

The Denison Journal of Religion

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The content of the Journal shall be academic discourse which promotes and illuminates community dialogue. Appropriate topics of submissions include but are not limited to the secular critique of religion, inter religious dialogue, the interpretation of sacred texts, the interaction of religion and society, the validation of ethical discernment, and issues of race, gender, and class.

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for all he has done to make this publication possible

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Note from the Editors

Students and faculty founded the *Denison Journal of Religion* with the intentions of showcasing student scholarship in the Religion Department. To this day, the Journal strives to publish work from Denison students, thus allowing its content to manifest itself in the Religion Department and into the greater community. In this issue, we, the editors, have sought to represent the diverse nature of Denison's Religion Department, including but not limited to, Biblical Studies, Hinduism, and Liberation Theology.

We received many submissions to the Journal and are thankful for those who chose to submit. Although there was not room in the journal to include all submissions, we encourage students to continue submitting work to the Journal. The variety of submissions we receive, from inside and outside of the Department, grant the Journal its diverse nature.

We present to you this fifteenth volume of *The Denison Journal of Religion*. We would like to thank our supportive faculty advisors, Dr. John Cort and Dr. Maia Kotrosits as well as the academic administrative assistant, Matthew Hughes, whose dedication and hard work made this journal possible.

With Regards,
Andrea Waclawek, Senior Editor
Margaret Hill, Junior Editor

“To Free the Truth”: The Depth of Latin American Theology of Liberation

Dylan Parson

“Truth is Alive and Suffering”

It is as important
to free the truth
from systems of thought
which suffocate it,
as it is to free men
from inhuman
imprisonment
to the death

— Archbishop Dom Helder Camara

There exists a discourse that, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the decay of the Communist Bloc, liberation theology fell too, supposedly a victim of its own weak foundations and over-reliance on the losing side of the Cold War conflict. Perhaps the most strident promulgator of this viewpoint is the American Catholic theologian Michael Novak, who, in 1984, penned a fairly condescending case against Latin America’s liberation theology in *The New York Times*, emphasizing over and over its “naïveté.” He points to what he sees as their key failure:

The liberation theologians, standing almost entirely outside the Anglo-American intellectual tradition, totally fail to grasp the genius of the free economy in the free and pluralistic polity. . . . They have an uncommon trust in the political elites to whom they intend to confide all economic (and other) decisions.¹

Seven years later, in 1991, Novak believed himself to have been quite prescient in his critique, noting that liberation theology was on its deathbed due to what he saw as its inability to stand apart from Soviet Communism:

In brief, the collapse of the socialist idea has deeply endangered the project of liberation theology. As an economic idea, socialism is now widely regarded as a mistake based on bad nineteenth-century economics. As a political idea, socialism is now widely regarded as too centralized and monolithic to secure basic human liberties. This

¹ Michael Novak, “The Case Against Liberation Theology,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 1984.

leaves liberation theology's social theory in embarrassingly threadbare condition.²

Novak implies liberation theologians are nothing much beyond garden-variety Marxists, and his criticism of liberation theology's promotion of a centralized, monolithic socialism makes clear he sees their eschatological vision as a very worldly one—a global embrace of Soviet-style state communism. Through the rest of his *First Things* piece, he accuses liberationists of quietly giving up their emphasis on praxis as the Cold War came to an end, pivoting towards a focus on spirituality in order to cover up the failure of a socialist worldview. Essentially, he speaks of a kind of end of history, in which the capitalist ideal has triumphed, apparently even in the theological realm, and, just like Margaret Thatcher, declares there is no alternative to a capitalist economic order. Those who disagree, as of 1991, have seemingly proven themselves to be on the wrong side of history, whether their perspective came from the Kremlin or the cathedral in San Salvador.

Of course, Novak's conflation of liberation theology and Soviet communism is a rather strange non sequitur, though perhaps to be expected in a polemic by a prominent figure of the Reagan Administration. But the conflation is unfortunately a common one. Yes, liberation theologians make use of Marxist analysis, but that's hardly the end of their biblical hermeneutic and their thoroughly biblical theological conclusions. Liberation theology did not take a side in the Cold War. Gustavo Gutiérrez, widely considered the father of liberation theology, cites Pope John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in his seminal work *A Theology of Liberation*: "The church's social doctrine is not a 'third way' between liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism. . . Rather it constitutes a category of its own."³ Capitalism versus communism was a struggle happening around it, but it was neither. Theology of liberation, to use biblical language, was *in* the Cold War, but was not and is not of it. Gustavo Gutiérrez frames its witness in terms of Jesus' life of "eschatological radicalism," recalling that he was executed as a political criminal because that radicalism gave only the options of accepting the status quo or living the reality of the arriving Kingdom.⁴ Christ committed the "Great Refusal" to accept the world the way it is.⁵ Thus, his followers must do the same, rejecting the status quo as well as the notion that the options presented by this world are all that is possible. The truth is greater than the choices offered by the world, just as Archbishop Camara wrote in his prayer-poem "Truth is Alive and Suffering." Liberation theologians reject both the capitalist banner carried by the United States and the communist banner carried by the Soviet

2 Michael Novak, "Liberation Theology: What's Left," *First Things*, June 1, 1991.

3 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 175.

4 *Ibid.*, 133.

5 *Ibid.*, 136.

Union, recognizing that neither is the banner of Jesus Christ. Latin America, going beyond rejecting these two banners, is portrayed by the liberation theologians as being through with the necessity of choosing one of the two hegemonic forces: no more did it wish to be historical object rather than subject.

Liberation theology stands against the hegemonic rule of any order but God's own, calling for nothing less than the Kingdom of God on earth. Here lies the flaw in accusing liberationists of dogmatic Marxism. Some did indeed support the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, a common criticism; Archbishop Oscar Romero said this openly in one of his homilies.⁶ But they stood, here, for a popular, democratic movement overthrowing the violently exploitative Somoza dictatorship, not for communism per se as a political end. Accusations of Marxist materialism or allegiance to Soviet-style state communism reveal ignorance of what the liberationists stood for and currently stand for, or perhaps unwillingness to disrupt the status quo marriage between Western Christendom and capital. *Sandinismo* was not enough, Marx is not enough, and socialism is not enough. Ending the power of the bourgeoisie is not enough, if social hierarchy is simply flipped for another group to dominate. Any system of thought that puts the truth of the Word of God in a box is not enough. While the response of liberation theology often leads to a political mandate, reaching theological, political, and economic conclusions, it is far more than this. It is truly exhaustive and holistic. Despite the claims of Novak and other critics, liberation theology has been a deeply spiritual movement from the beginning. It calls for holiness on a personal level, as well as a structural level, affirming that only these together can change the world and bring the coming Kingdom.

Certainly, liberation theologians and their counterparts in liberation praxis are quite radical, but they compellingly state why the nature of following Christ is itself radical. The movement of the Holy Spirit today, they say, remains radical as well, a radical inbreaking of holiness into the individual and society. A theology of liberation stands for nothing less than the coming of the kingdom itself, an order unimaginably different than our own, of justice, mercy, peace, and love in the social, political, and economic realms, as well as in the depths of the Christian's heart. Liberation theology bears a willingness to look at the Kingdom of God on the horizon and walk towards it even at the cost of martyrdom, daring to speak to the reality of the world while anchored in the Christian tradition and in the Holy Spirit, guiding with prophetic voice and pastoral hands to a "wholly new way for men and women to be human."⁷

6 Maria Lopez Vigil, *Monseñor Romero: Memories in Mosaic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013).

7 Gutiérrez, *Theology*, 29.

“The protests of the poor are the voice of God”:

Archbishop Dom Helder Camara

Perhaps one of the most underappreciated theologians and practitioners of liberation was the Brazilian Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Dom Helder Camara, who represents a beautiful living counterpoint to the narrow caricature of liberation theology presented by Novak and other critics. Born in 1909 as one of thirteen children in a middle class family, Camara might be called a grandfather of liberation theology.⁸ He brought the agenda of a preferential option for the poor to the Second Vatican Council in 1960 and stood for the poor and oppressed until forced into retirement by Pope John Paul II in 1985.⁹ Known as the Bishop of the Slums, Camara was not in any way bound by some Cold War paradigm, maintaining a profoundly spiritual life, for example writing innumerable prayer-poems while also actively pastoring in the Brazilian favelas and speaking out on behalf of the oppressed at risk to his own life under the military junta. Once a man came to his front door and pointed a gun at him, threatening to assassinate him, and Camara answered, “Then you will send me straight to the Lord.” The gunman replied, “I can’t kill you... You belong to God.”¹⁰ All the while, throughout his long and active ministry, he compiled a magnificent corpus of theological reflection, laying the groundwork for the liberation movement and then continuing to contribute in the following decades.

Far in advance of today’s burgeoning theological discussion on empire, Camara recognized its significance to Christian thought in his 1971 *The Spiral of Violence*, speaking to the economic injustice of exploitation perpetrated by the developed world on the undeveloped world as a kind of violence, oppressing human beings and leading to inevitable rebellion and then reactionary further repression.¹¹ The locus at his time of writing was Vietnam, which, he said, “is a field on which the capitalist empire and the socialist empire are locked in battle,” with the Vietnamese trapped in the middle, many of them “wish[ing], purely and simply, to defend their country and ultimately attain the right to live in peace.”¹² An avowed proponent of nonviolence, he laments this spiral of violence, devoting much of his writing to evangelizing for a Christian alternative to armed liberation struggle, one that would step outside the spiral and usher in a new future.

His solution is the establishment of what he calls Abrahamic minorities, a

8 Hugh O’Shaughnessy, “Helder Cãmara—Brazil’s Archbishop of the Poor,” *The Guardian*, October 13, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/oct/13/brazil-helder-camara>.

9 Jim Wallis et al., “A Living Example,” *Sojourners*, Nov.-Dec. 1999; John Dear, “Dom Helder Camara, Presente!”, *National Catholic Reporter*, April 28, 2009, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/dom-helder-camara-presente>.

10 Dear, “Dom Helder Camara.”

11 Helder Camara, *The Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1971), 29-34.

12 *Ibid.*, 42.

concept which he pulls from the Genesis narrative. Just like Abraham, who was called by God to "to do his best with the gifts he was given" and set out "to arouse his brothers in the name of God. To call. To encourage. To start moving," so too are little pockets of Christian witness.¹³ Regular Christian people are invited by God to participate in his creative work, and every individual is given gifts to do just that.¹⁴ They should join together to set out to make love flow abundantly, as God's love is abundant to all the Earth, seen in fresh water flowing from springs and the great light of the sun.¹⁵ Stemming from a theology of liberation that Camara arrived at from his on-the-ground experience in the Brazilian slums, this is both an effort of person-to-person love and lasting structural change that pivots toward the Kingdom of love:

We live in a world where millions of our fellow men live in inhuman conditions, practically in slavery. If we are not deaf we hear the cries of the oppressed. Their cries are the voice of God. We who live in rich countries where there are always pockets of under-development and wretchedness, hear if we want to hear, the unvoiced demands of those who have no voice and no hope. The pleas of those who have no voice and no hope are the voice of God.¹⁶

Those in Abrahamic minorities who call for a new world by amplifying the voice of God in the poor become "awkward friends" in a society uncomfortable with the Word. The wealthy, Camara says, will pull money from prophetic churches and finance opposition, the powerful will turn away, and the average working person will be scared of losing his or her job and family's livelihood if he or she stands up.¹⁷ Yet, he writes a prayer-poem about the bravery prayed for by those who live in the Spirit of God:

Let my behavior
show men that they cannot
part me forcibly
from you in whom we
breathe and move
and are.¹⁸

As the book of Isaiah claims, the Abrahamic minorities will cry, "Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God!"¹⁹

13 Helder Camara, *The Desert is Fertile* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974), 9.

14 *Ibid.*, 8.

15 *Ibid.*, 15.

16 *Ibid.*, 16.

17 *Ibid.*, 24.

18 *Ibid.*, 26.

