

Metro New York Synod Assembly, Talk One: “We Believe in the Holy Spirit...”
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Honor to be here *for such a time as this*: election of bishop, new initiatives in rolling out your strategic plan, much evidence of the Spirit at work!

Greetings from Trinity Lutheran Seminary

Introduction: Bonhoeffer, New York, and the Holy Spirit

As a Bonhoeffer scholar, I feel a special gratitude and connection to this place already, because New York was the place where Dietrich Bonhoeffer became a Christian. In fact, Christians all over the world, in the almost 70 years since his death, have a special debt to New York for hosting and making possible the conversion to Christ of this remarkable Lutheran teacher and witness and martyr. To be Lutheran in New York will change the world!

And as an American scholar of Bonhoeffer’s legacy – and particularly his spirituality – for many years, I have always been secretly proud and intrigued at the fact that the two major turning points or conversions his biographer names in Bonhoeffer’s journey (when the theologian became a Christian, and when the Christian theologian became a person of his own time) both took place not in Germany but in America. And not just America in general: they both took place *in New York*. New York is the place of conversion, of the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit, and of discernment, vocation, and radical deepening union with Jesus Christ.

Outline of today and tomorrow – the two conversions...

Biographical Sketch:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906, along with his twin sister Sabine, as the 6th and 7th children of a prominent neurologist and psychiatrist father, and aristocratically born mother: a deeply cultured, lively, intellectually inclined and more or less unchurched family, where Dietrich learned to take active part in the richness of the arts and literature and politics around the dinner table and in his family's huge social circle of Berlin's elite, but almost never went to church. Why would you ever want to go there? So boring and bourgeois in comparison with the rest of Germany's rich cultural life! The family baptized and confirmed its children, and Paula (the mother) instructed them in Bible, hymns, and catechism, but that was it – this family didn't ever really go to church, let alone every Sunday, and the father (Karl) and Dietrich's older brothers were agnostics and atheists. Yet Dietrich was drawn to theology, with his brilliant intellect, and he completed his doctorate at age 21 with a dissertation on the sociology of the church. Even after writing a second dissertation and completing his parish internship (in Barcelona, Spain), he was still too young for ordination, so he went off to New York for a post-doctoral year at Union Seminary up in Morningside Heights, and entered a whole new world.

Though initially condescending toward liberal American theological discourse and what he felt was weak preaching and too little depth, he found himself transformed by the experience of worship and Christian life in the black church. Just a few blocks from Union seminary, Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem became his home away from home: the place where he not only learned about racism in the U.S. through the lives and heart-rending stories and experience of new friends, experiencing first-hand what it was like to be black in the U.S. (as he and another white seminarian traveled with two black friends for several weeks through the American South in 1931... imagine the reception they got) – but Abyssinian Baptist was where he also

experienced worship that was full of the theological depth he missed in the white churches of America, and *full of the Spirit*. This community LIVED the Gospel: it mattered to them, their worship was full of heart, emotion, joy, grief, passion, power, ALIVE.

And in conversation with a French pacifist colleague at Union – simultaneously with all this – he was being stretched to take the Bible seriously on a whole different level, especially the Sermon on the Mount: to not only consider that maybe Jesus intends us to *really* love our enemies and live according to his most radical and transforming teaching *in real life*, but to begin thus to hear Scripture as then the *Word of the Living Word*: to hear the voice of Jesus himself through the Scripture, addressing him personally. An I-Thou experience, face to face encounter. The Bible became Scripture, Word... and the Word became the words of the Living Word... all becoming increasingly transparent to Jesus himself, calling him – Dietrich – to love and live in him, no matter what. Bonhoeffer's biographer names this year in Harlem and at Union as the first major "turning point" in Bonhoeffer's life: when the academic theologian *became a Christian*. New York is a place to become Christian. The Holy Spirit *makes people Christian*.

All that would follow – of resistance to the Nazi state the day after Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and attempts to lead the German church to stand up to Hitler from the very beginning, and the formation of the Confessing Church, and his famous insistence on *costly grace*, and radical discipleship that is joy because it brings us utterly, *immediately*, into whole-lived relationship to Jesus for the life of the world – and Finkenwalde, the experiment in theological education and intentional community and communal and personal prayer – all that he saw as essential for the difficult and risky sustaining of *Christian life in Nazi Germany*, that radically un-Christian world, under the threat of imprisonment or death in the Confessing Church: All of this, all that came later, flowed directly from New York, from the Spirit who met him here.

“We believe in the Holy Spirit...” – *watch out!*

For the Spirit is the one who made for Dietrich what had seemed a more or less purely intellectual faith into FIRE, alive. The Spirit is the one who brought him into worship where people dance, where the Word catches fire and the tradition sings and raises the roof, where the urgency of the Gospel is a matter of life and death in people’s day-to-day experience right in the grit and the shock and the stress of the city.

This was the very Spirit of God...

who in the beginning moved over the face of the deep, chaos, *tohu wa bohu...*

And by this breath of God, *ruach*, the Word was spoken that burst forth into creation: *Let there be light...*

And this same breath of God spoken gave birth to the very structure of reality, waters divided and dry land appearing, and every kind of plant and animal, creeping things and winged creatures...

And this same breath breathed into human nostrils brought our own lungs into their full first stretch, and we wailed out our voice newborn by that Spirit...

And through the night the Spirit blew over the waters and divided the sea, so that the people walked through on dry ground...

And the Spirit led the people in the wilderness, and gave them a land, and raised up judges and kings and prophets to lead them...

And in the fullness of time overshadowed Mary whose Yes brought this creative Word into our own human flesh...

And the Spirit poured forth through the split-open heavens and drenched him in the river, and in his immersive divine belovedness, still echoing in the air and dripping off his body, the Spirit drove him out again to the wilderness to hear the vocation to become all flame: to teach and heal and cast out demons, to inflame by this Spirit and infuriate and console, and to be raised in this Spirit, in this flesh of ours, from the cold tomb, the very depths of hell, as all the dried-out dead bones on Earth are set to dancing, and the breath of God pours forth with a mighty wind and fills all that is.

This is the Spirit who fills your churches and this synod, whom we long for and plead for in this assembly, and beyond into all that will be born from these days.

