

Practicing Resurrection: Body, Place, and Creatureliness

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2017 ACELC Free Conference – Lincoln, Nebraska



Abstract: Using three contemporary issues as test cases, transgenderism, environmentalism, and transhumanism, this essay will propose a system of ethics derived from our status as those raised in the resurrection of Christ. In other words, a resurrection ethics. We will aim at restoring the resurrection in both our preaching and practice and argue that our future bodily resurrection can serve as the basis for our everyday living.

He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.”

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Ez. 37:3, 7-10)

Can these bones live? Can kiln-dried, sun-bleached bones grow flesh, generate organs, and take breaths? When God's prophet commands them to live, they do. And when His Holy Spirit breathes into them, they live. That's good news, not just for skeletons in caskets, spread over the expanse of cemeteries and millennia, but also for preachers looking out over their congregations on Sunday mornings, whose hearers have lost the *telos* of resurrection. Can these bones live? Can guilt-saddled, grief-stricken, short-sighted, over-filled, fat-and-happy, here-and-now-but-soon-to-die bones grow hope and flesh, generate courage and lungs, and breathe again? Yes.

GNOSTICISM AND NEW-GNOSTICISM

Among the first heresies with which the New Testament Church had to contend was that of Gnosticism. From the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge, the core belief of Gnosticism was that the material world was a corruption of the perfect spiritual realm, the creative work of a Demiurge, who is divine, but less divine than the supreme Monad, the gnostic god. Human beings are their real spiritual selves trapped in the physicality of bodies. Salvation, in Gnosticism, is to achieve the secret *gnosis* – knowledge – and be set free from the trappings of the material world. Against this kind of belief that the material world is bad and the savior aeon Christ came in the form of Jesus to teach man how to be free from flesh and physicality, Christianity confesses a radical materialism: God became man. The Word became flesh. The Creator looked at all of His creation before the corruption of sin and called it *very good*.

While no one today confesses a belief in a Monad, the emanation Sophia, or the Demiurge, the Gnostic dualism of matter vs. spirit is very much pervasive in the Christian Church. Spirit is better than matter, right? Heaven is preferable to earth, right? Souls are more real or more eternal than bodies, right? Wrong on all three counts. Christianity is a distinctly material religion.

Against this Gnostic perversion of Christianity, many theologians have battled the neo-Gnostic influence on our culture and confession that denies the resurrection of the body, which we confess simply and succinctly in the Apostles' Creed. Many preachers have labored in the trenches, preaching and catechizing towards a full-bodied belief in the goodness of creation, which is fully restored in the resurrection of the dead. They rightly rail against the disembodied hope for a purely spiritual dwelling of the soul in heaven while bodies languish in tombs. And yet, this neo-Gnosticism persists. There remains a doctrinal crisis even in our pious, Missouri Synod preaching and our practice. Much of what passes for preaching, particularly in funeral sermons and Easter sermons, where a bodily resurrection is the breath of our hope, is nothing more than Gnostic dualism warmed over, pagan theology rebranded as Christian hope.

Unconvinced? Consider a recent sermon by an influential Lutheran church leader at the funeral of another like-wise influential church leader. In the 19-minute funeral oratory, the only hope hearers got was not resurrection on the Last Day, but the eternal dwelling with Jesus of their now disembodied “real being” father, grandfather, and friend. Grappling with the question of what death is, the preacher related the story of his then-three-year-old daughter who wondered if death was like when a person removes his clothes. “Daddy, when a person dies, does he take off his body?” He answered, “Yes, that's precisely what happens when a person dies...Everyone has a body, in which that person's *real being* resides as long as he is living on this earth. And when death occurs, that person's soul, that person's spirit, that person's *real being* leaves the body behind and moves on...That's what's in this box: the physical body inherited and inhabited by the soul, spirit, real being of [the man we knew]...This body was the home of the person...This body contained the man ...The *real being* that resided in this body for over eight decades has gone to eternal life.”¹ The sermon goes on to confess the eternal state of the deceased, as living forever in this disembodied state, now in the presence of Jesus. Not once did he proclaim any hope for the flesh and bones in the casket. Not once did he preach the resurrection of the dead.

This problem is hardly confined to our preaching; I suspect that this sermon is just a symptom of the cancerous neo-Gnosticism that continues to metastasize in our church body. Consider three controversial issues, among perhaps a host of others, that – I argue – are symptomatic of our neo-Gnostic infection.

CASE 1: THE NEO-GNOSTICISM OF TRANSGENDERISM

Meet Gina Eilers. In the spring of 2014, 57-year-old Rev. Greg Eilers retired from pastoral ministry. A year later he went public with his reasons for a premature departure from the ministry, disclosing his life-long struggle to feel comfortable in his body as a man, and became the self-appointed advocate for transgendered people and their issues in the Missouri Synod. In June of 2015, he published an article in the online magazine of the youth-oriented Higher Things, discussing his struggles and inviting youth who struggle as he does to contact him via his Facebook page. When that article was published, Eilers led his audience to believe he was struggling to continue to live as a man, despite his feelings that he must truly be a trans woman.

But that was two years ago. Even before this public admission, Eilers was undergoing hormone replacement therapy, which he credits with keeping him from going insane and relieving him of the desire to kill himself. Eventually, Eilers began the process of transitioning from a male to a female. He legally changed his name to Gina and exclusively dresses and presents himself in public as a woman. In April of this year – on Holy Tuesday – Eilers underwent sexual reassignment surgery. His facial feminization surgery is scheduled for next month. He maintains a blog and online presence in order to inform his church body about the plight of the trans community and to encourage fellow strugglers.

The typical way for conservative Christians to answer the question of Gender Dysphoria, as the disorder is now classified in the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), has been to reject the pitting of bodily reality against subjective gender identity as essentially a neo-Gnostic dualism. The material reality, the bodily hardware and chromosomes, determine both the sex and gender of a person. Feelings contrary to one's biological sex are nothing more than the old Gnostic preference for the spiritual over the material. Much of what passes for Gender dysphoria is the belief that the spiritual you, the interior you, is the real you, just waiting for doses of hormones and a surgeon's scalpel to align your body with your spirit.

