

Jesus' Death and Burial: The Divine Parable of Abandonment

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- 1** Etymologically the word abandon goes back to middle English *aboundonen* and is derived from the French *abandoner*: to hand over or to put in someone's control. It means to renounce something that is one's own and hand it over to another or leave it without any support. In common language abandonment is tainted negatively. We hear it in such images as abandoned children, abandoned wife, abandoned house, abandoned land, abandoned town, abandoned car. It speaks of absence of someone who ought to be there – a loss of care. In its current usage to abandon is a transitive verb: it is an act of abandonment, but it is also intransitive: the experience of being abandoned, left without care.
- 2** In the Christian spiritual tradition abandonment as a transitive act has an interesting history. In its present form it is distinctly modern. Whereas in earlier spiritual traditions the relationship between God and the individual is described in terms of a battle between flesh and spirit, between my will and God's will and as a loss of self in the union with God, the terms of description of the interaction between the human and the divine take on a specific tenor in modern times. And it is in modern times that the word abandonment with its specific connotations takes root in the language of spiritual writers.
- 3** In most cases abandonment is described as a spiritual act. In these spiritual traditions it reflects the human attitude before divine providence. Toward the end of the Middle Ages the attitude before divine providence became more and more perceived as interaction between the human will and the divine will. To honour divine providence in one's life meant to renounce one's own will so that it may conform to the divine will as expressed in God's good-pleasure towards creation. God was seen as directing or permitting all that is and happens in the lives of individuals and in the world. The human will was considered to be in a continuous contest with the divine will. It was the task of the human will to let go of its self-

assertion and to submit to the divine will so that only God's will be achieved. This emphasis upon the battle of the human will in relation to the divine will became more and more prominent from the late 16th century onward. This is the historical backdrop to the rise of the notion of abandonment in early modernity. The divine will was manifested as a feature of divine providence.

4 Much effort was given in spiritual writings to giving practical advice as to how the human will might conform to the divine will. The attitude of the human will before God's will was described in such terms as resignation (Thomas a Kempis), submission, obedience, acceptance, detachment, acquiescence, indifference (Ignatius Loyola), holy indifference (Francis de Sales), renunciation, abnegation. Abandonment fits within the same semantic field. As the classical article on abandonment by M. Viller states, abandonment is the most suitable word to describe the attitude before God's rule over creation.¹ It places the human in face of divine providence. It counsels humans how to live in the face of God's ultimate rule over all creation. A great number of spiritual authors insist that the human attitude of the will ought to be one of abandonment of one's will before the will of God.

5 M. Viller insists that these ascetical notions form only one dimension of abandonment. True on the one hand abandonment means renunciation, that is, letting go of oneself and of one's will, of one's self-interests, to pre-occupy oneself with the will of God and God's love. Viller here quotes Francis de Sales: "One ought not to ask or refuse anything but to leave oneself in the arms of divine providence, without entertaining any desire except to will what God wills of us."² This ascetical dimension of abandonment must be complemented by its deepest motivation which is love. Because the whole spiritual enterprise is geared toward salvation and perfection, abandonment's ultimate ascesis is to open oneself to divine love. Abandonment without love is not worthy of the Christian. Love was to be its highest motivator. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux stated: "The one who acts out of fear, bears the cross of Christ patiently; one who moves in hope, bears it freely; one who is truly consumed in love, embraces it already ardently."³

ABANDONMENT IN THE NEW CREATION

6 The ascetical notion of abandonment as a bending of the will to God's will is grounded in a notion of creation that all too often has lost its tensional view of the new creation which erupted in the resurrection of Christ and the bursting forth of God's Spirit. It connected with a notion of divine providence rooted in a somewhat naturalistic notion of creation. The Creator God is often thought only in monistic

¹ M. Viller, article "Abandon" in *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*. Fondé par M. Viller et al. et continué par A. Dewitte, P. Ramarche et A. Solignac et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1937 - 1995) Vol. I, 1932, col 2-49.

² *Entretien XXI*. See M. Viller, art. "Abandon", col. 25.