The Spirit and Spirit-uality:

But what does it mean to speak of a Christian or even Lutheran spirituality, in a multiple religious world like New York? We say that in New York something happened in the young German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer that set his life on a new trajectory and somehow made him Christian – but what does this mean? What does it mean to participate in the life of this Spirit who is the breath of the very Word and Wisdom of all creation – or to be Lutheran today? “We believe in the Holy Spirit” – what does this mean, in a world haunted by violence and degraded by demons of all kinds, as Bonhoeffer well know too – a world simultaneously filled to overflowing with the beauty of God in all that is? This Spirit aflame in all that is clearly doesn’t stop at the edges of the church, let alone just the ELCA. Attention to questions of spirituality can thus be a bridge for us to honor and cherish the experience of all we meet, as well as to cherish what makes a Lutheran spirituality distinctive.

For *every* human being – indeed, every living thing – comes into being with a spark or wiggle or pulse of this fire from the heart of creation: our cells dividing and miraculously diversifying in the womb to be knit together into this new life out-bursting in birth into infant cries to toddler energy to adolescent rages and lust, to adult ambition and creativity and addictions, to the griefs and generativity of older age. This passion to grow and connect and love and generate new life in us is desperate in urgency, painful in frustration, sweeter than any love on earth, hopeful toward heaven itself... We humans are wired for desire, from our birth; it is the breath and wildness of God rooted in the deepest desire of all: for the One who transcends every desire and is the only place of deepest peace. Many have traced this deep desire at the heart of human life, from St. Augustine to singers of love poetry through the ages to saints and mystics. Contemplative Ronald Rolheiser defines spirituality here. *Spirituality*, he writes, “is ultimately about what we humans do with [that urgent] desire” at the very core of us.¹

In this sense, *spirituality* isn't necessarily Christian – for every human is created with this deep desire for growth, for love, this fire deep in the soul. Every human being has to do *something* with the energy of being alive – and what we do with our deepest desire, Rolheiser asserts, *is* our spirituality. This gigantic urban zoo that is New York is nothing but desire, a pulsing energy that never stops, and this restless relentless urgency is tiring I'm sure but also profoundly attractive – it draws people from around the world to visit here, and to live here. Everyone we meet every day – brushed against in the subway or on the street, or encountered in every possible way in this impossible metropolis and its boroughs and Long Island and upstate – all these people, Christian or Jewish or Buddhist or doubt-ist, religious or not, self-proclaimed “spiritual” or not – have a spirituality in Rolheiser's sense: in some way, each of them is engaging those inner longings they were born with. “Long before we [ever] do anything

¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Image Books, 1999), 5.

explicitly religious at all,” he writes, “we have to do something about the fire that burns within us. What we do with that fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality. Thus, we all have a spirituality whether we want one or not, whether we are religious or not,” even whether we think we are “spiritual” or not. Fueled by this longing, “...we act in ways that leave us healthy or unhealthy, loving or bitter.”² *This* is our spirituality. You can use that energy to out-compete the 99% and build bigger and bigger towers or you can diffuse that energy in distraction or addiction, or you can engage it to create edgy new street art, or get up at 3 AM for monastic Vigil prayer or to breastfeed a beloved infant in the peaceful dark – or, for most of us, some shifting combination of many energies or joys or distractions or the terror of it all that we stuff down with depression or rage: but *how you channel your life’s energy is*, says Rolheiser, your spirituality. Whether they want it or claim it or not, in his view, everyone has a spirituality.

It’s a definition much like how Luther in his *Large Catechism* articulates what your god is: he writes, “A ‘God’ is that upon which one relies for all good things and in whom one takes refuge in all times of trouble.... Now anything upon which you hang your heart and rely, I say, is really your God.”³ Everyone has a god, whether they are a religious person or not; even atheists have something to which they turn in times of trouble and need, some place they hang their hearts – regardless of whether they *say* they believe in “God,” this *is* their God! Everyone has a god, religious or not; similarly, everyone has a spirituality – the question in both cases is the *adequacy* and *life-giving power* of your god, your spirituality. Does your God give LIFE to the dead? Does your spirituality create a life of balance and joy, passion opened for the life of the world and the health of your heart and body and community, the thriving of some big or little

² Ibid., 7.

³ Martin Luther, “Large Catechism,” cited in *Luther’s Spirituality*, ed. Philip Krey and Peter Krey, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 193; cf. also Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 386.

piece of creation? Is your spirituality animated by the ongoing life of Jesus Christ, alive in the flesh, bringing abundance of life and costly discipleship and resistance to evil here and now?

Then that's the Spirit at work in you!

So a *Christian* spirituality is not just what some call religious: “going to church” or “believing rightly,” nor just the ethical, “doing good in the world,” nor just typically charismatic signs like speaking in tongues; a Christian spirituality is the road to Emmaus: “**were not our hearts burning within us as he opened for us the Word...?**” Is not that fire at the heart of every human soul – that fire at our heart – brought into rich, sweet, mysterious LIFE when we hear Jesus’ words *for us*, experience him walking with us in the midst of our pain and grief, when we recognize him in the breaking of the bread? It is the Spirit who makes our hearts burn within us on this Christian way, who connects this fire at our core to the inflaming in love of all creation, and we see all things in Jesus Christ in their exquisite beauty, alive: Aflame!

Sidebar: Re Terminology

Language of *spirituality* can sometimes seem New Age-y, privatistic, “interior,” otherworldly... it might not seem to have much to do with the fire of God, in an incarnational, communal, this-worldly faith like ours. Yet the actual etymology breathes different air: for St. Paul, the Greek term *pneuma* (breath, spirit) doesn’t mean some immaterial ghostly part of us detached from the world and the body; the term refers to a particular spirit, that of Jesus himself. Thus when Paul speaks of “spirit” (*pneuma*) he means any part of a human being – body, mind, or soul – that participates in or mirrors the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. And similarly, Paul’s term “flesh” (Greek *sarx*) doesn’t refer to the body, our material being, but to any part of us – body, mind, or soul – that *resists* the Spirit of God.

In time, the noun *pneuma* was used in an adjectival form: *pneumatikos*, or “having to do with the Holy Spirit,” the *pneuma* of Jesus Christ who is incarnate, this-worldly, communal in nature, indeed a Body. As the tradition and Scriptures were translated into Latin in early Christianity in the West, *pneumatikos* became *spiritualiter*, which in time moved into the French *spiritualité* and English “spirituality.” Along the way, the term lost its Pauline sense of an embodied participation in the Spirit of Jesus himself, and the language of “spirituality” did in fact take on connotations of ethereal or otherworldly concerns: located perhaps in the cloister or the prayer cell and not in the daily life of vocation, family, or politics. In the last forty years or so – since Vatican II on the Catholic side and in the increasing Protestant recovery of the language of spirituality – the term has recovered much more of its original Pauline meaning. But it’s important to use it in a way that reflects this grounding; and some assert that in order to make clear what Lutherans might mean by “spirituality” we need to supplement it with other terms. Gordon Lathrop, for instance, proposes that we use the term “carnality” alongside “spirituality,” to show the necessarily material dimensions of our lives of faith – following Luther’s own embrace of the earthiness and carnality of the Incarnation and the sacraments.⁴ In a parallel way, building on the language of “Gaia” (the contemporary hypothesis that the Earth is a single complex organism), we might name a creation-embracing spirituality like ours a “gaiety”! Lutheran spirituality, carnality, gaiety – I like it.

