

**Truth-Telling and  
Other Ecclesial  
Practices of Resistance**

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Chapter 5

Complicity and the Christological  
Path of Ecclesial Resistance

*Summons to a New Catechesis for a  
Time of Despair*

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OVERTURE

An acute problem of Christian conscience today is that of complicity in structures of malice and injustice. If all are entangled in webs of racism, sexism, and classism (the unholy trinity opposite the Apostle's assertion of the Beloved Community in Christ, Gal 3:26–28), there is accordingly no simple exit, neither individualist nor collectivist. There is, however, a way through the sinful web of complicity by the incision of the Christ-event. Just so, the plight of unwilling guilt, which accompanies this path and afflicts the conscientious believer as in Romans 7, cries out for illumination.

Such illumination would distinguish between universal sinfulness and relative guilt as between relations *coram deo* and *coram mundo*, respectively; this illumination is brought by the gospel which breaks in like a thief into a strong man's house. The distinction points those thus set free from captivity away from moralistic or utopian posturing for the re-engineering of individual or society. It points them instead to the struggling life of the ecclesia as the form of Christological resistance given here and now under prevailing structures, provided only that redemption is taken to affirm the goodness of the oppressed creation by way of new creative work for the vindication of the suffering (as per Romans 8's "redemption of our bodies").

If cooptation of this resistance by the dynamic "governmentality" (i.e., "governing rationality," Foucault) of contemporary neoliberal<sup>1</sup> structuring of malice in injustice is to be averted, the theological need is for a new catechesis in congregational life. This new catechesis would teach the "power of the powerless" (Havel)—"living in the truth" within a "system" of

mendacity—and this “upward calling” (Solzhenitsyn) as the redemptive path of holy resistance through the tangle of complicity and despair.

### COMPLICITY AND DESPAIR

One leg pushes to free the other from the morass, but in the process sinks itself more deeply into it. A foot pushes free only to land anew in mire. Resistance thus seems futile; reaction only makes one complicit in new ways. In this counsel of despair, activism at length turns to resignation. The defeated individual finds serenity in his Epicurean garden or her Buddhist-mystical *Gelassenheit*.

The foregoing paragraph is a reflection to be made as recently as the transformation of 1960s protest into the 1970s Me Generation’s culture of narcissism; yet it is as old as Paul the Apostle and Luther his interpreter: knowledge of sinfulness leads to despair of self. Such is our contemporary plight. So Wendy Brown concludes her exemplary analysis of neoliberalism as the “governing rationality” spreading across the globe today: “we know what is wrong with this world, but cannot articulate a road out or a viable global alternative ... we are reduced to reform and resistance ... action as reaction.... [But] the Left’s predicament refracts a ubiquitous, if unavowed, exhaustion and despair in Western civilization ... Neoliberalism’s perverse theology of markets rests on this land of the scorched belief in the modern.”<sup>2</sup>

Brown’s precisely articulated despair fairly begs for a renewed theological grounding of the human subject with attendant illumination of the modern self’s ironic denouement today in paralysis. In an important study that aims to liberate Luther’s Paulinism for new appropriations in the Global South, Vitor Westhelle shrewdly observes, “If the heirs of the Reformation paid more attention to the fact that the reformers eliminated the difference between sinful acts and concupiscence, they might acknowledge the immense difficulties twentieth-century European theology had in explaining *theologically* how citizens who abide by the law can still connive in systems that standardize evil. One is a sinner and a murderer not only by pulling the trigger, but already by being part of the system that condones and promotes it.”<sup>3</sup>

This rebuke contains a bold claim for the Christian doctrine of human sinfulness. Complicity is, by this reading, a socially “objective” state in which desire is captured and, being captive, takes the collaborative form of malicious envy—even in would-be “resistance.” In a feedback loop, the malice of envy becomes in turn the energy which powers the social system that standardizes evil, configuring also its supposed dissidents. Exposition of these dense claims will be provided in what follows as we turn to Havel and Solzhenitsyn.