Most Christian responses to the question have been shaped by ethicist Oliver O'Donovan's 1984 treatment of the topic. O'Donovan writes,

The sex into which we have been born (assuming that it is physiologically unambiguous) is given to us to be welcomed as a gift of God. The task of psychological maturity—for it is a moral task, and not merely an event which may or may not transpire—involves accepting this gift and learning to love it,

¹Kieschnick, Gerald, "138. Bolhmann Funeral Sermon" (2016). *Chapel Sermons Academic Year 2015-2016*. 143. <http://scholar.csl.edu/cs1516/143>. Accessed February 22, 2017.

even though we may have to acknowledge that it does not come to us without problems...We cannot and must not conceive of physical sexuality as a mere raw material with which we can construct a form of psychosexual self-expression which is determined only by the free impulse of our spirits. Responsibility in sexual development implies a responsibility to nature—to the ordered good of the bodily form which we have been given.²

In short, the bodily reality is the reality to which thoughts must conform.

Certainly, toward some transgendered persons this may be a helpful confession. Creation is good. Spirit is not somehow more real than flesh. This emphasis on bodily reality as normative is the approach of the 2014 statement from the CTCR: “our embodiment is understood as an aspect of our creation by God and therefore instructive regarding behavior that is good and pleasing to Him. Human embodiment indicates simply and eloquently God’s intention for sexual activity – that male and female by becoming “one flesh” might end their aloneness in lifelong unity with one another and, according to God’s blessing, in the procreation of children (Gen 1:26-28; Gen 2:18-24).”³ The CTCR distinguished between Gender Dysphoria and physical intersex conditions, where genes or genitals are confused and a person’s bodily reality is neither exactly male nor female.

In a similar treatment to the CTCR’s, but with the allowance that Gender Dysphoria itself may be an intersex condition, professor at Concordia Irvine, Rev. Scott Stiegemeier published an article in 2015 in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* on gender identity. Stiegemeier maintains the same position of the CTCR in rejecting the dualism of body against spirit, but acknowledges that the current medical field offers little in the way of an answer that is hopeful to those who suffer with this dysphoria. But listen to his nuance that allows for the brain to have a gender, as well:

The Platonizing tendencies of our culture must be resisted and the goodness of the objective body confirmed. It is essential to understand that psychological conditions are corporeal afflictions to the extent that our thoughts, will, desires, and memories are grounded in the material substance of the brain. The mind/soul is more than the brain but is not naturally dissociated from the brain. The hypothesis that gender dysphoria is an intersex condition of the mind/brain is consistent with the evidence. It also helps explain the strong resistance GD has to all forms of psychotherapy and all current drug therapies. If this hypothesis is granted, one cannot argue that maleness and femaleness are determined exclusively by the genitals, gonads, secondary sex traits, or even chromosomes. Because our confession is that humanity is binary, people born with atypical bodies still presumably, we would say, possess a gender in some sense, confused though it is. The brain is involved. Though changing exterior characteristics is easier than changing the brain, this yet does not make the sex change surgery acceptable. At present, we must conclude that there is simply no medical solution to GD. Grasping at straws is not an answer.⁴

So, while we can affirm the goodness of the bodily creation, we have no satisfactory answer for how to counsel those who struggle. Toward what end should we counsel them?

CASE 2: THE NEO-GNOSTICISM OF ECOLOGICAL ESCAPISM

For the last half century, fears of environmental degradation and destruction have been at the forefront of the minds of many people in western society. Since the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* began the modern environmental movement, Americans have gradually stepped back from whatever precipice they believed they were heading toward with the gradual reevaluation of practices toward the environment around

2O'Donovan, Oliver. *Begotten or Made*. Oxford: Clarendon. 1984. 28-29.

3<https://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=3012> accessed November 18, 2016.

4Stiegemeier, Scott. “How Do You Know Whether you are a Man or a Woman?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. v. 79, n. 1-2, January/April 2015. 47-48

them and the reconsideration of some things as harmful or too exploitative that once were previously adopted without concern.⁵ Fear and hand-wringing have been the way of things since then.

Christians are often accused, and sometimes rightly, of being apathetic at best and antipathic at worst toward creation. In December of 1966, as the environmental movement was beginning to gain steam, historian of medical science and technology, Lynn White Jr. presented a paper to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, later published in the journal *Science*, which has become standard reading in any environmental science or ecology class: "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." In it, White laid the blame for this said crisis not at the feet of industry, but at the feet of our western worldview which has produced such industry and uncritically embraced technology, a worldview born from by Christianity. White argued, "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." Our industrial, post-Christian world may have rejected belief in a Creator, but it has not jettisoned this exploitative view of man's environment. "Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians."⁶

So, is White right? Except for some liberal protestant denominations, it generally holds true that the Church has been slow to get scared about climate change or to get in line behind the Lorax to speak for the trees. Conservative denominations have inclined toward seeing themselves purely as exiles on earth, humming along to "I'm But a Stranger Here; Heav'n is my Home" or joining their hippy children, whistling "We Gotta Get out of This Place." Much of White's criticism is fair. Hoping to leave earth and "go to heaven," has created a mindset in the Church that we can act with disregard and selfish indulgence toward the rest of the created realm, as only humans possess the spiritually superior souls, and we're headed to a disembodied heavenly dwelling with Jesus. Moreover, especially among American Evangelicals, there has been a tendency to interpret the "dominion" of Genesis 1:26 in an exploitative sense: creation is man's to do what he wants with it.

Theologian James White describes the effect of the environmental movement on the rest of Protestant theology, particularly sacramental theology:

The 1970s brought a new dimension to our thinking about sacraments, largely from the world outside the church. This was the environmental movement, and it often confronted Christianity with being the source of evil in urging conquest and dominion over nature. Some Christians sincerely believed that the natural world was for humans to exploit and that dominion and control (Gen. 1:28) meant liberty to do whatever was profitable rather than what involved stewardship.⁷

Perhaps you've observed in your own congregations a similar disdain for the physicality of sacraments over the more spiritual realities of prayer and emotional enthusiasm. How many attempts to reintroduce the Lutheran practice of weekly Lord's Supper have been rebuffed with receiving the sacrament so frequently will make it "mean less"? And how many of your parishioners prefer to seek the forgiveness of sins in their private prayers

⁵ Since then, our society has seen the passage of legislation to protect endangered species (1966), to establish an Earth Day holiday (1970), to create the Environmental Protection Agency (1970), and ban Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) from aerosol cans (1978). We've weathered the meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in 1979, and a decade later, the discovery of a hole in the earth's ozone layer, and the spilling of 11 million gallons of oil over 1,300 square miles of the ocean from the *Exxon Valdez*. The first warning about the effects of a gradually warming climate in 1988 led to the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which would subsequently issue reports every few years about the looming catastrophes from the effects of human-induced global warming.

