his own behalf. To do so would negate his vulnerability as a body in place, a creaturely body in the place of the wilderness. To use his divinity in this way would make creation something belonging to him and at his disposal, rather than a web of relations to which he belongs. Jesus declines to use his power thusly, and affirms that his ministry is one of creaturely inhabitation of the world and vulnerability to the world, not mastery over it.

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[31] Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 42.

Second, Jesus is offered political authority of the empire and ownership of the world.[32] He is given the opportunity to become a particular kind of Lord: one with authority, power, and dominion. "Choosing to go that route," one interpreter explains, "will simply preserve the present situation where rules exercise authority in the world in oppressive and violent ways (cf. 22:25)—an authority reflective of the one ultimately calling the shots, namely, the devil."[33] Jesus' rejection is twofold. He rejects this form of authority, choosing to become one who serves through embodied participation and risk in the social and spatial relations of place, rather than one who controls a place and its relations without personal risk or involvement. And, he rejects Satan's implicit claim to have the authority to give Jesus such power by refusing to bow down to Satan. This is important: Jesus declines to relate—socially and spatially—to the forces of evil by refusing to take what was offered by Satan and refusing to bow down to him. Jesus declines Satan's participation in the place-formation of Jesus' reign; he declines to make room for such demonic powers of domination in creation.

Finally, Satan takes Jesus to a place of both political power and religious authority, the high pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem. Here, Jesus is positioned at a great height, demonstrating a kind of geographic and spatial power as well. There, Satan proposes that Jesus make a show of his relationship with God by casting himself off the pinnacle and trusting God's angels to catch him. But Jesus rejects this stunt, choosing instead participatory relationship, humble inhabitation, and personal vulnerability. Jesus' room-making ministry cannot be inaugurated by a display of power in which he himself is protected from and raised above of creaturely life and its vulnerabilities and sufferings. Rather, Jesus chooses a mode of implacement that transforms place from the inside, as an inhabitant. In so doing, he declines to become the kind of messiah that is expected: "a violent,

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[32] Johnson notes that Luke uses the term *oikoumene* (inhabited world), which here carries the political connotation of empire, as it does in 2:1, which accounts the Emperor's degree that "all the world should be registered." Luke uses *kosmos* to the natural, created order (9:25; 11:50, 12:30).
[33] Byrne, 42.

military, zealot vision" of messianic power.[34] Instead, Jesus chooses to "walk in the way of peace," (1:79, 2:14, Acts 10:36), a way of inhabitory love and personal commitment.

Returning from the wilderness, Jesus moves to the synagogue in Nazareth, a place of communal life, rhythms of worship, study, rest, and celebration. If the scene in the wilderness was a moment of decision for Jesus, the second scene is Jesus' announcement of that decision to the community. Luke's Gospel introduces the scene, saying, "When he came up to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom" (4:16). Jesus stands to read from the scroll of Isaiah, a prophet who brought a message of hope to the exiles returning from Babylon. It is a prophetic word for a displaced people. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Luke's Jesus reads, "because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18-19).

Thusly, Luke presents Jesus' ministry in prophetic terms. He is anointed (the Messiah) to bring good news to the poor, understood here—as it was in Mary's song (1:52)—as including all who are marginalized by the dynamics of a place, its economy, its systems of power, its borders between insider and outsider, all for whom the present social and spatial relations do not make room. The good news that he brings is one of release (*aphesis*). This word is used to describe the release of slaves and prisoners (4:18), the forgiveness of sins (1:77), and the wiping out of debts 11:4). Importantly, the language of "release" evokes the Deuteronomy tradition of Jubilee, the "year of release," in which there was to be the remission of debts, the release from slavery, the return of land to rightful owners, and the rest of land and animals (Deut 15: 1-18).

Evoking the Jubilee tradition, Jesus describes his incarnate mission in terms of the spatial and social relations that form a place. His commission is to proclaim that—in this and every place—

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[34] Johnson, 77.

the relations that form places malfitting for the fullness of creaturely life are abolished and new relations—relations of peace, freedom, mutuality—are being formed in their stead. This is the dawning of the anticipated and hoped for change to the world of places of which Mary sang. This is the relational foundation of the Kingdom of God, the place formed by God's incarnate presence in creation, the place fitting for the fullness of creaturely life. The promise of place—this new, capacious kingdom—is being fulfilled now, "in your hearing" (4:21). Room already is being made. Good news for the poor, indeed.

The reigning structures of place already are being upended. As we saw in the account of Mary above, when God makes room for the fullness of life in creation, the old order of things cannot stand. Threatening news for those in power, Jesus' declaration of his room-making, place-changing ministry leads to his displacement. He is run out of the synagogue, and out of Nazareth: "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown" (4:24). Jesus' inhabitory mode of implacement entails, paradoxically, his displacement. The reformation of social and spatial relations that together compose places is difficult work, even painful and disruptive, for those who had known themselves in and through the old structure of relations. Having invested the fullness of his personhood in this place—particularly in Nazareth, but also in creation more broadly—Christ Jesus does not stand above the effects of his room-making proclamation, but experiences the very real upheaval it inaugurates.

Displaced from his hometown, Jesus travels to Capernaum, where he begins the room-making ministry he had chosen in the wilderness and announced in Nazareth. The scenes in Capernaum are occasions of healing that occur in the ordinary places of human life. Let us turn to one scene in particular, an occasion of healing that takes place in a home where a great crowd has gathered to hear Jesus teach. The house is so full that when a group of men arrive, carrying their paralyzed companion on a pallet, they find no way to get him in the door to Jesus. There is no room.

Therefore, "they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus" (5:19b). They made room for him. They rearranged the structures of place in order that their companion might be in the fullness of Jesus' presence. Jesus recognizes this as an act of faith, active participation in his own room-reforming, room-making ministry: "When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you'" (5:20). While the friends made room for their companion in the presence of Jesus, Jesus makes room in the midst of all of them for the fullness of creaturely life: "Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God" (5:25). To be healed to is to be restored to the fullness of creaturely life, that is, to the posture of worship, life at full stretch in the presence of God. Faith makes room for doxology. Healed, the man is restored to home and to community, to those relations that gather, shelter, and orient him aright.

Through this hermeneutical lens, we see the incarnation of God in Jesus as an act of implacement in the mode of inhabitation. In the wilderness, Jesus rejects demonic temptations of security for himself, of power over place, the way of violence and dominion. Instead, he chooses the way of inhabitation: the way of embodied embeddedness in the places of creaturely life, the way of affective attachment to place, the way of vulnerability to the dynamics of place. In this way—through the ministry of incarnate, inhabitory presence—Jesus will make room in the brokenness of creation for the fullness of creaturely life.

In the synagogue, he announces the inhabitory ministry to which he has committed himself. In the prophetic language of Jubilee, he proclaims the social and spatial transformation that is already underway: release and freedom from manifold captivities, specifically for the poor and the displaced, those on the outside or margins of the social and spatial relations of places as they stand. The Jubilee proclamation sets forth an agenda that will transform the social and spatial relationships

that form places, making room for the fullness of creaturely life. Jesus, himself, suffers the consequences of this transformation; he is rejected and displaced.

In a local home, Jesus demonstrates what this Jubilee message looks like in quotidian places. In the presence of Jesus, room is made for the fullness of creaturely life. The room created is not merely "spiritual space," but an actual change in a concrete and particular place: the bodies of the crowd are pressed back, the roof is opened, the outsider is at the center. Nor is the room created magically. By faith, people participate in this Jubilee by reforming and transforming places so that those outside are brought in, those low are lifted up, and room is made in the presence of Jesus.

Inhabitation, I have been proposing, is the mode of God's implacement in Christ. By inhabiting creation, God has expressed not only acceptance of the gift, task, and risk of place, but has chosen to invest Godself personally in the creation and to make creation God's own home. God has not merely skimmed the surface of this place, or become implaced in the mode of one who rules over place from a protective remove. The God who inhabits creation is a God attuned to the deep sedimentations of creation, including its sedimentations of sin, broken relationships and life together. Yet, in Christ, God determines to invest Godself in creation so as to bind God's personhood as Son to this place, even to the brokenness of creation under the conditions of sin. We will not see this completely until we turn to Christ's death on the cross, which is the depth of the incarnation: God's inhabitation of creation all the way down to the *lived no place* of the cross. Yet, even before the cross, I posit, God's inhabitation of creation is revelatory and redemptive. It is to a more explicit account of this that we now turn.

3. Revelation and Redemption: Room for New Creation
When God enters into the place of creation, God embeds Godself in its place-forming relations, including its distorted, broken, unjust, and sinful relations. God inhabits creation as it is found,

arising into the ruins of creaturely life, into places of creaturely suffering and death, loss and hopelessness. In short, God inhabits creaturely displacement: the dispersions, disorientations, and naked homelessness of creaturely life in a place formed by and sedimented in sin. In this place—creation as it is found, even in its ruins—God makes room for the fullness of creaturely life. This room-making activity of God is both revelation and redemption. Revelation and redemption are not two acts of God, but one. God's inhabitory presence is revelation—of Godself and of the fullness of creaturely life—and God's inhabitory presence is creation's redemption.

Here the distinction between sheer implacement and deep inhabitation matters. By sheer implacement, God reveals God's *being here.* This in itself is a certain revelation of God, namely, the revelation of a God who accepts the gift, task, and risk of place. Yet, it does not yet offer to creatures content about *who* God is. It does not yet reveal God's disposition toward creation, namely, God's love for creatures and God's being *for* them and *for* their fullness of life. The sheer gift of God's implacement does not yet reveal a God who is merciful or a God inclined toward the restoration or renewal of creaturely life together in God's presence. Yet, God's implacement in creation is not without content. It is not pure act. God's implacement is in the concrete and particular person of Jesus, who is God's *being here* in the mode of inhabitory presence. God's inhabitory presence in Jesus reveals a God who is not only *here,* but here in a certain mode and disposition. In Jesus, God makes creation God's home, investing Godself in the good of this place and binding God's personhood to this place. God's good inhabitation reveals a God who loves creation and who gives Godself to creation in order to make room here for the fullness of creaturely life.

Inhabiting creation, God's invests in creation God's *given* and *hidden* presence. God's given presence, as discussed in Chapter Two, is God's presence *given to be known* among the company of creatures. God gives Godself to be known in Christ, such that to know Christ is to know God.

Christ's inhabitation reveals a God who is *for* creation, a God who has committed Godself to creaturely life together and invested Godself personally in its good. Additionally, Christ is also God's *hidden* presence, God's presence clothed, sheltered, and at home, tucked into the folds of creaturely life. God does not hide in order to conceal Godself, but in order that God might be found and known here, at home in the particularities of creaturely life together. God's hidden presence, as also established in the previous chapter, is God's presence sheltered and clothed in creation, not only in its splendor, but also in its decay and brokenness, under what is contrary to God's glory and life. Inhabiting creation, God invests God's given and hidden presence in creation and makes this place God's home.

By making creation God's home—a place of ingathering, shelter, and orientation for God's own life—God has bound God's personhood as Son to creation. The incarnate life of the Son in Christ is now part of the deep sedimentation of creation. Creation itself will always be *the place of God's inhabitation.* Though creation always has been *creaturely life in God's presence,* it is now also *the place where God is at home among them.* This sedimentary layer of meaning, this deep memory of creation itself, makes creation new. It is a new place by virtue of God's home-making in it. Here we begin to see how revelation is already redemption, when both are a matter of God's inhabitory presence.

Moreover, if we affirm with Barth that God is toward us as God is in Godself, God's inhabitory presence among creatures really does reveal something important about the Triune God.[35] In Chapters One, I worked constructively with the idea that God is Place, the first and fullest analogue of placeness as such, and *good place* in particular. In Chapter Two, I proposed that God as Trinity is also mutual presence in its most fitting sense: full, freely given, and forming good communion. At that time, I promised that an account of God as place and fullest presence would be

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[35] Barth's understanding of revelation as rooted in his dictum that "God is who He is in His works"—such that God's act of revelation declares who God who really is in Godself—is found in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight, vol. II.1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 260.

borne out when we came to an account of revelation. The incarnation is this revelation. In Christ, God gives God's presence to be known by creatures. What God is toward creatures—fully and freely given, near and attentive, oriented and disposed toward them, and making room for the fullness of their life together—is what God is in Godself. God is in Godself this intimate nearness in distinction, this web of mutual presence that together make room for the fullness of life. God is this room-making communion, this place of Trinity: first for Godself and—as given in revelation—also for us.

In the incarnation, God's inhabitory presence makes room for the fullness of life out of love for creatures and as a promise to us. Once again, let us consider how a story from the biblical witness takes on new significance when we read it through the lens of God's inhabitory presence as a single movement of revelation and redemption. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus takes a boat to the far side of the lake, the land of the *other,* the Gentile land of the Garasenes (Lk 8: 22-39). The Gospel writer describes the place in the language of impurity: a place of tombs, swine, and the outcast (8:26). Jesus steps ashore and meets a man filled with unquiet spirits, a man naked and disorderly, who "did not live in a house but in the tombs," the unclean with the unclean (8:27). In his nakedness, we see everything that has been stripped from him: his dignity, his place in society, his humanity. His nakedness reveals his utter vulnerability and isolation, the starkness of his unanswered need. Possessed by demons, he has been dispossessed by everyone else, displaced to the tombs: a *lived noplace*. And, as discussed in Chapter One, implaced in *noplace* is to be dismissed by society as *no person*. (Here the intimate link between *who* and *where* is a risk for human life and not straightforwardly an occasion for flourishing.) Encountering this man, Jesus does not retreat to his boat, but steps out onto the land: present, stepping out in risk, fullness of presence, and personal commitment born of love. He involves himself in the relations at work in this place: relations between the place of the city and the place of the tombs, the relations between the legion of demons

and the man they inhabit, the relations between the townspeople and the man they dispossessed. Christ does not keep himself clean—ritually, physically, spatially, or relationally—but involves and invests himself in the dynamics of this place.

After a word from Jesus, the demons enter a herd of pigs who—now stripped of their own right minds—plunge off the cliffs into the watery abyss. The man is free. "Then the people came out to see what had happened," the story continues, "and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind" (8:35). In the place of Christ's presence, this man is displaced no longer, but is gathered in, reoriented, and clothed anew. What had been a place of displacement and death, now becomes a place of communion, a place where room is made in the presence of God. At the feet of Jesus is room for the fullness of creaturely life together.

In Christ, God the Son inhabits creation not with the occupying force of legions, but with love and with mercy. God inhabits human life, not by taking captives, but by becoming human. God does not come to usurp power. God does not enter creation as a colonizer. But neither does God's room-making inhabitory presence imply God's acceptance, adaptation to, or passive reinforcement of the dynamics of power already sedimented here. Rather, God inhabits the places of creaturely life as one sits-in at a lunch counter, subverting demonic powers and privileges.

In Jesus, God's inhabitory presence makes room. Presence—I argued in Chapter Two—is a matter of nearness and full attention. God's incarnation in Jesus and inhabitation of creation is real presence, fully and freely given. In Jesus, God has come near to and attends creatures, clothes and restores them to fitting place in right relation with one another. In Jesus, God is present to creaturely life. Jesus Christ is where room is opened up for new life, life that takes place in the midst of creation, even its disorderliness and brokenness. Wherever Christ goes, capaciousness emerges within the narrow places of creaturely life. By Christ's inhabitory presence and transformative

activity, the Plain becomes a kind of synagogue, a place of teaching among the people gathered (Lk 6:17-49). A town gate—a place culturally demarcated for begging and for the outcast sick, where a man who had died was being carried out, unclean in death—becomes, when Christ makes room for life there, a place of resurrection and restoration to relationship (Lk 7:11-17). The home of an ungenerous Pharisee becomes the place of an unbidden guest's own act of room-making hospitality and of God's forgiveness poured out like oil (7: 36-50). A little boat on a stormy lake—a place of movement, labor, and risk—becomes a place of faith's firm ground (8:22-25). Where Jesus is, there is room for new life and new personhood at full stretch.

Christ's inhabitory presence is revelation of the God who makes room. In finite, narrow, and even badly distorted places, Christ makes *good and fitting place* for the fullness of creaturely life in the presence of God and one another. Christ makes places that gather, shelter, and orient the vulnerabilities of creaturely life well, and, in so doing, reveals the God who gathers creaturely life together, shelters creaturely life in the safety of God's presence, and orients creatures to Godself and to one another in communion. Christ does this not by creating places *ex nihilo,* but by making room for creaturely life in and through the precedent places of creation. Creation, Christ's place-making reveals, is the stuff of new creation. *Life together* is the relational structure in and through which God is making room for new life.

Christ's inhabitory presence is not only revelation; it is also redemption. Christ not only reveals the room-making hospitality of God, Christ does God's room-making work in creation. Christ not only reveals the orientation of God toward creatures and our good, but *is* God's activity, God's presence and work *for us*. Whereas God already had made room within the mutual presencing of the Triune life *for* creation, when God inhabits creation in Jesus, God's incarnate presence makes room for new life *within* creation. Creation becomes a capacious place, a place fit not only for God's inhabitory presence, but also for new, abundant creaturely life. In the next two chapters—which

take up themes of resurrection and life together as church—we will discuss more fully the particulars of this new creaturely life for which we are formed more fully. For now, let it suffice to say that God's inhabitory presence in Christ has rendered creation a place where we can become new persons, given new life together, in and through the place of creation. *This place*, God's inhabitation reveals, is the place of new life. This place is graced.

In this way, I am arguing that the revelation of God's incarnate presence is already redemptive. In a temporal paradigm, one tends to conceive of the symbols of incarnation and salvation as distinct moments in salvation history—represented, perhaps by two historical moments in the life of Jesus: his birth and his death/resurrection. Through the lens of place, however, incarnation and redemption are part of the same act of inhabitation. Incarnation itself makes room for the fullness of creaturely life in and through the place of creation. Even before the cross, even before the resurrection, the sheer implacement and particular mode of inhabitation of God in creation has initiated God's saving, room-making activity in creation. God's inhabitory presence makes room for newness of life in and through this place. Even where broken and violent creaturely relations form malfitting places, even where creaturely relations ruin and devastate places, God's presence in Christ makes room for new life. God commits to creation and makes creation God's home—the place God recognizes as God's own, the place God forms in God's own likeness, the place of God's rest and return. God binds Godself to this place such that—whatever the future of creation holds—one does not go without the other. In this way, the room-making, inhabitory presence of God within creation is grace.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the symbol of incarnation, asking how it looks different through the conceptual lens of place. Whereas theological accounts of the incarnation often focus on the aspect

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of God *becoming flesh,* I have proposed that the lens of place invites us also to pay attention theologically to God's *implacement.* God's implacement does not mean God's containment in the limited spatiality of creation, but, rather, God's situatedness in the structure of creaturely relations and life together in God's presence. This means, then, that God not only takes place in creation, but also enters into God's own presence in a new way. God remains the Host of all creation, even as God also slips God's given and hidden presence into the place of creation as guest. As guest—as one who first takes place in the body of Mary and then in the wider world of places, some fitting, some ill-fitting—God accepts the gift, task, and risks of place. Yet, it is not enough, I proposed, to speak of the implaced God, for implacement can take many forms—some violent and place-destroying. (A bomb explodes in the event of its implacement, and is no-less implaced for its place-annihilating effects.) God's mode of implacement is seen in the content—the postures and practices—of Christ's life and ministry. In Christ we see a God who inhabits, that is, a God who enters creation as one who loves creation, who desires to be present in and with creaturely life. We see a God who develops inhabitory knowledge of creation, that is, knowledge in and through the body, its perspectives, and its vulnerabilities. In Christ we see a God who invests Godself personally in creation, such that creation's good is God's own good, creation's future God's own future.

Whereas theological accounts of the incarnation also often distinguish between God's *becoming flesh* and God's work of redemption on the cross, I have proposed that the lens of place helps us to perceive the incarnation as already both revelatory and redemptive. God's inhabitory implacement in Christ both reveals the God who makes room in God's own Triune presence for the fullness of creaturely life and redeems creation by making room within it for new life together. God in Christ *does* in this place *who* God is in Godself. This is not to undermine the irreducible work of the cross, which is—as we will see in the next chapter—the absolute depth of God's inhabitory love

and commitment to creaturely life. Rather, this is to situate redemption and revelation squarely in creaturely life together.

The inhabitory presence of God in Christ Jesus reveals what the noetic effect of sin has obscured, namely, the fullness of life for which we are creation. Christ's place-making ministry, the Jubilee of places and their relations, is restoration to the fullness of creaturely life together. Fullness of creaturely life, we see, is not a matter of individual personhood or relationship with God. It is not the human being standing out alone in God's presence. Rather, the fullness of creaturely life is the Jubilee of creaturely life together, in and through the place of creation. It is life together, an inhabitory Magnificat.

THE CROSS AND THE DISPLACED GOD

Introduction

We come now to the cross, the displaced and displacing center of Christian theology. In the

preceding chapters, I have worked through a selection of the Christian faith's central symbols—

namely, Trinity, creation, and incarnation—offering to the theological imagination a way of

perceiving these symbols and their significance anew through the lens of place. Yet, there is a crucial

way in which my account of these symbols and their significance has remained incomplete because it

is only by viewing them retrospectively from the vantage of the cross that we can perceive them

rightly.[1] God's presence on the cross both fulfills and judges all that has been said thus far about

what it is to be God as Trinity, how God is active and present in the world as Creator, and the

depths to which God has determined to inhabit creaturely life. The cross has the power to do this,

that is, to both fulfill and judge our precedent ideas about God and creaturely life, because—as I

argue in this chapter—the cross is the place where God reveals the fullness of who God is, the truth

about who we are, and the absolute depth of God's inhabitory love.

I. The Cross as Place

As a subject of theological reflection, the cross is most often interpreted either as an artifact of

history or as a theological symbol. In this section, I explore the cross *as a place*. By now, readers

should be clear about what I mean and do not mean when I speak of place; namely, that I do not

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[1] On the cross as vantage point from which one sees both God and humanity clearly, see Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 362.

mean simply a limited spatial area or geographical location, but a structure of social and spatial relations that, together, make room for something or someone else. When I speak of the cross as place, then, I do not mean merely the location of the crucifixion (*i.e.* Golgotha), though location is certainly involved; rather, I mean to evoke the complex, overlapping, and mutually reinforcing web of social and spatial relations that, together, make room for the paschal mystery: the betrayal, suffering, death, burial, descent, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. I am using "the cross," then, to signify not only the crucifixion, but this whole revelatory and redemptive event.