19 Isaiah 40:3 (NRSV).

Hope From Below and Above: The Framework of the Liberation Theologians

These words of Isaiah speak exactly to what all the theologians of liberation say the Church must do. Gutiérrez quotes Jürgen Moltmann, who says the Church's theology must not "limp after reality . . . they [must] illuminate reality by displaying its future."²⁰ The Church must express and embody a theology that is properly anchored in on-the-ground reality while always looking toward the eschaton. Framing this notion poetically, Gutiérrez says

It is sinking roots where the pulse of history is beating at this moment and illuminating history with the Word of the Lord of history, who irreversibly committed himself to the present moment of humankind to carry it to its fulfillment.²¹

It must affirm that the God of the Universe is at work in our own world and always has been, and then join him. The theology that emerges here is one that reflects upon the world and on God, and then "tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed," the end point being the establishment of God's reign.²²

In order to get to that point, liberation theology first provides a diagnosis of what afflicts the world that would ring true to any conservative Catholic or evangelical: sin. The human person is afflicted by sin, which percolates into systems and structures that maintain its power and grant it inertial resistance to being changed and redeemed. Liberation from sin is the fundamental goal of a theology of liberation, from which all other forms of liberation naturally follow. Gutiérrez again quotes Pope John Paul II, in his opening address at the Puebla Conference, that "It is from this sin, sin as the destroyer of human dignity, that we all must be liberated."²³ Christ is the liberator of all, delivering humanity from sin and the marginalized from subhuman status.

Here, to liberationists, the answers of mainstream European and American theologies are inadequate. They are quite capable of answering the intellectual questions of the nonbeliever about issues like atonement and salvation, convincing them of the reality of Jesus Christ. But they often do not answer the questions of those so marginalized they are "nonpersons."²⁴ A theology of liberation must write them into a narrative in which they transcend the subhuman status that has been placed upon them, giving them a reason to believe in God despite the unfathomably painful working of the world. Their questions are not, paraphrasing Robert

20 Gutiérrez, *Theology*, 11.

21 *Ibid.*, 12.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY, 1988), 148.

24 *Ibid.*, viii.

McAfee Brown's preface to Gutiérrez's *The Power of the Poor in History*, the somewhat privileged "where is God, in a world where science can answer almost all our questions?" but, quoted, "How can we believe in a personal God in a world that denies our personhood?"²⁵ For these people and for liberation theologians, the material position of the poor is of deep and pressing concern, but improving it is not the solitary aim in a tangled web of pain and misery. Liberation theology provides an all-encompassing answer for every human pain, from poverty to, say, the destructiveness of alcoholism. It is, according to the Latin American bishops at the Medellín Conference, the "sinful situation" of Latin America that has continued to perpetrate "rejection of the Lord."²⁶

What is needed, and what is Christ's good news, is a holistic, transformative liberation from sin. Referencing Vatican II's document *Gaudium et spes*, Gutiérrez insists that the idea that economic and social emancipation amount to the full liberation of humanity is "among the forms of modern atheism."²⁷ Neither world socioeconomic system that claims to most effectively grant economic and social salvation does so; both fall far short of the divine plan for humanity. Archbishop Helder Camara sharply writes that despite the perception of much of the West, communism is not the only godless system. Both communism *and* capitalism are inherently godless in their operation and both have "materialist roots."²⁸ Both "the capitalist and communist empires" are to be resisted by God's people.²⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez offers another harsh critique of capitalism, in particular as practiced in Latin America with the agenda of "development" or *desarrollismo*. Though it is touted as a cure-all, liberal capitalist reform would not ever bring Latin America up to North American or European standards of living, and trusting capitalism to do so would be to treat history as "unilinear" by assuming the god of the market will raise up all peoples.³⁰ Even if it did so, liberation of the human person would not be complete by increased material comforts, which both the Marxists and capitalists see as the object of pursuit. Liberation must be liberation from sin, "insofar as [sin] represents a selfish turning in on oneself," and any system that does not heal that does not heal the wounds of the world.³¹ Sin is the breaking of right relationship with God and neighbor, the foundational cause of all injustice and discord.

The only "system" that can help is Communion, in both its meanings. Communion as community in Christ is crucial, as is the Eucharist that rises out of it,

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 102.

27 Gutiérrez, *Theology*, 22.

28 Camara, *Desert*, 32.

29 Ibid., 16.

30 Gutiérrez, *Theology*, 49-51.

31 Ibid., 24.

which signifies the affirmation by the community that Christ is present and that the meal represents his sacrifice for the salvation of all.³² Communion is the polar opposite of selfishness, which itself is “the negation of love,” so to extend Communion between God and his people is to broaden the reign of love while counteracting the pernicious effects of sin.³³ The freedom and salvation granted by liberation in Christ is the freedom to love without limitation, and this boundless love is an unabashedly revolutionary goal that upends all the structures of our world.³⁴

The revolutionary act of salvation, however, is found in the very nature of God’s Creation. It “underlies all human existence,” even before the foundation of the world, since Christ has always been present in the triune Godhead.³⁵ A central narrative of the Old Testament meanwhile is the Exodus, in which God saved his people, leading them from bondage to become the root of Israel, from which salvation will flow to all the world—from slavery to glory and beauty on the cosmic level, all through the Covenant with God.³⁶ Gutiérrez defines history in the words of Yves Congar, who says it “is none other than the story of his ever more generous, deeper Presence among his creatures.”³⁷ God is constantly present among his people, pouring out love and salvation since the beginning of time. God, too, whose Kingdom of justice, peace, mercy, and love is both coming and already here, is simultaneously “I Am Who I Am” and “I Will Be What I Will Be,” demanding then that the Church live in this salvific reality.³⁸ The nature of that Kingdom has a fundamentally political component, so injustice (created and upheld by human structures and action) must be actively addressed by those who affirm Christ is Lord.

Yet when the Church goes beyond using theology as a tool to comfort and soothe, moving instead toward trying to change the things that cause misery, its bishops and priests are often accused of “meddling in affairs outside their competence” by those who would prefer things remain the same and the Church retain a domesticated role.³⁹ The prophetic word rankles those who are comfortable and dominant, who wish for religion to remain, using the language of Marx, the opiate of the masses. These people argue that the world’s structures and systems will be made better only when human hearts change, which, Gutiérrez counters is a thoroughly “mechanistic” argument no less absurd than the notion hearts will im-

32 Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 67-69.

33 Gutiérrez, *Theology*, 104.

34 *Ibid.*, 24.

35 *Ibid.*, 86-87.

36 *Ibid.*, 88-89.

37 *Ibid.*, 107.

38 *Ibid.*, 95.

39 Gutiérrez, *Power*, 62.

mediately be made pure when structures are changed around them for the better.⁴⁰ He insists the *ecclesia*, the community of God assembled as the Church, must be subversive, engaging in a kind of "subterfuge" against the powers and principalities of the world, battling all that obstructs the coming Kingdom of God, including the pushback of those who "use 'Christian' notions in order to justify a social order that serves only their interests."⁴¹ To settle for less than the coming Kingdom is to fall into what Gutiérrez calls ideology and fail in the practice of the Great Commission, to go forth and make more disciples of Jesus Christ and to teach his good news.⁴² The *ecclesia* must consist of rebellious enclaves recognizing the possibility of death in the service of God, fully aware of the radicalism of "hoping against hope."⁴³

For his part, answering what a better system would look like Gutiérrez calls for one that more closely reflects this idea of communion, specifically suggesting a socialist economic order—but not an authoritarian one like the Soviet Union. He quotes a panel of priests in Chile, who note the ideal of socialism "asserts that the motivation of morality and social solidarity is of higher value than that of individual interest."⁴⁴ Crafted correctly, it would build dignity and fellowship among people, reducing the structural causes of antagonism. Gutiérrez argues systemic changes like this must be made, for any struggle against human pain and misery is a step forward in the provisional "implementation of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus."⁴⁵ A cooperative social-economic order, meanwhile, would reach toward the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, who proclaimed "they shall not build for others to live in, or plant for others to eat."⁴⁶ Gutiérrez describes this prophecy as portraying an eschatological order, the Kingdom, in which "everyone profits from their own labor," and therefore "to work for a just world where there is no servitude, oppression, or alienation is to work for the advent of the Messiah."⁴⁷ To do so is nothing less than to work to, little by little, negate the deadly grip of sin.

For liberation theologians, this is not something done solely by the privileged and powerful. The poor themselves must be empowered to bring about movement in history. Here, Michael Novak's allegation that liberationists "have an uncommon trust in the political elites to whom they intend to confide all economic (and other) decisions" runs squarely into the exact *opposite* expressed by not only Gustavo Gutiérrez, but also Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino. The transformation of

40 *Ibid.*, 47.

41 *Ibid.*, 67-68.

42 *Ibid.*, 69.

43 *Ibid.*, 72.

44 Gutiérrez, *Theology*.

45 *Ibid.*, 66-67.

46 Isaiah 65:22, quoted in Gutiérrez, *Power*, 32.

47 Gutiérrez, *Power*, 32.

the world will be spearheaded by the poor themselves, not, as Novak appears to assert, the Comintern or some other powerful body. The poor themselves possess a charism of evangelization, by living “a life of evangelical values themselves—solidarity, service, simplicity, and openness to receive the gift of God.”⁴⁸ Puebla declared that the evangelization of the poor opens possibilities for them to become historical agents in and of themselves; it is not just that heaven will be theirs someday, but that they are taking part in God’s liberating action on Earth here and now, both for the redemption of themselves and for others worldwide.⁴⁹

In the *comunidades de base*, or base communities, in Latin America, the Church discovered the fortitude of the empowered Christian poor to be a beautiful reality. Leonardo Boff explores the base communities in his *Ecclesiogenesis*. Describing the movement, which consists of little cell communities of devout laypeople spread all over the cities and villages of Latin America, he likens it as parallel to the early Christian Church, saying “the church sprung from the people is the same as the church sprung from the apostles.”⁵⁰ Evangelists, then, first brought the Church to the isolated poor of Latin America, and now the Church bubbles up from them as well. Boff insists that base communities must be considered “genuine church,” despite their differences from traditional structures in hierarchy and formality, because, like traditional church, they seek “to lead all men and women to the full communion of life with the Father and one another, through Jesus Christ, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, by the means of the mediating activity of the Church.”⁵¹

He argues they are closer, perhaps, to the living movement of the Holy Spirit than the rigidly institutionalized hierarchy. To Boff, each of these little Christian communities exists in the tradition of Pentecost. The Spirit is speaking the language of people all over the world, including these, reaching people where they are while carrying the same Gospel message to all.⁵² For this reason, seeing the power that arises from the movement of the Holy Spirit among ragtag, uneducated groups of laypeople, Boff places the locus of the Church’s foundation not on Peter the Rock’s apostolic legacy but on the day of Pentecost, where the Spirit inspired many to go forth.⁵³ The Spirit continues to enflame hearts today, such as those within the *comunidades de base* that have proven themselves to be quite capable of living out their call as liberative Christian communities. Leonardo Boff recalls one of Brazil’s annual Inter-Church Meetings of Basic Communities, when, “After 480

48 Ibid., 150-51.

49 Ibid.

50 Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, 7.

