

Returning to God and Each Other: Anatheism as Christian Citizenship and Resistance

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Today I want to introduce the thought of Irish philosopher Richard Kearney's postmodern theology, presented in a text titled *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* as an entry point to explore possibilities for critical theology of democratic citizenship, and name the antichrist nature of nationalism and capitalist citizenship. We're going to walk through some of the demands of our faith and consider the contested frameworks and constructs of citizenship in our popular social imagination, and finally, I'll propose something I'm calling sacramental democratic citizenship as a posture of political engagement for Christians.

First, let me introduce myself a little bit. I am a married heterosexual white woman. I'm a U.S. citizen, and the daughter and granddaughter of citizens, from North Georgia. English, the dominant language in this country, is my first and only fluent language. I don't have a criminal record. I'm able-bodied, and cisgendered, which means that my gender identity matches the one socially assigned to me as a child, based on biological sex. I'm a parent. I'm a priest in the Episcopal Church, one of the oldest and most economically affluent Christian traditions in the United States, which was a product and beneficiary of the British Empire. I studied here at Lee, at Vanderbilt Divinity School, and at the University of the South at Sewanee.

I consider myself a feminist theologian, a scholar who thinks and researches and writes about God from a commitment to the dignity and empowerment of women in the Bible, Christian theology, the church and society. I'm also postmodern, which I would sum up as being a commitment to critical and constructive interpretation, and holding the belief that our words

about God are not God. I've been influenced by poststructuralism and religious pluralism, but I also affirm the Nicene Creed, administer Christianity's oldest sacraments and practices, and rely on the Bible and the Holy Spirit to guide my life.

I tell you all of this for a few reasons. I introduce myself because my faith and my citizenship are socially conditioned and privileged, and my litany of social capital and my marginalization as a woman shape my thoughts and guide my research on the topics we're addressing this weekend. So, I am a Christian, a contextually produced Christian with both traditional and progressive inclination in my thought and practice. And finally, I introduce so thoroughly because for Kearney's text, *Anatheism*, the pivotal moment of theology is in the encounter with a stranger.

We return, in the greek prefix "ana," to God when we return to our neighbor and the stranger, risking openness toward them. Naming different facets of my identity gives you a sense of who I am and where I'm coming from, gives you, perhaps, an opportunity to meet the stranger. But more importantly, the practice of naming our identities and location in society provide all of us a reminder that our perspective and positions are only one of many, many ways of being and views of the world. When we know and identify our own selves and locations, we are better prepared to know other persons and places. Maybe that's why our Teacher said we need to love our neighbor as ourselves. Those loves and knowledges of self and neighbor are tied up together. But before we move into Kearney's philosophy, I want to offer a working understanding of sacrament, since not all of us share a Christian tradition that focuses on understands sacraments in the same way.

The church in which I am a priest is a sacramental tradition, which means that the Episcopal Church, which traces its lineage to the Church of England, and the Roman Catholic Church before that, orients its worship and identity to acts of worship that we understand to be particularly important physical acts and materials that communicate the grace of God to God's people. Sacraments are rooted in the core belief that God came and put skin on, and lived with us, and did profoundly ordinary human things. Our two great sacraments are those modeled by Jesus in the gospels: baptism and communion, which we call Eucharist, from the Greek word for "giving thanks." These unique sacraments are part of a larger attitude toward the way that God is revealed to us. The scriptures are understood to be sacramental, as they convey God's presence through the texts and tales and truths carried within it. Marriage, reconciliation and forgiveness, ordination, praying with and anointing folks who are sick or struggling — these are all sacramental. They aren't officially sacraments of the church, but they are bodily and social experiences that nourish and challenge us with the holy grace and presence of God's spirit. So as I'm talking, when you hear the word "sacrament" or "sacramental," it includes but is not limited to communion and baptism. Sacrament is a tangible, earthly, human thing that shows us and brings us into God's grace.