In a more formal sense, **my Lutheran definition is this:** “Christian spirituality is “the world-encompassing and life-transforming action of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ in the life of a person or community, and her/his/their experience of and response to that action of God.”⁵

Four comments on particular pieces of this definition:

⁴ Gordon W. Lathrop, *The Pastor: A Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 70.

⁵ Lisa E. Dahill, “Spirituality in Lutheran Perspective: Much to Offer, Much to Learn,” *Word & World* 18 (Winter 1998): 72.

- World-encompassing and life-transforming – A Christian spirituality from a Lutheran perspective makes clear that whatever we mean by this term is not just private, interior, disembodied, otherworldly... but bodily, this-worldly, incarnational, political, ecological.
- Action of God –The definition centers not on what *we* do (as when people speak sometimes along the lines that “my spirituality is that I have this discipline or try to live by that practice or do this and this and this...”), but on what *God* does. [This emphasis on divine initiative also provides a Lutheran-flavored complement to definitions like Rolheiser’s that – while not necessarily focused on individual practices, disciplines, or activities – still frame the understanding of spirituality around human action: how one channels the core desire of one’s life.]
- Experience of Jesus Christ/Triune God – Speaking of the “experience” of God implies and requires an ever-deepening capacity for *attentiveness* and *discernment*: thus, it invites me to attend to what in my life reveals the presence/action/voice of God and what does not. Where do I experience God? What is God’s presence like for me? And it invites me to listen to others: Where do you experience God? How do we learn to know and sense God’s voice and leading and presence together?
- Life-enhancing response to this action of God – Having experienced God, how do I/we respond to God’s presence and action and leading? That too is essential to our spirituality.

Walk through hand-outs on reality/unreality and the good/evil spirits

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

Lisa Dahill, Prepared for Metro New York Synod Assembly, May 2014

Characteristics of evil spirits (if this “spirit” seems to animate a given option, impulse, desire, or relationship, *very likely it is not of God – or how I am approaching it is not of God*):

- + harsh and brutal, shriveling me/us, cutting us off from our own beauty or the goodness of others, leaving us scattered and vulnerable to evil. These voices kill and wither us; they leave us powerless to resist. The voices of deceit seek to steal and kill and destroy us.
- + using verbally abusive language: “don’t be an idiot”, “how stupid I am,” etc.
- + feelings of despair, emergency, compulsion, anxiety, failure, turbulence, tension, alienation from God/self/others, exhaustion, confusion, disquiet, dryness, irritation, desolation
- + cutting us off from the goodness and sweetness of life, the natural world, the miracle of breath

- + appeal to the fear of being “bad” (bad mother/father, spouse, friend, son/daughter, Christian)
- + appeal to feelings or temptations of being *either*:
 - Omnipotent: “If I don’t do _____, the world (or church or relationship) will end...”
 - Powerless: “It won’t make any difference in the big scheme of things, whatever I do”
- + using “divine” logic to talk me into things that may not be God’s desire for me:
 - “A good Christian would ...”, “Jesus would ...”, “Bearing my cross [always] means...”

- + denying *whatever part of Jesus’ teaching/voice I am already blind to ...* :
 - perhaps – often for women or others socialized or traumatized into invisibility – self-love, seeing the image of God in oneself, caring for oneself, choosing one’s own good
 - perhaps – in our consumerist culture – compassion and politics that truly help the poor
 - perhaps – in our fearful world – love of the “other,” the “enemy”: anxious reversion to attack and aggression because we don’t trust God and love to protect us
- + blurring one’s capacity to say No to what God isn’t calling one to (or then YES to God either!).

Characteristics of Good Spirit (pay attention and follow, *even at great cost...*):

- + gentle, compassionate, patient – no urgency, only patience and space
- + oriented to one’s own good, and leading *from there* – this can feel radically disorienting to those conditioned to selflessness ... the experience of being radically loved and cared for
- + knowing and revealing one’s “true name”, my true self beneath the masks, in individuation
- + drawing persons into greater health, courage, truth, and desire to *participate in God’s healing*
- + in line with the fullness of the Word of God, Christian/Lutheran tradition, and deepening those
- + *was Christum treibt*: what opens the living reality of Jesus Christ in and for and through us
- + often surprising leadings, not “prudent,” pushing beyond prejudices and self-constraints
- + brings feelings of joy, peace, gratitude, mercy, intimacy, reality, energy, groundedness, liberation/freedom, clarity, deepened love of God, oneself, others, the world and creation
- + expands my circles of encounter and connection: listening more deeply to the truth, wisdom, and quirkiness of every new human, to other cultures, to other species, to the biosphere itself

Definition: Christian spirituality is “the world-encompassing and life-transforming action of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ in the life of a person or community, and her/his/their experience of and response to that action of God.” Lisa E. Dahill, *Word & World* XVIII/1 (Winter 1998): 72.

What does it mean to live in:

<u>UNREALITY</u>	<u>REALITY</u>
Hitler, Pharaoh, your favorite tyrant (and any mortal), or one's own demons functioning as Lord	Jesus Christ is Lord <i>...if we really believe this, how do we live?</i>
I/we live in fear, terror, rage, scarcity, poverty, unfreedom, constriction	I/we live in peace, trust, mercy, abundance, contentment, liberation, expansiveness
We cultivate hostility/paranoia, aggression, and crude/brazen/expedient uglification	We cultivate love, tenderness, and beauty
Our lives are marked by despair, exhaustion, paralysis, isolation, numbness, or panic	Our lives are marked by hope, ease, trust, and the ability to speak/act in the world
We live cut off from the creation	We live in ways that respect our bodies, others' bodies, all creatures, the Earth itself – and find ways to be outdoors, in touch with nature, attentive to it
The poor are just going to starve, and the rich are cut off from the mystery and goodness of simple nourishment, always craving more and more	The poor eat and are satisfied (Ps. 22:26)
God's will is irrelevant to the conduct of our lives and the affairs of state	God's will is done on Earth as in heaven... and if we don't live in correspondence with it, we (or others, or our children) will die
Real love is a fusion of hearts, souls, identities: every need met by the romantic other, one's shadow borne by one's child/ren (recipe for projection and abuse)	Jesus Christ mediates all human relationships, standing between me and every other, preserving the mystery of the other and opening us to one another in love
We sacrifice our minds, our time, and our children's hearts to addictions hard and "soft" (TV, web-surfing, shopping/consumerism, clutter, busy-ness, noise)	We let our minds, our time, and our children's hearts be nourished with an abundance of prayer, play, silence, music, art, rest, creation, and relationships: Sabbath-oriented lives
"Reality" is discovered, normed, and gauged by criteria expounded on the news, in advertisements, by public officials	Reality is encountered and received in Word and sacrament: as <u>means of grace</u> (i.e., trustworthy places where Jesus Christ comes to us) and <u>means of discerning</u> the relative reality of every other dimension of our lives and the world's
What is "good" is what makes me/us feel good, avoid pain, succeed, win, surpass others, rise in the world (etc.)	What is good is what corresponds to Reality: the broken places of our hearts and of our world better reveal the crucified God than places of privilege do: God is found more truly "down" than "up"
What is "good" is what makes me/us suffer (nowadays more often unconscious)	What is good is what corresponds to Reality: Jesus Christ is <i>life in all abundance</i> (John 10), for you and all the world

Bringing It Home: What Makes a Lutheran Spirituality Distinctive?

In a world of vicious violence... for the sake of children...

What marks a Christian spirituality in the midst of all these competing spiritualities – even (in Bonhoeffer’s day) Nazi “spiritualities” – is that the Spirit breathing in it is the same spirit animating Jesus Christ: love poured out in the flesh for the healing and the flesh and the life of the world. We live still in a world ripped apart by violence that terrorizes children and adults, in their own homes and bodies, on streets and battlefields and in prisons and the wasting of lives in so many ways; and the unbearable wounds and scars of trauma are part of what make our longings for God so hard to face, because they are held inside a world of pain. The pain fills our pews, fills this room, fills our world; for the glorification of violence even in the name of God didn’t end with Hitler’s defeat. It infects Christians today – including surely ourselves. But in order to see a bit more clearly, here is an example not from the ELCA, or Nazi Germany, but from another community.

In May of 2007, *The Christian Century* published “Spanking away Sin,” by Beth Felker Jones, an examination of the book *To Train Up a Child*, by Michael and Debi Pearl – a volume with a widespread readership for a time among fundamentalist Christians in the U.S., and continued support to this day. Here is a world where toddlers and even infants sin and need punishment, being slapped with a switch when they reach for a desired object, and being molded into “obedient” children whose “will is broken.”⁶ A *New York Times* article published November 7, 2011, notes that the authors “advocate systematic use of ‘the rod’ to teach toddlers

⁶ Beth Felker Jones, “Spanking Away Sin,” *The Christian Century* 124/9 (May 1, 2007): 8-9 (<http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2007-05/spanking-away-sin>). The book in question is Michael and Debi Pearl, *To Train Up a Child: Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children* (Pleasantville, TN: No Greater Joy Ministries, 1994/2009).

to submit to authority.” Their methods “are modeled, Mr. Pearl is fond of saying, on ‘the same principles the Amish use to train their stubborn mules.’ They write that ‘a little fasting [imposed on children] is good training’.”⁷ Jones comments: in this worldview, “[c]hildren are understood to be devious and self-centered. Normal childhood frustrations are understood as manipulative, self-indulgent assertions of a child’s sinful nature” and requiring diligent punishment. All this is “justified by the need for them as sinners to experience Jesus’ suffering and submissive obedience physically” – a travesty of the atonement!

Without implying that such enacted theology of childhood is somehow particular only to fundamentalists, this rather extreme example might allow us to think about the question of *what spirit* animates that culture: is it the Spirit of Jesus Christ? More important: how can we tell? Even closer to home, *what spirit* animates your heart, your congregation, your outreach? We can perhaps at times empathize with frantic parents desperate for docile children – and we can surely empathize with the children themselves suffering the treatment described in these articles since presumably most if not all of us have experienced such trauma at the hands of others as children, or at some level of our being. It is the defining mark, some say, of a wide swath of Western childrearing – including many Lutherans. This is not just one issue among many; it matters (as a primary focus in today’s look at conversion and spirituality) *because* our fundamental God-experience across society is formed pre-consciously, in how children are treated in their bodies and hearts and gaze and trust in their very earliest years. Thus to raise children as ugly sinners to be whipped and “broken” and made submissive to cower under a vicious God determines that primal God-experience of an entire generation of human beings. It is that *unreality* from which many, many people today long for conversion into the *reality* that is Jesus Christ: namely *grace*.

⁷ This *New York Times* article was reporting on the death of a child being raised by parents claiming influence from the Pearls’ book (other deaths have been reported as well); see http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/07/us/deaths-put-focus-on-pastors-advocacy-of-spanking.html?_r=5&pagewanted=all&.

And **Lutherans have perhaps the most powerful spirituality available** for countering the violence and viciousness with which our world insists human beings ought to be treated: for we assert that **it's love alone that saves us**. The Spirit with which God meets us – the Spirit of Jesus himself – matters. For precisely here, in a world that perpetuates the shaming and torture of children, and also by extension the vicious treatment of the poor, the elderly, the “weak,” strangers, immigrants, enemies, and the immature needy parts of ourselves, an authentically Lutheran spirituality is different. Instead of a God who redeems by inflicting and perpetuating violence, we proclaim a **God who redeems by loving**. **Being truly and fully and personally LOVED – the astonishing *experience* of utterly unconditional love (“grace”) and the process of receiving that love *for oneself* (“faith”) – is what transforms people over time into the image of the One who is Love Incarnate.** This is what Lutherans mean when we say that we are “saved by grace through faith”: not that we believe the right things about Jesus in our heads and therefore God marks our name in a book in the sky, but that by Spirit’s own miraculous power we have somehow taken into the very depths of our muscles and bones and cells and breath the experience of being radically personally loved in Christ, no matter what. This is what saves people. As Luther insists over and over, it is a spirituality *of the heart*.

This is true for children: they grow best when they are loved best, when they can stretch in trust and learn to open up in love to the world. It is true for your enemies. It is true for your congregation members and those you meet on the street. And it is true for you. Clergy and all Christians can embody the mercy and love of God only if we *live here ourselves*, 24 hours a day, and rest in this mercy and love as the reality of our deepest experience of God *for us*. The grace of God is meant first not to be *preached* or *taught* (for others); it is meant first to be *lived* (*for us*). We are not the Source; we are the beloved. In a violent world, Lutheran spirituality *saves*.