⁶ White Jr., Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." <https://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf>. Accessed

⁷ White, James F. *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. 29.

than from the man-in-the flesh sent by God to deliver the physical reality of forgiveness? A disdain for the bread, wine, water, and word realities of God's means of grace cannot be divorced from a neo-Gnostic rejection of the created physical realm is inferior to some future spiritual dwelling.

Metropolitan John Zizioulas laments the effects this quietism has had in the Eastern churches, as well, "Christian theology and the Church can hardly be excused for staying silent for such a long time on this matter; particularly since, and not without good reason, they have both been accused of having something to do with the roots of the ecological problem."⁸

It is neither difficult to demonstrate nor to observe the virtual absence of care of creation from the piety and ethics of most Missouri Synod Lutherans. Try suggesting to Midwestern Missouri Synod parishioners, for instance, that a concern for the good of creation should make them want to stop using styrofoam cups, and you might receive a similar reaction as if you pulled into the "Pastor" parking spot with a Bernie Sanders sticker on your car's bumper. That dog don't hunt.

How can we proceed? How can we confess the goodness of this created realm and also hope for the life of the world to come? How do we acknowledge the groaning of all creation, in anticipation of the revelation of the sons of God, which St. Paul describes in Romans 8? We need more than a bare environmental ethos.

CASE 3: THE NEO-GNOSTICISM OF TRANSHUMANISM

How much of your brain's capacity are you currently using? Though neuroscientists disagree, the popular notion is that you are only using 10-20% of your brain's natural human capacity. But there's a pill for that. Or an implant. Or maybe the problem is the limitation of your human body itself. It gets old, wears out, ages, and finally dies. The problem of overcoming the limits imposed on man's existence by his own body and his environment is the domain of an emerging movement called Transhumanism.

Three hundred eighty years after Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, "I think; therefore I am," which is really the creed of neo-Gnostics today who assert that the internal reality – what you think – is normative for your existence in the world, neuroscientists and self-proclaimed biohackers are part of a burgeoning movement that seeks to transcend man's bodily limits. The Transhumanist movement is diverse and its goals are varied. Though definitions vary, the word was coined by Aldous Huxley's brother Julian, who offered it to name the movement in the early 20th century that sought to utilize emerging technologies to help humanity to transcend being human, to guide the process of evolution to the next stage, a humanity beyond human, *transhuman*. Today, the movement is governed by the World Transhumanism Association, which was founded in 1998 and unites the diverse movement under a common statement, the "Transhumanist Declaration."⁹ As a movement, transhumanism seeks to use technology to reduce human suffering, enhance human abilities and cognition, and prolong human life. The ultimate goal of many transhumanist adherents is to achieve eternal life by uploading human consciousness into a machine. As long as you still *cogitas, ergo es*.

As a worldview, transhumanism has a narrative. Though there are certainly some professing Christians who affiliate themselves with the movement, the narrative of transhumanism is incompatible with the Christian narrative. Both stories have the same elements of a plot – problem, solution, and resolution – but the differences are significant. For the transhumanist, the problem is human suffering, death, and limits. There is no *telos* to transhumanism, though, except simply relief from these problems. The final goal for the transhumanism movement is deliverance from human problems by being delivered from being human. Technology will be the savior of humanity by bringing about the end of humanity, as the transhumanist hope is that one day human consciousness can be transferred from biological bodies into some kind of cyborg body that will not suffer, be limited, or die. The solution is technology, devised and implemented by mankind.

⁸Zizioulas, John. *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*. London: T & T Clark, 2011. 145.

⁹<http://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/>. Accessed November 9, 2016.

To navigate the moral milieu fabricated by quickly emerging technologies, enhancement, biohacks, and more, we cannot simply categorize some technologies as good and others as evil. Your cup of coffee testifies that you don't believe in a blanket condemnation of human enhancements. The question can't be where to draw the line between technologies and enhancements that are acceptable and others that are off limits, like horny teenagers wanting to know how far is too far. Instead, we need a way to foster a kind of creaturely dependence on the Creator, a desire to live within the limits of the order of creation, believing them to be both inherently good and for the good of the creatures they proscribe and describe, in spite of and in preparation for whatever technologies may emerge. Theology cannot hope to keep pace with technology but should strive to set the ground rules for technological advancement. What can guide us?

TOWARDS A RESURRECTION ETHICS

If there is any order to creation, it cannot be temporary. Though broken or disordered by sin, there must be an underlying, eternal order to which the groaning of creation testifies. This is the essence of the Law. Had there not been the rebellion in Eden, there would have been no need of the proclamation from Sinai. The Law is good, but to sinners, it inflicts a lethal wound. The Gospel doesn't invalidate or abolish the Law. Like Christ, the Gospel fulfills the Law and sets Creation back into its original goodness, its original order.

The Gospel is resurrection: life from death, forgiveness for sinners, bodies and souls knit back together as they were intended to be in the Garden, order restored. The resurrection is the *telos*, the end, the goal of the Christian life. Thus, it can and should be normative for Christian living today.

It is the resurrection that knits together theologies of body, place, and limits (or creatureliness). It is the resurrection that solves all ethical dilemmas because it puts creation back on its trajectory to fulfillment and perfection. Resurrection, then, ought to solve our contemporary ethical dilemmas.

THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture is replete with reliance on the resurrection as the new reality that shapes man's everyday ethical decisions.

- Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)
- If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (Colossians 3:1)
- The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? (1 Corinthians 6:13b-15a)

Finally, after a lengthy argument in 1 Corinthians 15 about the necessity of the resurrection for Christian faith ("But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. v.13-14) and about the goodness of our resurrection bodies ("So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. v. 42), St. Paul admonishes those awaiting the fullness of this resurrection in their ordinary, daily labors in the Lord:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (v. 58)

St. Paul clearly intends the resurrection – both of Christ and of believers in Christ – to be normative for the daily lives of Christians. The “whole presentation of 1 Cor 15, which is Paul's fullest treatment of the subject of the resurrection of believers, is designed to undergird his imperative call for believers at Corinth to stop following a self-indulgent way of life.”¹⁰ The life of the believer is shaped by what he believes will happen to his body in the future. He lives toward that ideal in the way he goes about his daily work.¹¹

A SURVEY OF APPROACHES TO RESURRECTION ETHICS

Many Christian ethicists have tried to work out what the resurrection of our bodies means for Christian living. Oliver O'Donovan argues that an ethic of the resurrection mediates between two John Finnis' “creation ethics” and Stanley Hauerwas' “kingdom ethics,” between an ethic derived from natural law and one derived purely from revelation: “If, on the other hand, it is the gospel of the resurrection that assures us of the stability and permanence of the world which God has made, then neither of the polarized options is right.”¹²

Resurrection roots man's living within creation.

In proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, the apostles proclaimed also the resurrection of mankind in Christ; and in proclaiming the resurrection of mankind, they proclaimed the renewal of all creation with him. The resurrection of Christ in isolation from mankind would not be a gospel message. The resurrection of mankind apart from creation would be a gospel of a sort, but of a purely Gnostic and world-denying sort which is far from the gospel that the apostles actually preached.¹³

Gustaf Wingren agrees that the Church becomes the community that lives out this story of the resurrection.

While man lives in the world he continues to be affected by the Gospel and his Baptism, but in this he is one with the rest of the world in awaiting an event which will happen not only to him and to the Church, but to all men – the return of Christ, the Last Judgment, and the resurrection of the dead. This last event has already begun with the work of the Spirit in the Church. Everything, therefore, that takes place in the Church takes place with the whole of Creation and for the whole of Creation. What

10G. Walter Hansen, “Resurrection and the Christian Life in Paul's Letters. Ed. Richard N. Longenecker. *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1998. 205

11See also Paul Brown: “For Paul's audience, and especially the deniers of the resurrection, the conclusion to 1 Cor 15 is a call to be abounding in the activities that the heavenly man has done or does. This call to moral obligation is predicated upon, and given weight by, the Greco-Roman notion of the imitation of exemplars in society. In the case of the believers at Corinth, Paul was asserting that they, because of their connection to and incorporation into the Messiah, were beneficiaries of his resurrection...The moral norms for this way of living are defined by the exemplar, Jesus the Messiah. Yet, even as Paul was an imitator of Jesus, so also the Corinthians could be called to imitate Paul. Thus Paul's labor and hardship, which he endured for the sake of the gospel, are examples of living that is motivated and shaped by the reality of a future bodily resurrection. In the immediate context of his discussion about the resurrection, therefore, being endangered hourly, dying daily, and metaphorically fighting with beasts are concrete examples of such labor in the Lord that are not worthless (κενός), but exemplary and fruitful (1 Cor 15:30-32). The future bodily resurrection is critical because it signifies a status for those who are in the Messiah and therefore results in a moral obligation to live in imitation of Jesus.” Brown, Paul J. *Bodily Resurrection and Ethics in 1 Cor 15: Connecting Faith and Morality in the Context of Greco-Roman Mythology*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. 230-231.

12O'Donovan, Oliver. *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1986. 19-20

13Ibid. 31.

happens in the Church is simply the continuation of what happened when Christ became man. And He became man in order to restore what God had created.¹⁴

Stanley Hauerwas argues that the resurrection gives a *telos* to the Christian life that shapes even what he does daily. He knows the end of his life, its goal, and lives towards that goal.

- “Ethics is a function of the telos, the end. It makes all the difference in the world how one regards the end of the world, 'end' not so much in the sense of its final breath, but 'end' in the sense of the purpose, the goal, the result.”¹⁵
- “The Christian commitment to the protection of life is an eschatological commitment. Our concern to protect and enhance life is a sign of our confidence that in fact we live in a new age in which it is possible to see God's peace as a present reality....we believe that peace has been made possible by the resurrection.”¹⁶

Gilbert Meilaender argues that in what we do, we are telling the story of the resurrection with our bodies. On the one hand, we tell our personal stories, which culminate in resurrection: “To live the risen life with God is, presumably, to be what we are meant to be. It is the fulfillment and completion of one's personal history. To try to think from that vantage point, therefore, is to imagine human life in its full dignity.”¹⁷ On the other hand, we tell the story of the rest of the Church. We confess our common hope in our presently being transformed: “[The resolution to] the tension between these several views of virtue...lies in the narrative Christians tell and retell – a story, not yet finished, in which God is graciously at work transforming sinners into saints.”¹⁸

Drawing on these sources of Christian ethics, Joel Biermann makes the case for a virtue ethics, ethics that speak more about our being than about our doing, that takes its shape from the articles of the Apostles' Creed.

At the cross the restoration was accomplished, a fact wholly realized even now in the lives of believers *coram Deo*. And, a fact increasingly revealed, *coram mundo*, as believers grow into God's will, becoming, incrementally, more of what God created them to be: fully human. This is the rich and unified reality available when Christian theology and Christian living are considered together within the context of the creedal frame – a framework that points to creation's ultimate telos – the consummation of God's will at the Parousia when reality *coram Deo* and reality *coram mundo* are made fully and finally one.¹⁹

To pursue virtue is to pursue the restoration of God's creation, the very reason for God's work of justifying fallen humans. Christians strive to grow in virtues and the consequent production of good works for their fellow creatures simply because this is their appropriate work as redeemed creatures – it is what they have been put here to do.²⁰

It's a resurrection ethic, then, that allows man to navigate living with these two realities. Not unlike Hauerwas' contention that the resurrection sets man free to forgive, Biermann's assertion that man's *coram Deo* reality

14Wingren, Gustaf. *Creation and Law, translated by Ross Mackenzie*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961. 197.

15Hauerwas, Stanley, and William H. Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989. 61-62

16Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. 88-89

17Meilaender, Gilbert. *Body, Soul, and Bioethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995. 42

18Meilaender, Gilbert. *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. 125.

19Biermann, Joel D. *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 197.

20Ibid. 156.

shapes his incremental growing in righteousness *coram mundo* – towards his neighbors and fellow creatures – is possible because of his new *telos*, resurrection.

In her work *Resurrection and Moral Imagination*, Sarah Bachelard finds the resurrection a helpful mediator between a philosophical worldview that lacks transcendence and a theological worldview that lacks moral purpose.²¹ The resurrection of Jesus and subsequent hope for resurrection for the individual believer enable him to live in a broken and disordered world and enact God's work of reconciliation and restoration.