Exploring the cross *as place* opens up theological possibilities, of which three are of primary importance here. a) Places gather multiplicity into unity, bringing diverse entities, lives, events, memories and narratives into relationship with one another in the formation of a unitary phenomenon. To approach the cross *as a place*, then, is to recognize its capacity to gather together into a single phenomenon elements that often are perceived as separate from one another. This is true also with respect to time; that is, places gather together into a single phenomenon elements that—were we approaching them in temporal terms—would be dispersed across time. In a grotto or chapel, for example, one stands in a place formed by the prayers of people offered over time, even centuries. Places bear time within themselves, presenting an accretion of history, memory, and meaning to one as something to be inhabited. When the paschal mystery is perceived through the lens of time, it is approached as a mystery unfolding in a series of temporally sequential events: he was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead; on the third day, he rose again; he ascended into heaven. When the paschal mystery is perceived through the lens of place, one encounters it, not by trotting out a timeline of events, but by inhabiting the place demarcated by its mystery. The paschal mystery, then, becomes something thick and inhabitable, something formed of sedimentary layers of meaning and memory, something in which one dwells and from the vantage of which one perceives everything else.

Furthermore, when the cross is approached as a place, we recognize it as a phenomenon that is formed not simply by spatial bodies and entities (people, objects, landscape), but also by memories, meanings, and narratives. The cross—as Jesus inhabited it—was already a place formed by the prayers of the psalmists, by messianic hope and expectation, and by ancient understandings of prophecy. And the cross—as inhabited today by the theological imagination—is a place formed by those same psalmists, etc., by Jesus' own life, and further by the Apostle's letters and the Gospel writers' theological narratives, through which the theological imagination inhabits it. This means that the cross is at once the place of the crucifixion *and* the resurrection. It is always already the place of Christ's apparent abandonment by the Father *and* the place of Christ's giving of the Spirit to the church. What is more, it is always already—and here I must specify always already *for us* today, as we receive and inhabit it theologically and approach it methodologically—a place formed by the prayers and hopes of psalmists and prophets, by the Gospel writers and their own contexts, and by the church's continual inhabitation of that place by the Spirit.

b) Approaching the cross as a place situates its revelatory and redeeming power in the actual geography of creation. Christ and the whole of the paschal mystery are relational events that form and transform creation *as place* and, in so far as creation takes place in God's presence, forms and transforms God *as Place*. Place itself becomes the mechanism by which the concrete particularities of the incarnation and paschal mystery become saving and transforming events for us. God's revelatory and redeeming work on the cross happened *here*, in creation, the very world in which we live. If there is a troublesome ditch to negotiate, it is a ditch between the particularity of the place of the cross and its relationship to the whole creation. That is, through the lens of place, the question we face is not about how the events of history can become religious truths (*a la* Lessing); rather, we face the question of how God's presence and action in one concrete and particular place can be saving or

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healing for the whole of creation.[2] In other words, how God's activity in *that* place can restore *every*

place. We will return to this question in the pages to come. For now, it is enough to identify the shift

from the traditionally temporal articulation of the particularity question to a spatial one.

c) Finally, when we approach the cross *as a place* we have available to us the various tools of

place-analysis and the tools of analogical language as laid out in Chapter One. In Chapter One, I

argued that the analogical concepts of place and good place refer first to the place of the Triune

God and to other candidate places in so far as they share characteristics with the Triune God. In so

arguing, I proposed that the Trinity is the place by which other places are judged as to the degree of

their placeness at all and as to the degree of their "goodness" as places in particular. Places that do

not share the characteristics of Trinitarian place (co-arising with being, social and spatial relationality,

dynamism, room-making, etc.) are not places, or fall closer to the non-place end of the formal

continuum. Places that do exhibit the characteristics of place but make room for the cultivation of

something other than the fullness of creaturely life—such as for creaturely exploitation—are places,

but are not *good* places as normed by God's own goodness in making room for creaturely flourishing.

The Triune God, then, is the plumb line against which the placeness and the good-placeness of

candidate places are measured.

The place of the cross complicates this tidy paradigm, however. Here a paradoxical double-

judgment occurs. On the one hand, the place of the Trinity judges the place of the cross as to its

fitness for creaturely life. The condemnation is full: the cross is a *lived noplace,* wholly *unfit* for life and

meaning. On the other hand, since the cross is the place of God's fullest self-revelation, God's deep

inhabitation, then it is at the cross that we see rightly just who God is. As a place of revelation, then,

the cross is *good place*—place where creatures can stand in and know God's life-giving presence. This

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[2] On Lessing's ditch, see, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, ed. Henry Chadwick, A Library of Modern Religious Thought (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1956).

paradox—that God would give Godself to be known in a *lived noplace*—comes as a critique and corrective to understandings of God apart from the cross. In turn, this changes the analogical concept of place by which other contestant places are fulfilled and judged.

1. *The Place-forming Relations of the Cross*

A place, I argued in Chapter One, is a complex relational structure formed by things and people and by the relations between them. Together, by the dynamics of this multiplicity of relations, something more than the sum of its parts is formed: a place, an inhabitable, room-making web of relations in which other lives, other things, other events may "take place." The cross, I argue, constitutes a place in just this way. The place of the cross is formed by the convergence of people, powers and principalities, by its geography as lived and sedimented with meaning, by hope and lamentation. Together, these participant factors and their relations are united by their work of making room for the suffering and death of Jesus. To develop a rich sense of the cross *as* place, let us consider the most significant of these formative factors, asking what each contributes to the place of the cross and its fittingness to be the place of God's own presence and activity.

a. Roman imperial power and terror

The place of the cross was formed in the context of Roman imperial occupation. A political, economic, and military force, the Roman Empire expanded the scope of its power and influence through a process of invasion, conquest, and rule.[3] In 63 B.C.E, Roman troops invaded and seized

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[3] The following discussion of Roman imperial power and its practice of crucifixion draws on the scholarship of Martin Hengel, whose *Crucifixion*, presents a respected account of the political significance of crucifixion in the Roman Empire, and Neil Elliott's *Liberating Paul*, which situates the Apostle's own discussion of the "crucified Christ" in the context of Roman imperial domination. See, Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress

Jerusalem and brought the Judean region under the Empire's control. As a client kingdom of the Empire, Judea was governed by its own governor—first the infamous Herod the Great (37 – 4 B.C.E), and later his sons, Herod Archelaus (4 B.C.E. – 6 C.E.) and Herod Antipas (6 – 29 C.E.)—but ultimate, imperial power belonged to Rome. Signs of Roman authority shaped daily life in Judea: the Emperor's visage on coins, the presence of Roman garrisons, the collection of taxes for the Roman government, and the execution of sentences for crimes both civil and criminal. As recounted by Gospel narratives, it was the authority of the Roman Empire that compelled Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem to be registered in the census (cf. Lk 2:1-5), and it was Herod the Great who conducted the round-up and massacre of children when he felt his authority threatened by rumors of the birth of a child king (cf. Mt 2:16-18).

By its very nature, imperialism is a place-forming mode of political power, whereby a centralized power engages in (often violent) land-grabbing campaigns by which it increases the spatial and social scope of its authority. Places like Judea, which have their own rich histories and cultures, are absorbed into the Empire as "shadow places," places of utility valued for their wealth, natural resources, or strategic location for trade.[4] What is more, imperialism forms places by the violent, often terrorizing, expressions of authority used to maintain control of a place and its people. Imperial authority—often manifest in military occupation or through the legal authorities of a client king or local governor—controls when and how people move, whether to migrate, cross borders, or traverse town. It establishes who counts as an insider and who must be rejected as an outsider. It

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Press, 1994); Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

[4] On "shadow places," particularly their relation to the machinations of empire, see the preceding discussion in Chapter One as well as the original source of the concept: Val Plumwood, "Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 44 (2008).

regulates which types of speech and behavior are "fitting" for a particular place and use violence as a means to deter and limit that which is deemed unfit.[5]

The Roman Empire used crucifixion as "an instrument of imperial terror," a means to control a place and its formative social and spatial relations.[6] Crucifixion was one of several forms of "aggravated" capital punishment used to secure the subordination of the lower classes and to prevent rebellion by the conquered.[7] It was used most often for crimes against the state, including treason, desertion, and insurrection. Perhaps more important than the actual death of a particular criminal, crucifixion instilled terror in the community that witnessed the event and looked upon the corpse in the aftermath. Crosses were placed in public places, often near busy roads, where those considering participation in a rebellion would be forced to look upon the brutalized corpses and reconsider their allegiances. In some cases, a criminal would be killed by another means only to be hung on a cross subsequently, a practice that demonstrates crucifixion's power not only for execution, but as a means of terrorizing the public and deterring future acts of rebellion.[8] Crucifixion thus served as "a means of waging war and securing peace, of wearing down rebellious cities under siege, of breaking the will of conquered peoples and of bringing mutinous troops or unruly provinces under control."[9] In short, crucifixion was not simply a criminal punishment, but part of a larger strategy for control, including control of places.

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[5] On the issue of the "fittingness" of persons, bodies, or behaviors for particular places, see Chapter One.

[6] Elliott, 93.

[7] Crucifixion was used primarily as a form of execution for the lower classes, while the upper class faced capital punishments of a somewhat more "humane" form, including decapitation. The place of the cross, then, is already a place formed by socio-economic relations. On this distinction, see Hengel, 34.

[8] For example, Julius Caesar is said to have shown great mercy to a band of pirates who had held him ransom in just this way, namely, by having them first strangled and then crucified as a deterrent against future piracy and acts of ransom. This story is recounted by his imperial biographer in Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, trans. Catharine Edwards, Oxford World's Clasics (2008), [74] 33.

[9] Hengel, 46.

For the length of Jesus' life and for a generation following, Judea was among the "unruly provinces" that the Roman Empire sought to bring under tighter control through the practice of crucifixion. It was used as a means to "pacify" citizens during the two Jewish rebellions (66 and 70 C.E), as recounted in horrific detail by Josephus. The city utterly besieged by the Roman military, citizens of Jerusalem—"penniless workers"—attempted to flee the city walls in search of food.[10] As many as five hundred such people a day were captured by the Roman army, tortured, and "crucified in view of the wall" of the city.[11] "In view of the wall" implies that the crucifixions were a) outside the city proper, yet b) intended as a public spectacle. Indeed, the families of the crucified and other would-be escapees were dragged up onto the wall and forced to witness the terror just beyond it. The Emperor, Titus, permitted these daily mass executions out of "the hope that the sight of it would perhaps induce the Jews to surrender," according to Josephus.[12] This continued until, "owing to the vast numbers there was no room for the crosses, and no crosses for the bodies."[13] Thus, in Judea specifically, the Roman Empire used crucifixion as an instrument of place control: keeping the starving multitudes inside the city walls while under siege, deterring would-be rebels, and creating political pressure for the city's submission to imperial rule. What had once been a lively city, bustling with commerce and culture, and the center of worship became, during this time, a place of rubble and ruin.

The place of the cross was formed by these very relations of domination and subjugation, of Roman imperial power and terror. Though the particularly heinous events of the mass crucifixions by the Roman Empire took place after the death of Jesus, Jesus' crucifixion was an instance of the same imperial impulse to prevent sedition since his life and ministry were perceived by the Empire

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[10] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. G. A. Wiliamson (London: Penguin Books, 1959), 325.
[11] Ibid., XI.1, 326.
[12] Ibid., 326.
[13] Hengel, 26. See, Josephus, V.449-51, 325-6.

as a threat.[14] In this way, Jesus' own cross was like the cross of those before and after him: namely a "politically engineered horror."[15]

b. Religious Fidelity and Resignation

The place of the cross was also formed by the dynamics of religious fidelity and the resignation of a certain kind of messianic hope, as well as by the dynamics of an honor/shame culture. Since each is exemplified by Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, I have brought them under one heading. To recall, according to Gospel accounts, Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem and tried before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish judicial body, which included the High Priest (Mt 26:57, Mk 14:53, Lk 22:54, Jn 18:24). In this narrative scene, portrayed somewhat differently in each of the Gospels, the Sanhedrin question Jesus regarding his identity; that is, whether he does in fact claim to be the Christ/Messiah, the Son of God, or the King of the Jews.[16] Jesus answers—at least obliquely—in the affirmative: "You say that I am" (Lk 22:67), "You have said it" (Mt 26:63), "I am" (Mk 14:61), and "You say that I am a king" (Jn 18:37). The Sanhedrin then condemns Jesus and turns him over to Pilate, the governor of Roman Judea, for a civil trial and capital punishment. In Luke's Gospel, the charges brought against Jesus by the Sanhedrin and conveyed to Pilate were of sedition: "And they began to accuse him,

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[14] For theological discussion of the political nature of Jesus' execution, see, as two noteworthy examples, Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino—who argues that "Jesus was actually executed as a *political rebel*, not as a blasphemer," because his vision of God's coming kingdom threatened those in political power—and New Testament scholar Paula Fredriksen—who argues, in part, that Jesus' ministry was a religious and political response to Roman rule in Palestine. Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of New Testament Images of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University, 2000); Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 368.

[15] Elliott, 93.

[16] In each of the Gospels, Jesus is questioned as to his identity with respect to a title of great religious, as well as cultural and political, significance. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each use the language of Messiah (Christ, in the Greek) (Mt 26:63, Mk 14:61, Lk 22:67). Luke and Matthew add the language of "Son of God" (Luke 22:70), Mark adds "Son of the Blessed One" (Mk 14:61), and, in John, he is questioned regarding his claims to be the "King of the Jews" (Jn. 18:33-38).

saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king. [...] He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching.'" (Lk 23: 2, 5a). The charge of sedition—a threat to Empire as well as to religious authority—lays the path to crucifixion, which was, as discussed above, a Roman form of execution reserved for the rebellious and treasonous.

While the manner of his death and the kind of political charges that led to his execution were political in nature, the Sanhedrin trial raises the question of how, exactly, Jesus had raised the ire of religious authorities. Given that the Sanhedrin is a large judicial body, the majority were most likely "sincerely religious men who thought they were serving God by ridding Israel of a troublemaker like Jesus (see Jn 16:2)," according to Raymond Brown's assessment: "In their view Jesus may have been a false prophet misleading people by his permissive attitudes toward the Sabbath and sinners."[17] According to Jewish law, a false prophet must be put to death "for having spoken treason against the Lord your God. [...] So you shall purge the evil from your midst" (Dt 13: 5).[18] Concern about Jesus' "prophetic castigation of Temple practice" also may have stirred up anger among the priests, Brown proposes, whose life's work was the preservation of the Temple and the people's worship and life centered around it.[19]

Our task here is not to determine the precise role of the Sanhedrin or the chief priests, or to understand precisely the charges brought against Jesus, but is, rather, to reflect on the layers of relations that form the place of the cross. In addition to the imperial power of Rome—manifest particularly in the manner of Jesus' execution—the place of the cross is formed by Jewish religiosity

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[17] Raymond E. Brown, *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week: Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 12.

[18] Brown notes that, in Jesus' time, the Sanhedrin was dominated by Sadducee priests. Unlike the Pharisees, who embraced the oral law, Sadducees relied solely on the written law, which supports Brown's claim that the Sanhedrin verdict regarding Jesus may have arisen from concerns about him as a seductive, though false, prophet. See ibid., 13.

[19] Ibid.

and authority, specifically, by Jewish interpretation of the law and faithfulness. It is formed by relations of power and responsibility wielded by those charged with upholding the law on behalf of the community, of protecting Israel's relationship with the God who brought them out of slavery. In this way, the place of the cross is formed by a people's understanding of what it means to live in right relationship with God, to be a liberated people, and a people who stand in judgment under the law. It is also formed by a long prophetic tradition, which understands the weightiness of a prophet's words, the power they have to lead (and mislead) people, and the very real harms that false teaching and prophecy can have on a community. The place of the cross, then, is a profoundly religious place, which is to say, a place formed by a community's religious tradition and practice, a place formed by the judgments of religious authorities, and by the very real hopes and fears that prompt those judgments.

The place-forming powers of imperial Rome and religiosity overlap when the chief priests of John's Gospel respond to Pilate's presentation of Jesus—"Here is your King!"—with their own affirmation of Rome's authority: "We have no king but the emperor" (Jn 19:15). This affirmation of Caesar's sovereign authority constitutes, according to Brown's interpretation of John's Gospel, an abandonment of Jewish messianic hopes. The place of the cross, then, is not only a place of imperial and religious power, but of religious disillusionment and resignation, of memories of the promises to which they had clung and the relinquishing of hope in their fulfillment, at least now, in Jesus: "By rejecting him, the chief priests have given up their hope for the messiah king to be sent by God and have settled for Roman civil kingship."[20] The cross is the place where messianic hope has come to die, where a people who had so longed for a messiah articulate that, though some "had hoped that

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[20] *The Death of the Messiah, from Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, 2 vols., vol. 1, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 849. Andrew Lincoln's reading of this passage concurs: "Not only is Jesus cast aside as messianic king; so also apparently are all expectations of a royal Messiah who would deliver Israel." Andrew Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 125.

he was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21), it appears that he is not and that, despite hope to the contrary, "we have no king but the emperor."

c. Lived Geography

The place of the cross is formed by its lived geography. In addition to the objective landscape, a lived geography involves the subjective, inhabited geography of a place: the place *as experienced* by inhabitants, rather than as theoretically charted, mapped, or measured. The lived geography of the cross includes the particular site called Golgotha, as well as the experience of being outside of the city, at a distance from the Temple, and along the roadway in public view.

All four of the Gospels name Golgotha as the location of Jesus' death. Golgotha is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word for "skull" (*kranion*, used by Mark, Luke, and John) or "place of the skull," (*kraniou topos*, used by Matthew), though it is uncertain how this location came to be so called.[21] Some archeological studies suggest that Golgotha was an abandoned stone quarry where tombs were hewn from the remaining rock.[22] The location of Golgotha is disputed, though historical understandings of the practice of crucifixion in the Roman world, as well as New Testament accounts, suggest that it was located outside of Jerusalem's city walls yet near to the city (Mk 15: 20, Jn 19:20; cf. Heb 13:12), along a major road near one of the central gates into Jerusalem, from which the public passing could see and mock the crucified (Mk 15:29). In the Gospel of John, Golgotha is described as including a garden and within it a new tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea (Jn 19:41). It is there that the body of Jesus is laid and there that the women encounter the presence of

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[21] Some have suggested that the hill itself had the shape of a skull, others that it was a known place of public execution and burial. For an analysis of both suggestions, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah, from Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, 2 vols., vol. 2, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 936-37.
[22] Archeological evidence suggests that the site was used as a limestone quarry since the 8th or 7th century B.C.E., excavating stone used to build Jerusalem's wall. In the 1st century B.C.E. the quarry was partially filled in and used as a garden and burial site. Ibid., 938.

the risen Christ, mistaking him for the gardener (Jn 20:11-18). The place of the cross includes in its lived geography the particular locations of the crucifixion, the garden and its tomb.

The geographic, spatial location of Jesus' crucifixion and burial contributes meaningfully to the overall formation of the place of the cross understood more broadly. If the archeological studies are correct in identifying Golgotha as an abandoned stone quarry, then the place of the cross is formed, in part, by its geographical role as a kind of "shadow place," a place valued for its utility as a site of either resource extraction (as in this case) or garbage disposal, serving the needs of the centralized, prioritized place. In any case, the place of the cross is spatially located both in relation to and importantly outside of the center of Jewish life and culture and the place of Temple worship.

What is more, according to ancient tradition, the Jerusalem temple was envisioned as a microcosm of creation, representing "the firmament set in the seas from which creation arose," and as the navel of the earth itself.[23] "Legend has it," writes one scholar of the Temple, that "just as the body of the embryo receives its nourishment from the navel, so the whole earth too receives the waters that nourish it from this Navel."[24] This legend imagines that the waters that flow from the Temple arise from a spring that taps into the primeval waters of creation, which, if released, would flood the earth with pre-creation chaos.[25] Both of these images suggest the absolute centrality of the Temple, not only socially, but geographically in the world *as lived* in this place, at this time. As the centralized place of worship, the Temple was a place of ritual purity and sacrifice, of festivals, liturgies, and pilgrimages. It was a place of ultimate religious and cultural insideness. The place of the cross, by contrast, is characterized by its being near to, but importantly outside of, the centrality, legitimacy, purity, power, and beauty of the Temple. That is, the cross is a place characterized by

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[23] Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Phoenix: Sheffield, 2008), 88.
[24] John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 146.
[25] Ibid.

marginalization, criminality, impurity, and the gruesome ugliness of the body distorted by pain and succumbing to death.

At the center of this shadow place is the artifact of the cross itself. Its material presence—its beams of wood—gives to the place, finally, its character as a place of suffering, indignity, and crucifixion, and not merely of oppression or betrayal. The artifact of the cross itself is not a place at all, but a weapon of execution with the spare capacity to hold one body, dying, in its suffocating circumscription of breath and life. The place of the cross also includes the material artifact of the tomb: a place for a corpse, for decay, for dry bones. The artifact of the tomb is not a place unto itself either, but merely a container, a limited spatiality, carved out to hold the dead. As a place of execution and burial, the place of the cross is formed in a very real way by the sedimentation of skulls. Though neither the weapon of crucifixion nor the tomb is a place unto itself, the material presence of both forms the wider place of the cross, giving it its gruesome and grievous character.

d. Human Sin

Theologically speaking, the place of the cross is formed by the conspiracy of human sin. That is, the place of the cross is formed not only by the socio-political and geographic realities discussed above, but also by a deeper reality present and active in the human creature itself and all human relationships, including place-forming relationships: namely, the human creature's distrust in God *as the one in whom room is held open for creaturely life*. I am not speaking, then, about the particular "sins" of those present at the crucifixion (bearing false witness, for example), but about the theological interpretation of the cross as a place where God confronts human sin, indwells the wreckage it has wrought, and negates its ultimate claim on creaturely life.

In Chapter Two, I offered an account of human sin through the lens of place, rooted in Luther's (Augustinian influenced) diagnosis of human sin as, first and finally, a matter of distrust of

God and in Luther's image of sin's effect on human life as the human being *incurvatus in se,* turned in on itself. Here, a brief word about both the diagnosis and the effect through the lens of place will suffice. To be a creature is to be one who receives the gift of place, first and finally, from the God who makes room for creaturely life in the mutual presence of Godself as Trinity. In this way, God is place, I proposed, first for Godself as Trinity and also for creaturely life. Creatures are ultimately dependent on God's faithfulness and persistence in *being God,* that is, in continuing to be *place for creaturely life.* But—whatever the source of this doubt—human creatures do not trust God's faithfulness in being place at all, let alone in being good and fitting place, and do not trust God's persistence in continuing to hold open room in God's own presence for the fullness of creaturely life.