Conclusion:

The Spirit is the power of God inviting us all – all humans – to *live in reality*:

- To treat people as *who they really are* (i.e., as wildly passionately loved, “claimed,” known by name, welcomed, included, baptized);
- To remember (anamnesis) and receive this Reality over and over in our bodies, our body and blood in Jesus’ body and blood, so that grace becomes thanksgiving – in Latin, *gratia* becomes *gratitude*... in Greek, *charis* opens up into *Eucharist*;
- To live so fully in the Spirit that, like Bonhoeffer at Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church, we never leave, but the walls fall away and here we are in the world still singing, telling the truth, becoming fearless in love.

Like Bonhoeffer, we too *become* Christian, by the Spirit – over and over and over, deeper and deeper... we too learn to follow Jesus in new situations we can’t have imagined or foreseen – over and over and over, farther out and in whole new languages...

And broader New York is an amazing place for precisely such stretching to take place, where people from different cultures and idioms and experiences of God mix and mingle and clash and touch... over and over and over...

The Spirit converts people in all kinds of journeys, unpredictable and wildly diverse ...

How will this synod and your community continue being the place where conversions happen, where the Spirit lives? I can’t wait to find out!

Come, Holy Spirit!

Metro New York Synod Assembly, Talk Two: "...the Lord, the Giver of Life"
Friday, May 30, 2014
Lisa E. Dahill
Hilton Long Island

Connect to Talk One: second of Bonhoeffer's New York conversions, movement of the Holy Spirit for such a time as this: the Christian theologian becomes a "person of his own time."

Introduction: Bonhoeffer, Abstraction, and Reality

One of Bonhoeffer's most important insights is his insistence that to separate the categories of "God" and "world" from one another is to create (of either side of the equation) an "abstraction," divorced from the Spirit's union of God and world fully and forever in Jesus Christ: *one* reality. Thus in the opening pages of his *Ethics*, he writes:

[T]he reality of God has revealed itself and witnessed to itself in the middle of the real world. *In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of the world....* All concepts of reality that ignore [this union of God and the world in] Jesus Christ are abstractions.... In Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, the one not without the other.... What matters is *participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today*, and doing so in such a way that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world, nor the reality of the world without the reality of God (*Ethics*, DBWE 6:54-55).¹

Bonhoeffer's insistence on Christian participation in the union of God and the world in Jesus Christ made obvious sense in his Confessing Church context in Nazi Germany. We can see why concepts of God or the church's life in 1930's Germany that failed to face, name, subvert, or resist Nazi tyranny – the world – appeared to Bonhoeffer as "abstractions." But it's still amazing to ponder what it means to assert that Jesus is the reality of *all things*, including our

¹ Quotations from Bonhoeffer's writings throughout are from the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBWE) edition published by Fortress Press. Citations are given in parenthetical notes providing the volume number in the DBWE series and page number/s.

world just as it is. Imagining writing these lines in 1941 Nazi Germany, in full awareness of the Holocaust, in the middle of the war, and under threat of one's own life:

There is no part of the world, no matter how lost, no matter how godless, that has not been accepted by God in Jesus Christ and reconciled to God. Whoever perceives the body of Jesus Christ in faith can no longer speak of the world as if it were lost, as if it were separated from God.... [T]he church-community of believers is to make this known to the world by word and life (*Ethics*, DBWE 6:67).

- Yesterday we considered with Bonhoeffer some of what it means to become a Christian *in reality*, by the power and transforming grace of the Holy Spirit: To be Christian – and Lutheran – means to live in reality, the outpouring of mercy... especially with implications for children and adults caught in systems of violence.
- Today we are looking at what it means to become a Christian in reality *in our own time*, and its complex costly political and spiritual implications *for us too* – just as Bonhoeffer did in Nazi Germany. Thus we are looking at the second great turning point of his life (which took place also in New York, this time in 1939). And today as well the emphasis will be on the effect on children, for generations to come. Thus we will look at the urgent contextual factor *we* face, as catastrophic for life as Nazi Germany was in Bonhoeffer's time: namely climate change and the accompanying cascading ecological/economic threats awaiting us if we refuse to change our course.

The Spirit who called Bonhoeffer into his own time calls us too as the church to face reality and address it in difficult, risky political action with those of any and all faiths willing to act *for the sake of the coming generation*. The miraculous thing is that – for us as for him – this process of risk and collective action turns out to be the way of *life and hope*, where we too draw close to our Lord: for, truly, “discipleship is joy” (Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4:40).

Bonhoeffer and Resistance to Evil: New York Conversion #2

Bonhoeffer is remembered today not because of his academic writing or his life of prayer alone; he is remembered because this life of prayer took him way out into dangerous discipleship, risking his life with others to try to stop Hitler. I noted yesterday that Bonhoeffer's resistance began the day after Hitler took power in late January 1933, as Bonhoeffer gave a national radio address denouncing the new Führer. In April of that year, after the first Aryan legislation passed, excluding Jews from state positions (including the state church, which included many baptized Christians of Jewish racial heritage), Bonhoeffer appealed to the church, calling for clear bold united speech and action against Hitler, action for the Jewish victims of the state, and even civil disobedience to jam the gears of the Nazi machine before it could even get started. It was a call to collective risky resistance with clear personal implications. The church wasn't ready to hear him, to gather into actual political resistance – neither then, in early 1933 when organized church resistance really could have stopped Hitler, nor really ever. The Confessing Church organized in 1934 to secede from the Nazi state church was a great attempt and provided cover and a sense of shared Christian reality for many, but it didn't succeed in mobilizing actual resistance to the Nazi state.

So Bonhoeffer had to find other ways to do this in the church. From 1935-37 he ran the Confessing Church seminary at Finkenwalde, then when that was shut down by the Gestapo he continued to administer theological education underground, to small circles of Confessing Church pastors – until by 1938 he was himself targeted, his movements tracked and his writings monitored. Aware that he was in danger in Germany and also vulnerable to the draft – since war was clearly imminent and the Nazi Army had no provision for conscientious objection, so if you didn't want to fight for Hitler you would be killed – in spring of 1939 he accepted an invitation

back to New York and safety. But the decision never felt right, and once here he paced the streets of Manhattan and his room at the seminary, praying and tossing and turning through the night, and came to realize that the Spirit was not in this move to New York – that this Spirit who had met him here so powerfully eight years earlier was now pulling him back to Germany... this time into danger. He wrote of his decision to Reinhold Niebuhr:

I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people (DBWE 15:210, dated late June 1939).