Already in the New Testament, it was clearly understood that the change in possibilities for human being brought about by Jesus' life, death and resurrection had profound significance for moral life. The boundary of death, thought to be fixed, is now believed to be penultimate. The being of God and so, among other things, the character of God's love and judgment are now understood with reference to the person, practice and resurrection of Jesus. Paul exults that God in Jesus has overcome the power of sin and death (Rom. 6.8-11), and so the possibilities of human life, freedom and relationship are made new. *Therefore*, he writes, live out the implications of this reality, and in accordance with it (Rom. 6.12).²²

Resurrection ethics is sourced in the experienced reality of the reconciliation of all things in Christ, the re-integration and forgiveness of that which separates us from the source of life, from ourselves and from each other, and so being transformed into Christ-likeness, apt to love with God's own love. The church is the sacramental sign of that reconciliation already realised, and exists (as Hauerwas says) to be and to witness to the alternative kingdom.²³

Such a practice of resurrection, for Bachelard, is transformative to the world around the believer because he himself has been transformed by the life that Christ's resurrection secures for him.

In his commentary on Ephesians, which like this paper takes its title from the last line of Wendell Berry's poem, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, Eugene Peterson contends for a resurrection ethics that means for Christians a way confessing life in the midst of a world fixated on death:

The church is an appointed gathering of named people in particular places who practice a life of resurrection in a world in which death gets the biggest headlines...The practice of resurrection is an intentional, deliberate decision to believe and participate in resurrection *life*, life out of death, life that trumps death, life that is the last word, Jesus life. This practice is not a vague wish upwards but comprises a number of discrete but interlocking acts that maintain a credible and faithful way of life, Real Life, in a world preoccupied with death and the devil. These practices include the worship of God in all the operations of the Trinity; the acceptance of a resurrection, born-from-above identity (in baptism); the embrace of resurrection formation by eating and drinking Christ's resurrection body and blood (at the Lord's Table); attentive reading of and obedience to the revelation of God in the Scriptures; prayer that cultivates an intimacy with realities that are inaccessible to our senses; confession and forgiveness of sins; welcoming the stranger and outcast; working and speaking for peace and justice, healing and truth, sanctity and beauty; care for all the stuff of creation. The practice of resur-

21On the need for such a project, she writes, "Although resurrection may feature implicitly in much Christian ethical reflection, there has been little direct attention paid to its moral theological or ethical significance." Sarah Bachelard. *Resurrection and Moral Imagination*. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2014. footnote on p. 59.

22Ibid. 58.

23Ibid. 172.

rection encourages improvisation on the basic resurrection story as given in our Scriptures and revealed in Jesus. Thousands of derivative unanticipated resurrection details proliferate across the landscape.²⁴

Finally, the most significant advocate for an ethic that proceeds from the resurrection is N.T. Wright.

How does believing in the future resurrection lead to getting on with the work in the present? Quite straightforwardly. The point of the resurrection, as Paul has been arguing throughout [1 Corinthians], is that *the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die*. God will raise it to new life. What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it.²⁵

The resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit mean that we are called to bring real and effective signs of God's renewed creation to birth even in the midst of the present age.²⁶

The church is called to a mission of implementing Jesus's resurrection and thereby anticipating the final new creation.²⁷

*The revolutionary new world, which began in the resurrection of Jesus – the world where Jesus reigns as Lord, having won the victory over sin and death – has its frontline outposts in those who in baptism have shared his death and resurrection. The intermediate stage between the resurrection of Jesus and the renewal of the whole world is the renewal of human beings – you and me! – in our own lives of obedience here and now.*²⁸

Part of getting used to living in this post-Easter world – part of getting used to letting Easter change your life, your attitudes, your thinking, your behavior – is getting used to the cosmology that is now unveiled. Heaven and earth, I repeat, are made for each other, and at certain points they intersect and interlock. Jesus is the ultimate such point. *We as Christians are meant to be such points, derived from him.*²⁹

What you do with your body in the present matters, [Paul] insists, because God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Glorify God in your body because one day God will glorify the body itself. What is to be true in the future must begin to be true in the present, or it will be called into question whether you are really on track in the first place.³⁰

The resurrection was the full bursting in to this world of the life of God's new creation; Christian ethics is the lifestyle that celebrates and embodies that new creation.³¹

TOWARDS A MODERN RESURRECTION ETHICS

Body, place, limits, creatureliness, the order of creation, the goodness of creation, the Creator's good design for His creation: all these are restored in the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ. And all are brought to fulfillment in the resurrection on the Last Day. Though these theologians represent widely different Christian

24Peterson, Eugene H. *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2010. 12-13.

25Wright, N T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York: HarperOne, 2008. 192-193.

26Ibid, 209.

27Ibid. 212.

28Ibid. 249.

29Ibid. 251-252.

30Ibid. 283.

31Ibid. 284.

traditions and span several recent generations, they make several common points that will be helpful in crafting a functional, Lutheran system of resurrection ethics.

- Bodies matter. We are not Gnostics. What we do with our bodies and the way we treat the bodies of others confesses our belief in the inherent goodness of creation and the hope for a bodily resurrection. With our bodies, we're called to tell a story that transcends the hopelessness of the world around us.
- Place matters. The renewed heavens and earth are our final dwelling place, the place which Jesus promises to go and prepare for His disciples. But our future dwelling has a connection to our present dwelling in the same way our present bodies have a connection to our future, glorified bodies. We're not hoping to leave this world of dirt; we're hoping for the dirt to be renewed.
- Limits matter. And they're good. Creation functions best according to the Creator's design. Desiring to be our own gods, transgressing the limits set outside of us has never profited mankind. And acting against the good interests of our fellow men, or even against the good of our fellow non-human creatures, never ends well. Vocation puts man into his proper limits.
- The resurrection sets us free from the world's story of death and decay. Our lives have a new *telos*, a new meaning, a new destination, because Christ's resurrection has secured our own resurrections.
- While we are set free from one narrative into another, the perils of this story of death still afflict us. We are living toward a future that is not yet fully realized. We can endure suffering with a future-focused hope.
- Ordinary life has new meaning in light of the resurrection. Whatever work apart from the resurrection was merely staving off death a day at a time now is imbued with transcendence and purpose. The people we serve, like us, will rise. In some sense, what we do is not destined to be lost forever.

This is a start. Much of such a way of living will have to be, according to Peterson, improvisational. But if such an ethic is true, it must also be practical.

THE PAROUSIA MEETS THE PAVEMENT: RESURRECTION ETHICS AND THREE TEST CASES

What do our aforementioned, disparate ethical dilemmas have to do with one another? I suggest that they're all essentially neo-Gnostic, a kind of implicit denial of the original goodness of creation and functional rejection of any future, embodied hope for creation. Moreover, they all exist because our culture has become like the popular Lutheran preacher, proclaiming the "real" person of the soul/spirit/thought against the body which in death is simply taken off and discarded in a casket or a furnace. And they all beg for a more cohesive answer than we've given them in the past. They need a single ethic that denounces neo-Gnosticism, that confesses the goodness of the original creation and our future new creation, they need the hope found in the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity. They need the resurrection.