51 Ibid., 12.

52 Ibid., 22.

53 Ibid., 58.

years of silence, a religious, oppressed people had the floor, and the monopoly of the corpus of church experts on speech was over."⁵⁴ Here, bishops stood in line for the microphone just like common people. Rather than one group acting as teacher for the other, all listened to the insight of all, seeking to be disciples. The heartfelt needs and thoughts of the poor were no longer mediated through professionals: theologians and members of the priesthood placed their thoughts and concerns second. Shocking those who thought that the voice of the Church ought to only come through traditional channels, Boff notes, the laity of the base communities were extraordinarily informed, passionate, and politically engaged.⁵⁵

The people of the base communities, steeped in a liberative Christian tradition, live and walk in faith, uttering a commitment as an Abrahamic minority to strive for a new world closer to the Kingdom of God. Even in the Cold War era, they were more than mere pawns in the Soviet-American conflict. A theology of liberation empowered them to understand their own situation and come to their own conclusions (a process Gustavo Gutiérrez calls *concientización*) about how the world ought to be remade in the image of God's Kingdom.⁵⁶ This remaking of the world, Boff says, does not mean Marxism—"it just means Gospel."⁵⁷ Empowered by a theology of liberation in Christ, the poor are "the emerging new historical agents," throwing off systems of domination and embracing community that seeks the participation of all, regardless of merit, station, wealth, or power.⁵⁸ A theology then emerging from that location, rather than answering the questions of the "modern (bourgeois) human being," as many liberal theologies from the Global North do, instead answers the "nonperson," keeping the marginalized at the center of the theological project.⁵⁹

The Salvadoran liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, embracing the power and agency of the masses, says working *for* them, for the liberation of the poor, is the easier side of liberation praxis. Trusting them and believing in them to live boldly as agents of salvation themselves is another question entirely, one Sobrino says requires a deep faith that the praxis of simply working with the poor or for a new world cannot provide.⁶⁰ Something is needed far more than the "scientific" assurances of Marxist theory or hope in one's own efforts. This faith is spirituality, a recognition of the power of God and a recognition that the weight of history is

54 Ibid., 35-36.

55 Ibid.

56 Gutiérrez, *Theology*, 67-68.

57 Boff, *Ecclesiology*, 42.

58 Ibid., 44.

59 Gutiérrez, *Power*, 92.

60 Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 25.

not dropped entirely on our own shoulders.⁶¹ True solidarity with and then trust in the poor requires nothing less than a conversion experience, including a renouncing of sin and acknowledgement that one has participated in it. In finally seeing the face of God in the poor, we recognize we have missed the image of God and ignored his people. We are called then not only to be compassionate, but to enter relationship with them, and in so doing with God as well.⁶² Boff says the Church has the choice to enter into this relationship of respect, trust, and solidarity. The institutional Church has the option to continue to be affiliated with the state and the affluent and be irrelevant to the masses it leaves behind, or make a pivot towards communities like the base communities that “carry to the throne of God the cries for justice that rise up from the bowels of the earth.”⁶³

To do this requires a daring leap: the Church must become quite literally a poor Church. Novak, strangely, in his *First Things* commentary, says that Gutiérrez writes a “blistering” critique of the doctrine of spiritual poverty, but this observation is either a large misunderstanding of his text or a deliberate misstatement. Gutiérrez, in *A Theology of Liberation*, argues that in fact spiritual poverty is the ideal state for a Christian, consisting of a lack of self-possession and “above all total availability to the Lord,” going on at length about its crucial importance.⁶⁴ He calls for *kenosis*, or utter self-emptying and self-giving, as seen in its fullest in Jesus Christ. It was also valued by early Christians, as we see when the author of the book of Acts, understood by the tradition to have been the apostle Luke, praised them for holding all possessions in community. Rather than making real, painful material poverty an ideal, this sharing of possessions abolished neediness among them by simply “seeing to it there were no poor.”⁶⁵ Only from this kind of kenotic spiritual poverty can follow “utopia.”

This notion of the poor Church and its with-ness in relationship with the poor speaks to the spiritual core of liberation theology, and this is the focus of Jon Sobrino’s *Spirituality of Liberation*. Sobrino acknowledges and avows that his exploration of these themes is not new in the liberation movement. In fact, he says, “the theology of liberation, which is interested primarily and per se in the practice of the faith, emphasizes spiritual themes like prayer, contemplation, and generally what we might call a spirituality of liberation.”⁶⁶ A spirituality of liberation requires what he calls “fidelity to the real”—that is, fidelity to the reality and truth of one’s

61 *Ibid.*, 26.

62 *Ibid.*, 63.

63 Boff, *Ecclesiology*, 8.

64 Gutiérrez, *Theology*, 171.

65 *Ibid.*, 172-73.

66 Sobrino, *Spirituality*, 2.

relationship to the Spirit of God and of her role in history. Against all odds, hoping against hope, one must deny any negation of the reality of the eschaton of love and justice.⁶⁷ This depth of faith declares there is no end to history besides the one God ordains. Of course, it is true that the Kingdom of God often seems quite far away, and the world theologians of liberation envision is not one immediately at hand, so those like Michael Novak who accuse them of naïveté appear at first blush to have a legitimate concern. But the faith of Christians has seemed naïve since the beginning, and to be naïve is to be faithful to the reality of God's unfailing promise.

Sobrinó places the root of this faith in Christ crucified:

Even when Jesus no longer perceives the coming of the reign of God, but sees only everything imaginable to the contrary, even when he hears only silence on the part of his Father, Jesus never wavers in his fidelity. He continues his incarnation in the history he seeks to transform, though that history now be his cross.⁶⁸

From the cross of hopelessness came resurrection and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. *This* is the real. The Kingdom of God is coming and is always at hand, and the Church must live into that reality in whatever historical moment it finds itself, regardless of how hopeless it seems.⁶⁹ All of this requires an immensity of faith and strength to see and believe in what is not readily visible amidst often-thin evidence for the presence of the Kingdom in the world. The strength needed to keep the faith—maintain fidelity to the real—is supernatural. "The giver of life," Sobrinó says, "is the Spirit," and powerful, salvific life in history is therefore impossible without her power. A life of liberation requires not only doctrine or a desire for liberation, but holiness, allowing Christ and Spirit to imbue each action, decision, and thought along the way.⁷⁰

The Holy Spirit is God with us, just as Christ was. Sobrinó notes that both the Word and Spirit of God always point towards *homo vivens*—that is, a more human life. God helps his people toward this end. Similar to most Christian theology, Christ is the exemplar; the gospels recall he "went about doing good," which seems like a small statement, but indicates Jesus himself humanized the lowest, as the Spirit does now.⁷¹ Far more than merely sympathizing with the poor, the type of spiritual poverty that follows in the footsteps of Jesus and is demanded by a theology of liberation is to become poor, "walking with them on their path" and embracing the spirituality that comes from their position.⁷² In Latin America

67 *Ibid.*, 17.

68 *Ibid.*, 18.

69 *Ibid.*, 9.

70 *Ibid.*, 66.

71 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

72 *Ibid.*, 59-60.

as well as elsewhere, to “drink from the well” of the poor and stand with them readily leads to persecution and martyrdom, so to be filled with the hope of what is to come is essential.⁷³ In pointing to real-life enactment of spiritual poverty and a spirituality of liberation, Sobrino points toward the martyrs of Latin America, and, in particular, his fellow Salvadoran, the martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero. Romero and the other martyrs expressed solidarity with the oppressed even unto their own deaths, just as Jesus did.⁷⁴ Persecuted and martyred saints are a “crucified people,” and persecution and martyrdom, to Sobrino, are to be expected by any follower of Christ.⁷⁵

**“Let us not be afraid to transform into flesh and blood, into living history”:
Archbishop Oscar Romero**

Oscar Romero, for his part, fully expected both to be results of faithful Christian ministry. In a 1975 pastoral letter he wrote presciently that his “already numerous trips through the towns and the cantons have been a prolonged Palm Sunday,” as he visited and built relationships among the Christian people of the Salvadoran countryside.⁷⁶ This was a number of years before he was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, where he would act as prophet and intercessor for his whole nation. But he did not always exhibit a spirituality of liberation, and, in fact, Romero was never to refer to himself as a liberationist. Nonetheless, well into his episcopal career, he underwent a profound conversion experience that drew him deeply into spiritual poverty and a tremendously courageous stance with the poor until his assassinated in 1980.

He began his ministry as an anxiety-ridden, tense man, stringent with the rules and formalities he expected of himself and other priests, though he was considered a fair and effective leader even by those who opposed him.⁷⁷ Romero was known for his friendships with the wealthiest and most powerful families of El Salvador, in particular the coffee barons, and he was enormously popular in upper-crust society. Complains one parishioner from the earlier parts of his career, “What did we know about Monseñor Romero back then? That he was an ally of the rich ladies and that he went around blessing their parties and their mansions.”⁷⁸ Another recalls his pastoral approach as being disappointing amidst the startling inequality of Salvadoran society: “To the rich, he would say, ‘Love the

73 Ibid., 50; 53; 65.

74 Ibid., 81-83.

75 Ibid., 86; 91.

76 Oscar Romero, ‘The Holy Spirit in the Church’, 18 May 1975, <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/documents/pastoral%20letter/lost%20pastoral%20romero.pdf>.

77 Vigil, *Monseñor*.

78 Ibid.

poor.' And to us poor he would tell us to love God, and that God knew what He was doing by putting us last in line, and that afterwards we would be assured a place in heaven." The rich would go to heaven if they gave alms, and so would the poor who didn't cause too much trouble.⁷⁹

While upholding a stable social order, he did the same in his diocese's hierarchy in the atmosphere of tremendous change following Vatican II. Pushing back against the active political currents rising up from some parishes and priests, he countered that the Church must be "first and foremost Church, strong and lovely in its faith, its grace, and its hierarchical communion, so that it can be a divine sign which distinguishes itself from temporal interests."⁸⁰ He clamped down on priests teaching classes for the poor deemed too political, worrying both about the doctrine taught and the risk of teaching poor *campesinos* things from which they might draw their own conclusions unapproved by the Church.⁸¹ The Church and temporal planes, for early Romero, were entirely separate. It was the role of "experts" in sociology and politics to speak to the problems of social injustice faced by El Salvador, "far more competently than a pastor in the Church."⁸² The pastor was instead to simply summon rich and poor to love each other, and Romero clearly saw his role as bishop to be one of pastor and not prophet. It is easy to see why, when appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, he was seen by both the Salvadoran elite and Vatican hierarchy to be a safe, controllable choice.⁸³

His conversion was a slow arc of great magnitude. He began to surround himself with *campesinos* and their priests, hearing personal stories of outrageous injustices as he opened church buildings to migrant coffee and cotton workers. Romero was shocked by the actions of his own friends, the coffee and cotton barons, whom he knew as "Christian" people. The bishop sat in on classes and religious meetings of the *campesinos*, and came to a realization (remembered by his priest, Father Juan Macho): "I had my reservations about these *campesinos*, but I see that they do better commentary than we do about the word of God. They've really got the idea."⁸⁴ He had begun to trust the poor, but the final straw came with the assassination of his good friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande, at the hands of American-trained Salvadoran military men. Grande was the first of many priests to be assassinated, and Romero was heartbroken. For his funeral, he boldly called for a single mass: only one mass would be held that Sunday in the entire archdiocese

79 Ibid.

80 Romero, "The Holy Spirit in the Church."

81 Vigil, *Monseñor*.

82 Romero, "The Holy Spirit in the Church."

83 Vigil, *Monseñor*.

84 Ibid.

to remember Grande. At this point the elite declared war on him because his allegiance was no longer with them, and his entire ministry was flipped upside down; vicious accusations of communism were soon to follow. "When I saw Rutilio dead," he told a priest friend, "I thought, 'If they killed him for what he was doing, it's my job to go down that same road...'" So yes, I changed. But I also came back home again."⁸⁵ In the One Mass, he thundered, "Beloved priests, remain united in the authentic truth of the Gospel. This is another way to say to you, as Christ's humble successor and representative here in the Archdiocese: the one who attacks one of my priests, attacks me."⁸⁶

He became the voice of the oppressed of El Salvador. One priest describes walking along the streets of San Salvador on a Sunday, not needing to carry a radio to hear the Archbishop, because every single household in El Salvador had their radio tuned to hear their Monseñor's homily for the week, which would lament in great detail tragedies of the week and call for change and repentance by the perpetrators, assuring them always that salvation is available to all, even torturers, murderers, and those who participated in "disappearances." Romero was the walking alternative consciousness for his country, even as he faced opposition and betrayal both from outside the Church and even inside the offices of Pope John Paul II. Romero adopted an analogy given to him by a *campesino* of what the Church ought to be: "If you put your hand into a pot of salty water and your hand is healthy, nothing happens. But if you have a scratch or a sore of some kind, ouch, it hurts! The Church is the salt of the world, and naturally where there are wounds, the salt is going to burn."⁸⁷ Any Word from the Church that fails to do this, he said, is over-abstracted and spiritualized, while instead it must speak to historical reality, "burning like the word of the prophets," because the Church must be incarnated into history.⁸⁸ "If we really want to live up to the name of followers of Christ," he said in July of 1978, "let us not be afraid to transform into flesh and blood, into living history."⁸⁹ In March of 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero gave a small mass for twenty or so people in a hospital chapel. He preached on the parable of the grain of wheat, falling on the ground and multiplying to a great harvest. As he went to lift and bless the plate of the Bread of Life to serve Communion, he was killed with a single shot to the heart and fell to the floor at the foot of the altar's crucifix. "And in an instant," said his friend Teresa Alas, who was sitting in the pews, "the floor [was] sowed with the seeds of his blood."⁹⁰

85 Ibid.

86 Oscar Romero, "The One Mass," May 20, 1977, http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/homilies/14/14_pdf.pdf.

87 Ibid.

88 Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love*, ed. James R. Brockman (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2011).