Heading back to Germany, the Spirit who had refused to give him peace in New York, this second visit, gave deep calm and grace on the ship home. Within a few weeks of his return in late July, Hitler invaded Poland, World War II began, and there would have been no more possibility of coming back to Germany. In returning, he was aware that this discernment would take him into the conspiracy, with his brother, sister, and two brothers-in-law. Bonhoeffer and other conspirators were double agents, employed by the Abwehr (the Nazi military intelligence unit) but in reality coordinating the plot against Hitler. Bonhoeffer's role was as the conspiracy's foreign minister, as it were; his international contacts made him useful to the Abwehr, and he was sent on trips to Switzerland and Sweden in the early 1940's, where he secretly sent messages to the Allies on behalf of the conspiracy through his ecumenical church colleagues. The conspiracy's was complex, aiming not merely to assassinate Hitler but to create a new non-Nazi government ready to overthrow the entire Nazi machinery, end the Holocaust, and end the war. And they failed; they were unable to assassinate Hitler, although the final attempt alerted him to the existence of a plot against him and sealed Bonhoeffer's fate, along with many others. The war ground on, the trains to Auschwitz continued, and Bonhoeffer sat in a Nazi prison from 1943 to 1945 before being executed days before the liberation of his concentration camp by the Allies.

So what was a Lutheran pastor doing in that Nazi prison, guilty of high treason against the state? What was a committed pacifist doing in a murder plot? What was a disciple of Jesus Christ doing in such a dangerous and ultimately futile public effort? It was all secret and looked shady – and he was aware that in doing this he was surely sacrificing his pastoral reputation and place in the church forever. He had no way to know that anyone would ever know the truth of what he and the others had been doing; and once the plot failed he could only assume, from his prison cell and later concentration camp, that he would die disgraced and invisible, his ashes mixed with those of all the anonymous others burned at Hitler's command.

And indeed, his ashes are long gone in the winds from the camp crematorium. Yet Bonhoeffer is remembered today not despite his stepping out of the normal Lutheran state-church role and into the secrecy and confusion of that conspiracy, but because of it. We hold him up today *because* he enacted his own insistence on the Christian life being lived not just in safety, in our own familiar circles and roles – as if the church really were a separate sphere from the world – but publicly, taking on the real needs of the world already embraced in Jesus Christ, taking active public responsibility for the sake of the coming generation. Christian life means living in reality: to live in, and make real for all to experience, the reality already opened in Jesus Christ. What matters, then, is not that we come through this mess safe or with our own house intact – and the Bonhoeffers, as good Aryans, could indeed have sailed through the Hitler years just fine. What matters rather is that we discern as best we can what *God's will* is leading us to do, for the sake of the coming generation. This was the discernment churning in him right here in New York, 1939: and thus he became, in his biographer's term, a *Zeitgenosse*, a person of his own time: out of the ivory tower and into the church in 1931 in New York, and in 1939 out of the church-as-usual and out of the box and all the way out into the world – *one reality*, Jesus Christ.

Becoming Christians of Our Own Time

We are Lutherans too, discerning these same questions in New York. What would it mean for us to become Christians *of our own time*, for the life of the world today? Here's one, again, to live in reality for the sake of the children: Last month governments around the world, including the U.S., signed off on the latest report of the U.N.-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which shows climate change spinning "out of control"² unless widespread measures to restrict carbon pollution are enacted immediately.

As theologian Mark Wallace recently noted, "Few observers of the contemporary situation doubt that we face today an ecological crisis of unimaginable proportions.... the specter of ecocide haunts all human and non-human life that shares the resources of our planet home."³ We can list the staggering dimensions of this crisis: pollution and waste of the air, soil, and water on which our lives depend, deforestation and desertification, acidification of the oceans, food systems that malnourish or starve people around the world, radioactive wastes, mass extinctions, and climate change itself – which will compound and intensify them all. We are betraying the very Source of Life for a mess of pottage, thirty pieces of silver. We are standing with all those German Christians watching Hitler take over every facet of society and doing nothing to stop him... And the trains to Auschwitz are already running for the poorest humans on Earth and a compounding number of species God has created. It is possible human life itself won't survive our global societies' experiment in out-of-control capitalism and environmental wreckage.

² *Columbus Dispatch* front-page headline (April 1, 2014): http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/national_world/2014/04/01/global-warming-heads-out-of-control.html. For the text of the IPCC report see <http://www.ipcc.ch/>. For a faith-based perspective on the IPCC report, see the statement issued April 15, 2014, by Interfaith Power and Light: <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/2014/04/ipcc-releases-final-report-on-climate/>.

³ Mark I. Wallace, "Earth God: Cultivating the Spirit in an Ecocidal Culture," in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Blackwell, 2004), 210. Several of the items in the list following, specifically "deforestation and desertification" and "radioactive wastes," derive from the similar list in the sentence following this quote in Wallace's text.

At Trinity Lutheran Seminary where I teach, we are beginning a three-year process to green ourselves in every aspect of the seminary's life, GreenFaith, a multi-religious organization in New Jersey (www.greenfaith.org). Along with many other Christian communities today, we take seriously God's command in Genesis 2 to human beings to care for the Earth and keep it. To turn from this primary divine mandate is to betray the meaning of Christian faith: throwing future generations to the mercy of climate imbalance and impoverishing life on Earth. Our present consumptive, sickening, impoverishing way of life is also, as Lutheran theologian and ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda notes, a repudiation of the theology of the cross we Lutherans cherish. For in the Heidelberg Disputation (Thesis 20) Luther wrote: "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil; a theology of the cross calls a thing what it is."⁴ So: we call *this* – an economy that is suffocating the poor and making the privileged insane and polluting us all and killing the planet – the "good life"? It is time to call the thing what it is: this fossil-fuel and profit-driven way of "life" is in fact a way of *death*.⁵ And those who believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of LIFE, are charged today to speak and act to stop this mass insanity, this suicidal path.

We are the church – like Bonhoeffer, we are called to act.

For IF INDEED...

In the beginning... the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters....[And after six days] God beheld everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:1, 2, 31)

And if: *The Word through whom all things were made [has]... come that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 1:15 and 10:10)*

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957 [1518]), volume 31: "Career of the Reformer I."