Westhelle in any case goes on immediately to discuss the systemic blindness of complicity to its own captivation by way of Hannah Arendt’s notion of the “banality of evil.” Analyzing the testimony of Adolf Eichmann, Arendt came to the daunting realization of Eichmann’s “sincere”<sup>4</sup> struggle against personal inclinations to save some Jews as a “temptation” contrary to his Kantian sense of duty as configured within the National Socialist regime.<sup>5</sup> Because of this insight, both the judges at Eichmann’s trial and Arendt herself struggled to articulate precisely the special criminal responsibility of Eichmann for obeying orders and doing his duty by masterminding the sprawling logistics of the Holocaust. “If everyone is guilty,” Arendt finally expressed the conundrum, “then no one is guilty.”<sup>6</sup> Christian insight into universal sinfulness cannot descend into a fog in which the difference between victim and perpetrator is no longer discerned or prosecuted.

Westhelle parses this conundrum with the Lutheran-Pauline distinction that, while spiritual sinfulness *coram deo* is universal, criminal guilt *coram hominibus* is particular and relative. He concludes that one’s position in the power hierarchy determines the degree of responsibility and guilt, while giving no one unlimited responsibility and guilt, nor completely absolving anyone. The crucial insight here, if also offensive to modern sensibilities, is that everyone who participates in the system is passively, if not actively, guilty of the system’s sinfulness. Also the one who actively resists its criminality remains passively guilty by sheer dint of participating in the system, which as master configures its own resistance. Note well, however: the “alien,” as identified by the system of malice and injustice, is as such hapless, a *non-participant* yet present within it. It is “mere life” and thus rather purely its pitiful *victim*.<sup>7</sup>

One can evade this troubling insight into the tangles of complicity, paradoxically, by consigning it to the exceptional case of Nazism as some kind of aberration over against the historical march of progress. But the insight applies broadly to modern social systems, liberal democracy under today’s regime of neoliberalism included. In my 2013 study, *Before Auschwitz*, I accordingly warned that fascism is neither a reversion from modern progress to medieval barbarism (the usual liberal interpretation of Nazism as a special relapse), nor is it the logic of capitalism driven to an extreme by internal contradictions (the Marxist interpretation). Fascism is rather an endemic *modern* possibility, where “modern” indicates the rival possibilities of realizing the Cartesian-Kantian sovereign self, whether in fascism, in Marxism-Leninism, or in (today) neoliberalism,<sup>8</sup> even though all these end ironically in bondage and thus at length in despair.

Václav Havel saw *precisely this* about *us* in the West and made a point of it in his magnificent essay, “The Power of the Powerless,” to which we shall carefully attend as our catechetical primer on authentic resistance under

conditions of intractable complicity. The web of complicity through which human beings sacrifice their integrity through ideological rationalization to the "system" is not, he wrote, "the result of some incomprehensible misunderstanding of history, nor is it history somehow gone off its rails."<sup>9</sup> Rather, as Havel detected from within the Brezhnev-"normalized" Czechoslovakia of the 1970s, there is "in modern humanity a certain tendency towards the creation, or at least the toleration, of such a system. There is obviously something in human beings which responds to this system, something they reflect and accommodate, something within them which paralyzes every other effort of their better selves to revolt ... alienated humanity supports this system as its own involuntary master plan, as a degenerate image of its own degeneration, as a record of people's own failure as individuals."<sup>10</sup>

Havel here presumes, as one must in an analysis of "alienation," that there is underlying the modern social systems some "proper" humanity. He writes that the essential aims of life are present "naturally" in every person, and he specifies these aims as longing for dignity, for moral integrity, for the free expression of oneself, and a sense of transcendence. Havel in this way seeks a different source for human agency than those provided by the materialist Marx's *homo faber* or the idealist Kant's ethical subject. The source is, I daresay, the "theological subject." Readers may recognize in his list fragments (vestiges) of the biblical doctrine of humanity as made in the image of God for likeness to God.<sup>11</sup> This calling designates the theological subject.<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, this notion of human calling *by God*, of the human *vocation*, is integral to Havel's crypto-theological analysis of alienation.

Because of our thorough-going historicism, a muted appeal to the theological tradition such as Havel made seemed to be the only, lonely recourse from within the immanent plane of complicity-cum-mendacity. There is for us at the end of modernity no *philosophical* foundation available anymore to identify an underlying human "nature" or "essence" which, on account of its timeless substantiality, naturally resists its own supposed "alienation" and thus is always there to awaken, to activate, to arise in revolt as the "political" or "revolutionary" subject, agent of its own liberation. All that remains is theology's witness to God who calls and humanity as called; yet, in Havel's Euro-America, such witness is but the muted resonance of a fading memory.