Distrust in God's gift of Godself *as fitting place for us* curves one inward on oneself in a self-defeating attempt to establish place for oneself, that is, to get under and to stand upon oneself, so to speak. The striking spatial metaphor of "curvature" evokes an image of the human being bent unnaturally inward, contorted and constricted, gaze fixed inward. This inward curving posture restricts the human being's capacity to enter into relationship with others (including God) and to perceive his or her own situation clearly. The effect of sin, in other words, is both relational and noetic. With respect to the relational effects of sin, curvature constricts the human being's capacity to be fully present with others—where presence is a matter of proximity and attention—in the way that is necessary to enter into room-making relations. Gaze fixed inward, the human creature struggles to attend to others, including to creation itself and other creaturely lives, let alone to enter into communion with them in a way that can so much as make room for creaturely others to enter in, to receive place, to find refuge or shelter. What is more, with gaze fixed inward, the human creature cannot meet or recognize the presence of God. This, then, leads to the noetic effect of sin: our inability to perceive rightly *where* we are (that is, in the presence of God) and, because of the

relationship between *where* and *who*, our inability to perceive rightly *who* we are (persons for whom God has made room in God's own presence.)

The place of the cross is formed by creaturely life curled in on itself. While Luther's image of sin's *incurvatus* effect evokes the effect of sin on the individual human person, sin also curves inward social, political, and economic forces, religious authority and practice, communities and families.[26] The *incurvatus* effect of sin is seen anywhere relations among creatures do not make room for the fullness of creaturely life in God's presence, but—on the contrary—make room for cruelty, negation, oppression, and death. The place of the cross is one such place. It is a place formed by sin's conspiracy to turn creatures in on themselves and against one another. It is a place formed by sin's lie that creatures cannot trust the gift of place—ultimately from God, or penultimately from one another—but must make and defend places by and for themselves and those like them. It is a place formed by idolatry: by trust in something other than God to give one place and standing in the world, to make room for one and one's life, namely, in the empty promises of empire, religious purity and legalism, and even natural and built environments themselves as the grantees and guarantors of place and peace. And the results are disastrous. The place of the cross is formed by the tangled web of *incurvatus* relations and, formed in this way, makes room for betrayal, violence, suffering, and death.

2. *The Cross as Place of Displacement*

In the preceding pages, I have presented an account of the place of the cross as formed by empire's violent and self-serving power, by religious fidelity and resignation, by its lived geography, and by

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[26] To recall, Luther writes in his commentary on Romans: "Our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself […] that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself, indeed, it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact, that in acting so iniquitously, so perversely, and in such a depraved way, it is even seeking God for its own sake." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 25 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 291.

human sin itself. Together these formative influences and their relations to conspire to make room for the betrayal, suffering, death, and burial of Christ, that is, to push God out of the world by way of the cross. Given this account of the cross *as place*, I now venture three theses on the place of the cross.

§ 1 *The cross is a place of displacement.*

In contrast to the experience of home—a place that gathers, orients, and shelters—the experience of displacement is one of separation, disorientation, and exposure. Given the preceding account of the cross's formation as a place, we are in a position to describe the cross as a place of displacement. The cross itself—here I am speaking of the particular artifact of crucifixion—is crafted for the purpose of separating, exposing, and disorienting a human being or human beings from any form or sense of community belonging, of physical and psychological shelter, and of social or spatial orientation by which one finds a footing in the world. The relations that together compose the wider place of the cross—the machinations of Empire, the collusion of religious fidelities and resignations, the insider/outsider divisions of its lived geography, the *incurvatus* force of sin, etc.—conspire together to displace Christ: from the Empire, from the temple and synagogue, from his peripatetic teaching, from table fellowship with outsiders, and, ultimately, from life itself.

On the cross and in the grave, Christ becomes a displaced person. To be displaced is not to be removed from a placed existence altogether, but to be implaced—often by external forces—in a manner that renders one separated, exposed, and disoriented. On the cross, Christ is separated from family and community, from those with whom he had made home. Betrayal by one nearest to him strips him of belonging. Betrayal is a special form of separation and disorientation, leading one to mistrust one's own memory and sense of relationships. In the place of the cross, Christ is exposed physically—stripped, flogged—as well as personally—taunted, denigrated, left to die. To be exposed

is to be stripped of the protective sheathing that a fitting place provides, a swath of the world through which one can move with a sense of belonging and personal agency. Displacement strips one of the protections of community and culture, those relations in which one knows one's place, purpose, and identity and by which one has one's personhood reflected back to one. Christ's cry of forsakenness on the cross reveals his ultimate sense of disorientation, even from that communion that had been his orienting ground and guidepost, namely, his relationship with the one he called Father (Mt 27:46, Mk 15: 34).

The relationship between place and personhood is such that displacement is experienced as an assault to personhood, an erasure of self, a rupture to the continuity of one's identity. This experience is intensified when one has not chosen one's displacement, but has been forced into displacement by overwhelming powers of violence, shame, or disaster. Whether or not Christ knew what lay ahead of him at Jerusalem, he did not choose his displacement as a career move or personal adventure, but was forced into his displacement on the cross by the conspiracy of those who sought to silence and erase not simply his teachings but his very person, for while his teachings themselves may have been perceived as a threat to "law and order," so much greater was the threat of his personhood—his being as identified with the Son of God, the Messiah, the long-awaited—and the boundary-crossing community gathered, sheltered, and oriented by him. To thoroughly displace him and the community gathered around him, Christ is displaced not simply to *some other place*, nor to an obscure place, but to a place in public view designed to thoroughly undermine his personhood and his identification with messianic hope and restoration. In so doing, the forces that displace him count on the relationship between *who* and *where*, as discussed in preceding chapters. That is, they count on passersby concluding that, since he is *here*, in the place of the cross, he cannot possibly be who he claims to be. Since he is displaced from polis and synagogue, since he is displaced from every good and honorable place, since he is displaced from life itself, he cannot possibly be a king or

a prophet, a person of honor or of wisdom. Since he is here, in the place of brokenness and death,

he cannot possibly be the one in and through whom wholeness and life are restored.

§2 *The cross is the noplace of sin.*

Creation, as I described it in Chapter Two, just is creatures, all the way down. It is a place, a web of

relations among the multiplicity and diversity of creaturely lives who together make room for one

another and for new creaturely lives in their mutual presence. As such, creation itself imitates the

Trinity's own perichoretic act and being: bearing up and being borne, receiving and giving the gift of

place. But sin curves human creatures inward, constricting their capacity to enter into room-making

relations with one another. Curved inward, human creatures can be near, but not attentive to one

another or to other creatures and so cannot form a room-making communion fit for the flourishing

of either. Curved inward, human creatures cannot form good place, fitting for and hospitable to the

diversity of creaturely life and so use creatures—animals, plants, minerals, and all—for their own

ends. Humans use creatures to form places fit only for themselves, construct *incurvatus* places that

erode communion, wall out diversity, and—ultimately—imprison themselves. When the human

creature is *incurvatus,* the whole of creation suffers and falls to ruin, groaning under the weight of

human sin (Rom 8:22).

The place of the cross is the epicenter of creation's ruin. It is there that human sin's *incurvatus*

conspiracy caves in on itself, closing down any last room held open there. The cross is the epicenter

of creation's ruin not because the particular violence or suffering of Jesus was greater than other

instances of creaturely violence or suffering, but because it was there that human sin conspired

finally to push God out of the world, that is, to displace God once and for all.[27] The narrow place of

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[27] The image of pushing God out of the world comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letter to Eberhard
Bethge on July 16,1944 in which he writes, "God let's himself be pushed out of the world on the

God's displacement, the cross of Christ, becomes so *incurvatus* and delimited by sin as to be *noplace* at all. No place, no personhood. This is the meaning of Christ's forsaken cry from the cross: that there Christ descends to the *noplace* of sin, into the void of being and of relationship, displaced even from the presence of the one he calls Father. The displacement of God in Christ from God as Father—a severance that runs right through the place of God as Trinity—is the absolute depth of God's inhabitation of creation's ruins. This is the depth and length to which God is willing to go—sparing not even the integrity of God's own life—to inhabit creation so that creatures may know fullness of life in God's presence.

§3. *The cross is a place of solidarity.*

On the cross, Christ enters into the human experience of displacement and its person-negating consequences. As a place of displacement, the cross is not different in kind from other places of displacement and hellish negations of life and dignity. It is "of a region," so to speak, with other places also formed by relations so curled in on themselves that they make room only for the undoing of personhood, the exploitation of creatureliness, and the negation of meaning. The cross is of a region with other historic and contemporary places of war, genocide, incarceration, and slavery. It is of a kind with states turned in on themselves in the idolatry of nationalism, from communities curled inward by racism. It can be mapped along side places like the valley of Sarajevo where, during the nearly four-year siege, Bosnian Serbs encircled the city in the surrounding mountains with landmines and armed forces. Shellfire rained down from the mountainside, while snipers were positioned in the streets and alleyways of the city. The city and its location in the mountain valley

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cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us….Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 360-61.

became a trap, a place from which there was no exit. To live in Sarajevo during the siege was to be at once displaced from the beautiful city one had known and to descend into a living hell, a place of no exit, terror, and death, a *lived noplace*.

Lived noplaces—of historic and contemporary expression—are formed by the conspiracy of sin's power, by relations curled in on themselves, seeking only to build up, satisfy, and preserve themselves over and against other creaturely lives. They are places formed by political, economic, and even religious powers in collusion with one another to make room for suffering and death. In a very real way, then, Christ's inhabitation of the particular *lived noplace* of the cross is an act of solidarity with those who also inhabit their own particular places of suffering, death, and displacement. The cross is a place of solidarity not only by sharing similarities with other places of displacement, but—more profoundly still—by being the *lived noplace* of sin itself.

In the *lived noplace* of the cross, Christ enters into the relations of sin itself and thereby inhabits every other human displacement formed by sin. That is, Christ's solidarity is not a matter of being familiar with the kind of displacement other human beings, creatures, and communities undergo, but actually by undergoing their displacements with them. On the cross, Christ enters into the wreckage, the aftermath, the ruins of place and of personhood wherever they are found. Christ is present wherever sin exploits creaturely vulnerability and threatens personhood. This is the mystery of Christ's descent to the dead. The place of the dead is *noplace* itself. It is a symbol that imagines *noplace, no personhood* as a kind of a common (no)ground where Christ can so much as meet us. We need not squint too hard at such symbols, however, for Christ's inhabitation of the *lived noplace* of the cross—in all its particularity—can itself bear revelation and redemption, the efficacy of which will be developed in the next two sections, as well in the next chapter's discussion of the symbol of the church, by which the particularity of Christ is opened into its catholicity.

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II. The Cross as Place of Revelation

The place of the cross would be only a place of solidarity—of Christ's co-erasure and co-descent with other victims of displacement—if it were only a place of displacement and sin's *lived noplace*. But the Christian Gospel is the word that the place of the cross is also—by God's love, as God's grace—the place of God's revelation, which is to say, God's own presence, *given* and *hidden*. What the preceding account of the formative relations of the cross does not yet take into account is God's own presence and activity in the place of the cross. It is there, in this place of suffering, death, and displacement, this place that exploits creaturely life and undermines personhood, that God has determined to reveal the fullness of who God is. The place of the cross is still a place of suffering, death, and displacement, but it is also—even in so being—the place where God reveals who God is and how God is at work making room for the fullness of creaturely life. In short, I argue that the cross is the place where God reveals the absolute depths of God's inhabitory presence.

Place and Trinity, presence and revelation, incarnation and inhabitation: these three pairs of concepts have been developed in iterations over the course of this project and now, from the vantage of the cross, come to their interpretive fulfillment. Together these three concepts now allow us to speak of the cross as the place where God reveals the absolute depths of God's inhabitory presence in creation, which is to say, as we will see, God's knowledge of, personal investment in, and love for creaturely life.

Presence, as developed in Chapter Two, is a mode of being with and toward another. It is a kind of extroverted relational orientation in which being is turned outward. It entails spatial and temporal proximity, such that being present necessarily involves the sharing of space and time with another. It also entails orientation and attention toward the other, such that one cannot merely share space and time, but must orient oneself toward another. To orient oneself toward another in this way is an activity of self-giving—the sharing of one's own finite life—and therefore involves

vulnerability. When one is present to another—spatially and temporally near, oriented toward another and giving one's attention—one extends oneself toward that other relationally. One cannot be both fully present to another and wholly protected from that other. In its fullest manifestation, presence is a kind of original nakedness, an incarnate vulnerability of the whole creature standing out in existence, the disposition of Adam and Eve in the garden to one another and to their Creator, who walked among them. Presence is a way of knowing and being known. In this way, presence—in its fullest form—is the gift of one's whole person to another.

The incarnation is God's determination to be wholly present to creatures as God is present to Godself. In Jesus, God gives Godself to creation in original nakedness, standing out in incarnate vulnerability before creatures. In Jesus, God takes place among creatures and, in so doing, accepts the gift, task, and risk of place. Place is the gift—the precarious gift—of receiving the conditions of one's existence from another. In Jesus, God receives the precarious gift of finite place—the gift of womb and manger, the gift of wilderness and city, the gift of roadway and well—and knows God's own incarnate life borne up by webs of creaturely relations, even sinful, inwardly curved relations.

Since places are not neutral, being implaced is always already to be situated in relations, stories, and systems. It is to be a participant in the non-neutrality of a place, to be involved—even culpable—in the stories and systems of that place. In this way God knows the vulnerability and risk of dependence, of standing out as one existing in and reliant on places one did not choose and one cannot control. Incarnate and implaced in places formed by empire and violence, by poverty and greed, by misuse of the law and abuse of creation, God knows the dubious gift of implacement in places formed by sin's curvature. God's decision to be incarnate entails God's election to enter into the non-neutrality of place: the propped up places of political power, the contorted places of religious idolatry and self-justification, the murky places of human sin and striving. Implaced in creation, God undergoes the experience of being grounded and upheld by other's relations, of

forming of places for others not *ex nihilo* but in the midst of preceding and concurrent places, and the vulnerability of standing out in place embodied and known.

In the incarnation, God not only determines to be present and implaced, but to be present and implaced in the mode of inhabitation. Inhabitation, as I developed the concept in Chapter Three, is a way of life in place. To inhabit is to cultivate a relationship with a place in a way that produces attachment through the cultivation of deep knowledge of place and its formative relations, affection for it, and personal commitment to it, including the acceptance of personal risk. It is to bind one's good and one's future to a place, its good, and its future.

The cross reveals the absolute depth of God's inhabitory commitment. There God reveals God's total investment of Godself as Son in creation, without remainder, by inhabiting creaturely life all the way through the displacement of the cross and grave into the *noplace* of sin. God's implacement on the cross, then, is not simply an accident of history, nor even the inevitable conclusion of the kind of life he lived, but is the fulfillment of the incarnation. The cross is the place where God's determination to inhabit creation reaches its consummation.

Inhabitation is a way of knowing and the cross reveals the depth of God's inhabitory knowledge of creation. Inhabitory knowledge is perspectival, procedural, and personal. It is intimate knowledge that changes not only one's cognition, but one's person. It is knowledge that one undergoes, to which one submits, by which one is formed. On the cross, God reveals the fullness of God's inhabitory knowledge of creaturely life by submitting Godself to creaturely vulnerability and finitude, physical and relational suffering, and death itself. On the cross, God undergoes human weakness and is able thereby to sympathize with human weakness (Heb 4:15). In so doing, God wills to be changed by what God undergoes. God wills to be personally formed by the incarnate, inhabitory knowledge that God undergoes on the cross and determines to bring creaturely finitude and frailty into the Triune life. Into the Triune life, God brings God's inhabitory knowledge of

human suffering and death, of what it is to undergo suffering and death, to have one's personhood undermined and one's creaturely vulnerabilities exploited, to descend to the *noplace* of sin's constriction. Apart from the incarnation (if one can even say such a thing), God—at home in God's Triune Place—knows only the roominess of God's own life, the capaciousness of God's own mutual presence and indwelling. Inhabiting the place of the cross, God undergoes the knowledge of what it is to walk the straits of suffering, to be taken where one does not wish to go.

To inhabit creaturely life all the way to the cross, God empties Godself and inhabits a place ill-fit for the expansiveness of God's glory. Nothing about the place of the cross is fit for the glory of God. Nothing about God is fit for the horror of the cross. The cross reveals the unexpected implacement of God, the hidden presence of God in the concrete particularity of this utterly unfitting place. In so doing, it calls into question our precedent understanding of fittingness, where part and whole (in this case, person and place) align with one another, reflecting the norms and characteristics of each back to one another in affirmation. But nothing about the cross reflects God's glory back to God. Rather, the crucified God reflects back to the cross its own ugliness and horror. This affirmation troubles the easy connection between *where* and *who,* because there is nothing about this place that suggests that it should be the fitting place for the presence of God, and, yet, it is precisely the place that God has chosen to make Godself fully known *as crucified. Where* God is, then, does reveal *who* God is, but not in the expected way. God's presence in the cross reveals the depth of God's inhabitory commitment, the lengths to which God is willing to go in order to be with creatures, to make Godself known to them, and to reveal Godself as a trustworthy ground for the vulnerability of creaturely life.

The cross thus reveals the depth of God's love for creation, God's *topophilia*: a love for place that shapes the one who loves.[28] That God loves creation must be revealed to creatures because creation's state of rubble and ruin, of relations curved inward, prevents creatures from seeing clearly God's presence and love. God holds open room in the center of God's own life for creation, but creatures do not see the loving, hospitable quality of the roominess held open for them. In the midst of rubble and ruin, in places of suffering and malfittingness of place, creatures wonder: is the room held open as a trap, a prison? Facing ecological crisis and nuclear war, humans fear: might God resolve—whether in judgment or in mercy—to close down the room of creation, to cease to make room for creaturely life because of our "ugly failure to evolve"?[29] In the incarnation, God invests Godself personally in the creation so that creatures can see and trust that God's will for creation is God's will for Godself: fullness of life and flourishing.

III. The Cross as Place of Redemption

Christ's displacement on the cross is God's act of inhabitory solidary with creaturely displacements and it is God's act of self-revelation, whereby God reveals the depth of God's inhabitory presence. But the cross is not only a place of solidarity and revelation. It is also a place of redemption. The epicenter of creation's ruin—the very place where sin pushes God out of creation and into the *noplace* of sin—is also the place where God in Christ gives Godself resolutely and actively *for us*. I argue now that Christ inhabits the ruins of creaturely life not only to know and accompany us in our displacement, but to *make room* in creation once again for the fullness of life in God's presence. In this place made new, we are people made new.

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[28] For a fuller discussion of *topophilia,* see Chapter Three or Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

[29] The poet Denise Levertov speaks of human sin, even "the worst our kind can do," with this turn of phrase in Denise Levertov, "On the Mystery of the Incarnation," in *The Stream and the Sapphire: Selected Poems on Religious Themes* (New York: New Directions Books, 1975).

Displacement is the loss of one's fitting place, one's place of belonging, shelter, and orientation. As such, it is experienced as separation, exposure, and disorientation. What is more, the relationship between place and personhood is so strongly felt in human life that displacement is also experienced as a threat to one's personhood, such that the displaced, the migratory, and the shadow-dweller are often perceived as—and indeed, may even perceive themselves as—no persons at all. Human sin has so curved human beings in on themselves that they cannot engage in the relationality of place-making, cannot form places that make room for the fullness of creaturely life. Neither home nor school, neither arctic tundra nor coral reef make room any longer for the fullness of creaturely life. Because of human sin, the place of creation has fallen into ruin and we live, displaced, in its rubble. Displaced, even the dignity of our personhood comes under threat. On the cross, Christ makes room in creation for fullness of life by offering himself *as place for us.*

He does this in two movements. First, by his death and descent, Christ offers his own personhood to fulfill the functions of place in human experience: gathering, shelter, and orientation. In our displacement, he offers himself *as place for us.* He gives his personhood to be our place. In other words, he gives to creatures *who* he is, in order that we might also be *where* he is: standing in fullness of life before God. As we will see just ahead, this entails risk for us because *where* he is is always two-fold: both in the gracious immediacy of God's own life-giving presence *and* in displacement among creaturely life and suffering. In this way, our re-implacement in God through Christ is always also our displacement. Again, we will return to this theme ahead.

By his resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, Christ offers himself as place in a second way, namely, he gives his Spirit to his disciples so that they may become his Body. The disciples—and Christ-followers in every time and place—are empowered and sent to become the room-making Body of Christ in the world so that those undergoing literal displacements (refugees and immigrants, those homeless, cast out, lost, or forgotten) can find restoration to community, to shelter, and to a

sense of purpose and orientation. Through the work of the church—that community of disciples in every time and place—Christ's Body gives itself quite literally as gathering, sheltering, and orienting place for others. (Again, as we will see just ahead, this entails risk for the church because to be the Body of Christ is to be a body of radical hospitality and room-making, a body that crosses borders and tears down walls.) Let us now develop this two-fold sense of Christ's saving gift of himself as place for us.

1. *Christ as Ingathering Center*

Displacement separates by rupturing community, the relational bonds in which one had experienced a sense of belonging. On the cross, Christ speaks a decisive *no* to all that would separate and gathers the scattered into a new community.

Christ had been about the work of building this new community during his earthly life and ministry. He gathered people together with his teaching and table fellowship. He restored the divided to one another with his works of healing, restoring the sick, dying, and ostracized to community. (cf. Lk 4:38-41, 5:12-16, 8:26-39, and 8:40-56, and parallels). The new community that Christ gathers to himself is a community formed not by lineage or honor, not by empire's colonizing force, not by purity and law-keeping, not by borders or walls, but by God's own ingathering hospitality. Christ calls his disciples into relationship—with one another, with himself, and with the one he calls Father. Christ calls his disciples into relationship that heals and renews by patterns of forgiveness and mercy. The community that Christ calls does not receive its identity by its homogeneity or by who is kept out, but by the person who stands at its center: the person of Christ, crucified and risen, displaced and making room.

Yet while Christ began this ingathering work during the course of his life, it is fulfilled only in the place of the cross. It is there that he fulfills his promise to "draw all things to [himself]" (Jn

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12:32).[30] There he forms of creatures a new creation, a new community with his own personhood at its center, giving to the ruins of creaturely life his own personhood and dignity. Descending into the *noplace* of sin's constriction, he interposes his own personhood in its tight, inward grasp. He puts his own life and personhood in the *noplace* of sin: submitting to its constriction and pressing outward with the eternal life and personhood of the Son, to uncurl even the sin-bent relations of *noplace,* to open up even in the depths of hell, so to speak. By the inhabitory gift of his personhood, God in Christ makes place out of *noplace*. With his own room-making personhood at the center, Christ gathers all of creation—all creatures together—into a new community. It is his prayer that those gathered together by him would "be one" in the way that he and the Father are one: near and attentive, mutually present to one another, making room in their presence for the flourishing of creaturely life (Jn. 17:21). By the gift of his own life and personhood, Christ makes himself and his own relationship with the Father the founding and formative relations of a new creation.