⁵ For development of this insight, see Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

AND IF: as Cynthia Moe-Lobeda again notes:

“We live in a world of beauty beyond comprehension, a glorious bit of earth and water resplendent with sight, sound, smell, and touch, a shimmering sphere created and destined to provide abundant life for all....”⁶

And:

“Today, humanity faces a moral crisis never before known: We are ... ‘living toward a *dead* end,” destroying Earth’s life-systems and building a soul-shattering gap between the rich and the impoverished.... Our numbers and our excessive consumption threaten Earth’s capacity to regenerate life.... *We have become the ‘uncreators’.*”⁷

AND if in fact: The Spirit today – the Lord, the Giver of Life – is calling us all to what is truly good: the flourishing of life in abundance for all.

Then:

How are we to participate in God’s mission to *all creation* – especially its most vulnerable human and non-human members – for the flourishing of life and the preservation of creation’s goodness for the poorest on Earth now and for future generations?

And: How is *the Metro New York Synod* raising up leaders for this foundational dimension of God’s mission – in partnership with scientists, interfaith coalitions, and ecological leaders of all kinds here in New York and around the world?

And: What does it mean to be Christians *of our own time* – galvanized by the Spirit – except by addressing this most urgent set of crises the human species *has ever faced*?

⁶ Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, “The Theology of the Cross for the ‘Uncreators,’” in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 182.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 182-83, italics in the original. Citing Cobb and Daly, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon, 1994).

THESIS: The Church Is the Community that Lives in Reality:

This is not easy. In the face of overwhelming (and overwhelmingly complex) crises already unfolding on Earth among those at the economic margins – and poised to degrade creation in increasingly catastrophic ways in years to come – the understandable reaction is to turn away. Faith communities have a unique role in equipping people to 1) *face reality*, to 2) *tell the truth of what we see*, and to 3) draw on our centuries of shared ritual, symbol, and practice to *participate in God's work today of re-creating* human economies, communities, and lives toward the flourishing of all.

In fact, these three things are always our call and purpose in the world, in Bonhoeffer's vision. We face in trust and mercy and hope the One who is Reality, Jesus Christ; and to *face reality* in the world is no different, then, from facing Reality in prayer – pure grace – because it's the same Reality in both cases, ONE reality. Even in Nazi Germany, even in the face of climate change and hopelessly entrenched economic powers, Christians are those who *face reality* and love reality and don't turn away, because it is only *in the reality of the world today* that we can encounter the One who embraces and redeems it all... For this reality is not only endangered – it's also exquisitely beautiful, astonishing, delicate, the primal sacramental face of God. Second, now and always we *tell the truth of what we see*: we preach the One who is the truth and we call leaders and people to speak and act in *accordance with reality today*, for how else can we tell the truth today? And, third, we draw on 2000 years of witness, sacrament, and symbol to *participate in the Spirit's work today of recreating* human economies and lives toward the flourishing of all life on Earth. We are sacramental people who cherish and bathe and bless and feed and heal and anoint and bury and birth real bodies with real grace for the real life of the world today: this is who we are, what we do, generation after generation. We invite all things into abundance of life.

These three things are always true, but they are huge and abstract. So to the question of what a Christian life of the Lord, the *Giver of Life* in all things, would look like today, I want to close with **four specific ideas** that are much more concrete. The first begins with a *story*...

1. The View from *Way Below*⁸

In May 2012, a friend and I took an eight-day bicycle trip from Pittsburgh to Washington, DC. Our trek along the Great Allegheny Passage trail began through the valley of the Youghiogheny River in western Pennsylvania. Tall trees shade the trail, an abandoned rail line; the shale hillsides were alive with water full and high and fast, so much water that it seemed to spring from the rock into waterfalls joining the river. All this water brought wildflowers: ladyslippers, trillium, buttercups, thick stands of mountain laurel and rhododendron. The creeks were full of turtles and choruses of frogs and toads, air alive with dragonflies, butterflies, and songbirds. Up, down, and on either side – in sound and sight and the sparkling (or rain-spattered) waters of the great river itself – life was teeming.

At some point late on the first day, as we became increasingly immersed in this river world, the path moved under a high overpass. Far above us, motorists on I-70 were rocketing along at 65 or 80 mph, most presumably hardly noticing that a river snaked far below. Passengers would have had to peer over the overpass rail intently at just the right moment as they zoomed by to have seen our bike path at all, let alone the two of us on it; and from that distance and speed all the wet complexity in which we were immersed and the creatures so vivid for us would have been at best a green blur disappearing as quickly as it had appeared.

⁸ This heading echoes the title of an article to appear this year in *Dialog*: Lisa E. Dahill, “The View from *Way Below*: Inter-Species Encounter, Membranes, and the Reality of Christ,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* (forthcoming Fall 2014). The first five paragraphs of this section are taken verbatim from that essay and thus should be cited from that essay only.

I-70 is the interstate whose steady hum is audible from my backyard in Columbus, OH, and it gives travelers easy access to the seminary where I teach. I travel it regularly. So the experience of seeing this highway from far beneath – from within a world to which I less often give myself permission to spend time – was striking. From the Youghiogheny River valley, in the beautiful living thickness of the world itself in all its created reality, the oblivious world of the interstate seemed impossibly remote, even alien. We were perpendicular – cross-wise – to it in direction, and hundreds of yards beneath it in plane.

That day on the Youghiogheny River gave form to a perception I am coming to call *perpendicularity*: the experience of the disconnection between much of contemporary human life from the living reality of the natural world. Viewing modern life *from the level of the world* inhabited by those whose lives are treated as expendable commodities in our current economic systems – economically exploited humans and creatures of every other species, including those flapping and blooming in the shale Youghiogheny hillsides not yet destroyed by fracking – getting all the way down there where they live gives us, Bonhoeffer asserts, the most reliable standpoint for seeing and living in reality: getting off the interstate which is pure abstraction, and moving cross-wise, perpendicular, “way below,” much slower and much closer to Earth. This language gives spatial form to the perception of radical disconnect between the life experience of the economically privileged of our time and the sheer existence of the other creatures with whom we share this planet and whose exploitation provides our privilege. Encased in cars and buildings, pavement and climate control, and shrouded now every further, at nearly every level of our experiential lives, within “virtual reality” – a world created by humans and machines – we are increasingly imprisoned far from the world *God* creates and is moment by moment giving us: the real world [*Here ends the material drawn from the forthcoming essay in Dialog*].