In just this *desperate* way, however, Havel's crypto-theology is relevant for us in the United States today as we endure the demoralizing catastrophe of the Trump presidency, including a merely political "resistance" which increasingly apes precisely what it otherwise rightly despises in the scoundrel-president. While the "post-totalitarian system" of communist Czechoslovakia which Havel described had evolved, as he acknowledged, from the historical encounter between communist dictatorship and capitalist consumer society, Havel's analysis of "living a lie" bore a deep connection

with the sibling unwillingness of Western consumers to sacrifice material blessings for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity. Thus his reflection on living in truth in a system of mendacity issues, as he explicitly notes, in "a kind of warning to the West, revealing to it its own latent tendencies."

For in truth we were in the 1970s but *sibling* rivals! "The post-totalitarian system is only one aspect ... of the general inability of *modern* humanity to be the master of its own situation..." (emphasis added). Note the irony of Havel's analysis of the paradoxical powerlessness to which the modern dream of sovereignty comes. The sovereign self of modernity becomes enslaved by the pursuit of mastery, though in varying ways. "The deep crisis shared with Western consumerism drags humanity helplessly along by the automatism of global technological civilization" while "there is no real evidence that Western democracy can offer solutions that are any more profound."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the West "people are manipulated in ways that are infinitely more subtle and refined than the brutal methods used in the post-totalitarian societies, as Solzhenitsyn pointed out in his 1978 Harvard lecture."<sup>14</sup> We will capitalize on Havel's allusion here to an exemplary resister, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, in the conclusion to this chapter.

The conundrum—that even the awoken who would resist remains entangled in the system's sinfulness, that rebuke of another for complicity rebounds like a boomerang on the one who hurls it—gives rise to a desperate search for the missing "political" or "revolutionary" subject as may be seen in Alain Badiou's<sup>15</sup> (or Wendy Brown's) neo-Marxist quests for alternatives to neoliberalism's purchase of the human self, or in Edward Nik-Khah's similar nostalgia for the Kantian subject in his exposé of the idolatry of treating the unfettered market as an "omniscient" information processor.<sup>16</sup> If all we have as an alternative is such philosophical wishful thinking and/or nostalgia for a modern subject who can both see through the fog of systemic mendacity and act against natural inclinations to choose rewardless duty to universal values for their own sake, our plight is beyond redemption.<sup>17</sup> But in truth, not only is this lost Kantianism fatally predicated on an invidious anthropological dualism,<sup>18</sup> it arose in tandem with modern Europe's post-Christendom project of global colonialism and constitutes its deep rationalization. Not accidentally, Kant pit his "Tribunal of Reason" precisely against the theological subject.<sup>19</sup> Just so, the utopian dream of the modern subject in due course comes to grief in either the Marxist "god that failed"<sup>20</sup> or the liberal Mark Lilla's "still-born God."<sup>21</sup>

Still confident modern philosophers, like Lewis White Beck, opine that the Kantian subject was justified as a rebuke to Lutheran pessimism and quietism,<sup>22</sup> as grounded in its doctrine of inherited sinfulness, descended from Augustine's doctrine of the sin of origin. Indeed, as Luther himself put

system's general automatism and servants of its self-determined goals...." How do these passive victims become active, if unwitting collaborators with their victimizers? "[U]ltimately, and with no external urging, they come to treat any non-involvement as an abnormality, as arrogance, as an attack on themselves ... the post-totalitarian system makes everyone instruments of a mutual totality, the auto-totality of society."<sup>28</sup> In this way, Havel likens the profile of a genuine resistance to the member of a dysfunctional family who ceases any longer to enable the cover-up of the family secret. Thus this very "pillar"—of living in an ideology which systematically deceives—provides a very unstable foundation for the system. "It works only as long as people are willing to live within the lie."<sup>29</sup>

So precisely in his powerlessness, as both victim and unwitting agent of the lie, the greengrocer possesses a latent power: simply to tell the truth. Havel "imagines" that one day the greengrocer just "snaps" and stops displaying the party platitudes merely in order to ingratiate himself within the system which despises him and which he in truth despises in turn. Havel calls this imagined revolt "an attempt to *live within the truth*."<sup>30</sup> The Johannine echoes are palpable. This breach of truth-telling seems an "arrogant abnormality," as the snapped greengrocer now appears as an impolitic disruptor in the eyes of peers. Nonetheless he exposes, as Havel writes referring to the well-known fable, the "nakedness of the emperor." Truth-telling breaks the spell of the systemic lie in principle and thus threatens it entirely. Truth-telling ignites and spreads like a contagion because "under the orderly surface of the life of lies ... there slumbers the hidden sphere of life in its real aims of its hidden openness to truth"<sup>31</sup>—a crypto-theological reference once again to the *imago Dei*. Truth-telling finds an ally here in the invisible but omnipresent sphere of authentic humanity.