Richard Kearney's book, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*, is a work of philosophy of religion contending with postmodernity to develop a theism "beyond the extremes of dogmatic theism and militant atheism."¹ He identifies the absolutes of theism and atheism as the polarizing product of the Enlightenment, fundamentalist positional buckling down as a response to postmodern uncertainty. Instead, he proposes "anatheism," a theology after theism,

¹ Kearney, *Anatheism*, 3.

or a return to theism, which seeks to return the guiding principles of encounter in theistic belief with the healthy criticism of atheism, without falling into dogmatic or absolutist adherence to a position either for or against the divine.² It's not theism. It's not atheism. That prefix is crucial. Ana-return to-theism. Now, though he develops this terminology and framework, Kearney doesn't suppose to create something new. He writes that "the faith that anatheism gestures toward has always been there, in past ages... wherever a person suspended her certainty about a familiar God and opened the door to the stranger."³ It is a risk-taking faith that relinquishes certainty about God and certainty about other people. It is a posture of openness, to returning to essential things in a new way. When we lose our certainty, consider what we might not know about other people, about God, when we ana, return to the beginning, we rediscover God and God at work.

Kearney introduces the concept of the anatheistic "wager," riffing off of the rationalist philosophy of Pascal, who calculated theistic belief in terms of a wager with risks and benefits of theism and atheism. But for Kearney, the modernist idea of theism and atheism misses the point. He reframes the belief wager in terms of concrete engagement with hospitality or hostility. The encounter with the other, and decision toward hospitality or hostility, is the truer wager, a bigger and more ideologically pervasive risk of belief in action.

For the purpose of our discussion today, I'll just briefly share Kearney's thoughts on Christianity, but know that he gives similar treatment to the thread of hospitality and hostility in Judaism and Islam as well. Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on this teaching that to

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ Kearney, 167.

encounter God and direct our love toward God, we must encounter other people, strangers, and direct our love toward them.

Kearney points to the story of Abraham and Sarah welcoming the three strangers (interpreted by our tradition as angels, or perhaps even the triune God) who bring news of their child. From Christianity, Kearney highlights the annunciation and Matthew 25 as moments of choice to accept the stranger and accept God. In both of these passages, one narrative and one parable, the actors are presented with a choice. Abraham could turn the strangers away, but instead runs to them, calls to Sarah and they work together to create a feast. They stand with the strangers.

In Matthew, the parable gives side-by-side descriptions of those who meet the stranger as God and those who do not, with dramatic eternal consequences. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Or did you? Both texts give the sense that if we choose to welcome the stranger, there is a good chance we will draw near to God in beautiful and otherwise inaccessible ways. And it’s a risk either way. On the purely practical plane, we risk our well being and our resources. On the sacramental plane, we risk missing out on the presence of God.

So this wager, the risk of welcoming and meeting and opening, is explained as a fivefold moment, following the motions of: *imagination, humor, commitment, discernment, and hospitality*. Imagination expands our hermeneutic, enables empathy, and carries us beyond ourselves. Humor, rooted in humility of our finitude, allows us to release what we think we know

to be true and play with a new thing. Commitment is the acting out of the wager, the concrete and lived decision. Discernment is the process of clarifying our perceptions of the stranger. It is a curious attitude toward the stranger, asking if this is the stranger who kills or the stranger who brings life, as we interpret and choose. Finally, in hospitality, saying yes to and making an offering, “the self becomes Other to itself as it encounters the Other beyond itself.”⁴ The ego is refigured in spacious encounter with the other. Exchange, multiplicity, and hospitality take primacy over certainty, singularity of thought, and security.