As a second movement, the risen Christ—having inhabited creaturely life all the way to its depths in the grave and having made place out of *noplace* by his personal presence—returns to his disciples huddled together in their upper room of grief and fear. Bearing the wounds of his displacement, Christ breathes into them the Spirit (Jn 20:19-22). In so doing, Christ forms them to be his own Body (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12-21), a Body now socially and spatially extended, formed of many members, unified by the indwelling, room-making presence of the Spirit (Eph 4:1-6). In this way, Christ fashions himself *as place* quite literally: a socially and spatially extended web of relations, an inhabitable, room-making communion. To be the Body of Christ, then, is to be an inhabitable,

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[30] Often translated "all people," the Greek *ta panta*, means all things in their totality. *Panta* is elsewhere used to describe the whole creation, as in *"All things came into being through the Word"* (Jn 1:3). See, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I-Xii*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 26.

room-making communion. To be the Body of Christ is, moreover, to be the place where the presence of the Spirit makes room for the fullness of creaturely life in God's own presence.

The Spirit makes room for fullness of creaturely life in this way by the forgiveness of sins (Jn 20:23). Forgiveness is the Spirit's room-making work. To forgive sins is to loosen and unbind the human person, to release sin's *incurvatus* constriction, and to restore people to relationship and community. Forgiveness rehabilitates human postures such that—now upright and free—they are able to be present to one another, to form communion with one another, and to make room for others among them. The Spirit empowers and sends Christ's Body to gather creatures together into a community of mutual forgiveness, to form a place with and for one another where creaturely life is set free from sin's bondage.

Forgiveness—and its partner, reconciliation—has place-forming ramifications. Since places are relational, the quality and mode of those relations matters to the formation of place. When human relations are in bondage to sin, the effect on place is ruinous. But when human relations are freed through forgiveness and reconciliation by the power of the Spirit, the effect on place is restorative and liberatory. It is the condition for the possibility of fullness of creaturely life, for "where there is forgiveness of sin," Luther writes, "there is also life and salvation."[31] Forgiveness restores human lives to communion with one another. Communion—as defined in Chapter Two— is formed when presence is full and mutual, when creatures stand out in vulnerability and in hospitality toward another, making room in their presence for new life and possibility. Restored to communion, the walls—both figurative and literal—erected to protect one from another, to divide and imprison are no longer needed. By the room-making power of the Spirit, then, walls can come down: borders and fences that scar creation's wholeness, sanctions that restrict access to creation's

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[31] Martin Luther, "Small Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 362.

feast and table, defense systems that control relations by threat and fear. Where forgiveness makes room, life abounds.

The place of the cross, we are beginning to see, is where God in Christ is at work gathering creatures into a new community. This community is where the many are made one in Christ and are empowered by the room-making Spirit to forgive one another and so to loosen sin's formative power on human beings and their place-forming relations. As human beings and their relations are set free, the effect ripples into creation, where human sin had led to ruin. In this way, Christ gathers all things to himself, reforming creation as a place for life. Yet, even as Christ gathers all things to himself, he bears the marks of his own displacement. The Body of Christ that gathers, then, is not the restoration of Eden, so to speak, but a place sedimented with the marks and memories of displacement.

2. *Christ as Sheath and Shelter*

Displacement exposes one's vulnerabilities, strips one of the protective sheathing that place, especially a fitting and good place, provides. Displaced, one loses the swath of the world through which one can move with a sense of belonging and freedom: one's home, one's land, one's ecosystem. In displacement, creaturely vulnerabilities are exploited and one's personhood systematically stripped. Without the protections of citizenship, the bodies and labor of immigrants and migrant workers are often exploited. Desperate to escape the dangers of home, refugees are exploited for money by those who can offer passage and used as political pawns in the halls of power. Place not only protects one's body, but also grounds one's personhood, dignity, and honor. To be from nowhere is to be no one, invisible and vulnerable.

The God of Genesis knows the naked need of embodied creatures for a protective sheathing. When sin displaced human kind from their fitting home in Eden, "the Lord God made

garments of skin for Adam and for his wife, and clothed them" (Gen 3:21). Garments of skin become God's gift of a traveling place, a small tent and refuge for their journey into wandering. Christ, too, knows human need for the clothing and sheltering function of place. Recall from the previous chapter that when the Christ of Luke's Gospel crosses the lake—to the other side, the side of the other—he meets a man occupied by legions and living as one displaced among the tombs: the *lived noplace* of the dead and the outcast (Lk 8:22-39). Recall, moreover, that the man is naked, lacking even the most intimate sense of place and protection that clothing provides. Christ not only displaces the demons, but freshly clothes him and restores him "to his right mind" (5:15), which is to say Christ restores the man to himself, to the full integrity of his personhood: integrated, whole, and with dignity. He then sends the man home to his community. To be restored to place—to belonging and relationship, to community and friendship—is to be clothed and restored to the dignity and wholeness of being human. What sin's displacing power exposes and exploits, Christ clothes, shelters, and restores to place in relationship.

Yet, while Christ had begun the work of restoring the displaced to the garment of place in his ministry, God in Christ fulfills this work in the place of the cross. There Christ gives himself as a sheltering, cloaking place for a displaced people. Christ places his own life between creaturely vulnerabilities and the threats of *noplace* that would undermine personhood. Christ wraps his own personhood around creatures as clothing and shelter, as refuge and oasis, such that no displacement, no descent into death or sin, can strip creatures of their essential personhood: the wholeness, relationality, and dignity of Christ's own life. Though risk and vulnerability are inevitable aspects of the condition of embodied creaturely life in and through place, God gives Godself in Christ as a kind of mobile, intimate, all-surrounding place for us—a kind of clothing or shelter—that subtends and surrounds one even in displacement, even in death. Christ as subtending and surrounding place means that, no matter *where* one goes, no matter how lost or hidden in the shadows, *who* one is—

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one's irreducible personhood, one made for fullness of life in God's presence—cannot be stripped away.

Christ interposes his own personhood for us in this way by his descent into the *noplace* of sin. In a concrete and particular way, Christ bears his personhood in two natures—divine and human— into *noplace* at the cross: that hellish place of exposure and suffering, of rejection, denial, and shame, that place that mocks not only his "kingship" (cf. Mark 15: 16-20 and parallels), but also his humanity. By indwelling the *lived noplace* of the cross, and through it, the *noplace* of the dead, Christ bears his own personhood into that groundless abyss of life and of being, that void of relationality. Had that been the final word, Christ's descent to the dead would have been only—though profoundly--a matter of solidarity with those whose personhood is undermined in *noplaces* of sin. Yet—by Christ's resurrection—God has spoken a decisive *no* to the person-negating power of displacement and *noplace*. On the cross, Christ submits to displacement into *noplace* thereby losing his own life; in the resurrection, Christ reveals his own living presence in *noplace* thereby bringing to *noplace* God's own life and being, personhood and relationality. The resurrection means that even *noplace* itself—every void of life or hope—has lost its power to strip creatures of their personhood and dignity. God's own living presence in Christ has made a place out of no place.

When the risen Christ appears to his disciples, he sends them into the very places he was sent: into earthly displacements and ruins, into the manifold *noplaces* in creaturely life that threaten to undermine personhood and to strip away creaturely dignity. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). To be the Body of Christ is to be a sheathing and sheltering place for those whose personhood and dignity are threatened by the loss of place or by displacement to places unfit for the fullness of life: those sick or in prison (Mt 25:43b), those on the road (Lk 10:30-38), those excluded from table fellowship (Lk 19:1-10), those widowed, orphaned, or abandoned (Jn 19:26-27). Christ's own room-making disposition—that is to say, his own radical hospitality—is to be a mark of the

Body of Christ. But to practice such radical hospitality is to be changed by those for whom one makes room. This is the relational dynamism of place, that when one makes room for others, they are not held in a room hermetically sealed, but are welcomed into the place-forming relations of that place. To be the Body of Christ, then, is to submit—as Christ himself did—to the risks of hospitality, including the risk of being changed by what one holds and, thus, the risk of one's own transformation. Submitting in this way, we trust that *who* we are in Christ is not threatened by such inclusion and integration because we are in Christ and Christ himself is at home with the Father and the Spirit, grounded in the fullness of God's own life. It is the Spirit's work in the Body of Christ to inspire this radical hospitality and the trust in God's person-grounding presence necessary to complete the room-making, place-restoring work that Christ has begun.

3. *Christ as Orientation*

Finally, displacement disorients, removing the landmarks that had given one's life direction and orientation. The landmarks that orient one's life can be physical—buildings, gridded streets, a mountain range, a river—but they also can be aural, temporal, or cultural: calls to prayer that order day and night, feasts and fasts that give a kind of high-and-low topography to a community's inhabitation of life together, seasons by which to tell time with the cycles of the earth itself. Such landmarks give order and meaning to one's days, which is also to say, to one's life, since how one orders one's days is, in a significant way, how one orders one's life. Displaced, one is separated from all such ordering of life, and one can feel at loose ends, unsure which way is up or down. In so far as places are also landscapes of meaning and memory, displacement can disorient one from one's sense of the continuity of one's life and personhood, from one's sense that life has meaning or purpose. When all that one had built by investing oneself in a place—perhaps a home, a business, or a community—is lost, one's life can lose its sense of continuity, purpose, or direction. Displacement

disorients, then, not simply the body (*where am I?*), but the whole person (*who am I, and to what end is my life?*).

On the cross, Christ gives himself as orientation to displaced creatures, which is to say, he gives himself as a kind of landmark by which one can know where one is and who one is. On the cross, Christ makes himself a sign in the midst of displacement by which one can perceive one's life as *in the presence of God.* If God, in Christ, is present even in the place of displacement and in the *noplace* of the grave, then "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). On the cross, Christ reveals what sin endeavors to obscure: that even the fallout zone and superfund site, the borderland and perilous crossing, the place of hiding and the place of exposure are not godforsaken, but are places of God's inhabitory presence. Christ gives himself as a landmark by which creatures may know where they are—God's own presence—even in the midst of displacement.

The Body of Christ is that community oriented to Christ. This orientation is embodied in Christian worship spaces formed by the liturgical practice of placing the cross of Christ at the center. In such spaces, one turns one's whole body toward the cross as it enters the worship space as an outward sign of one's inward orientation. One does so not as an individual, but in concert with the whole Body gathered and sheltered in that place. But, as discussed above with respect to the risks of hospitality, to make Christ and him crucified the orienting landmark of one's life is to orient oneself toward the margins and the shadow places. It is to be oriented backwards—so to speak—looking to the crucified as a kind of compass by which to know the depth and breadth of God's love and commitment to creaturely life. To be the Body of Christ, then, is to be a Body that does not seek to become a new center of power or privilege, but one that risks its own displacement.

In this section, I have been describing the place of the cross as a place of salvation. A place of displacement and the center of creation's ruin, the cross is also the unlikely place of God's revelatory presence and saving work on behalf of creaturely life. It is the place where God is at work loosening the bonds of sin so that the place of creation might be—in a new way—a place for the fullness of creaturely life, a place where creatures trust God's gathering, sheltering, orienting love for them, and live unfurled with one another in God's room-making presence.

But the question must be asked: if God is at work in this way through Christ and through the work of the room-making Spirit, why does creation still groan under the weight of human sin? Theologies written in the key of time often speak of Christ's work as inaugurating an eschatological future that is as yet seen. They place in Christ the seeds of salvation, but push its fulfillment into the future. A theology of place need not be antithetical to eschatological thinking, but must also insist that God's revealing and saving work in Christ matters *here*, in the places we inhabit, in the creation as it stands. God's revealing and saving work in Christ must matter on a planet on the brink of ruin. That is, things must look different from the vantage of the cross.

IV. The View from Here

At the beginning of this chapter, I proposed—in concert with Luther—that the cross offers the best vantage on reality. It is from the cross—that place of ruin and of resurrection—that we can see most clearly who and where God is and who and where we are. In the sections that followed, I gave an account of the cross as the place where God reveals the depths of God's inhabitory love by inhabiting the ruins of creation, all the way down to the *noplace* of death. From the vantage of the cross, we also see the ways in which the accounts of place and Trinity, revelation and creation offered in the preceding chapters were incomplete. In this final section, I give an account of several

ways in which the cross intervenes into our precedent understandings of the basic symbols of the

Christian faith, allowing us to see the whole picture anew.

Intervention 1: The Triune God as Place

When God reveals the depth of God's inhabitory presence on the cross, we see God *as Place*

differently. We see God not as occupying the sacred places of purity and power, but as indwelling

the places of ruin and despair, the places of suffering and lament. Christ's resurrection and ascension

back into the Place of the Trinity means that Christ bears his wounds into the Trinity.

When the risen Christ appears to his disciples, he continues to bear the wounds of his

crucifixion. Indeed, it is only by seeing his wounds that Thomas can believe that the risen, living one

standing before him is the Christ who was displaced on the cross (Jn 20: 24-29). The risen Christ's

wounds make him recognizable *as the Christ*, the one who inhabited the ruins of creation all the way

to the cross and into the *noplace* of death, and thereby underscore the identity of the risen Christ with

the crucified Christ.[32] The Gospels do not specify whether the glorified and ascended Christ also

bears the wounds of his displacement on the cross. Yet because the wounds are present and visible

to the disciples following the resurrection (Lk 24:38-43; Jn 20:19-20, 26-29), there is no warrant to

interpret the silence of the Gospel as signaling the erasure or healing of his wounds. What is more,

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[32] The presence of wounds on the body of the risen Christ has been interpreted theologically as underscoring the physicality of the body that appeared to the disciples in such a way as to preclude the possibility that the risen Christ only seemed to be present to the disciples, or was raised in spirit only, whatever that might mean. Cyril of Alexandria writes, for example, that the wounded and risen Christ who appeared to the disciples "was no phantom or ghost, fashioned in human shape, and simulating the features of humanity, nor yet as others have foolishly surmised, a spiritual body that is compounded of a subtle and ethereal substance different from the flesh." This is important for Cyril because it means that the earthly body and its wounds *is the very body* that God can raise to new life. See, Peter Widdicombe, "The Wounds and the Ascended Body: The Marks of Crucifixion in the Glorified Christ from Justin Martyr to John Calvin," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59, no. 1 (2003): 142; *Sancta Patris Nostri Cyrilli Achiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Ionnis Evangelium. Accendunt Fragmenta Varia Necnon Tractatus Ad Tiberium Diaconum Duo*, vol. 3 (Oxford: The Clarendom Press, 1872), 142-43.

at least in human experience, the wounds of displacement are not healed at once by homecoming. The sufferings of displacement—separation, exposure, and disorientation—change one, such that one cannot simply and straightforwardly return home again. What is more, for Christ, as for many displaced persons, "home" is not the same place it was when one left and homecoming is not as simple as physical return. As a kind of homecoming, then, ascension does not mean the erasure of Christ's wounds.[33] Risen and ascended to the Father, Christ bears the wounds of his displacement into the place of the Trinity.

In order to make fitting room for the fullness of the Son's life *as the Son*—who is now the Son who has undergone creaturely life, displacement, and death—the Father and the Spirit adapt the shape of the room they make for the Son, so to speak. Receiving the displacements of the Son into their mutual presence, they make themselves vulnerable to the wounded life of the Son and to the experience of creaturely suffering that he bears into their midst. The wounds of one become the suffering of all. In this way, the creaturely experience of suffering, death, and displacement finds room in the Trinity as Place.

Bearing the wounds of creaturely suffering in the place of God's own triune life, the triune God—and not just the person of the Son—undergoes a kind of displacement. It is a displacement of its own kind to bring the wounded into one's place, to change one's relations for the sake of hospitality. It is a risk to welcome home again the one who has ventured "into the far country" and

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[33] The question of whether Christ bears his wounds in his ascension to the Father has mixed response in the history of Christian thought, first appearing in Cyril of Alexandria and continuing into contemporary theology. On the development of this question in the history of Christian thought, see Widdicombe's learned study above. It is worth noting that, though the idea that Christ bears his wounds into the resurrected and ascending life in glory with the Father has been widely shared since Cyril first developed it, both Luther and Calvin deny that the ascended Christ retains its wounds, though their attention to the question is minimal and, as Widdicombe argues, may have been part of their wider program to remove layers of mythological belief (including ideas about purgatory and devotional practices of carrying and kissing crucifixes featuring the suffering Christ) that they worried too often piggybacked on sound theology. See Widdicombe, 151.

to bring into the shared life all that that one has witnessed and undergone. In short, in order to reveal the depth of God's love for creation—a love that goes to the unchanging center of who God is—God brings creaturely wounds into God's own triune communion, and is changed by what God undergoes. It is by changing in this way that God can be unchanging in God's love for and commitment to being a place in which creatures may find fullness of life in God's presence.

As soon as we speak of change in God, we are speaking in the language of time. Allow me to rephrase the same concern now in the language of place. Places bear history, memory, and narrative as layers of sedimentation within themselves, which give places their character and meaning. As place, the Triune God, too, bears sedimentary layers within Godself. Making room for creation within the room at the center of God's own life, God determined to bear within Godself the lives and deaths, memories and hopes of creatures. There is an important way, then, in which bearing the wounds of creation within Godself is not "new," but is part of what it means to be the Creator. Yet, by the Son's inhabitation of creation in Christ—and by Christ's death and resurrection—God comes to bear the wounds of creation not only in the room God makes within Godself for creation, but in the very life of God. By way of analogy, it is as though parents determine to make room in the communion of their marriage for the life of a child, but find that the real life and presence of a child (including sufferings large and small) change, in no insignificant way, the persons who are married, such that the marriage itself is not the same marriage it was before the child, and, thus, the room the child inhabits is always already different than it was. The Triune God makes room for creation within the communion of God's triune life, but the very real presence of creation—including its sufferings, large and small—changes the Triune relations that bear it. This is God's love revealed by God's dying. This is God's changeless love revealed by the acceptance of new sedimentations. This is God's power as place revealed through God's adaptive and tender hospitality.

Intervention 2: God as Judge and the Meaning of "Good Place"

If God as Place is the fulfillment and judge of all creaturely places, the revelation of the displaced God changes the measure by which creaturely places are to be judged. By the displacement of God, we see now that Place itself—God's own life as Trinity—makes room for suffering, for dying, and for displacement. Making room for these experiences is not the same as willing or creating these experiences. God does not desire or cause the suffering, death, and displacement of the Son or of creaturely life; they reveal, as I argued above, the depth of God's desire to inhabit creaturely life in order to make God's love for creatures knowable and known by them. But when the Son undergoes suffering, death, and displacement as consequences of human sin, God nevertheless continues to make room for the fullness of the Son in the divine life, even when doing so requires reformation on God's part. Likewise, when the creatures undergo suffering, death, and displacement as consequences of human sin, God persists in making room in God's own presence for them, even when to do entails bearing that suffering, death, and displacement within Godself.

This revelation shifts our own normative judgments of what counts as a "good place." Good places, it is now apparent, are not simply places Edenic in purity and beauty, not simply places where one feels a sense of fittingness or where one experiences the full stretch of creaturely freedom. Good places are not necessarily enchanted places where the presence of God seems close to the surface of things. Good places are not simply places of easy fittingness where one encounters oneself reflected back to one in easy accommodation. Rather, good places are those that make room for the suffering, dying, displaced other. Good places are places of hospitality that risk being reformed by what is welcomed and held there. Good places are those that imitate the God who makes room in God's own presence for suffering, death, and displacement.

Through the lens of the cross and resurrection, we see places of creaturely ruin not as places abandoned by God, but as particularly potent places of God's presence and room-making activity.

What is more we see places of creaturely ruin not as places that threaten to undermine personhood, but as places that provoke and call us to do the work of making room for creaturely life: of healing and reclamation, of forgiveness and liberation, of sheltering and clothing.

In this way, God as Place stands as judge not only of the obviously malfitting places of injustice, but also of purported utopias. I am using the term utopia broadly to describe places designed to cultivate a sense of fittingness for a select group of people. In this sense, anything from an exclusive, private elementary school to a securely bordered nation might count as a utopia in so far as they are places cultivated for the comfort and cultural reinforcement of select people who have the place-forming power to establish a place for themselves. In so doing, utopias hide creaturely suffering and brokenness, normalize an *incurvatus* posture, and cultivate blindness to what is outside or other. Utopias seek to or willfully deny their shadow places and suppress creaturely difference. They equate fittingness with homogeneity, and fullness of life with freedom from vulnerability or difference. They are places where one is protected from having *who* one is changed or challenged by *where* one is. From the vantage of the cross, we see now that such purported utopias are not, in fact, good places because they do not imitate the goodness of the God who is Place, first for the suffering and death of the Son and also for the suffering and death of creatures.

Intervention Three: The Fullness of Creaturely Life

Implied in the discussion above is another implication, which deserves to be articulated independently, namely, that the cross recasts what the fullness of creaturely life entails. In Chapter One, I proposed that good places make room for the fullness of creaturely life. It is now clear that "fullness of creaturely life" does not mean only creaturely life fulfilled and free, but entails, rather, the full spectrum of creaturely experience, including experiences of finitude, vulnerability, loss and lament. The fullness of creaturely life includes experiences of displacement: of separation from what

one loves, of disorientation from what one had known and trusted, of exposure by change or loss in what shelters and clothes one. Movement, migration, and displacement are not threats to the fullness of creaturely life, but part of incarnate creaturely life in, between, and among places. Nor are decay and death antithetical to the fullness of creaturely life, but part of incarnate creaturely life in place. God makes room in the fullness of God's presence for the fullness of creaturely life, including creaturely displacement and death.

Under the conditions of sin, creaturely lives take place in *incurvatus* place, that is, in the ruins of creation. In Christ, God inhabited the ruins of creation all the way to the cross. In Christ's resurrection, God made room in Godself as Trinitarian place for the displaced Son, and, in so doing, allowed Godself to be reformed by the presence of the Son and his wounds. In this way, God has undermined sin's power to separate creatures from God's presence by making room in God's presence for the fullness of creaturely life, even for suffering, death, and displacement. In so doing, God reveals the depth of God's love, that God would make room in the fullness of God's presence for the fullness of creaturely life, even at great cost to God. In short, God undergoes displacement in order that God might make room for displaced creatures. The fullness of creaturely life, then, means creaturely life in God's presence, both of which bear the marks of displacement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the cross as the place where we see most clearly the absolute depth of God's inhabitory presence in creation. From this vantage, we see both the *given* and the *hidden* presence of God in the ruins of creation. The cross is not only revelatory, but also redemptive because God in Christ inhabits the cross with God's room-making love. It is there that Christ gives his own lived body—his whole personhood—as place for us, so that we might be by grace where he is by nature: in God's own life-giving presence. The presence of God in Christ on the cross fulfills

and judges our precedent ideas about God and creaturely life. For example, it sheds light on the meaning of *good place*, toppling our utopian fantasies with the reality of God's actual goodness as place: room-making grace for the displaced. Moreover, it sheds light on the meaning of *the fullness of creaturely life.* When God makes room in God's presence for creaturely life, it is not life free of suffering or loss, not free of grief or change. Rather, the fullness of creaturely life is known when the whole spectrum of life in the vicissitudes of place is experienced as happening *in God's presence*, which is to say, in the center of God's room-making love. For creatures, however, all experience—including experience of God's room-making love, is given in and through creaturely places. We do not experience God's presence or love in the abstract, but only as real room is held open for us in the world. Thus, revelation and redemption must be experienced through the structures of creaturely place. This is the work of the church, and the subject of our next chapter.