From this, however, Havel draws a perhaps surprising implication: living in the truth does not, and need not, "participate in any direct struggle for power."<sup>32</sup> Attestation of truth within systemic mendacity is a politically vulnerable witness in terms of what the system regards as power. The revolt against manipulation made by truth-telling manifests merely "a free expression of life" to which no one would attribute "any potential political significance, not to mention explosive power."<sup>33</sup> The martyr-testimony—recall the Johannine scene of Christ before Pilate—is made by someone "who is unwilling to sacrifice his or her human identity to politics, or rather who does not believe in a politics that requires such a sacrifice."<sup>34</sup>

By contrast, a "person who has been seduced by the consumer value system, whose identity is dissolved in an amalgam of the accoutrements of mass civilization, and who has no roots in the order of being, no sense of responsibility for anything higher than his or her personal survival, is a *demoralized* person. The system depends on this demoralization, deepens it, is in fact a

projection of it into society."<sup>35</sup> Echoing down into the spiritually exhausted "post-humans" of Euro-America today, the demoralized person asks with Pilate, "What is truth?"

Pilate, captain of the demoralized and guardian of their order, is in charge. Steel upon steel, Pilate prevails, and if not, those who would prevail against him become themselves new captains of the newly demoralized. Accordingly, movements for living in the truth, Havel avers, "for the most part originate elsewhere, in the far broader area of the 'pre-political,' where living within a lie confronts living within the truth, that is, where the demands of the system conflict with the real aims of life."<sup>36</sup> The system generally fails to appreciate the significance of such "pre-political events and processes" that provide the living humus from which genuine change may sprout and spring into a new humanity.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, more than ever before such authentic "change will have to derive from human existence, from the fundamental reconstitution of the position of people in the world, their relationships to themselves and to each other, and to the universe ... it must derive from profound existential and moral changes in society."<sup>38</sup> The evangelical call to conversion thus sounds from Havel's crypto-theology.

Havel accordingly called for the cultivation of "independent life" within the system which would be marked by "a relatively high degree of inner emancipation." He envisioned everything from philosophizing to artistic activity to free civic associations as arenas in which "living within the truth becomes articulate and materializes in a visible way."<sup>39</sup> The truthful life includes such pre-political *action* to make room for the genuine aims of life. By the same token, this program of living within the truth must be "fundamentally hostile towards the notion of violent change—simply because it places its faith in violence."<sup>40</sup> Faith in violence, beneath the veneer, is politics as usual. Zealot proponents of violent change are not "radical enough."<sup>41</sup> What would be?

Citing the philosopher Jan Patočka, Havel argues that radical change, change which goes to the root, change which converts captivated desire is the *responsibility* that we carry with us everywhere (*imago Dei*, again); as such, "we must accept it and grasp it *here, now*, in this place and time where the Lord has set us down, and that we cannot lie our way out of it by moving somewhere else ... Christianity is an example of an opposite way out: it is a point of departure for me here and now—but only because anyone, anywhere, at any time, may avail themselves of it."<sup>42</sup>

So the Christian doctrine of vocation as "pre-political" conscience, "responsible to God for the world,"<sup>43</sup> does not offer an alternative program within "the spirit and methods of traditional politics." Its dissent is instead organic to "real, everyday struggle for a better life here and now ... the everyday, thankless and never ending struggle of human beings to live more freely, truthfully, and in quiet dignity."<sup>44</sup> This is true because "the most intrinsic and

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fundamental confrontation between human beings and the system takes place at a level incomparably more profound than that of traditional politics."<sup>45</sup>

Havel, whose covert theological inspiration only thus slightly surfaces in the end, takes us no further. Indeed, we do not know how to proceed out of the morass, he confesses in conclusion, foreshadowing Wendy Brown's *political* despair. In sad fact the post-1989 transition to liberal democracy in Czechoslovakia, and Havel's own journey "to the Castle and back" as a democratic politician cannot be said to have brought about the profound remoralization to which his essay summoned. On reflection, however, to affirm responsibility apart from the Word that calls and thus empowers its own response is utopian; needed is news of One who has broken into the system of complicity-cum-mendacity to recapture its prisoners. The space taken up by this news in pre-political culture is the life of the congregation of Christ.