Kearney considers anatheism to be enacted sacramentally, “a retrieval of the extraordinary in the ordinary.”⁵ Kearney presents continental phenomenology (which is most basically, the philosophy of lived experience) to show a sacramental approach. Kearney relies on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who describes the “phenomenological return,” or relating to self and the world, as rooted in the flesh. Phenomenology is the philosophical exploration of experience, and Merleau-Ponty’s thought put skin on a field of philosophy that, while focused on living and being, did not always consider bodily need and concrete daily life. He wrote that flesh is “an element of Being” in the sense of air, earth, and fire, and saw God as intrinsic to, not outside of, the elemental flesh of human existence.

This particular take on phenomenology isn’t too far from a long tradition of Christian mysticism, such as that of Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi, who, Kearney writes, “came to embody this communion in their everyday lives,” making connections between the Christian sacraments and doctrine of the incarnation and the mundane and ordinary life among people,

⁴ Kearney, 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

animals, and plants. This Christian panentheism, belief in the possibility of God revealed through all, is a way of recovering or rediscovering a living God in the present world.⁶ Sacramentality is reached not only in contemplative observance of God's presence in nature and life, but through self-giving service to the world, participating in the kenosis, or self-emptying, nature of Jesus, described in Philippians,

who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
 but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death...

The religious becomes sacramental when it seeks and serves God in the persons and things of the earth. The religious becomes sacramental when it empties itself for the world, and connects to that core truth and grace of Christ.

So in the model of Jesus, the relationship of the sacred to the secular must be present and persistent, but weak and hospitable, or else risk devolving into theocratic extremism, grasping for power in the secular realm. Kearney writes,

Anatheism is the attempt to acknowledge the fertile tension between the two, fostering creative cobelonging... To collapse politics and religion into one leads, as history shows, to holy war, theocracy, and ecclesial imperialism. Whence the need to preserve the fecund tension between the secular self and the sacred stranger.⁷

⁶ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁷ Kearney, 141.

We maintain the tension between secular and sacred through active engagement rooted in the self-emptying humility of Christ, giving not grasping.

In order for sacred to open to secular in this way, there must be a true consideration, a humility and openness of the philosophical, cultural, and political shifts taking place around us. Sometimes that might be intimidating, or a neglect of our principles, but in fact it is an act of deep faith to earnestly consider how God might be at work in the world, people, and ideas beyond ours. Living into this tension requires the rejection of absolutist faith systems and the interdisciplinary deconstruction of Christian theism as a historical power and system.

Postmodern hermeneutics are rooted in suspicion, and in this case, can offer resistance to idolatrous forms of religious authority. Kearney celebrates this deconstructive emphasis as a necessary part of the return to God. But deconstruction is not the place to stay. Kearney points beyond the suspicion and deconstructive to a prophetic moment, speaking a re-affirmation of God who is beyond human power systems and words about God. Unquestioned dogma and power can no longer be acceptable once brought under refining fire by postmodern events of holocaust and technological advance, challenged by the empowerment of previously marginalized and the pluralism of globalization. But atheism's sacramental turn speaks of God again by attending to concrete flesh, bringing word and faith into deed. The enacted, ethical atheism shows the critical point of faith in Kearney, the willingness to put in practice belief in divine grace, after the deconstruction of assured theism, in the absence of final doctrinal commitment or existential certainty.

So what does Kearney's work have to with citizenship? This wager of faith is essentially taking a wager, taking a risk, on other human beings. People of faith live in a place of tension

and competing loyalties to the vision of community offered us by Jesus and the visions of community offered by the kingdoms of the earth. Navigating that tension is risky. The complex questions of Christian social ethics are not clear cut, they are often a wager. And as others have identified this weekend, our ultimate allegiance is to the city of God. We get a vision of this city in Luke 4. After being tempted by the devil with power over earthly kingdoms, Jesus says that his work, the will of God incarnate in him, is about bringing good news to the poor, releasing captives, bringing sight to the blind, freeing the oppressed — all social concerns — as a practically manifested proclamation of God’s favor. This is only one of many visions of God’s city or kingdom in the gospels, but gives us a concise and helpful foil to critique our social structures.