89 Ibid.

90 Vigil, *Monseñor*.

Archbishop Oscar Romero embodied the witness of a theology of liberation, faithful to the beloved of God at the cost of his own death. His ministry represents the depth and power of a gospel of liberation and salvation through Jesus Christ, and his life was one lived actively in history, daring to inch closer to the coming Kingdom—far more bold, far more loving than any political ideology could ever motivate, and saturated with the Holy Spirit. Archbishop Romero, Archbishop Camara, and the theologians Gutiérrez, Boff, and Sobrino present a radical gospel, a complete and transformative gospel that demands following in the footsteps of Christ. Their work is unconfined by the clashes of the Cold War empires. Instead a theology of liberation is rooted in the historical reality of any place and time. It calls for a new heaven and a new earth, and it is unsatisfied with anything less. God's revolution is incomplete until all pain and oppression has ceased, all sin is cleansed, and God reigns in love over the whole world. The ground has already been sown by the blood of the martyrs, both famous and unknown, who stood for grace, salvation, and liberation, and the Kingdom is coming and here. This is the witness of the liberation theologians, continuing to bear just as much prophetic power as it did at its writing.

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Liberative Creation: Finding Alternative Meaning in Genesis 1:1-2:3

Steven Simpkins

Understanding a text's meaning is by no means an easy endeavor. There are a multitude of factors that play a significant role in how an individual interprets and uses the content. The challenge of interpretation is not made any easier when the text holds religious significance across the world. With this in mind, when one seeks to interpret the creation narrative of the world found in the Hebrew Bible, he or she should do so with nuance and care. Origin stories are fascinating and how they impact our worldview should not be underestimated, particularly when that worldview is widespread and well-known. The narrative described in Genesis 1:1-2:3 covers the creation and ordering of the entire universe and has been interpreted throughout history by well-known scholars and philosophers. Despite the huge amount of ink spilled in attempts to uncover the significance of the creation narrative of the first seven days, there is still no universally accepted interpretation. Over 2,700 years of discussion concerning God's role in creation has not cleared up the meaning of text. By no means do I claim to have the key to unlocking all of the mysteries surrounding the Genesis account; however I urge modern readers to consider reading the narrative with liberation in mind. A liberative interpretation has its foundation in the biblical story arc, restoring and reminding God's community of creation of the covenant they were called into, the covenant that brings them together.

So why Genesis? Why place importance on the interpretation of this text in particular? The short answer is within the text, due to shifting interpretations and understandings of words, there exists the possibility of the development and justification of worrisome, problematic environmental and economic ideas through God's words and actions. Ancient creation stories potentially impact the modern societal structure in fascinating ways. As a result, it is desirable to consider an understanding of the creation narrative that is liberative and non-exploitative in nature. The Babylonian exile plays a critical role in establishing Genesis 1 as a text geared toward combating oppression. This text emerged from a chaotic world in which the Israelites were under control of the Babylonian empire and desperately desired to return back to their homeland and live in self-governance. The context of oppression from which the first creation account emerged provides a wedge into the text and its intended meaning. Surely a reading of the text that allows for the justification of abuse of resources or a social structure that is unjust is a reading that misses the mark of the author's original intention.

The problematic nature of biblical interpretation can never be fully resolved because anytime someone reads the text, they are incapable of removing themselves from society and their particular context. In other words, one does not come to the text as a blank slate, which makes it very difficult to read the text solely for what it is saying. As a result, interpretations should be viewed curiously and critically. That is, they should not immediately be accepted because everyone has an agenda, such as psychological predispositions or social experiences. Reading a text objectively is an impossible task. No one is capable of removing oneself from all of his or her experiences and beliefs, myself included. As a result, I want to be clear and state that, here, the preferred interpretation of the creation narrative is grounded in the theme of liberation: a frame that is capable of recognizing the unjust oppression present in the world and works toward finding understandings that ameliorate the negative uses of the text to improve the social standing of outcasts. This frame is created and validated through considering God's actions that have made God-self known throughout history. These acts are primarily God's leading the Israelites out of bondage from Egypt and Jesus' commitment to exalting social outcasts that find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Thus, liberation will take precedence over all else. The desire for liberation emerges from the pain and oppression a community faces during times of difficulty, and authentic liberation for these people means that the dominant, familiar, and sometimes comfortable powers are challenged for the sake of improving the quality of life for those at the margins. Here, empire is the enemy. There are certainly other stances one can take; however, the liberation perspective was and is necessary in the midst of massive suffering in the world, both in biblical times and ours. This essay intends to develop a liberative understanding of Genesis 1 through examining creation faith and the contrasting theories of creation emerging out of nothing and out of chaos, both of which take into consideration environmental concerns that have been ignored in a consumption-driven society. Regardless of one's stance on the two theories of creation, the biblical narrative and the idea of creation faith demand that humanity interact justly with the environment and the entire community of creation.

Creation Faith

Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun [a poetic name for Israel describing its uprightness] whom I have chosen... (Isa 44:2)

In order to read Genesis 1:1-2:3 with liberation in mind, it is necessary to remember the context in which it was written- the Babylonian exile. As a result of this timeline, this excerpt of Genesis should be read alongside Isaiah of the Exile.¹ In this way, the content of the text has its own context that manages to shape its concerns. Pairing the texts together in this way allows for the socio-historical context of the Genesis narrative to come forth rather easily. Further, the pairing of the texts allows for a more thorough picture to be painted of Israel's God. That is, in Isaiah God is not creating at such a prolific rate and as a result much more of God's character can be revealed to the reader. A community in exile surely has little to no hope for the future of their nation and is truly lost. These people lacked all of the things in their lives that were comforting to them and needed something that was able to push them forward into countering the power they faced. Exile is a matter of life and death for a community's traditions and rituals that set it apart from the rest of the world, a troubling reality that calls into question a community's identity and reason for existence.

As the Israelites continued to struggle for purpose during the Babylonian exile, they turned to the creation of their universe. It is important to understand the placement of history in which the Genesis account takes place, so as to avoid any confusion. Despite Genesis 1 being the first text encountered in the Bible, it is not the first event that establishes Yahweh as God. The first act to make God a distinguishable entity was the Exodus from Egypt into the Wilderness.² This divine action sets up the potential for God to be known as liberator of the oppressed. With Israel now finding itself exiled to Babylon because of the massive corruption present in Israelite politics, this community began searching for new ways to maintain faith in Yahweh. The first creation narrative encountered in Genesis, as we know it today, was the community's response to their oppressive conditions. The text relied on other creation narrative myths in circulation at the time, such as *Enuma Elish*, for inspiration and plot. However, this narrative set out to show God's dominance over all the other demiurges/creators/gods in existence at the time. Establishing a firm faith in creation that emerged in light of the God the Israelites knew throughout history to that point was a major key for the faith community to emerge from the dreaded experience of exile in tact.

God as creator of all was a comforting thought capable of restoring faith that God would deliver the Israelites from their distress. Isaiah references numerous times the Creator God who made the Earth and will rule over it while strengthen-

1 Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 153.

2 Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 9.

ing the powerless so long as God's followers are patient.³ Creation faith became a key to Israelites' maintaining faith in Yahweh while despising the false gods of the Babylonians. Creation faith resulted in Israel's understanding that God can overpower the Babylonian gods and Babylon's immense political and military domination. Creation faith had two potential roles: it either restored hope to the community or served as royal propaganda to support the oppressive order installed by the King of the empire.⁴ The imperial version of creation faith is the opposite of liberative; it restricts the lives of the community and only intends to support the royal order. Meanwhile, the creation faith that restores hope provides an alternative way of life that defies the empire's rule. It reflects a hope that God will continue to reduce the amount of oppression the society faces. Hope that emerges from this understanding of God is a dangerous hope, dangerous in that it threatens the section of society that benefits from a corrupt system.⁵ This type of hope is transformative and grants people the courage to resist and counteract the world of pain and anguish, particularly the structures that have created and sustained this kind of world. Hope through creation faith demands that the world's powers be resisted because of the order God (and no other deity or force) established in the world. In addition to being resistant to forces of oppression, it should be noted that this newfound hope emerges within communal suffering. Israel's ability to experience suffering allowed it to be prepared to learn from its experience and change and push for a new reality. When communities fail to suffer or realize they are suffering, the result is a society that has no use for hope.⁶ In what, at its surface, seems paradoxical, hope emerges from suffering and the drive to topple oppressive social structures arises. God recognizes the suffering the entire time, but relies on God's community to seek God-self for the energy and power to hope against the Babylonian forces.

The Creator of Heaven and Earth was stronger than any other force known in the world and so would overturn the chaos of exile, just as God-self had previously done during the Exodus and then once again in the act of creation. Having a story to justify the creation of the world by God was critical in solidifying the belief that Israel would be rescued. If God could control cosmic chaos then God could certainly eliminate the worldly chaos Israel endured under Babylonian rule. Creation faith and the context of chaos from which it emerged sets the groundwork for a God who despises oppression and abuse of power. The cohesion of the

3 Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 150

4 Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 33.

5 Walter Brueggemann, *Ice Axes for Frozen Seas: A Biblical Theology of Provocation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 339.

6 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1985), 25.

biblical narrative provided by Isaiah's references to the God of Creation lead to an understanding of the Genesis text that is far better at indicating the power of God in the sphere of human actions.

Out of Chaos or Out of Nothingness?

Most of the scholars I have encountered, though a somewhat limited selection, have created various interpretations of Genesis that perceive creation as out of nothing. They do not want to scrutinize over the serious implications that Yahweh did not create everything. Yet, Walter Brueggemann challenges this norm in considering creation as out of chaos, an interpretation that can lead to troubling questions. If creation is out of chaos, wouldn't there have to be another force acting in the universe prior to God's act in creation? If so, is the monotheistic tradition a proper frame for Judeo-Christian faith? And how does this effect understandings of God's sovereignty and power over Creation?

Despite these potential roadblocks, Brueggemann insists the text should be read as creation out of chaos because it allows for a reading of Genesis that keeps the margins of society in mind. Creation is not an act of God's supreme sovereignty, but rather an ethical covenant marked with justice and righteousness that has liberation at its core.⁷ Jürgen Moltmann very briefly touches on interpretations that rely on creation out of chaos in stating that such interpretations face the danger of removing actual creation from the story of creation. He insists that those readings are focused on preserving and ordering the world, rather than understanding the implications of the biblical doctrine of creation.⁸ Therefore, they escape the original intention of the text to develop an understanding of God's divine grace in creation. His concern arises as a claim aimed against process theologians who neglect the creation narratives in the Bible.

Before beginning the argument that emerges from a reading as creation out of chaos, it is necessary to determine exactly what is meant by "chaos." When referencing chaos, the text is referring to the first verse of Genesis and more specifically the words "formless and empty." In terms of Israel's history, chaos begins once the community recognizes God's call to flee from the corrupt powers of Pharaoh. It is at first life in the wilderness, spent wandering as a result of their transgressions.⁹ The unpredictability of the community's life following the escape was similar to a formless existence; there was nothing by which to reliably count upon for any semblance of order. However, over time this chaotic lifestyle became organized

⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 158.

⁸ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 79.

⁹ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 28.

and, under the guidance of God, the Israelites encountered a land they could call their home. Thus, God's activity in history involves his creating out of something formless and void, which here looks like ordering and organizing the Israelites in a new homeland.

All throughout history, every time Israelites would be hugely unfaithful they would find themselves landless and living in exile or the wilderness. God's grace may be what manages to hold back the chaos until it is used for the purposes of divine retribution. Dominant social classes have a tendency to get "amnesia," numb to the painful, chaotic realities of those within their communities, and as a result, are prone to acting in ways that enable chaos to be present within the community; they do not see the chaos and thus continue to perpetuate it.¹⁰ Thus, it is helpful to extend this understanding of chaos to the notion of oppression. When oppression is most near and active in the Israelite community, chaos re-enters the scene. So as to make this argument pertinent to modern times, one can posit that the stronger the forces of oppression are in society, the more likely the society is to be in a chaotic state, causing widespread unpredictability and a lack of order. As a result, it is the duty of Christians to actively combat oppression not only because divine acts of liberation such as the Exodus show that God's order should be absent of oppression, but also because of the dramatic effects chaos has on our relationships with all of creation.