Christian theology in Luther's tradition that recovers its nerve in our time of moral catastrophe would see in congregational life the matrix of an organic and principled resistance to the commoditization of all things which is capturing desire under the regime of neoliberal governmentality. This would mean, of course, re-orienting the line of battle to the pre-political level of culture, as Havel diagnosed, in the place of the clumsy political interventions, both left and right, at the level of church bureaucracy lobbying that are commonplace in American Christianity. Such interventions presume politics as usual. But we are in much greater danger than business as usual allows.

Recall here the "state of exception" (Agamben) which scapegoats aliens. Refocusing to a new catechesis for congregational life neither declines nor minimizes the sacred duty always to bear a true witness in public against victimization at the hands of power, especially for the alien in one's midst, as the Law of Moses frequently reminds liberated Hebrews to bear in mind that they were once aliens as well. The Christian is under the divine imperative to bear true witness on behalf of the defenseless before the court of public opinion. Yet true witness is precisely not an alternative political program, and indeed witness in its integrity is jeopardized when it becomes instrumentalized by the competing partisanship for political power, also in liberal democracy.

So what would instruct an authentic resistance, to be forged as congregational life under our present circumstances? In conclusion, we take up Havel's hint by turning to Solzhenitsyn's Harvard Address to probe the more specifically and explicitly theological contours of authentic resistance, not in normalized Czechoslovakia or the U.S.S.R., but today.

#### SOLZHENITSYN'S SUMMONS TO THEOSIS<sup>46</sup>

Solzhenitsyn's 1978 Harvard Address was years ahead of its time. In its own time it was notorious for offending the neoliberal sensibilities of the elite American audience gathered at a Harvard commencement, even though at the outset Solzhenitsyn alluded to the commandment in Ephesians about speaking the truth in love; he intended to speak as "a friend, not as an adversary." But truth-telling in contemporaneous America, no less than within Havel's communist Czechoslovakia, offends, in so far as it exposes systemic lies which darkness's denizens prefer to light (John 3:19-21). In any case, one hardly need agree with every characterization Solzhenitsyn made of the Western world to appreciate today the *prescience* of his analysis from thirty years ago—the very time, according to scholars, of the ascendancy of neoliberalism.

Already in 1978 Solzhenitsyn foresaw the decline of the superpower rivalry of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. and the emergence of a multipolar world. He traced the present decline of the West to modern Europe's "easy" colonization of the globe in the nineteenth century, "not only without anticipating any real resistance, but usually with contempt for any possible values in the conquered people's approach to life." This "blindness of superiority" is still operative today, however, in "the assumption that the rest of the world should be pursuing Western pluralistic democracy and adopting the Western way of life." In this latter assumption, the colonialist sense of superiority only twists and turns in order to endure; under the banner of economic "development,"<sup>47</sup> the nineteenth century white man's burden to lift up little brown brothers by teaching an honest day's labor is not abandoned, but merely modernized by dint of economic rationality. Critical awareness of the crimes of colonialism and the dim awareness that these crimes continue in "globalization" and "development" work a paralyzing guilt. This guilt manifests as a loss of "civic courage" which is "particularly noticeable among the ruling and intellectual elites."

Needless to say, Solzhenitsyn was hardly recommending the kind of machismo recklessness in foreign relations that George W. Bush would consequently pursue. Rather he was criticizing the contemporary West for its root belief that "man lives in order to be free and pursue happiness," a belief that cannot co-exist with conscientious courage, personal or civic, willing to risk or sacrifice for the common good. The fatal error of consumerist materialism consists in one "psychological detail" that has been "overlooked: the constant desire to have still more things and a still better life[;] ... the struggle to this end imprint many Western faces with worry and even depression, though it is

customary to carefully conceal such feelings." Envy is insatiable; the solution is not to satisfy it, but to extinguish it.