The Kingdom of Heaven requires our participation in the here and now. As reformed theologian Karl Barth put it, “Faith in the Greatest does not exclude but rather includes within it work and suffering in the realm of the imperfect.”⁸ The sacramental paradigm, which has been beloved, practiced, and theologized by countless believers across generations, shows us the Greatest intermingled with the imperfect. This material engagement of divine grace moves beyond worship, beyond the altar. In my tradition, the end of the worship ritual is a blessing to “Go forth in the name of Christ,” that same Christ with whom we were just united in death and resurrection through communion, that we might seek out the myriad other forms of human life and social mediation that are, or could be, filled with the presence of God.

But citizenship, secularly construed, offers its own conflicting visions and values.

Sociologist A. Aneesh identifies two competing ideologies of citizenship: one is a voluntary

⁸ Quoted by Robert E. Hood, *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ: Karl Barth’s Christology and Political Praxis*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 1984, xii.

association with a system of governance, agreed upon as the means by which conflict between members is resolved. The other is a “ethnically cohesive solidarity reminiscent of strong membership in kinship network,” created by accident of birth.⁹ In another interpretation, William Cavanaugh distinguishes the state as that entity which has sole discretionary use of force, and citizenship is the appropriate acquiescence to the state sanctioned rule of law, punishable by violence.¹⁰ Self-evident in this presentation of varied understandings of citizenship is the nature of citizenship as a changing and comically constructed identity.

Citizens, as Dr. Bledsoe expanded last night, are not subjects. Citizenship entails some degree of democratic participation, opting into the process and outcome of governance, a level of self-governance as a polis. And democracy, most fundamentally understood as “a method of group decision making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants,” has a strong place in the Christian vision of society.¹¹ The political nature of Jesus’ ministry and community—from his eclectic bunch of disciples to his unqualified care for those in need, from his dialogue with Pilate to receiving instruction from the Syrophenician woman—shows a value for human equality across the structures of society, for the valuable voice and contribution of the differently abled, the suffering and poor, the outcast and marginalized.

But for Christians, who are obligated to the transnational citizenship of life in God, who are called to reduce the suffering of others no matter their identity, “democracy” is problematized

⁹ A. Aneesh, “Differentiating Citizenship,” *After Capitalism: Horizons of Finance, Culture, and Citizenship*, Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016, 198.

¹⁰ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, 10.

¹¹ “Democracy Defined,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/democracy/#DemDef> (Accessed August 21 2018).

by its relationship to, and adoption by, the ideology of U.S. American supremacy. This country's historical experiment with representative democratic government was conceived within certain circles of social power and capital, to the exclusion of many of "we the people." American "Democracy," then, as a rhetorical and ideological commitment, is too simply presented as a monolith, a static condition that can be, or in fact, has been achieved by a national document or a governmental strategy. This obscures the reality of many demographics and generations of people who have not been included within the United States' "democracy." The rhetoric of democracy can erase those who suffered and continue to suffer under the auspices of the land of the free. The rhetoric of democracy can ignore the victims of the false gospel of manifest destiny.

The constructed nature of citizenship becomes even more muddled in the United States' ethos of late capitalism. The particular western neoliberal ideology conflates good citizenship with capitalist productivity and consumption, justifying the political and spiritual violence of economic competition and oppression with the narrative of free market participation.¹² Economically productive citizenship is also uncertain in its national identity, as production and consumption take place at a global and interdependent scale. National economics is not a clear, bounded group of interactions and entities, especially in the United States, where the history of economics is the history of chattel slavery, the history of non-consenting international economic actors.