Brueggemann's stance on the creation story does rely solely on creation out of chaos since he states that *creatio ex nihilo* is of little concern his interpretation of Genesis; however, I cannot help but suggest his argument is able to surpass Moltmann's concerns because it is intricately tied up in creation faith and what the cultural and theological significances of a creator God are in a world full of dehumanizing power struggles. In his work solely concerning Genesis, Brueggemann avoids taking a stance of either chaos or nothingness.¹¹ However, elsewhere he clearly favors chaos and even in his *Genesis Interpretation* in which he refuses a stance, he spills far more ink over chaos. Moltmann's concerns should be recognized and taken into account though, so to avoid removing God from the beginning of creation, something Brueggemann would certainly not approve of. Brueggemann's argument here, in particular his belief that exile plays a major role in the Genesis text, relies on a reading of creation out of chaos. Without chaos, the connections he draws would be unfounded and much more difficult to make. As a result, chaos takes priority for Brueggemann's theological claims to be logical and

¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 29.

believable. Further, it should be noted that Brueggemann neglects to take a definitive stance on creation out of nothing but rather says it is not significant within the framework of his argument in his *Theology of the Old Testament*.¹² This could potentially mean he values the idea of *ex nihilo*, but that it fails to strengthen his reading in light of exile. Since he does not develop the idea of creation from nothingness any further, it is also possible that he completely dismisses it. Yet, in order to create the strongest interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3 as an inclusive and liberative text, the positive implications of both views on creation will be explored. This will show the versatility and complexity of the Genesis text while also providing more than one way to read the creation of the world for liberation. The next few paragraphs will discuss the merits of creation out of chaos from Brueggemann's perspective and then the possibilities of *creation ex nihilo* from Moltmann's lens.

Brueggemann's stance of reading Genesis as creation out of chaos ties into the text emerging from Babylonian exile, and it also allows for God to create the possibility of alternative realities, something which is sorely needed in times of oppression. These alternative realities are countercultural to the oppressive forces and create hope for the oppressed that in a society that follows God's order, such terrible conditions do not exist. Creation out of chaos leads to a belief that Yahweh desires God's created world to have a certain kind of character, a character related to the good qualities of life that become available to all, in particular the oppressed.¹³ This world is one that does not participate in evil, corruptive, coercive powers because of God's work to fight against the persistence of chaos. God's work in creation is not only an alternative to chaos, but it also emerges from chaos. Essentially, chaos is always in the picture waiting for its opportunity to enter the scene and generate disorder in society. This chaos can rather easily be understood metaphorically as an emperor, dictator, or any other government leader's oppressive rule. As an aside, one should be careful and state that Brueggemann does not seem to favor any one political system or party over any other so long as the system/party is living in accordance with God's promise for reality, which is an alternative to the gloom of oppression that those in need frequently face.

When oppressive forces enter society, God's initial acts of creating and ordering out of this chaos directly show God's resistance of chaos. The current real world implications are serious and cannot be ignored when accepting that God created Heaven and Earth out of chaos, and this sort of understanding of creation leads to questions about oppression and the persistence of evil. Since God has previously acted against a state of chaos, it seems safe to assume God will contin-

¹² Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 158.

¹³ *Ibid.*

ue to act in a manner that defies chaos. God's actions against chaos, as previously discussed, can be seen in Exodus and rejecting the harsh condition of life put forth by Pharaoh and the deliverance of Israel from Babylon in a Judeo-Christian frame. Furthermore, a Christian frame may see God sending Jesus into the world as an attempt to restore order and get Israel and the entire world back onto the proper path of caring for the oppressed, additional proof of God's resistance of chaos established by earthly powers.

Through God's creation out of Chaos, God creates alternate realities. These realities are brought into existence through God's speech. God's power is manifested when God's speech is used to generate a reality, and as a result God's speech is an action.¹⁴ God's words are so dramatically transformative that through speech deeds in the world actually take place. This action not only created the world as it came to be known to humanity, but it also presents everyone who hears or reads the story of creation with an understanding that chaos is not God's reality. Chaos (re)occurs when people turn against God's will and actively seek domination over certain segments of society, which of course results in oppression. Yahweh's actions against chaos present all who are clearly harmed by chaos with hope. Hope in a biblical context is best explained by Brueggemann as "a determined act of subversion that intends always to counter a culture of despair."¹⁵ Culture of despair is Brueggemann's poetic language for communities faced with oppressive forces. The most important part of this understanding of hope is that it comes from within a place of darkness and attempts to drive the forces of evil away. Hope is an essential aspect of countering the status quo, and through hope God recognizes the need for God's own presence within a community and grants the community strength to combat chaos that should not exist in God's order. In short, God's creation out of chaos allows for oppression to be actively combated through hope because of God's initial speech and action in the creation narrative.

Creation out of nothing also provides compelling arguments for the subversion of oppressive powers. These arguments deal with hope too, but obviously have nothing to do with drawing a metaphor between oppression and chaos. In considering the world being created out of nothing, Moltmann seeks to understand the creation narrative from a Trinitarian perspective. Perhaps most profound is his interpretation of nature, with nature in this section of his argument referring to all the earth including humanity. Nature is part of God's creation but does not cover all of the creation. Because of nature's plight throughout history, it can be seen as an object that continually faces destruction and is constantly suffering. This

14 *Ibid.*, 146.

15 Brueggemann, *Ice Axes for Frozen Seas*, 43.

suffering is full of hope for breaking the bondage it faces. Moltmann understands nature as temporary and evolving. As a result, it constantly has to reach for alleviation of its suffering, a process rooted and sustained through hope.

To be fully liberated, creation must continue to push for freedom from suffering and not grow complacent.¹⁶ This is tied into understanding creation as out of nothing through its character of apparent progression through history to return to God's grace. Creation out of nothing has no presuppositions of God's desired order for creation, yet it does offer ideas about human stewardship and avoidance of exploitation.¹⁷ This divine command to avoid exploitation is enough to show that God would not approve of oppressive relationships and establishes a God that supports a liberation framework. Further, a creation out of nothing means God acted in a self-limiting way and willingly gave up some of God's own holy space to create Heaven and Earth.¹⁸ God chose to self-limit God's own power when acting with creative power from nothingness, and this decision should sufficiently express God's disapproval of oppression.

If God brought creation into existence and gave up a part of God-self, giving all organisms places to live even though this action wasn't necessary, then God must be against domination and oppression. God would not want part of God's body to be neglected to the point that it becomes unhealthy. God's act in creation was purely divine grace; God first gives up some of God's own holy, divine space to make room for a creation that God does not need. God seeks to share God's own divine life with all of the creation. Surely that idea is truly radical and has the potential to transform the world if used as a lens into God's creation. Understanding that God gave up part of God-self so other things could exist is by no means a simple feat, but if the idea is accepted then God's care and love for the creation becomes evident.¹⁹ Nothing is outside of God because part of God's existence was transformed into the world, and so the world and all of creation exists in God's space.²⁰ God did not act gracefully so people and the environment could suffer, because in that way God would suffer as well. The easiest way to understand that God cares for the creation out of nothing is to see the world as part of God's body. Panentheism, which develops an understanding that God interpenetrates all of creation but that God is not synonymous with the universe, meaning that nothing in creation that is outside of God, easily allows for a paradigm in which God

16 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 39.

17 *Ibid.*, 75.

18 *Ibid.*, 143.

19 *Ibid.*, 88.

20 *Ibid.*, 152.

clearly cares for creation and disapproves of any exploitation.²¹ Panentheism calls creation to be treated responsibly because God is constantly present within it. *Creatio ex nihilo* can lead to the development of God caring deeply for creation and acting to preserve its integrity and goodness without becoming corrupt. It does not make sense for any other type of God, besides a God that wants liberation for God's own creation, to desire that all of creation figures out how to function in proper community with one another.

Looking forward, humanity cannot continue to ignore or delay facing the ecological dilemmas of today. Environmental crisis exists. Climate change exists. The negative role humans have played in allowing ecological degradation exists. It is time to be responsible and admit our mistakes. Denying that the environmental problem exists is becoming equivalent to denying that the earth is round. The facts have been presented to society over and over again. Everyone needs accept that there is an issue so we can begin working together in community to address and resolve it. It is time for humanity to practice some humility and recognize our faults in interacting with our common home. We must rediscover our role as stewards of the Earth and treat the rest of creation with the respect that it deserves.

One potential way this can be done is through practicing Sabbath. Rest is plainly critical for the sake of the community of creation. The order to rest inherently indicates that there should be a cessation of production and accumulation. God always intended for an abundance to exist; God consistently provided for Israel whenever they needed it the most.²² Creation faith paired along with Sabbath develops an understanding that God will provide in abundance whenever the community finds itself in difficult situations. In this way, creation faith as a means of ensuring the survival of creation calls the community into Sabbath. Remembering God as Creator invites the community into relationships that are healthy and continuous. Moltmann brings the aspects together quite nicely saying:

The Sabbath laws are God's ecological strategy, designed to preserve the life, which God has created. In its rest and its rhythmical interruption of time, the Sabbath is also the strategy, which can lead us out of the ecological crisis...and can show us the values of sustainable development and harmony with nature.²³

Sabbath's emphasis on community is unmistakable and should be discussed for the sake of developing a broader, more welcoming understanding of the community of creation. Sabbath taking place within a community impacts economic

21 Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 71.

22 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 378.

23 Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, 116.

life and life with respect to the environment. Perhaps it would be wise to explain how Sabbath requires, creates, and develops a sense of community. Sabbath at its core creates a community consisting of God, humans, and the entirety of creation. Each individual aspect of the community has their own Sabbath that is interlinked with other members of the community.²⁴ God's Sabbath is clearly the seventh day of creation, but through God's Sabbath the entirety of Creation gets crowned as being good. Then humans practice Sabbath for the sake of exalting their God and for giving the environment a small reprieve from being toiled with. Lastly, creation's Sabbath, perhaps the most easily forgotten one, requires humans to uphold their end of the deal and let land be unproductive so it may continue the following year to produce fruit as God commanded it to do from the beginning. This multi-layered community of creation, preserved and protected through the paradigm of Sabbath, has the power to restore the world into what God intended it to be. Within this model, exploitation cannot be sustained. The world cannot afford to be considered anthropocentrically for much longer, and a shift toward being community-centered would do wonders. The community of creation has to be rediscovered for the sake of our home and the lives it supports.

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²⁴ Joshtrom Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014), 315.

From Ancient Greco-Roman Culture the Contemporary LGBTQ Community: The Transfer of Sex and Power Dynamics

Ibrahim Ibrahim

While sexual behavior and power dynamics might be taboo topics, it is crucial to examine them for what they might reveal about social dynamics and relationships in general. These dynamics are not new and unique to our society, but rather our society has inherited them from past eras. The concept of “sex and power relations” itself suggests that relationships are often organized around domination and submission, regardless of the gender of the partners involved. This paper examines the concept of sex and power relations in 1 Corinthians and the *Judaea Capta* coin, a coin issued by the Romans after their conquest of Judea, as illustrations of the sexualized and gendered domination of Rome and subordination of Judaea.

In order to correctly analyze 1 Corinthians and the *Judaea Capta* coins, I will provide specific context by explaining the generalized Greco-Roman cultural understanding of sexual behavior. I will then examine Paul’s perspective on what he calls “sexual immorality” in 1 Corinthians, as well as the role power plays in the text—especially in light of *Judaea Capta*, which constructs the “free man” against the “feminized enslaved man.” Lastly, the paper will demonstrate the similarity between these ancient portrayals of sex and power and our contemporary society, specifically within gay male discourse of “tops” and “bottoms” – those who penetrate and those who are penetrated. Sex and power dynamics had significant impact on Greco-Roman society by asserting the rank and power of the elite, and these sex and power relations continue to persist in modern Western society, even impacting relationship organization within the LGBTQ community.

Greco-Roman Understandings of Power and Sexual Behavior

In her article, “Active/Passive, Acts/Passions: Greek and Roman Sexualities,” Ruth Mazo Karras discusses the anachronism of categories and identities such as homosexual/heterosexual in the ancient world. As Karras writes, “Gender roles-masculine or feminine, active or passive-were more important than object choice in the ancient world.” Ancient Greeks and Romans lacked emphasized not the gender of their partner, but rather the roles their partner embodied. In contrast to modern notions of sexuality, ancient “sexuality” was more concerned with whether an individual was passive (penetrated) or active (penetrator). Thus, sexual experiences were more fluid in terms of gender performance. However, this fluid-

ity simply broadened the pool of submissive (or subjugated) partners to both males and females by those who are viewed as stronger males.