So last night I went out. After our session I went to see if I could get into the woods nearby. This was impossible: it was all fenced off and from the looks of it potentially hazardous or polluted ground behind some of those fences. But out on the industrial roadway and in the fringes of the woods I did see a whole ton of trash... further down a stream bank there was a past or present homeless encampment... the hardiest of plant and tree species, many of which we usually call weeds... lots of birds... and a few other people out walking these high-truck-traffic roads: clearly those who are left out of the Long Island economy and are forced to walk... Being out – and “down” as far as I could go – brought me into a whole different world; and if I lived there, with no home, surrounded by trash and semis and possible toxic pollution, I would know a heck of a lot more about the reality of this industrial economy and its environmental and human reality than if I zoom past in my car and watch the news at night. This is precisely the “view from below” that Bonhoeffer found so transforming: it is only from the perspective of those on the margins – today, including those creatures we are so recklessly destroying – that we can *see reality* most clearly:

it remains an experience of incomparable value that we have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering.⁹

Getting literally outdoors includes learning to listen to who’s there, the voices of human and non-human Thou’s. As indigenous scholar Oren Lyons says, “What your culture calls ‘resources,’ we call ‘relatives.’”¹⁰ We need to get to know our neighbors of all species, so that we can tell if they’re in distress or missing: to “let the beasts speak to me” in and as the very Word of God

⁹ Bonhoeffer, “After Ten Years,” in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8:52.

¹⁰ Cited in a post (April 22, 2014) by Canadian blogger Sara Stratton: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/kairos-canada/2014/04/if-you-know-our-land-you-know-our-life-earth-day-call-reconcili>. For a parallel development of the Native conception of other species as *relatives*, see also “Tink” Tinker (Osage Nation), “American Indians and Ecotheology: Alterity and Worldview,” in *Eco-Lutheranism*, ed. Karla Bohmbach and Shauna Hannan (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2013), 69-86.

through whom all creation was made (Job 12:7). Learn the language and voice and life of the creatures who share your neighborhood.

For all of us with ears to hear, these voices urge us toward facing and grieving our alienation from Earth and the human and biological costs of our privilege, toward learning to sense and touch and see and hear again the life all around us. As with human relationships of justice and advocacy, so with the planet and its life: we cannot love those we do not know, and we will never learn to know and love those lives and worlds – human and more-than-human – to which our privilege blinds us.

The next are much quicker: So, first, was: Let's get outdoors and see who's there.

2) Let's move our worship outdoors too.

[A]s essential as... indoor experience is, with all the protection, nurture, shelter, and story held within the primal metaphor of “sanctuary” – from the wombs in which our lives first gestate, to the political refuge given to those fleeing oppression, to the literal shelter our mortal bodies and those who are homeless desperately need – it is not the only primary location-metaphor of our faith. We need “outdoor” experience too: of what is wild, of Earth itself, of the world in its strangeness, of the other, the stranger, of the G*D who breaks all image and language, meeting us endlessly in what is *not*-us, taking us out of security, outside the city walls, into the wilderness.¹¹

Taking Christian prayer and liturgy literally outdoors – into places perceived as “wild,” indeed, but fundamentally just into whatever outdoors is available to us – makes possible pray-ers’ opening beyond ourselves both to human neighbors of all kinds and to this non-human “strangeness” on its own terms as well, in actual, present, sensory experience: all part of our

¹¹ Lisa E. Dahill, “Indoors, Outdoors: Praying with the Earth,” in *Eco-Lutheranism*, ed. Karla Bohmbach and Shauna Hannan (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2013), 113-24. Pieces of the rest of this section are drawn from the first piece of this essay (called “Indoors and Outdoors as Literal and Metaphoric”). Subsequent sections of the essay – all having to do with this process of moving the Eucharistic rite outdoors in ways that respect both its liturgical integrity and the broader biological life of the actual creatures being encountered – are titled “Sharing the Peace with Other Creatures,” “Bodily Edibility,” “Ritual Actions,” and “Sending, Dwelling, and Liminality.”

broadening encounter with God.¹² Ongoing bodily-sensory experience of the outdoors and the life it holds, in all its unpredictable, uncomfortable, or be-wild-ering profusion, teaches us to pray in ways that draw us into a bigger G*D than the one we can know only indoors. Such outdoor experience as a *primary, essential* aspect of Christian prayer in all seasons, in all places, as a way of announcing and enacting our connection to the larger world is radically counter-cultural. We need – and homeless people embody most acutely the need for indoor prayer, safe space, warmth and shelter and home... But *we need also* to be, quite literally, in prayer out where they live too and all the creatures who share our one real world in Jesus Christ. Street-church, anyone?

3) Let's baptize in our local creek, river, lake, or ocean. The early church practiced baptism in living water, running water, water filled with oxygen and creatures and actual life – and the Spirit. Over the centuries we've made baptism too into an indoor rite, sterilizing it and confining it and symbolically making it only human-centered; we've lost the lived visceral *real* connection to danger, to the fullness of life on Earth, and to the Spirit who is so much bigger than our four walls. If it's hard to baptize in the Atlantic because of the danger and power of the water, then what a great image of baptism that creates! If it's unsafe to baptize in your local river because of pollution and toxins, then you have a major *theological* problem to confront – together with all the other Christian communities in your watershed. What will it take to make this waterway clean for the full baptismal immersion our sacramental life today demands? And then, what kind of lived baptismal life and vocation will such local watershed immersion make possible today? Wow!

¹² A liturgical community engaging this outdoor dimension intentionally is St. Giles Episcopal Church in Moraga, CA, which leads monthly "Holy Hikes" that include an outdoor Eucharist and 2-3 hour hike at places of natural beauty in and around the San Francisco Bay Area. See <http://holyhikes.org/>.

4) **Those are three:** get outdoors and see who's here... see what happens if you worship with them as your true and larger congregation... and baptize in the local water. **The fourth is up to you:** you have these marvelous strategic plan initiatives and funding springboards – just announced today. How can every congregation or community in this synod use these new strategic resources and funds and consultants to develop an ecologically edgy, creative *life-giving* ministry right in your place? Climate change is real, it's urgent – as you know well in this synod, thanks to Sandy – and we need all hands on deck, just as the Jews needed them in 1930's Germany: politically, liturgically, formationally, vocationally. For those who are not churched, and for lots of younger folks who are, green is hip – green is ecumenical – green is our shared future, or we will have no future at all. How can *you* sow real seeds of ecological hope – the greatest challenge and need of our time – for the life of the world?

*Come, Holy Spirit, give us life: **for such a time as this...***

*Come, Holy Spirit, green our hearts: **for such a time as this...***

*Come, Holy Spirit, water us: **for such a time as this...***

*Come, Holy Spirit, makes us yours: **for such a time as this.***