Of course the modern nation state is a relatively new idea in and of itself, and national boundaries and belonging are susceptible to change through annexations, decolonization, and refugee displacement. Right now, the globe is in a massive refugee crisis. Folks from Myanmar,

¹² Annie Lowrey, "Why the Phrase 'Late Capitalism' is Suddenly Everywhere," <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/late-capitalism/524943/> (Accessed 22 August 2018)

South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, Kenya and Somalia, and Yemen are fleeing massive violence and the economic scarcity and infrastructure disintegration that accompany it.¹³ And the definition of refugee does not legally apply to those from other areas of Southeast Asia or Latin and South America. Many people are not able to apply for asylum or refugee status because of specific group identity vulnerability or geopolitical situations, but are suffering gang violence, domestic abuse, and crippling poverty, all forms of systemic oppression that send people, at tremendous personal risk, to seek safety in other countries. These transient peoples call forth for consideration another facet of citizenship: the rights and benefits of national identity and belonging. Global regions with significant refugee exodus have a history of massive scale national and ethnic trauma. This is caused not only by the institution of colonial abuse, but also in the abrupt removal of those abusive structures, which leave power vacuums, depleted resources and economy, and traumatized peoples.

20th century philosopher, historian, and literary critic Michel Foucault wrote extensively about the postcolonial situation of his own life, an extension of his philosophy of power, control, and punishment. Writing during the French exit from Vietnam and Cambodia, and witnessing the corresponding refugee crisis in which countless people suffered and died, Foucault called for a transnational solidarity and recognition of Western complicity in current suffering, produced by the evils of colonial occupation. In a statement in 1981, he said,

There exists an international citizenship which as such has its rights and duties, and which is obliged to stand up against all forms of abuse of power, no matter who commits them, no matter who are their victims. After all, we are all governed, and, by that fact,

¹³ “What is a Refugee?” <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/> (Accessed 10 August 2018).

joined in solidarity.¹⁴

When the structures of national citizenship turn away the refugee or refuse responsibility for colonial harm, they serve to justify the nationalist who says, “Go back to where you came from.” Foucault pointed to the larger shared condition of being governed by powers as a thread of connection and point of potential solidarity for ordinary citizens.¹⁵ We offer care and protection for our own, but here, that category is expanded to include anyone who is abused or victimized by the powers that be.

In her comparative work on the social analysis of Foucault and Augustine, J. Joyce Schuld points out that this call to transnational solidarity is not too far away from Augustine’s concerns that Christians become complicit in the rhetoric and identity of the Empire. He instructed, “To help us form our judgment, let us refuse to be fooled by empty bombast, to let the edge of our critical faculties be blunted by high-sounding words like ‘peoples,’ ‘realms,’ ‘provinces.’”¹⁶ The rhetorical work of nationalist loyalty creation obscures the moral dynamics at work in the state, justifying self-preservation above all else, erasing both complex historical narratives and the humanity of the non-citizen. Augustine offered a clever and provocative story to question the naturalization of imperial power-seeking:

That was an apt and true reply which was given to Alexander the Great by a pirate who had been seized. For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, “The Rights and Duties of International Citizenship,” press conference with *Médecins du monde* and *Terre des hommes* 19 June 1981. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/michel-foucault/rights-and-duties-of-international-citizenship> (Accessed 15 August 2018).

¹⁵ Foucault, “The Rights and Duties of International Citizenship.”

¹⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, Book IV, 3. quoted in J. Joyce Schuld, “Augustine, Foucault, and the Politics of Imperfection,” *The Journal of Religion* 80, No. 1 (Jan. 2000) 15.

possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride, "What thou meanest by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, whilst thou who dost it with a great fleet art styled emperor."¹⁷

This interrupts the monolithic identity of the powerful leader and country to recall the principles to which all human beings are called, and remind us of those who are impacted by empire as the victims of piracy and theft.

Like the “ana” of Kearney’s theological reflection, our disillusionment with earthly citizenship and systems, expressed by Foucault, Augustine, and our own frustration, calls us back to engage with it, wiser and humbler in our attachment to an ideal constructed form.