Those who took on a passive role would be associated with femininity, while those who took on an active role associated with masculinity. For example Karras states, "For the Romans, to penetrate other men could be a sign of masculinity (hence Valerius Asiaticus's taunt, 'Question your sons, Suillius, they'll say that I'm a man,' whereas a modern taunter might be more likely to say, 'Ask your mother')." ¹ The "taunt" demonstrates that masculinity in the ancient world was established through the domination of males at least as much as through the domination of females: power struggles were more prominent between males, given the patriarchal nature of Greco-Roman society. Thus there was a perception that the "passive" members in the ancient world were degraded. Karras continues: "It is not a category based on object choice but the taking of pleasure in passivity that Aristotle criticizes."² This attitude is indicative of the ancient world at large associating the "passive" members of their society with those lower in social hierarchy or not free citizens. They were viewed as "enslaved" because they were conquered by a stronger male, and this is consistently demonstrated in the conquest propaganda of the Roman Empire, such as the *Judaea Capta* coins.

In 1 Corinthians, too, the concepts of sex and power relations are intertwined. Paul advises the men of Corinth to avoid sexual immorality: "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?"³ Sexual immorality is a chief concern for Paul as he addresses it specifically and directly in this letters.⁴ He establishes a significant distinction between sexual sins and other sins, ranking them above all others due to the fact that they "violate" the body. In order to comprehend this distinction that Paul establishes, his cultural and social conditions as well as his purpose behind his letters must be examined. Same-sex relations were simply part of the sexual landscape in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Thus, Paul's commands regarding sexual sin reflect his environment; however, he was not responding to "homosexuality" or homosexual identities, since those did not exist. Contrary to popular belief, the original English translated text in King James Bible did not include the word "homosexuals" due to the fact that the word was not coined until 1864 by

1 Ruth Mazo Karras, "Active/Passive, Acts/Passions: Greek and Roman Sexualities," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 4 (2000), pp. 1250-65.

2 *Ibid.*

3 1 Corinthians 6:18-19 (NIV)

4 Romans 1: 24, 1 Timothy 1:9-10 (NIV)

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs.⁵ However, the word “effeminate” was utilized instead, referring to male demonstration of womanly characterization, in this case passivity.⁶

Furthermore, the meaning of sexual immorality changes when considering Paul’s purpose for these letters. Paul’s letters to the Corinthians reflect his apprehension of the manner in which the Corinthian community presents itself to those outside its community; the idea of sexual sin and violating the body is a metaphor for not violating the “greater” body, the Corinthian community.⁷ As Karras notes, Foucault’s theory on sexuality in ancient Greece includes that “the regulation of the aphrodisi . . . sensual pleasures. . . was a matter of the health of the body and mind rather than a matter of morality.” This provides additional contexts to Paul’s behavior and attitude towards sexual immorality. Since he is extremely concerned with the well being of the Corinthian community, he utilizes the concept of sin to provide additional reasoning to prohibit the community from “harming” itself. At this point, the subject of power and sexual relationships emerge in 1 Corinthians. The power of the community as a whole lies within the fact that it is extremely united, strong, and *impenetrable*. This notion of representing the strength of a community, whether it is an empire, a nation, or a city, through sex is not exclusive to 1 Corinthians and Paul, as the *Judea Capta* coin will indicate.

After the end of the Roman Jewish War in 70 CE, coins circulated throughout the Roman Empire that portrayed the Roman conquest of Judea. These coins also illustrate the way social roles are organized around dominance and submission or the penetrable and impenetrable. Here, the characteristics of the penetrable are made more explicit. The coin depicts “captured, bound, draped and seated” female or male bodies, and the theme of dominated men by other men also reoccurs.⁸ The characterization of the “captured Judaea” illustrates the submissive and penetrated people, the “enslaved” and “conquered” body. On the other hand, the coin portrays the dominant and penetrating males as the “free” and “conquering” body.⁹ These illustrations on public items such as coins demonstrate the significance of domination within Roman masculinity and the society at large. Karras further explains the role of domination and its connection to social status:

Masculinity in ancient Rome was a very fragile condition but necessary for public manifestations of rank and authority . . . the importance of impenetrability to Roman concepts of man- hood . . . To be the pas-

5 Rictor Norton, “The Term ‘Homosexual,’” *A Critique of Social Constructionism and Postmodern Queer Theory*, June 19, 2008, <http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/social14.htm>.

6 1 Corinthians 6:9 (KJV)

7 Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (Chelsea, Michigan: Yale University Press, 1995), 3-37.

8 Davina C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 36-37.

9 Ibid.

sive partner in a sexual relation was . . . to have . . . the experience . . . that of a slave or freedman . . . the penetration of a soldier by a sword was equivalent to sexual penetration.¹⁰

Those who penetrate were associated with the powerful and elite; however, those who were penetrated were associated with the lower social ranks. This resulted in the fact that “same-sex relations... [were] far more acceptable among elites than among the masses . . . and that the latter condemned both the active and the passive partner.”¹¹ Unfortunately, these negative associations with penetration remain within our society, especially in the gay community.

Sexual Behavior and Power Dynamics in the LGBTQ Community

Tension between tops and bottoms in the gay community continues to increase as homosexuality becomes more acceptable in American culture. This conflict between the two sexual preferences in the male homosexual community might be attributed to the heterosexual concept of masculinity. Tops are viewed as more masculine and more acceptable than bottoms because they maintain the characteristic of the impenetrable male. On the other hand, bottoms are not as accepted by heterosexuals because they allow their bodies to be “emasculated” and penetrated. This is extremely problematic due to the fact that it causes division, inequality, and discrimination amongst homosexuals. Bottoms are viewed as more feminine, weaker and ultimately “lesser” than their tops counterparts. Therefore, the notion of the dominant penetrating male is once again upheld as superior.

Mass media and social media have served as a playground for discrimination against and shaming of bottoms. For instance, a recent video that circulated social media portrays a top gay man providing “rules” that a Tops Meeting established for bottoms. In the video, the speaker states that rule number one is to “know the dick that you signed [up] for . . . now you get to the toss place and you [are] like ‘what is this . . . hold on . . . give me a minute . . . don’t go so deep.’ This is the dick you signed up for.”¹² Although this claim may contain a valid argument that bottoms should be aware and knowledgeable about their bodies and capabilities, it does not justify tops being careless and indifferent with regard to the well being of their sexual partners. Likewise, the tone and language used to express his thoughts demonstrates disdain towards bottoms who have second thoughts about being involved in a sexual act. Further he states,

10 Karras, “Active/Passive,” 1261.

11 *Ibid.*, 1256-1257.

12 “5 Things Tops Want Bottoms to Know,” YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiMwVDPwGKQ>.

Rule number 4: don't think that if you're taking to someone they are willing to do everything to get sex . . . Gas is \$17/gallon. Who is gonna come pick you up for ass? Who does that?! Do you want a dick like that?! If he is that thirsty to pick you up, take you to his house to fuck and bring you back to your house. Is that the dick you want?! That's not the ass we want!¹³

Unlike the first "rule," this example does not contain any logical or acceptable argument. He once again shames bottoms for asking to be treated with respect. The questions he raises after stating the "rule" simply reiterate the shaming, and he directs this shaming not only towards bottoms, but also tops. Looking back to ancient times, Karras includes in her article an analysis of misconceptions of the "penetrated" males: "In classical Athens the penetrated were not seen as the inert objects of someone else's gratification . . . and wait for things to be done to them . . . The *kinaidos/katapugon* is not a sexual pathic, humiliated and made effeminate by repeated domination . . . who dresses up to attract men and has sex at the drop of a hat." Although this reference to the negative characteristics associated with the "penetrated" body refers to ancient misconceptions, it is clearly still relevant to contemporary society. Lastly, simply the fact that there are "rules" which individuals with a specific sexual preference impose upon others is extremely degrading. These rules and those that endorse them treat bottoms as nothing but a mere instrument for the pleasure of the dominant male. This is one of the most crucial issues in which the context of power dramatically affects sexual relationships. Although "hookups" and "one-night-stands" are more common in our contemporary society, it does not give permission for either of the parties, especially tops in this case, to treat sexual partners as an object.

Though a video similar to the one discussed above is extremely problematic, it is not likely to reach audience outside of the LGBTQ community. However, bottom shaming has also taken place in a mainstream television show that non queer-identified people are more likely to watch. Episode "Rapture's Delight" of the television series "American Dad" depicts a gay couple, yet only the top is "saved" from the apocalypse because "apparently God does loves gays, but only if they are tops."¹⁴ Although one can dismiss this outrageous statement as comedic, it will not remove its problematic nature. Due to the fact that "American Dad" is a mainstream series, it is very likely that this series is the only exposure to homo-

13 Ibid.

14 "Rapture's Delight." IMDb.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1555452/>, "Gay News, God Loves Gays," YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_sCndvIKCY.

sexual relationships some viewers have had. Thus, when “American Dad” presents the dynamics between tops and bottoms in such a manner, it reiterates ancient Greco-Roman condemnation of bottoms and bottom shaming in our society.

Sexual behavior and power relations are no unique character to American society, but rather a global phenomenon occurring across the LGBTQ community. For example, Latino gay males refer to tops as “activos” and bottoms as “pasivos,” which resonates with the Greco-Roman ideology of sexual behavior in terms of labels. However, terminology is not the only place in the Latino LGBTQ community where Greco-Roman ideology of sexual behavior persists; it also resonates in larger cultural perceptions: “While the pasivo role is associated with femininity and a man who is penetrated is seen as less of a man, the activo role in anal sex carries less stigma and at times may even enhance the social standing of the performer.”¹⁵ Another example of global demonstration of sex and power dynamics is pornography in Russia.

Another series of explicit sexual images created in Gulag camps and prisons were less concerned with expressing desire (although this cannot be excluded), but with cementing hierarchies of power. Tattoos branded members of Russian prisons’ most “degraded” (opushchennyi) caste, known as petukhi, those who were deemed sexually accessible for oral and anal intercourse to all “real men” (muzhiki, patsany).¹⁶

This statement clearly exemplifies the utilization of sex and power to establish a concrete social hierarchy. Once again, the idea that penetrated men are not “real men” and lesser than their penetrator counterparts resurfaces, this time in an even more explicit and hostile manner. When considered together, these examples illustrate the unquestionable resonance of active/passive inequality and discrimination in our society as well as LGBTQ communities in other nations.

After analyzing ancient as well as contemporary evidence, there is an unshakable resonance with and inheritance of Greco-Roman ideology of sex and power dynamics in our society, especially within discourse between gay men. In 1 Corinthians, two of Paul’s chief concerns are demonstrations of sex and power relations. Sexual immorality was a central metaphor for demonstrating the Corinthian community as a perfect and impenetrable body; thus power and impenetrability are utilized as interchangeable concepts. The condemnation of taking pleasure in passivity is also included in 1 Corinthians, which continues the tradition of viewing those who are “passive” as immoral and socially lesser. Further, the Roman Empire’s con-

15 Alex Carballo-Diéguez, Curtis Dolezal, Luis Nieves, Francisco Diaz, Carlos Decena and Ivan Balan, “Looking for a Tall, Dark, Macho Man . . . Sexual-Role Behaviour Variations in Latino Gay and Bisexual Men,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 6, no. 2 (2004): 160.

16 Dan Healey, “Active, Passive, and Russian: The National Idea in Gay Men’s Pornography,” *The Russian Review* (2010), 210-30.

quest of Judea was expressed as the subjugation of a weak and vulnerable male or female, while the powerful and dominating Rome was illustrated as a powerful and masculine man. These negative categorizations carry through into our contemporary society, where homosexual bottoms are discriminated against and stigmatized more frequently in comparison to their tops counterparts. Though such discrimination emerges from a heteronormative society that favors active males over passive females, it also resonates with the Greco-Roman ideology of sexual behavior and power relations. Some evidence of prejudice against bottoms can be found within the gay community, while others can be observed in mainstream media. Most importantly, these messages of prejudice resonate across the globe and not only in American LGBTQ community, which drastically increases the significance of the issue. Though many believe that our society has surpassed "primitive" bigotry against homosexuals, these issues clearly persist, and some gay men experience it daily. We might make ourselves believe that we have exceeded such notions as discrimination against sexual minorities, but examining ancient texts and culture proves that we still ascribe to their "primitive" views of sexual behaviors.