THE CHURCH AND THE GOD WHO IS HERE

Introduction

The Church—that global, ecumenical communion of faith—is, by grace, that which it professes: the ongoing presence and activity of the risen Christ in the world. It is, I will argue in this chapter, *Christ existing as place*: a room-making communion that inhabits the place of the cross. If the claim of the previous chapter—that Christ gives his personhood as *fitting place for us* in our displacement, so that we might be where he is: in the room-making presence of God—had appealed to the concept of place figuratively, it now becomes concrete and particular as Church. Church is the real presence of Christ actualized as place, a structure of relations bearing a deep sedimentation of meaning. It is as Church that Christ continues to give who he is as place for creaturely life in God's presence and in the ruins of creaturely life together. The Church is not called simply to be place in the formal sense of the concept, but to be *Christ as place*, that is, good and fitting place for the fullness of creaturely life, place that incarnates in creation what God is in Godself.

The communion of mutual presence that composes the Church is the community of the baptized: those who have known themselves gathered, clothed, and oriented by God's presence and promises, those who can proclaim against all the person-annihilating threats of displacement, "Where [Christ] is, there I shall be also!"[1] And it is the communion of creation itself: water and land,

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[1] So writes Luther in the closing to a letter to Jerome Weller, one of his students and tutor to his children, in July 1530 as a statement of faith in the face of all that would undermine one's confidence in one's own justification: "[To the devil,] speak thus: 'I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? […] For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the son of God. Where he is, there I shall be also." Martin Luther, "To Jerome Weller,"

ecosystem and watershed, animal, plant, and mineral. It is a communion of the living and of those whose presence is sedimented in soil and narrative. What is more, the Church knows that its very being as *Christ existing* in the world is not only gift, but also task and risk, for to be *where Christ is* is to be found in the place of the cross.

To develop this interpretation of the symbol of Church, the following chapter proceeds in two main sections. In Part One, I explore the claim that Christ exists as place in light of prevailing accounts of the church as primarily a relational community. I show that *existing as place* is additive, rather than contrastive with respect to place as community, by insisting on the spatial, material, creaturely element of Church. To clarify, when I speak of the Church as place, I am not arguing that Church just is the building, cathedral, or house where the community meets. Rather, I am arguing that to be the Body of Christ is to exist in the world—to be present and inhabitory in creation—and this presence is not amorphous, mystical, or spiritual, but concrete and particular, social and spatial, dynamic and durable, sedimented with meaning and inhabitable by creatures in need of community, shelter, and orientation. It is to exist in the world as place, good and fitting for creaturely life.

Christ's existence as incarnate revelation and his presence in the place of the cross are normative for the Church. I turn to these claims in Part Two. There I propose two theses about the Church: 1) the Church is ongoing, inhabitable revelation, and 2) the cross is fitting place for the Church. These two theses are true only insofar as each is submitted to the critique of the other. That is, the church is only ongoing revelation of God insofar as it inhabits the place of the cross, and the place of the cross can be fitting place for the church only insofar as it is ongoing revelation of the God who is place. Only *as cruciform revelation* of the God who makes room in God's own presence for the fullness of creaturely life in this way, I conclude, can the Church be *Christ existing as place*. In so

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in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing), 86-87.

concluding, I make good on the final promissory note issued in the Introduction to this project, namely, that this project would demonstrate how interpreting the symbols of the Christian faith through the lens of place contributes meaningfully to an account of God's presence and action in the world in a time of great and growing displacement. In a time of displacements provoked by violence and by economic and ecological crisis, God is present and active in the world as Church. When particular iterations of Church cease to make room for the fullness of creaturely life, cease to be cruciform revelation, they cease, in fact, to be the church. Instead, they themselves become a place of the cross, a place where the hidden Christ enters in, cruciform.

The Dangers of Place in the Context of Church

Before beginning, however, a word about the dangers of speaking of Christ *existing as place* is in order. In the Introduction, I discussed several dangers that face a theology of place. These dangers include the risk that a theology of place might become a theology of exclusion, idolatry, and violence. Since places are not mere locations, but bear meanings, memory, and hope, and are associated with identities and attachments, both cultural and personal, places can become idolatrous occasions for violence since protecting place can appear as tantamount to protecting everything that matters to one and to one's community. Another danger is the risk of valorizing arrival and cultivating a suspicion of migrants. When the home-place and the rooted life are valorized, migrants, exiles, nomadic peoples, and the otherwise displaced and on the move become suspect, associated with shiftiness and danger. Third, a theology of place risks becoming a theology of power when place is understood as something that belongs to one or can otherwise become commoditized and controlled.

I assessed and responded to each of these potential dangers in the Introduction, but we find ourselves presented with them in a new way now in the claim that "Christ exists as place." The claim

that the very presence of God is accessible, inhabitable, and locatable in the world is a dangerous claim indeed! And the dangers presented—again, the dangers of idolatry and exclusion, the valorization of arrival, and issues of power—are not hypothetical for the Christian church. Indeed, the Christian church has perpetrated—as a primary actor and as a colluding partner—each of these forms of violence against God and neighbor. The church's unholy history of collusion with the violence of empire—we might think of the Roman Empire and Nazi Germany immediately, but those of us in an American ecclesial context also should recall the Christian church's role in the genocidal colonization of the Americas and the "reeducation" of Native American children, the enslavement of African peoples and the systematic disenfranchisement of African Americans as examples of such collusion—stands as a warning to any theology of place.[2] As discussed in the previous chapter, collusion with empire is central to the formation of the place of the cross— Christ's own and others throughout the world. In our own time, nationalistic rhetoric—especially the rhetorical triad of 1) us/them language with respect to immigrants, refugees, and citizens of other nations, 2) declension narratives about place, and 3) mythic ideations of return to the nation's "golden age"—manipulates attachment to place and the intimate link between place and personhood in an attempt to drum up loyalty to reigning powers.[3] Not only is the Christian church not immune to the manipulations of empire, it has been complicit in the creation and perpetuation of those manipulations. When the church is complicit in this way, it ceases to be *Christ existing* and instead becomes a tool of empire existing as place. In other words, the Church ceases to exist as the Body of Christ in the world and renders itself, in the words of the Barmen Declaration, "an intrinsic

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[2] On the Church's complicity in such place-and-personhood-denying violence, see, Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); George E. Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (New York: Orbis, 2008).
[3] On nationalistic rhetoric and myth-making, see Matthew Levinger and Paula Franklin Lytle, "Myth and Mobilization: The Triadic Structure of Nationalist Rhetoric," *Nations and Nationalism* 7, no. 2 (203). Note well that the rhetorical triad I named above is closely related to, but not identical with their own proposed triadic structure of national rhetoric.

impossibility."[4] Christ exists, in such situations, in the place of displacement and suffering wrought by those who have mistaken themselves for the church.

One way to avoid these dangers is to conceive of the Church in a way that imagines it as something disentangled from place in any real way. Such an account conceives of the Church as strictly a gathering of people, "the assembly of saints." This assembly must occupy some location, and in that sense, "takes up space" in the world, but has no necessary or meaningful connection to that location, be it a national context or a neighborhood. In this way of thinking, place is simply an occasion for gathering in community, and the fittingness of any location is simply "that it could be adapted to the purposes of the assembly, a space in which a community could gather, in which words could be heard and communally spoken, in which a meal could be held."[5] In the language of fittingness—where parts are judged as fit for the wholes of which they are a part, or vice versa—the place itself is judged as fitting on the basis of its serviceability to what is central: the work of communal worship. This emphasis on the social assembly of human persons and the event of their gathering and pattern of activity together follows what I have described in earlier chapters as the trend in Christian theology to emphasize time, event, and history over place, and—when place is considered—to conceptualize it as a subset of space. "Indeed," confirms Gordon Lathrop, "time belongs to the core structures of Christian worship in a way place does not," since "theoretically, the meeting can take place anywhere," while the time and order of Christian worship is set, whether in

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[4] The so-called Barmen Declaration—drafted by Karl Barth—argued that when the Church has become so complicit in such unholy ideologies and submits to "alien principles," it in fact ceases to be the Body of Christ, the Church, and renders itself "an intrinsic impossibility." The full text of the Declaration is found in Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confessions under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 237-42.

[5] This description of what is needed from a space for Christian worship comes from Gordon Lathrop, who is wary of attaching undue meaning to the physical space where worship takes place, both because of its potential to be "a vehicle of destructive secular power," as discussed above, and also because its meaningfulness is so often a matter of nostalgia. See, Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 107; *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 1.

relation to the Sabbath, to Easter's dawn, the lunar calendar, etc.[6] In short, in the dominant narrative about Church and its gathering for worship, holiness/sacredness has had primarily to do with an experience of grace in time, not place. In this project, however, I have been arguing that place holds greater significance for Christian theology than generally has been recognized. Time, for its part, is actually a function of place and only encountered in and through place, which is evident, for example, when we consider that the lunar calendar is fundamentally a matter of cyclical spatial relationships and movement.

Attempts to disentangle the church from place are problematic for two reasons. The first is that they perpetuate the tendency prevalent in Christian theology (and in modern, western thought more broadly) to subordinate place to history, creation to redemption. In this temporally driven paradigm, creation is merely the theater of salvation history, a theater that can be torn down when its utility as the context for (salvation) history is done. Time's paradigmatic dominion contributes to the ecological crisis of our day because it obscures the fact that the future is not a place elsewhere to which one can go and "leave the past behind." The future is none other than creaturely life *here,* in this place, upon the sedimentations—toxic as they may be—left here today. What is more, such attempts leave the church without conceptual resources for thinking theologically about place and displacement. The second reason is that attempting to disentangle the church from place prevents the church from taking responsibility for its own place-making, place-taking power and vocation. As discussed in an earlier chapter, neither implacement nor place-making nor map-making is ever neutral with respect to power. Yet, in Christ, God inhabited the thick of the non-neutrality of place. The Church, likewise, is called not to deny the ways that it is embedded and implaced, but to enter into the thick of this non-neutrality, this risk of place, with Christ's own room-making activity.

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[6] *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, 110.

Thus, another way to respond to the dangers inherent in any discussion of the church and place—and this is, I hope predictably, in keeping with the trajectory of this project—is to approach the question of place and the church christocentrically. We cannot interpret the meaning of church through the lens of place rightly, I propose, except insofar as both place and church are viewed through the lens of "Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). When we view the church in this way, we see anew that a) the church's implacement in creation must be as Christ's own—namely, inhabitory and therefore reflective of God's deep knowledge of, commitment to, and vulnerability to creation—and we see that b) the church's place-making activity in creation must also be as Christ's own—namely, room-making for the sake of the fullness of creaturely life. As I will argue in more detail in the pages to come, the Church comes under the judgment of the God who is Place, the God of room-making hospitality and inhabitory commitment. Only insofar as the church is place in a way that answers to the God who is Place, first and finally, is the Church, in fact, *Christ existing as place*. That said, the Church's history of unholy participation with and benefit from empire's power and violence is a part of the Church's sedimentation as a place. When we take place seriously, we see that history is not something that can be walked away from. Rather, places bear history. Place does not only bear wisdom, as discussed in a previous chapter, it also bears the sedimentations of human sin. Again, I will discuss this more thoroughly just ahead, but it is important to say here that approaching the theme of church and place christocentrically is not a maneuver for skirting the issues of the church's complicity in place-based violence, but is actually a way of taking that complicity seriously.

I. The Church as Christ Existing as Place

What does it mean for the Church to be *Christ existing as place* in creation and for the sake of creaturely life? And how are we to understand this claim in light of prevailing accounts of the church

as principally a community formed of social relations? In this section, I show that *exiting as place* is additive, rather than contrastive with respect to the church as community. Indeed, a place is not a spatial container or commodity, but is an *inhabitable communion*. What the concept of place adds to prevailing accounts of the church are a) attention to spatial relations in a way that is constitutive of church and not merely a matter of its locational context, b) attention to other, non-human creaturely relations that are also constitutive of church and neither mere context nor antithesis of church, and c) attention to the inescapable sedimentary layers that form church as place, such that the saints who have gone before are less like an amorphous and surrounding "cloud of witnesses" and more like the sedimentary layers of soil in which the church of the present is rooted and grounded. What is more, viewing church as Christ existing as place means that the church's vocation is to indwell creation as Christ himself, namely, as a body vulnerable to displacement and to the distortions of place, a body that makes room for the fullness of creaturely life.

1. *Place, Personhood, and Community*

My proposal that the Church is *Christ existing as place*, appeals constructively to Bonhoeffer's account of the church as "Christ existing as community."[7] When Bonhoeffer discusses the meaning of community, he draws on sociological and philosophical studies to develop a concept of community that arises from a relational view of the human person. Being persons-in-relation is the basic ontological situation for human beings, according to Bonhoeffer, such that "the formal concept of

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[7] In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer develops an ecclesiology on the basis that "the Church is Christ existing as community," which itself modifies Hegel's concept of "God existing as church-community." My own thinking about the church is influenced by Bonhoeffer and my discussion in this chapter of the church *as place* and *as on-going revelation* will draw on arguments and logic developed by him, particularly as he deals with the distinctions between the Church in its fullest and proper meaning and the Church in its actual, ambiguous, and even fallen expression in the world. See, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 190, 98, cf. Hegel's formula in fn on 218.

person can be conceived only in terms of community."[8] Persons are established as persons in community with God and also in social community with other fellow persons. Community with God does not lead subsequently to social community, according to Bonhoeffer, as though the relationship were causal and temporal, but, rather, neither community with God nor social community exists without the other.[9] In the language of this project, they co-arise.

The ontological claims at play in Bonhoeffer's account of the human person and community bear relevant similarities to the claims I have made in earlier chapters about the creaturely beings, human persons, and place. In Chapter One, I drew on the work of human geographers and philosophers of place to develop a fundamentally relational concept of place. Place and being co-arise, I claimed, such that there is no getting behind place. To be is always already to be in place. There is no being that is not *somewhere,* standing out in existence before others. In theological terms, to be creaturely is to be a participating member of creation. At the same time, there is no place without being, for places themselves are constituted by the social and spatial relations among things that exist. Thus, place is not prior to being as its condition, but neither is being prior to place. The two co-arise with one another and one cannot conceive of or experience the one apart from the other. This account of the ontological relationship between place and being led to the development of a relational concept of place. A place, I proposed, is a web of relations formed and sustained among entities. It is a communion of presences, near and attentive to one another, which is to say, relationally extended and oriented toward one another. Human personhood is intimately liked with place, I further proposed, such that *who* one is and *where* one is are neither two discrete facts nor straightforwardly determinative of one another, but form one another in important ways.

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[8] Ibid., 34. In claiming so, Bonhoeffer draws on an account of personal and social basic-relations presented by Wilhelm Windelband, *Lehrbuck Der Geschichte Der Philosophie* [A History of Philosophy], trans. James H. Tufts, 11th ed. (New York: Harper, 1958).
[9] Bonhoeffer, 63.

Given the similarities between how I have talked about place and how Bonhoeffer speaks of community, we might suppose that place can be properly understood as a type of community (one that is spatial and social, instead of strictly social). Yet, to say so, would be to make the social logically prior to or more basic than the spatial, which is not the case. Indeed, neither the social nor the spatial is more basic than the other. Instead, *place* is more basic than either, which is to say, the relational integration of the social and the spatial aspects of being is more basic than either is in isolation. The whole is more basic than its parts. Integrated wholes are what have being and life in the world, not elements distilled and refined. This is the basis of ecological thinking, namely, that creaturely life and being are best approached in their relationships and concrete accompaniments, and not in abstraction or isolation. I have made similar claims about the human being: namely, that human being and personhood are something best approached whole, relational, and implaced, and not by distilling the soul or identifying component parts (like reason, for example). Likewise, creation itself is best understood as a whole: in its being created and in its being redeemed, creation is kept whole by God, held together in and by God's presence. (As I have written before, a certain preservation of wholeness is one of the basic contributions of the concept of place to theological discourse: namely, that the concept of place holds together elements that are often perceived as dichotomous or contradictory: space and time, the social and the spatial, the figurative and the literal, being and act. Place gives us language and a conceptual framework in which to think theologically about the God who is being in act and act in being, who is revealed in hiddenness and hidden in revelation, who is three in one and one in three.) In light of the ontological priority of wholeness, then, place should be conceived as more basic than community, since it holds together the social and the spatial in an integrated whole. Place, by this account, is not a type of community because it is more ontologically basic.

Yet, places, like communities, are fundamentally relational. Insofar as we are accustomed to thinking of relations socially, it may be helpful to *conceive* of place as a type of community, particularly, an inhabitable community bound together in part by shared presence in a continuous location. Indeed, this is how I have been speaking about place throughout this project: as a room-making web of relations and as an inhabitable communion, formed by the nearness and attention of presence. What distinguishes a place from a strictly social community, then, is its having a geographical location and a material structure, composed of those bodies that together form a place by their presence and orientation to one another. Places, in this light, are communities, yet they are communities extended both socially and spatially and, thereby, rendered potentially inhabitable by other creaturely lives. What is more, places are not formed strictly of relations among human persons, but also among other creatures, including soil and minerals, land and water, animal and plant life. In so far as it is helpful to our discourse, we can conceive of *place* as a specific kind of community, namely, one that is necessarily material and embodied, spatially extended and inhabitable by others.

I raise the question of the relationship between community and place because Church often is conceived as a primarily social phenomenon: a community, an institution, the communion of saints. Mover, as a social phenomenon, it often is conceived as a strictly human community. Thus, "church" and "world" come to be understood as separate entities. By such accounts, the church can be separate from the world or choose to go "out" into the world, but surely it is not the world. Likewise, "church" is understood as a community that has responsibilities to "creation," but surely it is not itself "creation." To such dichotomies, the concept of place offers the theological imagination another way of conceiving the church. Place is a concept that holds together those phenomenon that are often perceived in distinction in the prevailing narratives about reality. This is certainly true of Place in its first and proper sense, for the God made known in Christ is the one in whom all

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things hold together: act and being, who and where, personhood, community, and place, the diversity of creatures, human and otherwise. With reference to God as the primary analogue of place, we can speak of the Church as place in this way: it is a community whose identity does not depend on the conceptual isolation of the social and the spatial, or between the human and the otherwise creaturely. Or said differently, it is community that includes "world" and "creation," includes geography and watershed, includes soil and brick and asphalt. The "world" and "creation" and "city" are not merely the context of the Church or its mission field, but are bound up with what it is to be Church. In other words, the Church is not a web of social relations that can be abstracted from its concrete and particular accompaniments, but always and only exists in and through the spatial, the creaturely, the fleshly.[10] The Church would not be the incarnate *Christ existing* if it were not incarnate and embedded in creaturely life together. It would not be the implaced *Christ existing* if it did not choose inhabitation in the ambiguous and risky relations of place as its mode of being.

More will be said about this in the pages to come; for now let us take two things from this discussion. First, we bring along a reaffirmation of place as a fundamentally relational concept. As we have been discussing it, place is neither a subset of space nor simply a "meaningful locale," both of which render space or some wider area to be the more basic category. Rather, relationality is the more basic ontological category, such that being is always being-in-relation. Second, we bring along the reaffirmation that place and being co-arise, such that we cannot get behind place to being in abstraction, nor behind being to place apart from the beings that compose it. Third, we bring along the reaffirmation that place and personhood are intimately linked. In previous chapters, I have noted the way that displacement is often experienced as a kind of loss of oneself, a disorientation from

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[10] On the possibility of *Christ existing* in the "virtual body of Christ," that honors the fleshly and emotional vulnerabilities of life and the human need for physical presence, particularly in suffering and sickness, I commend Deanna A. Thompson, *The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016).

one's own identity. I also have shown the ways that Christ gives his own personhood on the cross as place for us, such that the displacements and *lived noplaces* of creaturely life do not have the power to annihilate personhood. To be a creature is to be one for whom God has made room in God's own presence, both originally in creation and restoratively in Christ.

2. *On Christ's Existing As*

It is necessary to say emphatically that the claim that the Church *is Christ existing as place* does not necessitate an absolute identification of Christ and the Church. The non-absolute identification of the two is true on both a formal and material level. In the formal sense, Christ and the Church are not identical because Christ is a person—God incarnate in Jesus Christ—who had a life and has both a history and a future, a person who, in the Church's language, ascended to the Father after the resurrection. The Church, on the other hand, is an earthly community, historic, present, and persisting.[11] As Bonhoeffer writes, "A complete identification between Christ and the church-community cannot be made, since Christ has ascended into heaven and is now with God, and we

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[11] The claim that the Church is an earthly community is not uncontroversial. While some traditions use the language of the "Church triumphant" to describe the communion of saints who wait in the full glory of God for the fulfillment of God's reign, I am speaking of the church as an earthly community. This community is the body of creatures who know themselves *as living in God's presence* as a matter of earthly reality, even in the midst of suffering, such that traditional distinctions between the suffering church and the triumphant church are descriptions of two simultaneous realities of being as church. As for the saints who have gone before, I speak of them as contributing—again in a very earthly way—to the sedimentation of the church as Christ existing as place, rather than as forming an immaterial, abstract church removed from earthly reality. It is thoroughly earthly, even in its fulfillment. "Fullness of creaturely life" is always life in God's presence, which is life in creation. Christian hope need not look elsewhere than here since "here" just is in God's presence. Finally, one further point: in the context of a theology of place there is good reason to avoid the language of the church triumphant because of the church's history of conspiracy with the colonial and military forces of empire and other place-placed "triumphs." The image of the Church that I am presenting is not one of triumph in this sense at all, but one of room-making hospitality, gift, and vulnerability. The fulfillment to which the church is called is not fulfillment of triumph, but fulfillment of creaturely life, even in and through death.

still await Christ's coming."[12] If Christ and the Church were strictly identified with one another, what could it mean for the Church to wait for Christ's advent? Furthermore, an absolute identification cannot be made on a material basis because what Christ is in himself—the room-making presence of God incarnate—the Church is only in an ambiguous, partial, and hidden way. The Church is a communion formed of human beings who are themselves paradoxical ambiguities of saint and sinner. The Church is—like all human communities and institutions—curved in on itself, collapsing inward on itself in sin. Sedimented by histories of patriarchy and abuses of power, of racism and colonialism, histories of things done and things left undone, the Church curves inward on itself. It exists—that is, has being and place in the world—only because of the work of Christ, who enters into its *lived noplace* and holds open room there for its life. Christ's presence in this *noplace*, is all that holds open this structure of *incurvatus* relations and makes room there, by grace, for new life through truth and reconciliation, for new life to arise therein.