GENDER DYSPHORIA AND THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

As an answer to Gender Dysphoria, the Church has long proclaimed a Theology of the Body. Popularized by Pope John Paul II, a theology of the body is a helpful answer to the dysphoria between bodily reality and disordered thoughts about what gender one *really* is. This is how the CTCR answers questions about this dysphoria and how confessional Lutheran pastors have been responding to those who come to them for counsel.

The Theology of the Body, articulated by JP2, argued that the sexual union in marriage was a kind of "Language of the Body." When bodies were being used for their intended functions, when the possibility of procreation was not divorced from the sexual act, for instance, the bodies of husband and wife were giving a silent confession about the goodness of God's created order. Thus, adultery is a lie. When the prophets used the analogy of

adultery as idolatry, they used the language of the body to speak, not merely of good and evil, but to speak of truths against falsehoods.

The language of the body according to the prophets is not merely a language of morality, a praise of fidelity and of purity, and a condemnation of adultery and of harlotry. In fact, for every language as an expression of knowledge, the categories of truth and of non-truth are essential. In the writings of the prophets, in the analogy of the covenant of Yahweh with Israel in marriage, the body speaks the truth through fidelity and conjugal love. When it commits adultery, it speaks lies; it is guilty of falsity.³²

This is, of course, congruent with how St. Paul admonishes husbands and wives to live toward each other. What they do with their bodies is a confession of a much bigger truth than their own union. “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32).

But an ethic of the body that only points backwards to creation misses the broader picture of the goodness of the body. To redeem His Creation, the Creator did not annihilate material existence and regroup all the disembodied souls of men to himself. He became one of us, a Man. The Incarnation of Christ confesses the enduring goodness of creation. More than simply by virtue of being given to us by the Creator, bodies now matter because Jesus has a body.

The story of Christian salvation stands in sharp contrast to the Gnostic hope to escape from the material realm by means of special *gnosis*. In His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus offers hope for those whose flesh He bears. As a full-bodied Man, He died. And rose. And He joins similarly full-bodied men and women into His death and resurrection by means of Baptism.

While this may provide an answer to many who suffer with a dysphoria between embodied reality and thoughts to the contrary, it doesn't apparently give hope to Greg Eilers. His contention is that his gender dysphoria is not any kind of Platonic dualism. As he describes his lifelong struggle, his condition is intersex. His brain is a woman's brain; his body is a man's. Eilers believes he's among a group of men known as DES Sons, who were prenatally exposed to a drug called diethylstilbestrol (DES), given to pregnant women, especially in the 50s and 60s, to reduce the risk of miscarrying.³³ Among men who have confirmed or suspected prenatal exposure to DES, one preliminary study observed an abnormally higher occurrence of gender dysphoria, as high as 30%.³⁴ The idea that the human brain can have its own sex, however, is still subject to debate in the scientific community.

Still, Christians confess a binary mankind. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This male-or-female reality is what makes procreation possible. Though those who suffer from gender dysphoria or intersex conditions may not fit neatly into one sex or the other, the very idea of this dysphoria is predicated on a two-gender binary understanding of humanity.

Eilers agrees. In fact, this is perhaps what is most interesting about his case. Eilers maintains a conservative view of Scripture in matters of sex and marriage, “God's Word clearly says that we shall not have sex outside of

³²John, Paul. *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1997. 360.

³³He makes this argument throughout his blog, notably here <https://eilerspizza.wordpress.com/2015/09/02/brain-and-body/>.

³⁴Hood, Ernie. “Are EDCs Blurring Issues of Gender?” *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 2005 Oct; 113(10): A670–A677. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1281309/>. Accessed November 21, 2016.

marriage, and that marriage is for one man and one woman. The practicing homosexual cannot justify his behavior, unless he pushes and pulls God's Word."³⁵ He also confesses a biblical, binary understanding of humanity. His transition to Gina is – by his own admission – only temporary. In the resurrection, he will be as he was created, and as he was baptized, as Greg, as a man:

That is how I see myself. I will always be a genetic male. It is only because I have an intersex condition that I have transitioned and am now a transgender woman. I see myself as Julie's husband, feel that way toward her, and act that way toward her. We are in an extreme situation, but not an insurmountable one.

Finally, I do not reject how the Lord created me. I was created with an intersex condition which is the product of Adam's Fall which fractured all people. The Fall means that all people come into the world with many and various maladies. One of mine is having an endocrine system which was disrupted, which left me with a male body and a brain which screamed female. . . I know that when I am resurrected from the dead on the Last Day, He will raise me in a perfected body – as all God's people will be raised – and I will be a whole male. I will be Greg, forever. Gina is only for now, a temporary (the word literally means "of this world") solution to get me through my earthly pilgrimage.³⁶

Here then, we certainly agree. The question to ask, then, is what bearing this future resurrection – present already in our lives having been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection – should have for our living as embodied creatures until that now-but-not-yet reality is fully revealed.

So what hope can there be for a male who identifies and presents himself as a woman, whose name is Gina, but who believes Jesus will call him "Greg" in the resurrection? Every hope. In baptism, he was made as he hopes to be in the resurrection: fully male, fully human, fully restored. That reality is temporarily hidden from his – and our – sight, though.

What Eilers needs, by his own admission is clearer hope in the resurrection. His hope in the resurrection on the Last Day needs to be so acute that it reorders his disordered thoughts. He genuinely believes that, when He raises him from the grave, Jesus will greet him as Greg and make him in the resurrection to be fully man, fully male, whose mind is then congruous with his body, fully and inescapably man. Until then, what should Gina Eilers do? He has a responsibility not merely to himself, but also to the church, to the world, and to his fellow transgendered brothers and sisters. He can and should confess the resurrection to them. But he ought to do so not merely in disembodied words, but with his body, too. In the words of G. Walter Hansen's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:58, a "believer's present bodily activity should be congruent with his or her expectation of a future bodily resurrection."³⁷ Or N.T. Wright's counsel may also be helpful, "What is to be true in the future must begin to be true in the present, or it will be called into question whether you are really on track in the first place."³⁸

Even in the name of coming to terms with one's dysphoric association with the sex assigned to him by his Creator and his genetics, removing healthy body parts or having them surgically reconstructed into something else does not confess the resurrection. It certainly confesses the brokenness of this fallen world, but it does not confess the goodness of the world to come. Thus, Eilers' surgeries, and all the gender reassignment surgeries, facial reconstruction surgeries, vocal cord surgeries and hormone replacement therapies of all the gender dysphorics on this side of the resurrection will be *undone* in the resurrection. It is the resurrection, and the full-throated

³⁵<https://eilerspizza.wordpress.com/2016/10/05/what-if-im-wrong/#comments>. Accessed November 14, 2016.