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Tree Worship: Accidental Conservation of Biodiversity through the Protection of Biodivinity

Emily Grabauskas

The worship of trees is a well-known practice among Hindus in India. It is said that through worship of a particular tree, one is able to connect with the universality of all deities. In performing sacred worship rituals, a tree is cared for and loved, but the question to examine is whether this love is meant for the tree itself or solely for the deity that is said to own or inhabit the tree. This essay will focus on whether tree worship leads to a conscious protection of biodiversity and in turn, to environmentalism; or whether the protection of biodiversity is purely by chance and therefore accidental. In addition, if the protection of the trees is intended to serve the needs of the gods, one should also examine whether the trees are receiving proper care. Although it is a Hindu belief that sacred trees and groves should be preserved and kept alive, the direct intentions of the Hindu devotees is not to protect the lives of the trees, but instead to protect the divinity that is found inside of the trees and sacred groves. Consequently, proper treatment of nature is not always the result of tree worship.

In order to examine the questions presented concerning tree worship, it is necessary to look at specific examples. In *People Trees*, David Haberman fully describes one instance of tree worship, worship of Pipal trees.¹ Although the ceremony described is a special one, Pipal trees are worshiped everyday in this way for the welfare, happiness, health, or prosperity of oneself and others. However, this specific ritual takes place on Somvati Amavasya, the day the new moon happens to fall on a Monday, and the women of the village perform the ritual. The ritual begins with a water offering followed by incense placed at the base of the tree along with garlands of flowers and other gifts. The women then proceed to offer rice, apply *sindur* paste to the trunk, and wrap the trunk of the tree in orange and red string signifying the establishment of a protective relationship. Finally, the women circumambulate the tree 108 times, embrace it, and kiss it.² The process of tree worship may seem primitive to those not familiar with the Hindu religion, as it seems as if people are practicing pagan nature worship, but this is not the case. Tree worship, in this case, is a display of animism: the belief that spirits are present in nonhuman life forms.³ In India, it is believed that trees are “the abodes

1 David L. Haberman, *People Trees* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 60.

2 *Ibid.*, 60-61.

3 *Ibid.*, 7.

or embodied forms of divinities.”⁴ For example, in the sacred pipal tree, “Brahma resides in the roots . . . Vishnu in the trunk, Mahadeva (Shiva) in the branches, and all the gods on each and every leaf.”⁵ It is through the worship of sacred trees that Hindus are able to connect and perform *darshan*, the practice of seeing and being seen by the deity during worship.⁶

Not only do deities inhabit trees, but also sacred groves, a belief articulated by Eliza Kent. As Kent describes: “The groves are sites where gods reside; thus they are temples.”⁷ The process of tree worship as described above can be mistaken for pagan nature worship; however, the reasoning behind Hindu tree worship goes much deeper as it is embedded in religious practice. Hindus articulate that they “do this to honor god. This is a part of our Hindu religion. We worship the pipal tree as god.”⁸ The worship of trees in India is not to intentionally give love to the tree, but instead to the deity that inhabits the tree. There are many steps taken to facilitate *darshan* with the god, and since this involves being seen by and seeing the deity, it is therefore common that the tree is made to be more human-like. This practice is known as anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism can be defined as “an application of what is familiar to what is unfamiliar.”⁹ In other words, the practice of anthropomorphism leads people to assign human-like characteristics to nonhuman things. In India, this is done in order to facilitate tree worship. The most common practice that demonstrates the belief that “this tree is a person just like you and me” is the placing of a face-mask on the trunk of the tree.¹⁰ Haberman explains this process, saying that “the placing of a face on a neem tree might best be seen as an intentional and effective strategy to connect with a nonhuman species.”¹¹ If this practice was not observed, it would be much more difficult for Hindus to connect with the divinity inside of the sacred trees, and so a facemask is “placed in the tree so that the worshiper who visits the temple has a view of the face.”¹² It is extremely important for *darshan* that the face has eyes, as this allows for the tree to see and be seen.¹³ Through this process, the devotee is able to create a deeper connection with the tree given that he or she will have placed a particular worth on it, a worth comparable to that which is inherent in humans. This practice of anthropomorphism is one that has

4 Ibid., 33.

5 Ibid., 64.

6 Haberman, *People Trees*, 63.

7 Eliza F. Kent, *Sacred Groves and Local Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39.

8 Haberman, *People Trees*, 63.

9 Ibid., 21.

10 Ibid., 4.

11 Ibid., 154.

12 Ibid., 143.

13 Ibid., 147.

the potential to protect trees and/or harm the trees and sacred groves in which worship takes place.

According to Eliza Kent, tree and grove worship inevitably leads to “accidental environmentalism” and anthropomorphism seems to allow for this even more. Tree worship, unknowingly to many, takes place all over the world. In parts of Europe, there were once extreme penalties imposed for even the slightest damage to a tree. According to old German law, in the event that one peeled the bark off of a tree, the consequence was that his or her naval was to be cut out and nailed to the damaged part of the tree as replacement bark.¹⁴ Furthermore, once the remainder of the torture was complete, the man or woman was left dead. Haberman offers the following as an explanation for this particular choice of punishment: “The intention of the punishment was to replace the dead bark by a living substitute taken from the culprit; it was a life for a life, the life of a man for the life of a tree.”¹⁵ Haberman notes that in pre-Christian Europe, this action was significant because they believed in animism. In places such as Austria, for example, many believed that the trees needed to be protected because they were “animate beings with feelings and consciousness.”¹⁶ As of recently in Thailand, the use of anthropomorphism allows for the protection of trees. Trees are “saved from the chainsaw in Thailand by ordaining them as monks and wrapping them in saffron robes.”¹⁷ In both of these instances, though thousands of years apart and appearing on different continents, the worshipers seem to be acting in accordance with environmentalism. However, upon further review, it is apparent that the protection of the trees and groves is not offered for nature itself but for the divine beings that inhabit it.

As I researched this topic, I was left with one unanswered question: has anyone ever specifically asked a Hindu whether he or she consciously protects the trees for environmental purposes? I elected to interview a family friend who is a Sikh city dweller in India. This offered the perfect opportunity to pose my question directly to someone familiar with Hinduism. She is not from a part of India that takes part in tree worship, so she was not able to provide me with a firsthand account of tree worshipping; however, she was able share information she has learned from other Hindus. After beginning my interview by mentioning my topic of tree worship, she indicated that customs such as tree worship “are for guaranteeing longevity, good health, eternal life, and protection in present life.” This is a

¹⁴ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 37.

basis for the personal gains one receives through worshiping the divine in trees. I further narrowed my topic during the interview in order to find out whether it was appropriate to call Hindus “accidental environmentalists” or if their intent was to actually protect the trees and sacred groves. Through her upbringing, she learned that “so much is blind faith and reverence for fear of life.” She believes that “the blind faith is a whole lot of blindness. Not cutting them (the trees) down is for fear of upsetting the gods and the fear of the unknown that gets invited therefore.” It is through these statements that she confirmed Eliza Kent’s claim that the environmental consciousness of Hindus is purely coincidental. While she is not a practicing tree worshiper and so her insight is limited to the knowledge she has obtained from others, she did claim that “there isn’t one ounce of thought regarding the environment. It is all steeped in tradition and faith.” Thus, from her perspective, the purpose of tree worship to devout Hindus is the protection of and devotion to the many deities that inhabit the trees and the forests, not to protect the environment itself.

While in Banaras, Haberman noted that there were numerous signs posted around trees. These signs read, “God resides in this tree.”¹⁸ If God did not inhabit trees and sacred groves, there is no reason to believe that environmental protection would be of importance to Hindu devotees. This point directly relates to the second tier of my question: the trees, according to Hindu devotees, are not worthy of worship unless they are viewed as more human-like. The belief that trees and groves should be preserved stems from man’s animistic theory of nature, the belief that spirits are present in nonhuman life forms. If one were to remove the belief of animism, it would be “possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.”¹⁹ In fact, Haberman points out that some argue “that much of the ecological crisis is due to the destruction of animistic worldviews.”²⁰ However, the belief that trees and groves are inhabited by the divine, is still a prevalent belief among Hindus. The addition of facemasks to the trees further exemplifies that unless they are viewed as more human-like, worship is not possible. Through anthropomorphism and animism, each “tree is regarded as a conscious personal being, and as such receives adoration and sacrifice.”²¹ Therefore, one may assume that nature would benefit from the devotion it will receive. However, if the goal is to protect the divine, it is likely that the actions taken will not be in the best interest of the trees and the groves.

18 *Ibid.*, 51.

19 *Ibid.*, 8.

20 *Ibid.*, 9.

21 *Ibid.*, 7.

Tree worship may allow for the belief that the trees and groves will be under proper protection, but, in fact, the practice of anthropomorphism can actually counteract the protection environmentalists work towards. When humans assign human-like characteristics to a tree, a label is placed on it indicating that the tree is “just like us.” When this occurs, humankind strips the tree of its voice. In return, the tree will not necessarily be properly cared for since the devotees will not account for what the tree needs in order to survive. Humans will instead provide different necessities that they think the tree needs because it is not regarded as simply a tree with the basic needs of a plant, but instead as an embodied form of the divine. The tree, therefore, will be given what the gods desire, which many not be what the tree itself actually needs. For instance, it is common knowledge that in order for a tree to survive, it must get ample water and sunlight. Deities, however, may desire other offerings that will not support the growth and health of a tree and may even harm it.

One example of a display of disregard for the well being of the trees is the construction of pipal tree shrines. According to the chronological hierarchy of pipal tree shrines, the most basic of them all “just a bare patch of ground at the base of an unadorned tree where water offerings are poured, flowers or other offerings are placed, and into which sticks of incense are inserted.”²² This type of shrine is the most basic; however, it is the most environmentally conscious. Next in complexity is “a circular plantar-like container,” with the plantar usually being constructed out of stone or concrete.²³ The roots of a tree are said to extend out as far as the covering of its leaves, so the placement of a concrete platform around the base of the tree prevents the roots from absorbing enough water. The next upgrade of the pipal tree shrine “entails building a temple enclosure around the entire tree, leaving a hole in the roof of the structure for a trunk to penetrate.”²⁴ This type of shrine is the most environmentally destructive and, like the others, does not consider the needs of the tree but only the desires of the gods. All of these shrines are built to facilitate proper worship, often sidelining the needs of trees in the process. The concrete platforms can serve as altars since they allow for standing, sitting, and the placement of offerings.²⁵ However, they negatively contribute to the destruction of the community’s trees given that through the practice of anthropomorphism, the voice of the tree is lost. Although there are instances where the tree is protected from being chopped down, the basic needs that must be met in order to maintain the tree are not taken into consideration.

22 Ibid., 81.

23 Ibid., 81.

24 Ibid., 85.

25 Ibid., 87.

Another demonstration of a disregard for the needs of trees is the construction of roads that interfere with sacred groves. Many of these roads were created to provide access to things such as education, employment, and more efficient travel. These roads ran along side of sacred groves, but villagers decided they “wanted to clear a path from the road to the shrine.”²⁶ In terms of devotion to the gods, this addition to the sacred groves is one that makes access to them much easier; however, the building of roads through groves does not take into account the protection of the trees in the area. As road construction began, “the forest department then began auctioning off the forest... people were allowed to keep the trees immediately surrounding the shrines.”²⁷ Although there is considerably more access to the shrines due to these roads, nature was not protected in the process. Not only did the construction of roads destroy the local habitat, but it also contributed to pollution. In fact, Kent points out that “roads were originally denied because of their supposedly polluting nature,” yet, we see that they were later constructed anyway.²⁸ The pollution and traffic caused by the newly implemented roads are incredibly destructive to the environment, revealing that Hindus do not always take into account the needs of nature; protecting the biodiversity in their countries, in this case and others, does not take precedence over worship.

In many locations where tree worship is prevalent, it is forbidden to cut down or damage a tree. This is classified by Eliza Kent as “accidental environmentalism” because the trees are inadvertently being saved from harm. She proves this point by concluding that “the religiosity surrounding sacred groves is not primitive, nor does it revolve around the worship of nature.”²⁹ It instead revolves around the worship and protection of the embodied divine. In addition, Haberman addresses this issue through the argument of Emma Tomalin. She would agree with Kent, claiming that “any protection of biodiversity was coincidental rather than intentional.”³⁰ My interview with Mrs. Love confirmed this point as well, causing us to conclude that the goal of Hindus is to protect bio-divinity, “the notion that nature is infused with divinity,”³¹ as opposed to biodiversity.