To say that the Church is Christ *existing as* place, then, necessitates that the *"existing as"* be understood in quite a specific way. To *exist as* something is to be actualized as that which one is ordinarily not, as that which is other than oneself. In as much as the "as" connects the two, it also betrays the difference between what one is properly and the mode in which one is existing. Put differently, the "as" is the grammatical marker that indicates the way God hides in God's revelation and reveals Godself in hiddenness. In the incarnation, for example, the Word *exists as* humanity, as that which the Son has *become* in time and in place.[13] In the Eucharist, Christ *exists as* bread and wine,

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[12] Bonhoeffer, 140. Despite his claim here that Christ and the Church are not fully identified with one another, Lisa Dahill raises the concern that his text more broadly actually reveals a "potential blurring or lack of distinction" between the two, which amounts to "their virtual identity." For her own careful reading of Bonhoeffer's discussion of this matter, see, Lisa E. Dahill, *Reading from the Underside of Selfhood: Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Formation*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 95 (Eugene, OR: PIckwick Publications, 2009), 55-57.

[13] This account of the incarnation differs importantly from that of Barth, who proposes that the Word is—in a real and important way—eternally incarnate, such that the incarnation is not a matter

broken and poured. The verb that precedes the "as" (in this case, "exists") is likewise critical because

it is something entirely different to *exist* as something than to *act* as or to *dress* as. Jesus Christ is not

merely the Word clothed or acting as a human being, but is Jesus Christ really *existing as* humanity.

Likewise, Christ does not merely act as place or appear as place, but really is *existing as* place in the

world.[14] In the precedent nomenclature of this project, Christ *exiting as* something (in this case, place)

is Christ's real presence in and through that thing. "Real presence" is not an amorphous affinity with

or spiritual nearness to something, but is a full and fleshly communion. When Christ exists as place,

that place is something concrete, particular, and inhabitable. It is as real and placely as a mother's

lap, a beehive, or a home. It is the Church.

    This same claim also can be articulated as a matter of revelation and sacrament. In

revelation, God gives God's real presence as—that is, *exists as*—a creaturely element. The union of

God's presence and the creaturely element is a dynamic, relational union—a communion, in the

language of this project—such that the creaturely element really does bear God's presence in its

material existence, without either a) containing or commoditizing it, or b) losing its own creaturely

materiality, including its finitude and imperfection. It in this way that bread and wine, as well as the

human words of Scripture, can *exist as* God's presence and as God's Word in a real way, without

ceasing also to be the grain, grape, and grammar of the earth's creation and of human cultivation and

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of the Word "existing as," but rather is the Word existing eternally and without change, even with
respect to the Word's humanity. See, for example, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II.2 (Peabody,
MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 94, 98-99. For an account of the development of Barth's
thought on the incarnation as an event that takes place in the eternality of the Trinitarian relations
and its controversial reception, see Stephen H. Webb, "Karl Barth's Christological Metaphysics," in
Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphyiscs of Matter (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2011).

[14] On the similarity between the incarnation and the church in terms of this "existing as,"
Bonhoeffer writes: "The church is the presence of Christ in the same way that Christ is the presence
of God." Bonhoeffer is clear in his explication of this claim that the church is not a kind of second
incarnation, but rather of a form of revelation. We will return to the theme of the church as
revelation ahead. See, Bonhoeffer, 138.

creativity. The creaturely element is not subsumed. As I will discuss in greater detail just ahead, the Church is a mode of revelation, whereby the material, creaturely element of human community is united by God's Spirit in a way that allows it to exist *as Christ* in the world without being strictly identified with Christ.

One reason to emphasize the non-absolute identification of Christ and the Church is to ward against any misconceptions that the Church is Christ in a non-ambiguous way. Just as the bread and wine of the Eucharist do not cease to be bread and wine in their also being Christ's presence, so the Church does not cease to be creaturely in its also being Christ existing as place. The Church is composed of creatures curled in on themselves and turned against one another. It is composed of anxious people, who know all too well the threat of *noplace* and so turn inward in a self-defeating attempt to ground their own personhood and identity. Concerned with its own preservation (that is, it's own *existence as anything at all*—a viable and significant institution, a financially solvent congregation, non-threatening cultural phenomenon), the Church does not always make room for the fullness of creaturely life. It participates in the building of walls and borders, in the segregation of peoples, and in harm to creation. The Church is Christ existing as place, but it does not also cease to be the church existing in collusion with empire and nationalism, *incurvatus* forces that undermine the fullness of creaturely life. The Church, in short, is complicit in the very malformations of place that form the *noplace* of the cross itself. In being "Christ existing as place," one of the primary practices of the Church *as Church,* then, must be to die continually to those parts of itself that are antithetical to its existing as Christ. We will return to this claim in the next section. What is important here is to affirm from the outset that a) even as Christ exists as the Church, the Church remains creaturely (and thus sinful), b) even as the Church is actualized only in and by Christ's presence as it, Christ's presence is not contained in or delimited by the presence of the

Church. In other words, *Christ existing as place* is a statement about the meaning of the symbol Church, not a delimiting of the ways in which Christ is present and active in creation at large.

Yet, despite the need to recognize a non-identification of the two in an absolutely strict way, the claim that the Church is *Christ existing as place* points to the mystery that Christ has, in fact, chosen to be present in and to creation *as Church*. Indeed, Christ existing as place *for us* is not merely a choice on God's part—that is, not only a matter of determination or election—but a matter of promise. God has promised to be present in and to creation. In earlier chapters, I offered that place is experienced first of all as a gift and, furthermore, as a trustworthy gift, for wherever one goes place always appears before, under, and around one. Even if one were to go to the edge of the universe with Archytas to cast a spear, it would not be lost to the abyss, but would land *somewhere*, in place. Places change, of course, and are lost, and one can be displaced from the places one knows and loves and has attachments. But one cannot be lost in an ultimate way. Place is a gift that always appears because place—in its first and final sense—just is God's room-making presence. What is more, by the incarnation, God has invested the fullness of Godself *in creation*. God is not only place *for* creation, then, but also takes place *in creation,* even in its ruins. This is the depth of God's inhabitory commitment. This is the firm ground of God's promise to be present with and actively for the fulfillment of creaturely life. "Christ existing as place," then, is Christ existing as the gift of God's trustworthy promise. And the promise is this: God is here. The Triune God is the "here" of creaturely life. The incarnate and inhabitory God is "here" in and with creaturely life. God as the risen Christ, by the indwelling animation of the Spirit, is "here" in an ongoing and dynamic way as Church. The Church, then, is that place rooted and grounded in God's presence and promise. This trustworthy gift is its firm foundation. To the above claims—a) that the Church remains creaturely and b) that Christ exists as, but is not contained by or limited to, the church—we can now add that Christ's non-absolute identification with the Church also means that c) Christ *exists* here, with and

for us, as a fulfillment of God's trustworthy gift of God's presence for the fullness of creaturely life begun as creation, made flesh in Christ, rendered redemptive on the cross, and now actualized as place in the Church.

What is more, the claim that the Church is Christ existing as place means that the church is nothing apart from Christ's presence as Spirit. The place of the church co-arises with the presence of Christ. Just as creation itself was made actual place only by God's investment of the Word into the room held open in anticipation and hospitality, so the place of the church is actualized, made real and alive, only by the real presence of Christ and indwelling of the Spirit. It is not enough to say that the Church depends on Christ's presence. Rather, the Church exists only as Christ's presence, without which it is nothing.

3. *Christ Existing as Place*

We turn now to the particulars of this claim that the Church is *Christ existing as place*. To do so, we recall the basic characteristics and functions of place, as described and assessed in the very first chapter. Place, I have been arguing, is an inhabitable communion—a web of relations among creatures who, together, make room for something or someone else in their mutual presence. To be a communion is a matter of presence—nearness and attention. As real phenomena, places are characterized by concreteness and particularity, relationality, dynamism and durability, and sedimentary with respect to meaning. The character of a place—its overall ambiance, meaningfulness, and functionality—varies depending on (for example) the particular creatures who compose it and their relationships to one another, its thick or thinness with sedimented history and meaning, the content of that history and meaning, and its particular balance of dynamism and durability. The character of a place influences the way in which it functions in creaturely life—the way it gathers, shelters, and orients, the way it grounds personhood, and the way it is fit or unfit for

the fullness of creaturely life. The question before us now, then, is, what kind of a place is the Church? What is its character and how does it function? With what meaning is it sedimented and for whom is this place fitting? In other words, when Christ exists as place, what kind of a place is it?

First, "Christ existing as place" means that the Church is not an abstraction (as such language as "the mystical Body of Christ" or "the communion of saints" might suggest), but really is something existing in the world, something actualized and happening. The symbol "Church" does not point to an ideal or an idea, not to a spiritual or mystical body, but to a real group of people who, gathered by the Spirit, become something more than what they are individually. Even in the present day, as the Church is a body globally extended, it remains always a local phenomenon. The Church is always *here* or *there,* and never ubiquitous. In other words, to be Church is an exercise in particularity. It is to be the Church *here, in this place.* This is the so-called scandal of particularity in ecclesial form. As an illustration, consider the Maundy Thursday practice of Eucharistic adoration in which Bolivian Catholics make a kind of intra-urban pilgrimage from parish to parish around the city to visit the consecrated host of the Eucharist, left in repose for adoration, at each place. The streets take on a festival atmosphere as worshipers stop into various parishes to kneel before the sacrament there, essentially affirming as they do so that, "God is here…and here…and here…" Consider how this practice celebrates neither the omnipresence of God nor the mystical union of Christ and the Church, but God's particular inhabitation of each of the many Church communities around town.[15] "Christ exiting as place" means, I am arguing, that Christ's presence is always concrete and particular, localized and with an actualized "hereness," even as it also persists and extends in global catholicity.

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[15] I encountered this practice in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where the pedestrian street festival element is particularity strong, but the practice of making pilgrimage to various churches (in some places exactly seven churches, patterned after the Stations of the Cross) on Holy Thursday for Eucharistic adoration is a wider Catholic practice, particularly in Rome where it originated.

Second, like every place, the Church is characterized by both dynamism and durability, and, over time, has accrued a thick sedimentation of meaning. The church is dynamic, first of all because it is *Christ existing*, which is to say, is something alive, unfolding, and responsive. The church's dynamism is not only a neutral fact of history—change, adaptation, and reformation have been characteristics of the church since its beginning—but is normative for the church as place. A place that is not dynamic is merely a site where something happened once. A rich, full, and living place continues to change as new creaturely lives and bodies and experiences participate in it, and as the context of the place itself changes. Yet, even in its dynamism, the church has an identity—Christ's own personhood—and it can only rightly be called the Church, the Body of Christ, insofar as it persists in *being as Christ* in the world. The durability of the Church is not only a matter of its perdurance, but more importantly is a matter of its ability to continue *being the church* even in new contexts and cultures, with new members and modes of participation.

To inhabit the place of the church is to inhabit a web of relations that are not only spatial and social, not only dynamic and durable, but also relations that bear meaning. That is, the church is not neutral with respect to meaning, but stands for something. It is not *any place*, but is *the place* where Christ's personhood is extended and made inhabitable by creatures so that they can stand upright, made new persons, in the presence of God. The foundation of the church is, therefore, a gift. The church is a place founded on the gift and promise of God's presence, a place—functionally speaking—where one can go with the expectation of being in God's presence in a way that becomes inhabitable and relational. It is a place where creatures are meaningfully gathered, sheltered, and oriented by Christ's own presence and functionally gathered, sheltered, and oriented by the community that is *Christ existing as place*.

God's presence and promise form the cornerstone, the scaffolding, and the meaningful, binding Spirit of the place of the Church. God's presence and promise became inhabitory in Christ,

but it was present long before that in creation itself and in God's covenant with the people of Israel. In this way, the church today is a place formed by the richness of Jewish Scripture and history and by God's self-giving presence and promise to them. When Christ exists as place, that place does not emerge with Christ *ex nihilo*, but sprouts up from the root of Jesse, up from the rich soil of all that preceded it. God's covenant with the Jewish people is a complete and continuing covenant, which is not negated by Christ's inhabitation of creation nor by his existing as place in the church today. Places, we must recall, are not strictly differentiated containers, but are overlapping and nesting webs of relations, such that one really can be in two places at once. Moreover, places are not commodities belonging to us, but communions in which we belong as a matter of gift, task, and risk. In this way, the rich soil formed by God's revelation to the Jewish people—a richness accrued by creaturely response to that revelation manifest, for example, in the words of the psalmists and prophets, the lives of the faithful in every generation, and place-making practice in wilderness and exile—need not be denied its own completeness and continuation in order for it *also to be* the good soil of the Christian church. When Christ exists as place nothing is lost or superseded, nothing is replaced or supplanted. (That is a danger of thinking theologically only through the lens of time and its sense of sequence.) In this way, God's presence and promise through all generations form the thick sedimentation of the place that gathers and shelters and orients the faithful today.

The ongoing presence of God in the church leaves an ever-thickening accretion. The Church is a place richly sedimented. This means, first of all, that the church is not a monolith, but a diversely composed place of relations among manifold creatures, histories, and meanings. As any place, the Church is not one thing, but is a multiplicity gathered into unity by the Spirit. The church is sedimented by the communion of forerunners in faith, people of every time and place who have

trusted God to be their sure place, their shelter, rock, and fountain.[16] Their lives, relations, prayers, and witness, their participation in the task and risk of place compose the church as it stands today. The church is sedimented by their witness to God's room-making, gathering, sheltering, and orienting work in the world. To inhabit the place of the church is to receive, in a real way, the gift of the Word preached and heard in all generations, the gift of psalms sung and the creeds professed by those who have gone before. To inhabit the place of the church is to receive Christ's presence as gift, a gift that gathers and shelters and orients one. It is to inhabit a place that bears meaning—fear and hope, praise and lament—not only for oneself and for those present, but also for those who have, with their lives, formed the place of the church over the generations. And, as discussed earlier, to inhabit the church also is to receive the place as formed by its own history of sinfulness and exclusion, its history of being other than *Christ existing,* other than a body that makes room for the fullness of creaturely life. To inhabit the church, then, is to enter into the reality of its own non-neutrality and its own *incurvatus* distortions. In this way, indwelling the place of the church is both gift and risk.

Yet, we must concede that the meaning of a place is formed not only by its founding meaning—Christ's own room-making presence—but also by its functional meaning in the lives of those who inhabit it and those who inhabit the wider topography in which it is located. In other words, the founding meaning and vocation of the church do not control its meaning into the future. Though a place's founding meaning is always a part of the deep sedimentation of a place, that founding meaning can be paved over, so to speak, when a place undergoes dramatic renovation or reimagining. An old saw-mill, for example, that has been renovated into luxury urban lofts will

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[16] Images of God as sure place in every need are common, especially in the Hebrew Bible where, for example, the psalmist praises the One who is "my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Ps 18:2). The prophet laments the people's unfaithfulness to the God who had been for them "the fountain of living water" (Jer 2:13). See also, Psalm 31 and 46.

always bear its history as a place of labor and livelihood, but that meaning may become a matter of historic novelty, a backdrop against which tenants conceive of themselves as the kind of persons who re-inhabit postindustrial buildings. Sometimes the change of meaning is a matter of trauma or violence, as when a school—a place that had been a place of safety, friendship, and learning— becomes the site of gun violence. Such an event becomes a real part of the place's sedimentary meaning and of students' perceptions of themselves, their worth, and their safety in that place. In other words, the meaning of a place cannot simply be given once-and-for-all, but must arise from creaturely, contextual experience of that place and can change over time or in an instant.[17] The meaning of a place is not something imposed, but experienced through inhabitation. The Church, likewise, can be *Christ existing as place* only insofar as the people who inhabit and compose that place, as well as the people who encounter or enter it, experience the church as such. There is an everyday way, then, in which the Church is judged as to its *being Christ existing as place* on the basis of the degree to which people actually experience it *as Christ's presence in the world*, that is, as room-making grace, and also as *good place* at all, that is, as gathering, sheltering, and orienting creaturely lives wholly and well.

For this reason, indwelling the place of the church is not only gift and risk, but also task. Places are formed by the bodies, lives, and relations of those who compose them. In this way, the place of the church is founded and sustained by the body, life, and relations of Christ himself, who gave his personhood to be place for creatures in the *noplace* of creation's ruin by the work of human

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[17] In this way, places are much like symbols in Tillich's sense of the word. They are concrete, creaturely things that bear meaning and participate in that toward which they point. Tillich writes about the death of symbols with respect to their inability to bear meaning in a given context any more in Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1957). To be clear, however, I am here not only speaking about the potential death of symbol of "church," but about the death of or a change in the meaningfulness of the *place* of the church such that it ceases to be *Christ existing* and bears, instead, some other meaning, such as "place of personal affirmation" or "place of moral formation."

sin. Yet, the church also is powerfully formed by the bodies, lives, and relations of those who bear Christ's name: the community of faith that lives *as church* in the world. In this way, church is not simply a place that one receives and inhabits, but is place in which one participates as one joined to the church's own vocation. If the church is to be *Christ existing as place*, then the church's vocation is Christ's own room-making work in the world. The Church's vocation is to make room for the fullness of creaturely life, which is life in God's presence. The church does this in a creaturely way, of course, and so imperfectly through creaturely words and relations, with creaturely bodies and in creaturely faith. Yet, insofar as the church is *Christ existing,* neither does it do this work apart from Christ's own room-making presence. By the grace of Christ's own presence *as church*, the community of faith is called to proclaim in word and in deed the Triune God who makes-room, first for Godself and also for creaturely life. The church is called to profess that there is no place outside of the presence of God, no place to flee from God's presence, and that the creation is good, not because it is the context of salvation, but because it is *fitting place*—fit for the fullness of creaturely life in God's presence, both Christ's own human life and the life of every creature that arises here in place-relation.

4. *Christian worship as place-making.*

Let us speak concretely by turning to one iconic example of how the church is Christ existing as place, namely, in Christian worship. Christian worship, I propose, is place-making. If liturgy is the work of the people, that work can be understood, in part, as the work of place-making, that is, of gathering creaturely lives into relations that, together, make room for the fullness of creaturely life. Surely, this work is not only done in worship, but it is seen there in an intentional and ritualized way. In this section, I offer an account of Christian worship, in which I highlight the ways that it functions in place-making ways and, ultimately, comes to form a room-making place of which it can

be said, *there is Christ existing as place*.[18] Listen, then, in this account of Christian worship, for the

themes that have been developed throughout this project: for instance, for the relationship between

presence, communion, and place, for the work of gathering, sheltering, and orienting, for

concreteness and particularity, sedimentations of meaning, and dynamism in tension with durability.

Listen, moreover, for the ways that worship forms the church to be Christ's own room-making

presence, especially in a world of ecological crisis and mass displacement.

Christian worship is a great in-gathering.[19] As grains of wheat scattered in the field are

gathered together to become one loaf of bread, the Didache says, so, too, the many are gathered into

one by Christ in worship.[20] They gather *here*: a home, a storefront, a cathedral, the river's edge, a

border crossing, a refugee camp. Christian worship can take place anywhere, but that does not mean

its location is of no consequence, for where the community gathers to worship *there* the many

creaturely bodies and lives, the histories, meanings and memories of that location also are gathered

together into the church's place-making. Consider, for example, the congregations in Canada that

acknowledge in the opening of their liturgies that they occupy "Treaty 6 land; the traditional home

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[18] Christian worship is, of course, a richly diverse phenomenon, in both historic and contemporary practice. Since this is not a study of Christian worship, but an example of how Christian worship can be conceived as *place-making*, I restrict my assessment to the mode of Christian worship that follows the Western Rite, as reformed by Luther and Vatican II, and practiced in present day. That said, the basic shape of what I am proposing holds true for every conceivable example of worship recognizable as Christian—namely, that it is place-making with respect to certain practices.

[19] Justin Martyr writes of Christian worship as "this common gathering," where believers join together from diverse places: "On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in the cities or in the country." See, *Early Christian Fathers, Vol 1*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 287.

[20] The Didache, an early church manual, instructs the community in this prayer before the Eucharist: "As this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills [a likely reference to the sowing of wheat on the hillsides of Judea] and then was brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom." The text of the Didache is found in ibid., 175, original text 9.4.

of many Indigenous peoples."[21] In so doing, they name the complicated sedimentations of that place, the violence and abuse that took place there, and the complicity of the church in those colonial practices. The *where* of Christian worship, they recognize, is no neutral backdrop. Rather, that land's complicated sedimentations of meaning and memory are an integral part of what it is to be church there. To inhabit that place *as Christ existing* is, they acknowledge, to inhabit it with a posture of repentance, reconciliation, and room-making. What is more, to gather in a place for Christian worship is to affirm that "God is here"—not exclusively, and not as circumscribed by a container or commodity—but radically and particularly *here*, even in places occupying the sedimentations of sin, displacement, and lament. God is here as the Place of creaturely life together.

It is not only in gathering somewhere once or occasionally that place is formed, but in the routine of gathering there regularly. It is in its regularity and in its lived patterns that a location becomes an inhabited place, a place deeply known and a place to which a community is committed. Week after week, the community gathers, and week after week place is formed, place richly sedimented with meaning and memory. In this way, Christian worship not only *takes place*, but also makes place through its ritualized patterns of inhabitation. Not any ritual will do. Christian worship follows a familiar pattern, so that when one is there—*being Church*—one knows where one is.

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[21] Treaty 6 is a treaty between the Canadian Crown and various First Nations. For examples of the ways churches acknowledge their "past complicity in colonial practices, and the abuses of the Residential School system," as well as engage in intentional "truth and reconciliation" initiatives in order to create room for the fullness of life together in that land, see exemplars at: St. Faith's Anglican Church—https://stfaithsanglican.org—and Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon—http://www.usask.ca/stu/luther. Whole church bodies have committed to such acknowledgements, as well as to repudiations of the Doctrine of Discovery, which is rooted in the assumption that the land was empty territory, and not someone's place, when European explorers and settlers arrived. See, United Church of Canada, "Acknowledging the Territory in Worship," *Gathering: Pentecost 1 2015 (Year B)* (2015).