Alongside the idea of God, the principle of democracy is at stake in Kearney’s wager. The returning in postmodern theology opens us up to the possibility that God is very much real and present, but that our questions and paradigms for God were inadequate. Similarly for Kearney, there is also the possibility that postmodern forms of critical theory, postcolonial studies, and political liberation movements can alert us to the fact that democracy, like theology, is still a present and real project, but it is an experiment of the most dynamic nature, in need of constant attention, adaptation, self-critique. He considers democracy as having an eschatological, processual dynamic. It is something in progress and requires continual re-evaluation. This openness and requirement for change provides a more optimistic framing. “Democracy” has been claimed as an ideal largely valued and worked out among the most privileged of society, reserved for white propertied men. But like theology, like faith in God, democracy exists beyond its appropriation by the powerful, and can be returned to and taken up in a fresh way.

¹⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, Book IV, 4.

For Kearney, democracy is best understood as the social and civil manifestation of the love of neighbor and self. A democracy more along the lines of Aneesh's voluntary association, provides social organization and a political governance in which each one has a right to be received into the community. In a globalized, diverse society that resists the more ancient forms of political belonging through ethnic kinship systems, democracy holds the possibility of a social commitment to the hospitality wager. It is a way of committing as a group to the practice of returning to each other. We exercise the humility of collaboration, the discernment of ideas and decisions, and a willingness to imagine a common good beyond our own good. Democracy suspends the certainty of a centralized power, it forces us to return to one another again and again, considering how values and perspectives align or diverge as we create a community together.

At the risk of ideological anachronism, I would like to suggest that the liberation thread of the gospel points toward democratic practices, toward a society in which the voice and participation of the marginalized is brought to the forefront, restored to community discourse. The example of Jesus' teachings and life shared with his followers do not exhibit a community for its own sake. It was a materially enacted anti colonial vision of life for God's people. In the life of Jesus, in the elevation of every person and voice to sacred value, in the miracles of economic solidarity and inclusion, we see a political resistance. His instruction, healing, and feeding defy the established power structures with what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha calls "sly civility." This is, according to Bhabha, the performed acquiescence of the colonial subject. It is a wily demonstration of obedience that might occasionally slip, revealing that there is no true intention to capitulate to the oppressor. Sly civility is "give unto Caesar what is Caesar's." It is

civil because it technically in accord with the guidance of the colonizer; it is sly because it knows how to work against the colonial system while staying within its official boundaries.¹⁸

And at times, Jesus was not even all that sly. He crossed geopolitical and ethnic boundaries to develop mutual relationships with Gentiles and Samaritans. Association with zealots and sinners, calls for the Roman Tax collectors to return to accountability to their people had profound implications of political resistance. He was ultimately accused, arrested, and killed after a sham trial because he provoked civil and religious unrest. The gospel posed a risk to the authoritarian power structures of Empire and to the religious establishment that would collude with it.

This politically resisting dynamic of the life and work of Christ is included in our worship. Circling back our opening overview of sacraments, specifically communion, we can see the places where worship can orient us toward the social and political work of the gospel. In the prayers for communion, certainly in the Episcopal Church, but also Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Methodist, and even some reformed and evangelical traditions, there is a repeated liturgy or pattern for worship for communion. And in this liturgy, we tell again the story of the last supper, how Jesus shared bread and wine and told his friends to eat and drink it as his body and blood. Next comes a part of the prayer called the anamnesis, which means remembrance. In the most commonly used prayers in my tradition, the anamnesis is: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” Another is “We remember his death, We proclaim his resurrection, We await his coming in glory.” The anamnesis, the remembering, holds that same

¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, “Sly Civility,” *October* 34 (Autumn, 1985).

prefix picked up by Kearney, “ana,” return. Return to the story of Christ, return to that kernel of our faith. “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

As the epistle of James puts it, Christians are to be “doers of the word, and not merely hearers,” and the words of the liturgy, quoting from the scripture, are to shape our lives beyond the liturgy. We gather in worship, and we go out into the world. We hear, and we do. Our liturgies and worship are the springboard for a whole life of discipleship. When we pray the anamnesis, all together in assembly, we are remembering that we are involved in the story of Christ, his death, resurrection, and anticipated return. In hearing and proclaiming our remembrance of Christ, and enacting physical solidarity with him by consuming bread and wine, we commit also to put this living memory of Jesus into practice in our own lives. We put ourselves into the story, we draw that core kernel of our faith into the here and now.