The 1987 analysis of envy anticipates the frank confession of the neoliberal credo by Gordon Gekko in the 1987 film, *Wall Street*: "The point is, ladies and gentlemen, that greed—for lack of a better word—is good. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms—greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge—has marked the upward surge of mankind." A better word would be *envy*<sup>48</sup>—envy as ancient as the serpent's *sicut Deus eritis*—as greed is only the derivative form envy takes among those rich in things.

In this vein, Solzhenitsyn captures the dynamic of nascent neoliberalism: "This active and tense competition comes to dominate all human thought and does not in the least open a way to free spiritual development." Who would ever renounce an almost "unlimited freedom in the choice of pleasures ... to risk one's precious life in defense of the common good?"

Solzhenitsyn next extends his critique to the litigious, as he puts it, "legalistic" Western culture deriving from its sole shared good of protecting the individual's assertion of rights; but this effects a social world where cross-bearing self-restraint or even a renunciation of rights to bear another's burdens would "simply sound absurd." Rather, legalistic adjudication becomes as inevitable as it is protracted, in that the individualistic assertion of rights must come into continual conflict with rights asserted by others, where and when a legal order protecting predatory competition is all that binds these free individuals together through regimes of procedural justice. "Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relationships, this creates an atmosphere of spiritual mediocrity that paralyzes man's noblest impulses." Not merely mediocrity, but the liberal imperative to maximize personal freedom grants ever-expanding space to destructive and irresponsible impulses. "For example, against the misuse of liberty for moral violence against young people such as motion pictures full of pornography, crime and horror ... life organized legalistically has thus shown its inability to defend itself against the corrosion of evil."

Blind faith in freedom "stems from a humanistic and benevolent concept according to which man—the master of the world—does not bear any evil within himself, and all the defects of life are caused by misguided social systems"—recalling here Havel's point that misguided social systems exist symbiotically with the modern self's craving for autonomy.

The freedom of the press is likewise corrupted by a blind faith in its own innocence. "There is no true moral responsibility for distortion or disproportion. What sort of responsibility does a journalist have to the readership or to history?" In-depth analysis "of a problem is anathema to the press; it is contrary to its nature. The press merely picks out sensational formulas." In spite of the alleged freedom of the press, someone coming from the totalitarian

East is especially surprised at the conformism manifest in the supposedly competing media: this newcomer finds "generally accepted patterns of judgment and maybe common corporate interests, the sum effect being not competition but unification ... in fashionable trends of thought ... hemmed in by the idols of the prevailing fad."

Solzhenitsyn's exercise in prophetic iconoclasm draws to an end with the observation that many in the West who are dissatisfied with their own society (for the very reasons that he has given in this speech) are swaying toward socialism; yet he begs that his criticism of the Western system not be taken to suggest socialism as an alternative.<sup>49</sup> In the same breath, however, he says that he would not recommend Western capitalism as a model or ideal for the transformation of his homeland. For all the reasons he has given he believes that, just as Marxism-Leninism is now bankrupt, "the Western way of life is less and less likely to become the leading model."

With his refusal of these two rival versions of modernity, Solzhenitsyn anticipates the Islamic revolution against what "could be called rationalistic humanism or humanistic autonomy: the proclaimed and practiced autonomy of man from any higher force above him." He calls the shared trajectory of the Renaissance through the Enlightenment onto the contemporary West and its sibling rival, the "naturalized humanism" of Marxism-Leninism, historically inevitable because the Middle Ages had become "an intolerable despotic repression of man's physical nature in favor of the spiritual one." But the one-sided over-correction by modernity "did not admit the existence of intrinsic evil in man, nor did it see any task higher than the attainment of happiness on earth." In the decline of the West today, it becomes increasingly visible that "mere freedom per se does not in the least solve all the problems of human life and even adds a number of new ones ... when the individual is granted boundless freedom with no purpose, simply for the satisfaction of his whims."

In sum, the development of modernity represents "a total emancipation from the moral heritage of Christian centuries with their great reserves of mercy and sacrifice ... man's sense of responsibility to God and society has grown dimmer and dimmer ... all the celebrated technological achievements of progress ... do not redeem the twentieth century's moral poverty." What has been lost is the sense "of a permanent, earnest duty so that one's life journey may become, above all, an experience of moral growth: to leave life a better human being than one started it." So Solzhenitsyn concluded by pointing to the way through our morass with the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis: "No one on earth has any other way left but—upward." Or in the words of Michelle Obama, "When they go low, we go high." Does "resistance" today remember this?