In Christian worship, the many gather for a liturgy that draws multiplicity into unity and orients anew. "Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention," writes Jonathan Z. Smith.[22] Indeed, ritual is a way of paying attention and, in so far as it also involves a spatial nearness with other participants in the ritual, it is furthermore a practice of presence. This is true of everyday, domestic rituals—the bedtime story, the off-to-work kiss at the door—and of civic and cultural rituals—the singing of the national anthem, the laying of flowers and mementos at the sites of fatal car accidents.

Liturgical rituals likewise orient one to the presence of Christ in the midst of the gathered, indeed, *as* the gathered. Imagine a congregation rising and turning their bodies toward the Gospel book as it is processed down from the ambo and into the midst of the people. Imagine them turning to one another with hands extended to share the peace of Christ. At the time of the meal, imagine the gathered processing to the table with hands open, oriented toward the gift of bread and wine and toward Christ's real presence therein. And imagine the congregation, at the end of worship, turning their bodies to follow the cross of Christ from that place to the myriad places opening before them. Moreover, Christian worship orients one in body and in attention to the needs of the neighbor named in prayer and supported in offering. In this way—that is, by attending to and orienting toward the neighbor, Christ, and Christ's promises—Christian worship "practices the presence of God."[23]

God's presence is always a matter of God's initiative, but that initiative already has been taken—first in creation and in a new way in Christ—and can be trusted as the precedent of Christian worship. It is on the ground of God's gift of God's whole self, given to be known, which is God's

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[22] In this way, Smith notes, ritual is precisely *not* "blind and thoughtless habit." See, Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward a Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103.
[23] This evocative phrase comes from the spiritual writings of the 17th century Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence. See, Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

full and inhabitory commitment to creaturely life in its fullness, that the church can so much as practice God's presence and, thereby, *exist as* Christ's room-making presence in the world.

      Christian worship begins at the font. The waters gathered at the font are the waters of creation and, in particular, they are the waters *of this place.* The waters gathered at the font are, to speak contextually, the waters of *this* glacier-fed aquifer*,* contaminated by passing coal trains and agricultural runoff, *this* river along which homeless youth camp and which the Greek Orthodox community down the road blesses each Feast of the Epiphany. In this way, the waters of the font make the church's worship scandalously particular and implaced in its watershed. These waters also bear—by the Word spoken and the stories invoked, the memories laced therein—the history of God's promises: promises to be *for* creaturely life in its fullness. Over the waters of baptism, God's liberating, room-making activity and promise is evoked in thanksgiving: [24] It is there—by water and the Word—that human creatures, curled in on themselves, are stretched open again by the capacious hospitality of the one named as Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is there that human creatures are restored to their own personhood, now sheltered and clothed by Christ.[25] In the waters of baptism, the intimate relationship between place and personhood holds: implaced in Christ, one is raised to a new life, which is creaturely life together in Christ. To the waters of baptism, the community of the baptized return—week after week—curled in again by sin, and

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[24] See, for example, the sacred history of God's liberating, room-making activity and promise, which is evoked in thanksgiving over the waters of baptism, including, for example, the waters at creation, the covenant with Noah and all of creaturely life, the Red Sea crossing from slavery into freedom, etc. Indeed, the "Thanksgiving over the Water," praises God, saying, "At the beginning your Spirit was at work, brooding over the waters of creation's birth, bringing forth *life in all its fullness.* Through the gift of water you nourish and sustain all living things. Glory to you forever and ever" (emphasis mine). See, "Thanksgiving over the Water," in *Book of Common Prayer* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 422.

[25] On the image of baptism as clothing, Luther writes, "Therefore let all Christians regard their baptism as their daily garment that they are to wear all the time." See, Martin Luther, "Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 466.

seeking restoration to themselves, to community and creation, and to God. Here, once again, the forgiven—those for whom God has made room in God's own presence—are reoriented to praise and stretched open toward others with God's own room-making grace.

Christian worship continues in Word and in prayer. Through the reading and preaching of Scripture, not only are God's own presence and promises brought into the room through the embodied voice of the preacher, but so to is the witness of the prophets, apostles, and other forerunners in the faith. The narratives and lives—spoken and heard and recalled—form the rich sedimentation of the place called Church. In prayer, the communion gathered makes room in their midst for the whole world: for the homeless and the hungry, for the sick and the dying, for the church in every land, for governments and leaders, for creation itself. In prayer, even disappearing places, shadow places, and toxic places are named and remembered in the room-making presence of God. In prayer, people and creatures who are demeaned in their displacements, deprived the dignity of personhood and the freedom befitting creaturely life, are entrusted to Christ our Place, in whom the vulnerabilities of creaturely life are sheltered. Intercession makes room even for our enemies and those who persecute us, those whom we fear and those who fear us.

Christian worship makes place around the table. It is a table of room-making hospitality, where fitting place is offered to all who come with hands open to receive. It is a table on which a meal has been prepared. The elements of this meal—"fruit of the earth (and vine), and the work of human hands"—bear the presence of creaturely lives, of the hungry neighbor, of human labor and creativity. Giving thanks for this meal, the congregation builds accretion of thanksgiving: praise for creation, for manna in the wilderness, for liberation from the narrow straits of oppression, for Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The Church is a place of thanksgiving, and its members are persons formed by gratitude. In this meal, the congregation is gathered, sheltered and oriented anew. In the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup, the congregation becomes what it receives: the Body

of Christ, who gives himself as place to creatures, the mercy-seat in the ruins of creaturely life together.[26]

To summarize, Christian worship forms place that is oriented toward the cross, elliptical with respect to font and table, and made capacious enough to bear the whole suffering creation in prayer. It is place sedimented with the lives of the faithful of every generation—a sedimentation that becomes literal when churchyard is also a place of commendation and burial, but that is just as powerful at the level of felt kinship, shared songs, and prayers and creeds spoken today as they were by grandparents and ancestors before them—and with Scripture's witness to God's presence and promise. Christian worship forms a place of resistance in the midst of empire and capitalism's dominion, a place where the ordinary hierarchies are toppled as Mary envisioned, and where persons are reoriented toward the cross, which is to say, toward the displaced neighbor.

Christian worship is place-making, but it is also person-forming. Those who gather around Word and sacrament are formed as persons by God's own room-making presence. If "we love because God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19) so, too, we make room for the fullness of creaturely life in the world because God first has made room for us. Formed as persons by God's uncurling, person-restoring forgiveness and reconciliation, the congregation is sent from the gathering place to be persons uncurled, persons who gather, shelter, and orient, persons who accompany in displacement and make fitting room. A theology of place is best professed by the Church's own hospitality and inhabitation, its own spatial and social resistance to powers that commoditize and divide creation and constrict the fullness of creaturely life. And it is in Christian worship—through ritual acts of

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[26] It is Augustine who instructs, regarding the bread of the Eucharist, "Be what you see; receive what you are." Saint Augustine, *Sermons*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/7: 230-272B on Liturgical Seasons, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (New York: New York City Press, 1993), 298, Sermon 72.

table hospitality, renunciation, repentance, and reconciliation, giving thanks and making offerings of life and labor for the good of all—that persons are formed for this good work.

Christian worship, I have been arguing, is not any place-making activity, but is the Christian community being *and* being formed to be *Christ existing as place*. Worship forms the community to be what Christ is in himself: place for us to stand at full stretch in the presence of God and of one another, place for us to be gathered, sheltered, and oriented aright even in the midst of displacements and unfitting places. In Part One, I have proposed that the Church is *Christ existing as place*. Conceiving of the church as place challenges us a) to attend to the spatial dimension of *existing as Christ* in creation, especially the ways that *existing as Christ* entails orientation to the neighbor in need, to the stranger seeking refuge, and to the one who seeks a place at the table. When the Church is *Christ existing as place*, the Church embodies the Jubilee ministry that Mary proclaimed in her Magnificat and that Jesus announced and inaugurated when he read from the scroll of Isaiah. Conceiving of the Church as place also allows us b) to attend to the non-human, creaturely relations that also constitute the church. Creation itself—that is, creaturely life together as water and soil, fruit and grain, animal and mineral—does not merely contribute the material context of the church, but actively participates in the formation of the Church. Water and soil and all participate in *Christ existing as place*. And finally, conceiving of Church as place challenges us c) to recognize the sedimentary layers that the Church bears—the lives of the saints, indeed, but also the Church's complicities and sins. Where the church itself stands in need of reconciliation and redemption, it is not only *Christ existing as place,* but is also a *lived noplace* into which Christ entered and for which Christ gave himself as place in God's presence.

II. Church as Cruciform Revelation of the God who is Place

In this section I propose two theses about the church that emerge from the preceding account of the church as *Christ existing as place*: namely, that § 1 *The Church is on-going, inhabitable revelation*, and that § 2 *the cross is the fitting place for the Church*. Each of these two theses, I further propose, is true only as it stands corrected by the other. That is, the church is ongoing revelation only insofar as the church inhabits the place of the cross. And the cross is a fitting place for the church's inhabitation only insofar as the church is on-going revelation of the God who makes room. In the pages to come, I take up each thesis in turn, and then show how each thesis corrects the other.

§ 1 *The Church is on-going, inhabitable revelation.*

In order to situate my claim that the Church is on-going revelation, a brief account of revelation more generally is in order. There is an important way in which each of the symbols that have been taken up in this project in previous chapters—namely, creation, incarnation, and the cross—are in fact *revelation*. I have been speaking of these symbols as together comprising the content of the Christian faith, but we are now in a position to say that the content of the Christian faith just is God's own self-revelation. This understanding has been implied in the preceding discussion, but not discussed or argued for directly. Let us do so now and thus situate my claim that Church is ongoing revelation.

Throughout this project, I have been proposing that "place" is an analogical concept. Language functions analogically, I explained in Chapter One, when a relationship exists between two uses of the same word that cannot be categorized as either univocal or equivocal, that is, as either identical in meaning or wholly divergent in meaning. Analogical language can function in multiple ways, of course, but this project has proposed an understanding of the concept of place as analogical in the attributive sense. Analogies of attribution affirm an analogous relationship between two applications of a term, where one application is primary and the other is secondary and derivative.

Analogical language is normative language in the sense that one analogue sets the term's proper and normative meaning and thereafter can be used to measure the appropriateness of attributing that term to other potential applications.

Analogical language functions theologically when a concept's first and proper meaning is defined by God as made known in God's revelation. To call God "place," then, is not to apply a strictly material and ordinary concept of place to God (to project a creaturely city, house, or throne onto the heavens, so to speak), but is to recognize God's own act and being as the first and proper meaning of place. God is place and sets the normative standard for placeness. Moreover, God is *good place*: place fit for the fullness of creaturely life. Creaturely places, for their part, may be considered places to the degree that they are recognizably in tune with the formal meaning of place expressed by the Triune God. Creaturely dwellings, landscapes, and other environments are judged as *good* places, in particular, by the normative standard of Godself as place, first in Godself and also as made known to and given for creatures in God's revelation. When language functions analogically, the derivative uses of the term also evidence dissimilarities to the primary analogue. If place and good place are defined—first and properly—according to God's own act and being, then creaturely places are always both like and unlike God as first and fullest place.

A further reminder is in order about the order of creaturely knowledge with respect to concept use. When analogical language functions theologically—as it does when we call God "place"—it is not as though we begin with the understanding that God is place and then, subsequently, go out and explore the world of places, always already knowing that God is place. Rather, creaturely knowledge and concept use develop in the other direction. As my toddler begins to explore the world on her own two feet, she is beginning to develop a concept of place. In her burgeoning understanding, a place is where one goes and stays a while: the grocery store, Aunt Maggie's house, the playground, the public library. She also shows me that places don't have to be

established locales or meaningful by cultural standards to warrant the name of place; the little ant hill in the crack of the sidewalk is, she showed me yesterday, place enough to warrant our going there and staying for a while. We develop a concept of place, then, through our engagement with various locales and environments, various webs of creaturely relations. It is, in fact, only by virtue of our development of the concept of place on the basis of these creaturely experiences that we can so much as recognize God as place in its fullest sense. Without a multiplicity of everyday, creaturely experiences with and examples of places, we would not have the concept of place at the ready and would not, then, have a way to recognize God *as place.*

We recognize God as the fulfillment of an analogical concept only on the basis of God's revelation. In revelation, God is at work "elevating our words to their proper use, giving Himself to be their proper object, and therefore giving them truth," as Barth describes it.[27] When God reveals Godself, God elevates the human concept already developed on the basis of experience and discloses Godself as its true and proper meaning. In this way, God's revelation fulfills the meaning of the concept. Looking back at the multiplicity of creaturely places, one recognizes now, in light of God's self-revelation, that it is *in this One* that the concept finds fulfillment.[28] In God's self-revelation, God not only fulfills our precedent concept, but judges it. "In view of a concept's retrospectively-recognizable fitness for application to God," writes Kevin Hector, "one can see the latter application as the culmination of precedent applications, yet precisely because the concept's theological use fulfills the trajectory implicit in other uses, it can likewise be seen to stand in

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[27] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight, vol. II.1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 230.
[28] The insight that one recognizes a concept's first and fullest application only retrospectively is thanks to Kevin Hector, whose work with Barth's discussion of analogical language has been helpful to this project: Kevin Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 39,134.

judgment over them."[29] From the vantage of God's self-revelation, then, the concept of place as borne out in creaturely experience is both fulfilled and judged.

What I have described in terms of the operation of analogical language maps onto the methodology of this project. First, in Chapter One, I developed a concept of place on the basis of human experience. In the collection and assessment of "human experience of place," I drew on three types of sources: my own human observations of places and the concept that unites them, the work of human geographers and phenomenologists who have taken up "place" as a matter of human experience, and the testimonies of those who undergo displacement, recognizing that sometimes a phenomenon is understood most keenly in the aftermath of its loss. At the end of the first chapter, I proposed that the Triune God is place in its fullest and proper sense. I was not yet in a position to argue for that proposal, however, and simply offered it in the mode of possibility. To argue for such a position is possible only by an appeal to revelation.

In the next three chapters, I discussed the ways that the symbols of creation, incarnation, and cross look different through the lens of place, but we are now in a position to see their fuller significance as revelation of the God who is place. In revelation, God reveals God's very self, that is, God gives God's very self to be known by creatures. In the parlance of this project, revelation is the gift of God's full and real presence, the gift of who God is, and not simply the communication of information about Godself.[30] In revelation, God draws near. Insofar as revelation is revelation *of*

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[29] Ibid., 134. As attributed in Chapter One, this project uses the language of "fulfilling" and "judging" to describe the function of God's giving a concept its normative meaning, which derives from Hector's account of analogical language here cited.

[30] In so proposing, I follow a line of thinking about revelation *as presence* prominent in theological thought, which finds its roots in Buber's account of the divine human encounter, which has been developed in the context of a Christian doctrine of revelation by Brunner and Rahner, among others. To maintain an account of revelation *as presence* one does not need to commit to a Rahnarian anti-propositionalism. Consider, for example, that the birth of a child is the revelation of a whole, irreducible life and mystery. It is the revelation of the child's very presence, given to be known. Even in so being, this revelation can be communicated, in the days to come, in narrative ("She has

God—and not simply of information about God—creation, incarnation, and the cross/resurrection do not represent three separate revelations, but one revelation in three forms. Revelation is God's presence, given to be known. What changes between creation, incarnation, and the cross is the mode of God's presence. For this reason, God's revelation in creation, incarnation, and cross are not three revelations, but are three ways creatures can so much as encounter God's one revelation, which is God's very presence, given to be known.[31]

Though revelation is God's presence, formally speaking, it is God's presence given *to be known*. That is, God does not give the glory of God's presence in a way that would do harm to human beings ("You cannot see my face," the Lord says to Moses, "for no one shall see me and live" [Ex 33:20]), nor in a way that reduces the mystery of God.[32] Rather, God gives God's presence

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Grandma's chin cleft") and in proposition ("Such strong lungs!"). Indeed, some far flung friends and family will never know the child in the indescribable immediacy of presence, but will come to know her only through the passing on of story and description. That such accounts are secondary to the revelation itself, which just is the astounding gift of the child's self-giving presence, does not make them disqualified as revelation, however. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1923); Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964); Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978).

[31] The claim that God's revelation is one revelation in three modes recalls Barth's discussion (which draws on Luther's prior claim) that God gives God's Word to be known in threefold form: in Jesus Christ, in Scripture, and in the church's proclamation. Each of these forms of the Word is God's self-revelation. In each case, God and a creaturely element are brought together by God in a dynamic, relational union in order to become the Word of God, God's revelation. The logic of my argument follows suit, namely, that God's revelation is one—namely, of God's very self—though it is made known in threefold form. The difference is that I am locating God's self-giving presence in creation, incarnation, the cross and—as I am in the process of discussing—the church. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bomiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. I.I (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 94-102. On Luther's allegorical reading of Luke 2, which images the threefold Word of God in terms of Christ (the Word), swaddling clothes (Scripture), and manger (preaching), see Barth's small print, 123, which cites Luther's sermon on Luke 2. See, Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 52: Sermons II, Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

[32] Though God is "Absolute Mystery," in Rahner's terms, God is absolute mystery who wants to be known by creatures and so communicates Godself to them. This is not the communication of truths about God, but is, rather, the act of drawing creatures into the Truth that is God's very self. This is Rahner's position, which we can also reimagine in terms of place. In revelation, God does not offer propositions about Godself, but makes room for creatures in the very presence of God, such that

to creatures in a way that can be meaningful knowledge and experience for them, without ever being subsumed or contained by human knowledge. God does this by giving Godself as inhabitable place for creatures. This, we are now in a position to see, is the real reason why place cannot be conceived as either a container or a commodity, but must be conceived relationally.

In creation, God gives Godself—God's Triune presence—as fitting place for the fullness of creaturely life. This is God's revelation, the form of which is neither identical with nor separable from its content.[33] In the incarnation, God gives Godself in Christ Jesus as inhabitory presence among creatures. In Christ, God reveals God's commitment to the place of creation, by accepting the risks of standing out as one in place, by investing Godself wholly in creation, and by binding God's personhood as Son to creation, such that creation's future and God's own future are bound up together. In Christ, God reveals God's deep knowledge of creaturely life together, not from an objective distance, but as one who inhabits the ambiguities, distortions, and ruins of place and life. On the cross, God reveals the depth of God's inhabitory commitment by inhabiting creaturely life all the way down to the *noplace* of sin and death. In each of these revelations, we see the room-making presence of God.

God is active *as Godself* in God's revelation, that is, God does in revelation who God is in Godself: a room-making communion of full and mutual presence.[34] In revelation, God does God's room-making activity in creation, particularly in the ruins of creation, reiterating Godself to creatures

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we ourselves inhabit God's presence. God is, then, intimately near, present, and given to creatures, and yet is also that mystery that can never be contained or commoditized by human knowledge or meaning-making. See, Rahner.

[33] Barth writes powerfully on how the form of God's revelation cannot be separated from its content in, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.I.

[34] Here I am continuing to advance, through the lens of place, a programmatic line of thinking in Trinitarian theology of the 20th century, namely, the idea that God identifies with God's revelation, such that "God is who He is in His works…in Himself He is not another than He is in His works," though not exhausted by God's works (Barth) and, differently, "the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity, and the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity" (Rahner). See, *Church Dogmatics*, II.1, 260; Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Continuum, 1986), 22.

as God is in Godself as Trinity. For this reason, God's revelation is also redemption. This is possible because God's revelation is not only communication *about* Godself (such that what is conveyed is information about who God is), but *is God's own presence* (such that revelation is God doing God's room-making work *here* and *for us*).

Having addressed the concept of revelation itself, we now come to my first thesis: namely, that *the Church is ongoing revelation*. This argument is possible on the basis of preceding claims: namely, that revelation is not primarily a matter of propositional content about God, but is, first and properly, a matter of God's presence, and that the Church is *Christ existing*, which is to say, Christ's real presence. Moreover, the Church does not reveal content about God that has not already been borne by the previous modes of revelation. Rather, the Church continues the revelation begun in creation and brought to its depth in the incarnation and on the cross. The Church is the lived Body of Christ—that is, Christ existing—and Christ exists as God's presence, incarnate and implaced. In this way, the Church exists as God's presence, made spatial, relational, and inhabitable by creatures. The Church is inhabitable revelation.

Moreover, since the Church is *Christ existing,* God's inhabitable revelation, creation isn't simply the place God *inhabited* once in Jesus, but is the place God *continues to inhabit*. Creation continues to be the place where God—existing as Church—is at home. This means that the Church's identity and mission do not call it away from creation, but more deeply into it. The Church can be revelation only in and through its good inhabitation of creation as Christ.

The claim that the Church is revelation is not new. Indeed, Bonhoeffer maintains that "the reality of the church is really a reality of revelation."[35] Moreover, "Just as Christ is present as Word

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[35] Bonhoeffer describes the church as revelation, first in *Sanctorum Communio* and also, in a somewhat more developed way, in his Christological lectures, published as *Christ the Center*. Since, for him, "The Church is Christ existing as community," it follows that "The reality of the church is really a reality of revelation, reality that essentially must be either believed or denied." Bonhoeffer's thinking in this

and in the Word, as sacrament and in the sacrament, so he is also present as Church and in the Church."[36] He goes on to argue that "as reality is form," so is the relationship between Christ and the Church. On the question of a reality existing in its form, consider, for example, the way in which the policies and practices of US immigration are actualized spatially in the detention centers where the children of immigrants and asylum seekers are being held in Texas, separated from their parents. The material form of these centers—large warehouses divided into chain link holding cells, where children sit on metal benches or bare mats on the floor—evokes, by the reports of visitors, a prison or a kennel.[37] This is a place whose form reveals *that as which it exists*: US immigration policy and practice under the current Administration. It is a case of a placial form that reveals and actualizes its (gravely unjust) reality. In the same sense—though materially different—Bonhoeffer argues that the Church is the material, spatial, actualized form of Christ in his post-resurrection, post-ascension life. Everything about the form of the church conveys the reality of the risen, room-making Christ. Or at least it ought to. Where ever the form of the church fails to convey this reality—*Christ existing as good place for the fullness of creaturely life*—it ceases to be the church, by his account, and becomes instead a place formed by the existence of human sin.[38]

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regard is influenced by Reinhard Seeberg who also describes the church as a "reality of revelation" in his Dogmatics (1925). See, Bonhoeffer, 127; *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), especially "Christ as Church," pp. 58-65.

     Among contemporary accounts of the church as revelation, Jennifer McBride—who works constructively with Bonhoeffer on this point—has been particularly helpful to my own thinking. See, Jennifer M. McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[36] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 58.