³⁶<https://eilerspizza.wordpress.com/2016/09/06/the-list-of-my-sins>. Accessed November 14, 2016.

³⁷Hansen, 221.

³⁸Wright, 283.

hope of the resurrection of our bodies alone, that gives hope to gender dysphorics, that fully and finally cures our dysphoria. Not temporary reassignment surgeries.

ECOLOGICAL ESCAPISM AND THEOLOGY OF PLACE

A theology of place is relatively new in Christian dogmatics, a response to the modern dilemma of displacement. It began not with theologians, however. Secular geographers were the first to observe our modern predicament of a loss of connection to the places we inhabit. Walter Brueggeman, in his seminal *The Land: Place As Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, seems to be the first to bring the observation of the geographers, that Americans are mobile and rootless, with a simultaneous loss of connection to a place and a yearning for place. Though the geographers and aestheticians have grappled for coming to understand why modern man desires and needs a connection to place, the theologians know – or have recently rediscovered – that the desire for a connection to place is as old as the world, minus five-and-a-half days. When God planted a Garden and rooted the Adam in the *adamah* to work and keep it, Adam had an intimate connection to his place, if only for a brief shining moment. The postlapsarian expulsion from Eden is the reason for man’s ongoing need to foster a connection to his place, to cultivate a new Eden wherever he goes.

Even after the Fall, God chose to interact with His creation by particular means in particular places. Leave Ur. Law from Sinai. Build a temple; sacrifice there and nowhere else. From Babylon, have hope for the return to your land. Buy a field. Plant. Build. Even in the New Testament, the connection to places is inescapable. Not in Jerusalem, but Bethlehem. Flee to Egypt. Can anything good come from Nazareth? Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem. Golgotha. Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. He is not here; see the place where they laid Him. Go to Galilee.

The Apostles assembled Sunday after Sunday in the upper room. The Pauline epistles are written to Christians assembles in particular places. Your congregation still remains an outpost of the Gospel in a unique place, a colony of the future in a definite location. A sacramental worldview, where not just any water, but the water from your municipal water department or from your well, has the potential to be the means by which God will kill and raise your children in Holy Baptism, serves to reconnect you to the place where you live. And yet, a sacramental view of the world holds the creative tension between place and space, particular and universal. The Eucharist calls Christians to an embodied experience of place.³⁹ God feeds you with forgiveness around the altar in your particular community.

A similar sacramental worldview and connection to place will hedge against an exploitative posture toward nature. The Eucharist joins the future and the present in a paradox, creates an alternate geography where the whole body of Christ is present in the local assembly, and offers resistance against the culture’s attempt to homogenize places. Ecological escapism is only possible without the sacraments or the liturgy. But the liturgy, the assembly of God’s elect, in the place where the Church has erected an altar, font, and pulpit, around the peculiar means of grace, locates man in the place where God meets him. Liturgy and sacrament are the first lines of defense against disregard for creation.

The solution to our dislocatedness, then, is not in getting out of this world and into the next. St. Paul describes the groaning of the creation around us, longing for more than just stop-gap measures to cure temporary ills like pollution or melting ice caps. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:19-22). Creation isn’t waiting for countries to sign the Kyoto protocol. She’s trusting her Lord’s gift of forgiveness to undo man’s disordered dominion. She’s waiting for the revealing of the sons of God, the Day of Resurrection. The resurrection alone resolves the tension between our present dislocatedness and our

³⁹ Hjalmarson, Leonard. *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place*. Portland, Ore: Urban Loft, 2015.

need for an eternal place.⁴⁰ An ethic of the resurrection will put man and beast in the trenches together, contending for and hoping for their common future, where sin and disorder are put to rest, where dominion is relocated under the inescapable dominion of the Creator, Himself.

TRANSHUMANISM AND THE CREATURELY THEOLOGY OF LIMITS

Like Transhumanism, the Christian narrative begins with a similar set of problems, but diverges sharply from Transhumanism by confessing an altogether different solution to these problems and a more certain *telos* than mere enhancement or avoidance of death. Death and suffering cannot be overcome by being avoided. They must be endured. In order to save men, God became man. To deliver them from suffering and death, the Incarnate God suffered, died, and rose from the dead. Christ's offer of salvation saves mankind from suffering and death that were the result of sin's corruption of creation. The *telos* is resurrection, which is not an improvement on humanity as the transhumanists suppose men need; rather, it restores man to the fullness of his humanity which he has been unable fully to realize since the fall. Professor of theology and ethics Ronald Cole-Turner contrasts the two worldviews, "Christianity and transhumanism could not be more different in how they view the goal of [human] transformation. For Christianity, it is to put the old self to death in order to be like Christ in his resurrection and glorification; for transhumanism and for the advocates of technological enhancement, the goal is to bring the old self to a higher life while worrying about whether it will remain the same."⁴¹

The question of expanding human potential and lifespan through technological means forces us to ask not what people should or should not do, but first and more precisely, what people *are*. St. Augustine argues that limits proscribed on man are a result of the fall, "To punish you a just limit has been fixed for the senses of your body."⁴²

But limits are not placed on man only after the fall. They exist before the fall, too, but then they serve a different function. After the fall, man's limits, dictated in God's Law, keep his self-destructive hubris in check. Before the fall, limits define man as a creature; they place him in relationship with His creator. He is commanded to eat from one tree but not the other. One limit requires him to eat in order to live; the other forbids him to eat lest he die.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer distinguishes between the kinds of limits that keep man in his proper place, limits external to him, and limits that define who man is, limits at the center of his being.

*Man's limit is in the middle of his existence, not on the edge. The limit which we look for on the edge is the limit of his condition, of his technology, of his possibilities. The limit in the middle is the limit of his reality, of his true existence. In the knowledge of the limit on the edge, there is constantly given the possibility of an inner boundlessness. In the knowledge of the limit in the middle all existence, man's being from every possible standpoint, is limited. By that limit – the tree of knowledge – there is also the tree of life, that is, the life-giving Lord himself. He is at once the limit and the middle of our existence; Adam knows that.*⁴³

In other words, contrary to the popular understanding of limits as something that prevents a man from being able to do what he needs or wants to do, limits as external boundaries around a man, at the core of his being is a limit that is intrinsic to what it means for Adam to be a creature. To order his life according to this two-fold command is not to be restricted, but to be a creature. Instead of restraining him, this limit calls man to live a life

⁴⁰ Inge, John. *A Christian Theology of Place*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.