In his political and liturgical theology, Bruce Morrill, a Jesuit theologian, sees this anamnesis, this remembrance, as a socially and politically provocative form of memory, and critical for the Christian disciple, one who seeks to model their life after that of Jesus Christ. He writes, “Just as the narrative memory [anamnesis] of Jesus is of his kenotic service in solidarity with the suffering even unto death, so the imitatio Christi is about a life lived with interest in the suffering of others...”¹⁹ We remember his death, “Christ has died,” and remember that his death was the culmination of a life of radical and politically engaged care of others. When we remember his death, we are also to remember all those who are killed by unjust systems, all those that suffer, those with whom Jesus lived in solidarity and love.

¹⁹ Bruce Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 189.

Part of our active remembrance and discipleship, then, is to take on Christ's mantle of political and social witness and engagement. This is not with the idea that we will establish some perfect City of Man, but with the hope of "Christ will come again." Speaking to and acting on the social realities of our day is a way of loving our neighbors as ourselves. It is the refusal to accept a different standard for the emperor than for the pirate, loving their victims and bearing witness to the suffering that each creates. It is how we love our neighbors in public. Our political and social environment is the backdrop of the holy wager of anatheism. The anatheist, the one committed to the risk of returning to God by returning to the stranger, is called to civic life. Considering the common life to which Christians are called, modeling themselves after Jesus' self-emptying, William Cavanaugh writes, "A true social order is based not on defeat of enemies but on identification with victims through participation in Christ's reconciling sacrifice. According to Augustine, then, the true sacrifice on which a true politics is based is the Eucharist."²⁰ The ethics of the Eucharist, called up by the anamnesis, are centered in the suffering servant. The sacrament is observed regularly, and its continual practice draws us into a stronger memory of this narrative. The repetition strengthens our identity, nourishing the people of God to give love and bear witness in society over and over again. And the true politics, based in the Eucharist, refuses the temptations of nationalism.

Because such a call to the civic and political is a call to deep uneasiness, particularly for the contemporary citizen of the United States. This uneasiness should not seek its own resolution, but be cultivated, sought out through a critical and loving mind. The critical and loving mind seeks truth beyond ideology in order to increasingly expand the wager of hospitality

²⁰ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 11.

to others. This is the task of the Christian liberal arts education, to cultivate that holy unease. At its best, the academy facilitates a structured engagement in Kearney's wager, encountering the other with hospitality and openness.

Whether that be the "other" of the new peer, or the "other" of the new idea, the mediated exchange teaches curiosity toward challenge rather than resistance of threat. Even the learning community beyond the classroom holds the potential to model hospitality toward the stranger, the chance to return to our neighbor-stranger through shared life. When the holy wager is incorporated into education, when students are formed not just to participate and question, but also to take a risk on the other, then the Christian liberal arts can be the learning lab for Christian citizenship and political resistance. Then the Christian liberal arts can be the classroom for holy unease of dual belonging; then the academy can impart the sacramental, honest memory that cuts through rhetoric and ideology.

I need to wrap this up, but since I'm a priest, I'm not going to give you a conclusion, I'm going to give you a blessing.

Do not fear. Be a community that calls to one another to risk ourselves for those beyond our community. Remember the key of our faith, Christ has died, risen, is coming, and in so doing remember the human family who is suffering unto death. Enter into solidarity with the sojourner, the displaced, the stranger. And may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, grant you courage and strength to risk, to return to God and one another. Amen.

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