Can we imagine a new catechesis along these lines which would nurture the life of our congregations as creative minorities in the darkness of this present culture? We can if we begin with Westhelle's Lutheran insight into the apocalyptic "incision" of the proclamation of the in-breaking Christ who reveals our bondage in the act of delivering from it and re-forming us as theological subjects. We can if we connect this proclamation and new-formation redemptively to Havel's Johannine venture that truth-telling in the world of mendacity finds a hidden ally with the authentic, but alienated human vocation, made in the image of God for likeness to God. We can if with Solzhenitsyn we soberly see from the moral ruins of the twentieth century on which we uneasily stand—Hitler, Hiroshima, and Stalin—that in Christ we have no way through the morass but *upward*.

## NOTES

1. For present purposes, let me stipulate without arguing the point: I understand *neoliberalism*, not as classical liberalism's affirmation of the wealth-producing efficiency of free markets exchanging goods and services, but as the generalized paradigm of market exchange as omniscient processor in all domains of life, resulting in the commoditization of all things. See further Paul R. Hinlicky, "Luther in Marx," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, 3 vols., ed. Derek R. Nelson and Paul R. Hinlicky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), vol. 2:322–41.
2. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 220–21.
3. Vitor Westhelle, *Transfiguring Luther: The Planetary Promise of Luther's Theology*, foreword by David Tracy (Cambridge: James Clark, 2017), 236–337.
4. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised and enlarged edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 146.
5. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 277, 135–37.
6. See the discussion in Paul R. Hinlicky, *Before Auschwitz: What Christian Theology Must Learn from the Rise of Nazism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 109–17.
7. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
8. On the sovereign self of modernity, see Paul R. Hinlicky, "Augustine, Luther and the Critique of the Sovereign Self," ch. 8 in *On the Apocalyptic and Human Agency: Conversations with Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna and Deanna A. Thompson (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 81–92.
9. Václav Havel, *Living in Truth*, ed. Jan Vladislav (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990), 53.
10. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 54.

11. On this theological anthropology, see Paul R. Hinlicky, *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 281–92, 341–48.
12. Westhelle provides an excellent dissection of Lynn White Jr.'s influential confusion of the image of God anthropology with the sovereign self of modernity in *Transfiguring Luther*, 137–40.
13. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 115.
14. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 116.
15. See the critique in Brent Adkins and Paul R. Hinlicky, *Rethinking Philosophy and Theology with Deleuze: A New Cartography* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 193–202.
16. Philip Mirowski and Nik-Khah, *The Knowledge We Have Lost in Information: The History of Information in Modern Economics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
17. Not to mention Marx's hope for the emergence—precisely through the purifying fire of capitalist exploitation—of a revolutionary proletariat, a universal class shorn of particular attachments with nothing to lose but its chains.
18. Adkins and Hinlicky, *Rethinking Philosophy*, 11–36.
19. Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties," in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 233–328. See Paul R. Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken: Fates of Theology from Luther through Leibniz* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 43–87.
20. Arthur Koestler, *The God That Failed*, ed. Richard H. Crossman, foreword by David C. Engerman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 15–75.
21. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and The Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007).
22. Lewis White Beck holds that Luther's "theodicy" at the conclusion of the *Bondage of the Will* "is the source of the strict Lutheran sense of the helplessness of man, the futility of practice, and the indifference or even evil of works." In contrast, the "modern world, with its emphasis on practice, required Arminianism, a polite Protestant name for the Pelagian heresy; hence Luther's denial of man's freedom did not make fruitful contact with humane activism, while Calvin's did." This modern need for Pelagian activism, Beck generalizes, is the reason why: "the German Enlightenment was secularized Calvinism, not Lutheranism, even though almost every German philosopher from Leibniz to Kant was confessionally Lutheran." Lewis Beck White, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 99. Calvinist friends will be abashed to learn here of their covert Arminianism.
23. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 311.
24. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 38–39.
25. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 42.
26. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 44–45.
27. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 51.
28. Havel, *Living in Truth*, 52.