⁴¹ Ibid. 9.

⁴² Augustine, and R S. Pine-Coffin. *Confessions*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1961. Book IV, Chapter XI (Page??)

⁴³ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Creation and Fall: Temptation : Two Biblical Studies*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. 57.

of faith with a posture of a receptivity toward his Creator. The limit that man is a creature and not the Creator, then, is grace. Bonhoeffer says, "He knows his life is only possible by his limit; he lives from this limit which is in the middle. Thus he understands the prohibition and the threat of death only as a fresh gift, as the grace of God. The limit is grace because it is the basis of creatureliness and freedom; the limit is the middle."⁴⁴

In addition to the limit that marks man as a creature, when God creates from Adam another human being for him to love and toward whose good he can order his life in service, he sets up another limit intrinsic to Adam's being. He is not Eve. She is from him, but she is not he. He needs her, and she him. This limit, like the prohibition not to eat from the tree in the middle of the Garden, frees Adam to live as he was created to be.

The fall, then, is not just for Adam a rebellion against his Creator. It is a rebellion against his own creatureliness as well as a shirking of his duty to love and serve his helper, the *ishah* who was extracted from the side of himself, the *ish*. Since then, limits in a postlapsarian world have functioned in a different way. Now, instead of something at the core of Adam's being, they exist at the periphery. They keep him in bounds. They keep him from re-entering the Garden of Eden. And they force him to labor with sweat and blood in order to make even the ground of his being, the *adamah*, function as it ought and yield bread without hindrance of weeds, thorns, or diminished fertility of soil.

Theology professor at Yale University, Norman Wirzba sees in the trajectory of modernity the same kind of limit-breaching motivation that drove Adam and his bride in the Garden to transgress limits and put themselves in the place of the Creator. On the dysfunctional nature of modern thinking Wirzba notes,

As autarchic and autonomous, this self is not genuinely open to or receptive of a genuine other. It acknowledges no limit at the center of its life. It can perceive limit only (temporarily) at the margins, and as a reality to be overcome...Modernity's rejection of limit is ultimately a rejection of God. Why? Because the rejection of limit and need is also a rejection of God as the one who establishes the sanctity of each creature and who provides for our need. To acknowledge God is to appreciate that we cannot live from out of ourselves. It is to affirm that each creature that exists is the expression of a divine love that desires all creatures to attain the fullness of their being. To be modern is to reject limits and to install oneself as a god.⁴⁵

In rejecting their limits, Adam and Eve become their own gods, their own arbiters of right and wrong. Immediately after their rebellion, they lose not only their creaturely identity, they also lose their vocations toward each other. Their gaze turns inward and they notice for the first time their own nakedness and in the midst of this new self-awareness they experience the navel-gazing emotion of shame.

Limits, then, are good and necessary. The transhumanist desire to solve all of humanity's ills with technological innovations is not only futile, it is more dangerously a rejection of God. On this loss of creatureliness, Bonhoeffer writes

In the first place the middle has been entered, the limit has been transgressed. Now man stands in the middle, now he is without limit. That he stands in the middle means that now he lives out of his own resources and no longer from the middle. That he is without a limit means that he is alone. To be in the middle and to be alone means to be like God. Man is *sicut deus*. Now he lives out of himself, now he creates his own life, now he is his own creator...Together with the limit Adam has lost his creatureliness. Limitless Adam can no longer be addressed in his creatureliness.⁴⁶

44Ibid. 58.

45Wirzba, Norman. *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. 113.

46Bonhoeffer, 80.

To be human, then, is to be limited. The drive of being limitless, then, finds its rebuke in the first commandment. Man needs God, and limits are intended to keep him in creaturely dependence on his Creator. The commandment “You shall have no other gods” intends both an external limit of prohibition but also an internal limit of being. Man is prohibited from placing his fear, love, and trust in anyone other than the Triune God. He is also by the commandment placed into a right relationship with his Creator. Fear, love, and trust implies creaturely dependence. It orients man toward God for every good. Luther's catechesis on the first commandment in the Large Catechism focuses on the inward keeping or breaking of this commandment, on the desires of the heart: “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol...The purpose of this commandment is to require true faith and trust of the heart, which settles upon the only true and living God and clings to Him alone” (Large Catechism, I, 2-3, 4).⁴⁷

Resurrection is a far preferable alternative to both death and human consciousness uploaded into a cyborg being. The plagues of death and physical limitations which perplex the Transhumanist are no obstacle for the confessing Christian living in an ethos of the resurrection. Their solution is already guaranteed. The question is how to live, how to alleviate or even improve the human condition while living toward this resurrection reality.

A resurrection ethic, finally, however, will have to yield to the resurrection itself. The goal of this ethic is not to make progress toward the resurrection. The Crucified and Risen Christ, who alone holds the keys to death and hell, will see every detail of the resurrection to perfect fulfillment. A resurrection ethic is not a do-it-yourself sanctification scheme, either. It is, rather, a confession of the goodness of creation and the common hope of all creatures – especially for those reborn as sons of God in Holy Baptism – for a complete renewal at the Eschaton.

A resurrection ethic, then, is a kind of resistance movement. It's a resistance against the forces of evil, from the worldly powers that want to normalize disorder and institutionalize decay, and the demonic forces that rage against the Lord's Church and His elect, to the gravitational pull of the grave that wrecks creation with death and suffering. A resurrection ethic, a deliberate decision to live as if death were not final and as if men could have a hope that endures beyond the grave, to order our daily lives toward this future reality, is a less than subtle way of jeering at the devil and making a mockery of his farcical power. A resurrection ethic imbues Christian vocation with an unyielding courage to any task, from changing diapers to enduring persecution. A resurrection ethic is what the preacher needs when he mounts the pulpit beside the casket with a beloved dead person inside. He needs the courage to call the dead body not a person's former accessory, but an intrinsic part of that person, courage that comes not from Gnostic theology or Hallmark sentimentality, but only from the resurrection. It's the resurrection that the preacher needs and also that his hearers need, to leave the funeral and face their daily callings by practicing resurrection.

⁴⁷McCain, Paul T. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions : a Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2005.

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