[37] This example refers to a still-unfolding current event. As reports now stand, see, "Trump Migrant Separation Policy: Children 'in Cages' in Texas," *BBC News*, June 18, 2018.

[38] For Bonhoeffer, the church fails to be *Christ existing* when it ceases to exist *for others* in the way that Christ himself existed for others. This is what happened, he argued, in Nazi Germany: the church had failed to be the church. His maxim that "the church is church only when it is there for others"—is found in an outline for a book on the question of the form of the post-war church, which he sketched while in prison. See "Outline for a Book," in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. et al Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 8:503.

Bonhoeffer, too, sees an intimate relationship between *who* and *where*, such that the "place of Christ"—which is, for him, the Church—is the *where* "within the structure of the *who*."[39] This means, for him, that Christ existing as church "depends upon Christ's presence to the Church as a person in space and time."[40] Furthermore, Christ's presence in this way is not accidental, but part of the essence of Christ's person, such that "space and time is the way of existence of the person of the risen one."[41] For Bonhoeffer, the Church is ongoing revelation because the Church really is the presence of Christ. God reveals Godself through the community of the Church: "The community of faith is God's final revelation as 'Christ existing as community' […] God's freedom has woven itself into this person-like community of faith, and it is precisely this which manifests what God's freedom is: that God binds Godself to human beings."[42] Since being is always imbedded and implaced—or, in the Heideggarian terms to which Bonhoeffer appeals—"being is always being-there-in-the-world," God's being in Christ is always concrete and particular, that is, being *here* or *there*.

Like Bonhoeffer, I am arguing that the Church is revelation. Church is revelation because it is where Christ has promised both to be present in a real and concrete way, and also where Christ has promised to make himself known *as present*. Here, in the place of the Church, one can so much as "taste and see" God's goodness (Ps 34:8), inhabit and abide in God's room-making grace. The Church is the place where one can say with particular confidence, "God is Here." Surely, this can be said rightly anywhere in all of creation—indeed, creation is predicated on the *hereness* of God—but it can be said with particular confidence in the place of the Church, for there God is present in a concrete and particular way, a way that is trustworthy and durable, a way that is dynamic and living. In contrast to Bonhoeffer, I do not speak of the Church as "final" revelation, as he does in the

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[39] *Christ the Center*, 59.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 60.
[42] *Act and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 112.

quotation above. (Finality is a matter of the "end of history," a way of thinking about God's revelation in Christ that appeals to the conceptual paradigm of time, and has no reality in the conceptual paradigm of place. In the ecology of place, nothing is final, for what was once presence becomes sedimentation, the soil that makes room for new life and presence to come.) Rather than "final revelation," the Church is simply and profoundly *ongoing* revelation, God persisting in giving God's presence as place for us, and to be known by us.

Specifically, the Church is ongoing revelation of the God who makes room for the fullness of creaturely life. It is the ongoing expression of God's revelation as *here* for us—"where we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). As such, the Church is a continuation of that revelation first made known in creation, and also in the incarnation and again, with profound depth, on the cross. The God who is Here persists in revealing Godself to creatures, because the room-making God, the God of presence and inhabitation, is the God who inclines toward communion as a matter of *who* God is. God is communion in act and in being. Communion, as discussed in an earlier chapter, is not only a matter of mutual presence, but is also a way of knowing and being known. Communion is the way of knowing proper to God. It is the way in which God knows Godself wholly as Trinity, and it is the way in which God gives Godself to be known by creatures. The Church is ongoing revelation because it is Christ's real presence—God's inhabitory communion with creatures. The Church, then, is not just the place where God is communicated, but is the place where God is present. In other words, to call the Church "inhabitable revelation" is to say that revelation is not simply something one receives as knowledge, but something upon which one stands, in and by which one dwells.

Consider, for example, a church community that gives itself as sanctuary to immigrants facing deportation or to people escaping domestic violence. In so doing, that church is an inhabitable revelation of Christ's own room-making reality. It is Christ existing as place. Or, consider

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a church community that hosts difficult conversations about racism, conversations that require mutual presence, full and free personal investment, and disarmament of heart. Forming itself to be a place that can host such conversations is not straightforwardly a matter of arranging chairs in a circle for a meeting, but of being formed—week in and week out through worship—as a place of confession and reconciliation, of shared lament, hope, and life together, a place trusted by all who will participate in such conversation to gather, shelter, and orient lives well for the sake of life in its fullness. In opening itself to being formed—spatially and socially—by such practices, it is an inhabitable revelation of Christ's own gathering, sheltering, and orienting activity in creation.

The call of Christian vocation is a call to inhabitation. It is a call to the inhabitation of creation *as place in God's presence,* which is to say, simultaneously as a gift of Godself and as a task of life together with creatures. It is a call to the inhabitation of the Church *as Christ existing as place*, an inhabitable revelation. Inhabitation, the reader may recall from previous chapters, is a way of life that involves presence, personal investment, deep and mutual knowledge, and the acceptance of risk. It is a way of life that involves commitment to the creaturely lives of that place, and the risk of recognizing oneself as belonging to the same communion of life together. To inhabit well is to recognize the fullness of one's own creaturely life as bound up with other creaturely lives and with the web of relations formed by them. To inhabit the church—Christ existing as place—is to recognize oneself as gathered, sheltered, and oriented there, to invest oneself in the relations of that place *as one's own place*, and to accept the risks associated with such creaturely life together.

Two interrelated points of clarification remain. One is the question of the particular risks of inhabitation with respect to the church. In previous discussions of inhabitation, the emphasis was on the embodied, creaturely vulnerabilities of inhabitation as a way of life in creation. Given the real vulnerabilities of embodied creaturely life, and of commitment to what is finite, these risks were not hard to imagine. But the risks of inhabiting God's own self-revelation as church bears with it

particular risks to which we must also attend. The second question is one that every ecclesiology

must face: namely, the question of discerning the church in the world. If the church is Christ

existing as place, how does one discern where, exactly, Christ is in the world? If Christ's existence as

the church is non-absolute and if the church can sometimes—by its own sin as a creaturely

communion—exist as *other than Christ*, that is, as a community or an institution that does not exist as

Christ in the world, but as an expression of sinful formations of place in the world (ie. idolatrous,

exclusionary, violent, or otherwise dangerous places), then how are we to discern where Christ is

existing as place and where something *incurvatus* has taken formative hold? To answer these

questions, we turn to my second thesis about the church.

§ 2 *The cross is the fitting place for the Church.*

In order to be *Christ existing*, the Church must inhabit the place of the cross. The place of the cross,

the reader may recall from Chapter Four, is where Christ inhabits the ruins of creation. As such, it is

a place of profound suffering, death, and displacement, formed by political and economic powers

and their terrorizing instruments of place-control. It is place formed by human sin, that inward

curving force present and active in the human creature and all human relations, including place-

forming relations. It is the place of God's displacement.

   The cross, I argued, is not different in kind from other places of displacements and their

hellish negations of personhood. In this way, Christ's displacement on the cross is not different in

kind from places that make room only for the undoing of personhood, the exploitation of creatures,

and other forms of deprivation, including the deprivation of belonging and meaning. The cross is

not different in kind from historic and contemporary places of war, genocide, incarceration, or

slavery. It is not different from nation states turned in on themselves by the idolatries of nationalism

or from communities malformed and distorted by racism. It is not different in kind from places

where the dignity of animal and plant life is violated, where the sedimentations of soil and rock are torn apart in the pursuit of human power by wealth. These places—of historic and contemporary expression—are formed by the conspiracy of sin's power, by relations curled in on themselves, which seek to build up and secure themselves. They are places where the desire to satisfy and preserve one's own personhood (and those with whom one shares affinity) not only ceases to make room for others, but begins collapsing under its own *incurvatus* weight. A place that does not make room ceases to be a place and becomes instead a kind of shrine, a statue to the idol of self and security. "The place of the cross," then, can refer not only to the place of Christ's own death and resurrection, but also more broadly to any place—historic or contemporary—formed for the annihilation of personhood and for the denial of creaturely life in its fullness.

The place of the cross is the fitting place for the Church, I am arguing. If the Church is in fact *Christ existing*, then, it must exist *as Christ:* that is, as one who inhabits the displacement of the cross and there gives his personhood as place for us. Likewise, the church is called to inhabit the places of displacement and loss—to be fully present and committed to those places formed of sinful relations hell-bent on annihilating the personhood of those displaced there and denying creaturely life its fullest expression. To speak concretely, the church is called to the borderlands, dangerous crossings, and the shadow places of empire, to places of containment and incarceration, to places of waiting and of working. It is called to the disappearing places, to the places where the displaced flee in search of higher ground. It is called to be place in displacement, to be room-making presence in the narrow straits. In such places, the church is called to the vocation of *existing as Christ*, which is to say, to inhabitation, deep knowledge, personal investment, and room-making hospitality. This is a vocation of presence: presence that is life together, presence that forms communion, presence that makes room for something new to live. In this way, the church is called not only to inhabit places of the cross with Christ's own solidary, but also to inhabit the places of the cross *as ongoing revelation* of

the God who is place, that is, as testimony to and revelation of the room-making hospitality that is God's own act and being, as well as God's act and being toward us. To inhabit the places of the cross as ongoing revelation means not only to live in imitation of Christ himself, but also to be the *ongoing*—and so dynamic, responsive, and contextual—revelation of the God who is room-making, inhabitory, and displaced for the sake of the fullness of creaturely life.

To the question of how one can so much as discern the church in the world, then, we must say that the church is recognizable as *Christ existing as place* only insofar as the church itself inhabits places of the cross. Inhabiting of places of the cross is, in other words, a "mark of the church," a way that the church can be discerned and recognized. Only when the church is located in places of the cross can the church be Christ existing. The cross is *where* the church knows *who* it is. And—to the question of the risk involved in this inhabitory vocation—only when the church risks its own displacement can it truly be—for itself and for others—Christ's own personhood existing as place. As Church, God gives Godself to be known as inhabitable communion in the midst of displacement and in the *noplace* of sin and death. It is, then, in displacement that the church reveals the God who is Place, first and properly. It is in its own inhabitation of those *lived noplaces* where personhood is threatened and creaturely life undone that the grace of God in Christ is revealed: Christ is place in every displacement, and not only place but new place for the fullness of personhood and creaturely life.

This also means that the God who is Place, first and properly, both fulfills and judges the church as place. When the church does not risk its own displacement and instead spends itself securing its own existence and perdurance, the church fails to be Christ existing as place. When this happens, "the church ceases to be the church" and is rendered "intrinsically impossible," having

ceased to be in fact *Christ existing*.[43] Only when the church inhabits the place of the cross can it be Christ existing. In other words, a church that fears its own death avoids its life as church. In this way, Christ—in his inhabitation of creation all the way down to the depths of the cross and grave—both fulfills and judges the church. Christ fulfills it in so far as he makes the church what it is—giving it not only its vocation, but also its existence—and Christ judges it in so far as he is the revelation of God that the church is to exist as. All purported revelation stands under the judgment of God, and this is certainly true of the church.

The two theses presented here offer a continual corrective of one another. The church is only ongoing revelation of the God who is Place to the extent that the church inhabits the place of the cross and makes room there for creaturely life in its fullness. Instantiations of the church that cannot be found in the place of the cross, or that in anyway despise places of the cross, wherever they are found, or that speak or work for some good other than fullness of life for those who live therein, do not exist as Christ, do not reveal the room-making hospitality of the God who is place, and have ceased to be the church. The correction also does important work in the reverse; that is, the cross is the fitting place for the church only to the extent that it is ongoing revelation of the room-making, life-working God. Instantiations of the church that inhabit places of the cross but do so in a way that reveals something other than a God who wills and works goodness and life for creatures, a God who has entered into the vulnerabilities and risks of displacement in order to protect personhood from that which would undermine it and to set them in a new creation, where "no one will make them afraid" (Mic 4:4), likewise do not exist as Christ, do not reveal the God incarnate in Christ Jesus.

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[43] Again, see the Barmen Declaration as found in Cochrane, 238.

By way of summary, then, we can say that even as ongoing, inhabitory revelation, the Church is "broken place."[44] It is place that is inhabitable and revelatory, good and fitting, but is so only insofar as it is itself continually displaced and rendered cruciform. It is place that must be recognized *as place*—vulnerable, creaturely, composed of finite bodies and relations—if it is to be revelation of the God who is here, making room for life in all its fullness. As broken place, the church is cruciform. Indeed, as broken place, the church is itself a place of the cross—a place in ruin, a place facing its own idolatries and its own finitude. When the church dares to demythologize itself in that way, dares to allow itself to be a place of the cross, it is then and only then—quite paradoxically—that it becomes *Christ existing* and becomes inhabitable revelation of God's room-making glory. The glory of the church as place, then, is in its displacement. The beauty of the church as place, then, is in its being cruciform. The scandal and risk of the church is this: that it is only in the church's inhabitation of the place of the cross, the place that threatens personhood and dignity, that the church has the capacity to bear the capacious, room-making presence of God.

Conclusion

The Church is at once inhabitable revelation and broken place. It is place formed by God's own room-making presence and it is place formed by creaturely life together, finite, vulnerable, and prone to sin and fearfulness. As broken place, the church exists as God's presence and activity in the world

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[44] The concept of "broken myth"/ "broken symbol" comes from Paul Tillich, who develops it as a way of speaking about demythologization and the way religious symbols participate in God—that to which they point—but also must be broken in order not to be idolatrous. As he writes, "A myth which is understood as myth, but not removed or replaced, can be called 'broken myth.' Christianity denies by its very nature any unbroken myth, because its presupposition is the first commandment." Gordon Lathrop makes use of this language in his own discussion of Christian worship, speaking of the ways in which liturgy must become "broken ritual." It is in this sense that I am speaking of the church as "broken place," place that must be recognized *as creaturely place*, and so broken, if it is also to be affirmed as inhabitable revelation. See, Tillich, 58; Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, 52-53, 157.

and, what is more, exists so that creatures can know and trust God as good and fitting place, place that anchors and holds the dignity of personhood, even in the midst of violence, displacement, and loss. In this way, Church fulfills the concept of place, insofar as it is *Christ existing* and, as such, is God's own room-making presence, hidden *and* given to be known.

Understanding church in this way, raises questions for the Church's own reflection, namely, questions about its own room-making vocation. What would it mean—in worship and in service—for the Church to think of itself as having a place-making function? How might it change the language of worship to think of non-human creaturely life as constitutive of the congregation of the church in a meaningful way? In what ways is the Church called to risk its own existence and displacement as an institution in order to exist as Christ in places of the cross? Such questions emerge when the church takes place seriously, not only as a matter of its own location, but also as a matter of its vocation in the world.

We live in a time of great and growing displacement. The day's headlines bear witness to this suffering as immigrants and asylum seekers are separated from their children at the southern border of the United States. Here we see the insult of borders and barbed wire to creation itself, the horror of cages and cells—containers for human life that are *no place* for persons—and the urgent need for communities formed for the work of making room, materially, politically, and personally. Reports also bear witness to the continued loss of place due to the rising tides and temperatures of climate change. Extreme weather, water scarcity, crop failure, and rising sea levels are expected to displace as many as 143 million people by 2050, by one estimate, in just three particularly vulnerable regions, which are *home* to over half of the developing world's population.[1]

The Christian church praises a God who is with us, present in creation, made known Christ Jesus, and active in the Spirit's continued work. But what can such doxologies mean in a world of displacement? What earthly difference does God's revelatory and redeeming work make in concrete and particular places where creation groans and the people are scattered? To what postures and practices is the church called in such a time?

To respond faithfully to such questions, I have proposed, the church needs conceptual resources for reflecting theologically on the role of place in human life and on the particular sufferings of displacement. The resources that do exist focus on the life-giving, God-bespeaking aspects of beautiful places where a sense of God's presence seems close to the surface things. This leaves such theologies of place open to the critique of sentimentality, that is, that they speak to the

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[1] Kanta Kumari Rigaud et al., "Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration," (Washington DC: World Bank, 2018).

glory of creation, but not its brokenness, toxicity, or suffering, to the power of place, but not to the use of that power to denigrate creatureliness and deny personhood.

To address this need, this dissertation has constructed a theology of place and displacement centered, in spirit and in method, at the cross—Christ's own and as made known in the ongoing suffering of the world. This project is an offering to the theological imagination, a proposal for how the central symbol system of the Christian faith looks different when place is taken seriously. Moreover, it is a proposal for how the church might think and live together faithfully in a time of great and growing displacement. This project gives the church language with which to speak of a God who inhabits the places of vulnerable creaturely life and suffering, binds Godself to creation, and calls the church to practices of risky inhabitation and radical hospitality.

At the beginning, I proposed three criteria by which to assess the success of this project, each of which now have been met. (1) In this project, I developed an analogical concept of place, which points to the mystery of the Triune God who is place, first for Godself and also for creaturely life. By analogical extension, place is also the myriad *room-making structures of relations* in and with which being arises, life is lived together, personhood is formed, and knowing is grounded and given perspective. Moreover, place is a means of grace by which God reveals Godself as *for us*. Place is the gift of God as a room-making Creator, in the inhabitory Christ, and through the church as Spirit.

In addition to developing the concept of place, I have developed other concepts, which together form a conceptual vocabulary: displacement, making room, *noplace, lived noplace*, and non-place, presence, communion, and inhabitation. I have differentiated between formal and material accounts of place, by proposing continuums of thin and thick places, good and distorted places. I have appealed to the concept of fittingness of place and to "creaturely life in its fullness" as a basis for judging the goodness of places. This lexicon is itself a significant contribution of this project insofar as it gives us language for imaging God, redemption, and the room-making work of the

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church in a way rooted in place itself—which is also to say, in the body, relationship, the built environment, and ecosystems—rather than flying above it.

(2) This project also set out to demonstrate how this conceptual vocabulary—especially the concept of place—might serve as a meaningful and constructive lens for the interpretation of the Christian symbol system. Each of the five chapters took up a central symbol by which Christian thought expresses God's presence and activity—Trinity, creation, incarnation, the cross, and the church—and showed how new layers of significance appear when they are interpreted by the light of place and displacement. I also traced the themes of sin, revelation, and redemption running through these symbols and binding them together. Surely other symbols and themes could have been explored—Spirit and eschatology stand out as important possibilities—but those I take up here provide a sufficient sense of how the whole of the faith looks different through the lens of place, as compared, for example, to the lens of time and history through which much of modern theology has been developed. The result, I hope, speaks for itself. Yet, I will bring to the fore a significant example.

Though each chapter focused on a specific symbol, there is a way in which all five chapters together imagine God through the lens of place. As Trinity, we see the God who is good and fitting place for Godself, the God who makes room for the fullness and freedom of God's own life in perichoretic relation. As Creator, we see the God whose first attribute is room-making hospitality, whose desire for creatures is fullness of life together. In Christ Jesus, we meet the God who gives Godself to be known not only as Host, but also as Guest, not only as implaced, but also as inhabitory. In Jesus, we see God doing Godself in the concrete and the particular: making room for the fullness of creaturely life, gathering, sheltering, and orienting aright. On the cross and by the resurrection, we see the depth of God's inhabitory love. Here is a God who risks God's own displacement in order to become good place for the displaced, place for those who do not know

who or where they are. Here is a God who descends to the *noplace* of death and the grave, to hellish place, in order there—even there—to make room for new life as new persons. No place is outside the ingathering love and sheltering mercy of this God, who interposed God's presence in *noplace* to make room there for life. In the Church, we become *Christ existing as place* in the ruins of creation, the ongoing revelation and a room-making grace of God for others. God is place, these symbols help us see, not as a maximal container of the cosmos, at a remove from creaturely life, but as one who gives God's very self in and for the sake of creaturely life, wounds and ruins and all.

Altogether, these chapters also present a view of creation as place in God's own presence. Creation has, by this account, an essential wholeness, a formal inviolability that is, nevertheless, materially malformed by human sin. Human sin divides and commodifies creation, rends its integrity as real estate and nation state, scars it with barbed wire and border walls. Such divisions deform creation—including human creatures—because they misunderstand the nature of place, which is found in relationality and room-making, in analogical relation to the God who is good place.

(3) Finally, this project has demonstrated that interpreting the symbols of the Christian faith in the paradigm of place contributes meaningfully to an account of God's presence and action in the world in a time of great and growing displacement. This is seen most clearly, perhaps, in the final chapter on the church, which synthesizes and fulfills all that has come before it. In the Church we receive the vocational call to be by grace what creation is by nature: life together in God's presence. In this sense, the church's vocation is simply to be creaturely, that is, to be whole and relational, to receive being and life together as gift, task, and risk, to stand out in fullness of life together in God's presence. Yet, in a world such as we inhabit—a world of borders and barbed wire, of mass incarceration and unjust immigration policies, a world of where toxic waste pollutes watersheds and rising sea levels submerge ancestral homes—the vocation of the church is to be *Christ existing as place*, as good place: refuge and sanctuary and communion in every sense. The church can only be Christ

existing, I argued, to the extent that it is prepared to risk its own security, to accept its own

displacement, and to practice the transformative, room-making hospitality of God in Christ. The

church is called to the inhabitation of the cross. It is called to this deep knowledge and commitment,

this kind of inhabitory presence and love in the *lived noplaces* of creation, wherever they are found.

Not only has this project shown how the theological material looks different through the

lens of place, it also has shown how the phenomenon of place comes to look different in light of the

theological material. In other words, this project contributes not only to Christian theology, but also

to the interdisciplinary field of place studies. Much of the precedent literature makes judgments

about the relative goodness of places on the basis of a predilection for certain kinds of what I have

called "thick" places—places rich in meaning, relationship, presence, dynamism and durability, etc.

But, as our account of the cross has shown, thick places can also be unfit for the fullness of

creaturely life. By the light of the theological material, we see that good places are not simply places

of beauty, meaning, and rootedness, as place theories so often suggest, but, in fact, are places that

make room for the suffering, dying, and displaced neighbor and stranger. Good places are places of

daring hospitality that risk being reformed by what or who is welcomed in. In this way, good places

are places that imitate the God who makes room in God's own presence for creation and for its

suffering, death, and displacement through the inhabitation and displacement of Christ. Moreover,

those places that appear at first to be badly distorted are, by the light of Christ and his cross,

particularly potent places of God's presence and room-making activity. There, God is present,

revealing God's given and hidden presence, and making room for new life.

In so doing the above, this project offers to the theological imagination the image of God as

place and as displaced, as inhabitory and as room-making, with the hope that the church will hear

anew its call to invest itself fully in creation, such that nothing more or less can be said of it than that

it is *Christ existing as place*, place that makes room for the fullness of creaturely life together, even in

the midst of the sufferings of displacement. In so doing, the church truly can proclaim a God who is Here, with us.

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