Furthermore, with regard to the second tier of my question, the worship of trees as the residence of a god causes the tree to be unintentionally harmed in attempt to preserve the home of a deity. Thus, one could argue that Hindus cannot be considered environmentalists since their intended devotion and love is solely

26 Kent, *Sacred Groves and Local Gods*, 62.

27 *Ibid.*, 61.

28 *Ibid.*, 58.

29 *Ibid.*, 10.

30 Haberman, *People Trees*, 195.

31 *Ibid.*, 195.

for the gods and is not based off of the needs of trees. Given the fact that the trees are being worshiped as embodied forms of the divine or as residences for the gods, the worshiper views a tree as more human-like through anthropomorphism. In facilitating darsan, the tree loses its identity as solely a tree, often resulting in failure to attend to the trees' needs. The shrines constructed to facilitate worship, as well as construction of roads that destroy the habitat needed for the growth of trees, prove that the needs of a tree are not taken into consideration. Eliza Kent refers to tree and grove worshipers as "accidental environmentalists" because they aim to love the sacred trees, but one could argue that they can not be considered true environmentalists because in order to fully love the trees, worshipers have to first make them more human. This causes the trees to be essentially forgotten as they are provided with necessities intended for worship as opposed to those intended for the preservation of nature.

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The Salt March Today: Gandhian Lessons for Social Media Activism

Kristóf Oltvai and McLane Sellars

From his 1906 Transvaal march to his 1947 fast unto death in Calcutta, Mahatma Gandhi's career in peaceful protest was as diverse methodologically as it was geographically and historically expansive. The "Great Soul" saw his efforts for Indian self-rule or *swaraj* as "experiments with truth," and so he often adjusted his methods of resistance against injustice based on his situation, aim, or personal spiritual positionality. Fasts, strikes, walk-outs, speeches, and a revolutionary press all played key roles in a movement that spanned two continents. Common to all of his activism, however, was the principle of *Satyagraha*, meaning "truth force," and eventually, this term was applied to all the acts of large-scale, nonviolent resistance Gandhi organized or inspired. Many of Gandhi's initiatives did not pan out; indeed, much of his spiritual vision for India remains totally unrealized. Nonetheless, if there was one high point of the Indian independence movement, it has to be the 1930 "Salt Satyagraha" or "Dandi March," an event so successful and so quintessentially Gandhian that at the turn of the third millennium, *The Economist* noted retrospectively: "more than any other event, the salt march, exemplifying his tactic of non-violence, gave India's struggle for liberation its Gandhian stamp."¹

The Salt Satyagraha began the morning of March 12th, 1930, when Gandhi and a cohort of seventy-eight trained activists departed from their intentional community in Sabarmati, marching southeast towards the coast near Dandi, a small village in Western India.² Their aim was to defy the monopoly on salt imposed by the British, and by collecting naturally occurring salt from the seashore, defy the British Raj. Gandhi's march lasted three and a half weeks, covered 240 miles, and drew hundreds of thousands of onlookers and participants.³ Local, national, and international media news outlets excitedly covered the suspenseful procession, which commanded enormous popular attention. After collecting salt at Dandi before a crowd of 12,000, Gandhi continued down the coast, teaching coastal communities how to produce their own salt and giving speeches on Indian home rule. Over 60,000 were jailed as a result of participating in the nonviolent protest.⁴

1 "The decline of empire: Gandhi, salt, and freedom," *The Economist*, December 31, 1999.

2 Dennis Dalton, *Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 91.

3 Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 20.

4 *Ibid.*, 21.

Superficially, this may seem similar to previous *satyagrahas*. What then made the Salt March so distinct and successful? And how can its lessons be borne out in our world 85 years later?

If we look at the historical record, we see that the Salt Satyagraha's success can be largely attributed to two things: inclusivity and publicity. First, the Salt Satyagraha was a very inclusive, participatory campaign, and Gandhi's choice of salt as political symbol was central to this goal. The British monopoly and taxation on salt, first imposed in 1882, was for Indians a daily reminder of British rule, as salt was a primary dietary need.⁵ This act particularly oppressed the poorest classes who already struggled to make ends meet. Among them, peasant women felt this oppression most keenly, as obtaining salt was vital to managing the household. By making salt collection his the central focus of his campaign, Gandhi created avenues of protest for people who otherwise had few political outlets, thus inviting hundreds of thousands to the struggle for Indian independence. The Salt March also made local participation easy. As Gandhi made his way down to the Dandi coast, he visited dozens of villages, recruiting followers and urging resistance to British rule. At one point, so many people joined the campaign that the column of marchers extending behind Gandhi reached a length of two miles.⁶ Thus, the entire Salt Satyagraha, from its choice of salt as a symbol to its act of a cross-county "march," was innovatively participatory.

Second, the Salt Satyagraha was a remarkably well-publicized event. As scholar Dennis Dalton says, Gandhi "provided ample advance publicity" and timed the march to the advantage of the press, which helped to expand the already significant international interest in Gandhi's political activity.⁷ He let both domestic and foreign newspapers know about the March, and the latter's coverage became very important in gathering foreign support for the home-rule movement. The media coverage even involved documentary filmmakers, a novelty at the time.⁸ What's more, given the length of the march and the pre-announced final destination, the whole campaign was laden with ever-increasing suspense as onlookers waited with bated breath for Gandhi to collect salt in Dandi. Gandhi's sense of timing and political artistry helped play up the event and bring it to a larger audience.

The Salt Satyagraha was therefore successful not because it diverged from previous resistance initiatives, but because it combined all the separate elements of the Gandhian philosophy into a kind of "perfect storm." It was Gandhi at his

5 Ibid., 91.

6 Homer A. Jack, *The Gandhi Reader: A Source Book of His Life and Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1956), 237.

7 Dalton, *Gandhi*, 107.

8 Ibid.

prime: a skilled orchestrator of social movements with an ability to weave an inclusive and highly publicized protest. Comparable to the context of Gandhi's work, the twenty-first century likewise needs well-organized political action. So how can Gandhi speak to us today?

One of the most prominent and promising developments in social activism is the use of social media, which has helped start large-scale movements like the Arab Spring and Euromaidan. Commentators have praised the potential of social media networks for creating political change. And it makes sense: if we compare social media activism to Gandhi's activism, it seems the case that social media can one-up the level of inclusivity and publicity that made older social movements such as Gandhi's so successful. After all, social media activists have an incredibly pervasive and interconnected network at their fingertips, with approximately 1.4 billion people using Facebook on a regular basis.⁹ Activists can enter into the world of everyday social interaction with great ease, making a seemingly typical website home to political protest, just as Gandhi imbued an commonplace household item with political meaning on the public scale. This digital innovation has the potential to be far more inclusive and public than Gandhi's movements, which were limited by the technology of his time.

However, when considering the success of social media in propagating political and social activism, the record is mixed. In 2012, for example, over 100 million YouTube users viewed the viral "KONY 2012" video, encouraging viewers to pressure the U.S. government to send troops to Central Africa and capture rebel warlord Joseph Kony. The movement gained ground for a time, raising \$28 million for the video's creators, Invisible Children, Inc. By 2014, however, the *Washington Post* was asking if "Stop Kony" had been "a failure."¹⁰ Kony himself was still at large, his militant organization still strong. Invisible Children itself faced dire financial struggles as donations had suddenly stopped pouring in. Very little change actually occurred besides accruing poorly-allocated funds. The *Washington Post* asked a particularly poignant question about this fiasco and, more generally, the role of social media in activism efforts: "Once you have the online support, how do you use it for real world impact? It's an important question, and if an answer could be found it may point to better things."¹¹

The Arab Spring is a poignant counterexample. Researchers and the media have long noted that social media was critical in organizing protests across the

9 "Leading social networks worldwide as of March 2015, ranked by number of active users (in millions)," *Statista*, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>.

10 Adam Taylor, "Was #Kony2012 a failure?," *The Washington Post*, December 16, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/12/16/was-kony2012-a-failure/>.

11 *Ibid.*

Arab world from Morocco to Syria, protests that would eventually lead to six governmental collapses and three civil wars. If we look to the archetypal example of Egypt, scholars agree that initially, social media activism resembled the techniques of the “Stop Kony” movement. Information about the Mubarak government’s wrongdoing and criticism directed against it were shared across social media platforms, resulting in a generalized “awareness.”¹² Yet the Arab Spring resulted in profound social change. So what was the difference between Arab Spring and KONY 2012? And, more broadly, what can sustain social media activism?

Throughout his life, Gandhi stressed the importance of action over empty discussion and philosophizing, which was reflected in his insistence on finding accessible ways for Indians to become politically involved. Yet it must also be noted that these avenues of involvement were always deeply physical, allowing for individuals to use their bodies. In the Salt Satyagraha, Gandhi empowered the masses to physically involve themselves by collecting salt; all of the preliminary discussion, awareness, and publicity of the issues at hand moved beyond themselves towards actual physical action. On the other hand, KONY 2012, while highly public and accessing millions more people than Gandhi, stayed mostly within the realm of the virtual and discursive. Beyond clicking a button on a website to donate money or the vague call to “pressure your government,” the cause provided no opportunities for involvement. Viewers had little physical outlet for their new awareness of the issue besides token support, perhaps “liking” a page or sharing a video, contributing to the ultimate failure of the movement to create lasting change. Whereas Gandhi’s movement was action-oriented and profoundly democratic, KONY 2012 was stuck in the realm of the virtual with little avenue for everyday people to become more meaningfully and actively involved. Even empirical research, such as a 2014 study carried out at the University of British Columbia, confirms the importance of this Gandhian insight, finding that individuals are actually *less* likely to participate meaningfully in a cause when limited to “liking” a page or displaying a small symbolic token, such as a ribbon. Rather, what *does* motivate individuals is the ability to express their values and convictions in a meaningful, physical way.¹³

This creation of meaningful, physical means of political action – rather than

12 M. Rabindranath and Sujay Kapil, “Social Media and the Arab Spring,” *Media Watch* 6, no. 1 (2015): 130, <http://www.media-watchglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/1btk6nnh1tkqhw15f6w2h/Media-Watch-January-2015-Issue-0011715.pdf#page=126>.

13 Kirk Kristofferson, Katherine White, and John Palozo, “The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 40, no. 6 (2014): 1149-66.

virtual, token support – defined the impact of the Arab Spring as well.¹⁴ Facebook events, for example, were used to organize real-world protests. Activists used text messaging and distributed flyers to spread the word to those without Internet access. It was when the people started showing up *en masse* in physical form, and not just posting and tweeting about alleged injustices, that the Egyptian government began to take the protesters' grievances seriously. Eventually, Internet companies themselves became directly involved, allowing protesters to "text to tweet" in order to get around the Mubarak regime's web blackout. Discourse moved from being "internal" to the Internet platform to being "external" and affecting everyday activity.¹⁵

If social media activism truly wants to capitalize on its potential for inclusivity and publicity, it must learn to point beyond its own networks. Social media activism has the ability to transform platforms of everyday interaction into places of protest and political change. To succeed, though, it must recognize that it cannot be the be-all-end-all of protest. Social media must move beyond the digital space and into the physical, beyond token "likes" into meaningful effort, if it is to be truly effective. Gandhi, ever a man of action, would have nothing less.

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14 This is not to say that the Arab Spring was a "success," or even that it has ended. Its consequences are still ongoing in the form of civil war in Libya and Syria – a historical development definitively antithetical to the nonviolent Gandhian ethic. In some Arab countries, protests only incited minor changes. News media have gone as far to call Tunisia the Arab Spring's "sole success story" ("Why Tunisia, the Arab Spring's sole success story, suffers from Islamist violence," *The Washington Post*, 18 March 2015). We are merely suggesting that the Arab Spring was effective in mobilizing citizens. As *The Economist* points out, however, the liberatory effects of the Arab Spring may yet be consummated: "The Arab Spring was always better described as an awakening: the real revolution is not so much in the street as in the mind . . . the journey may take decades. But it is still welcome" ("The Arab Spring: has it failed?," *The Economist*, 13 June 2013). Gandhi's goals for India were similarly not all achieved, or if so, sometimes incurred the cost of violence (e.g. the Partition).

15 Rabindranath and Kapil, "Social Media and the Arab Spring," 129.

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