³ *I Sermo S. Andreae*, no. 5. See Viller, article "Abandon" col. 5.

terms. However, creation pertains equally to Christ and the Spirit. For this reason, the first creation is only comprehensible from the second creation or its fulfilment. Only in its completion in Christ and the Spirit, only in its eschatological reality can we begin to grasp the archaeology, the Word “in the beginning.” Too often creation has been considered as a stand-alone doctrine. In theological tracts creation became an isolated theme. Because of its role in natural theology creation was studied under the heading of the doctrine of one God before its Trinitarian revelation. It was never such in the Bible.

7 The teaching of creation in the First Testament was never simply a dogmatic affirmation.⁴ The classical creation texts present God as the creator of the heavens and the earth but never in isolation to the people Israel.⁵ Hence we do not find in these texts a definition of Creation as the relation of absolute dependence upon God, to use the classical definition of creation by Thomas Aquinas. The biblical intent is essentially to present God as a redeemer God. Creation is subordinate to redemption. For the full narrative of redemption it is not enough to remain with the First Testament, we have to tell the narrative and the destiny of Jesus Christ.

8 Even within the First Testament creation is consistently placed in the context of redemption. I here follow Paul Beauchamp’s position in his dense but immensely rich *L’un et l’autre testament*.⁶ In the First Testament God as the creator of the heavens and the earth is always presented in relation to the people Israel. According to Beauchamp, Israel became aware of creation precisely at that point in its history when it discovered that as a people they existed so that God may offer salvation to the nations. From that moment Israel saw itself in a different light: as the point of encounter between God’s desire for life and for the nations. Its existence was to be a reflection – but also an actualization – of God’s desire. It was to reflect humanity’s desire for life. As James Pambrun interprets it, “in Israel, God’s desire for this encounter with the nations meets the deepest desire of humanity herself for life.”⁷ This desire for humans to be is at the heart of creation. Creation reflects the human desire for existence. Biblical creation, as Beauchamp pointed out,⁸ is a work of

⁴ I acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor James Pambrun (Saint Paul University) for the following insights into the scriptural notion of creation in his upcoming book on a theology of creation.

⁵ Genesis 1 - 11, Psalms (especially Psalm 104), Deutero-Isaiah, Proverbs 8. These texts are currently interpreted in light of other Near-Eastern cosmogonies which make it clear that the creation accounts are not a late-comer in Israel’s self-understanding. They appear to be original insights as Israel emerged as a society and a people. As such they are primarily referencing salvation and only secondarily reflective of cosmogonic origins. Here the creative genius of Deutero-Isaiah shows itself.

⁶ (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

⁷ “Systematic Theology and Scripture: Reflections on the Contribution of Paul Beauchamp” *Theoforum* 32 (2000) p.165.

⁸ *Création et séparation: Étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Génèse* (Paris: Cerf, 2005).

separation, separation from God, thereby establishing a relation. Israel became God's other. It expressed the desire on the part of God that things be other than God but also that things other than God be. Not only was Israel a purely gratuitous gift, it lived out its relationship with God precisely in the act of bringing its history to its term.⁹ Israel was to be a force of life for others. Its term is to be found in the final accomplishment of Israel.

9 The extent of this desire that we humans be and that Israel be a testimony to God's desire for the other nations, is manifested in the new creation. Here the separation takes a dramatic turn. It shows the completion of God's desire that I be. Here the separation manifests itself in God. God separates from God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The fullness of the drama of separation is best viewed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, or in the grave of Jesus.¹⁰

10 Let us follow this line in more detail. There was no clearer separation from God than in the death and particularly the grave of Jesus. The grave of Jesus is rightly seen as the boundary between the death and the resurrection of Jesus. On the one side of the tomb is the death of Jesus, on the other the resurrection. Here is the true Sabbath, the rest of God, in the tomb. The relation of this Sabbath with the first Sabbath of the seventh day of creation is almost impossible to fathom. However, in the tomb the original separation from God in creation is paradoxically accomplished in the second Sabbath of God's Son in the tomb among the dead, among the wicked. It is in this context of separation that the scriptures use the extremely provocative language of abandonment.

11 The grave represents two kinds of abandonment. In Mark's gospel these two are played out one against the another. First, there is the abandonment of all the personages of the story, except Jesus. "All abandoned him and fled," says Mark (14.50): Judas, the betrayer, all the disciples, but in a variety of ways also all the others: the priests, the guards, cowardly Peter, and Pilate, the violent soldiers and even the simple passers-by. But there is also another abandonment. This is the abandonment of Jesus by God. Mark reserves the greatest pain of abandonment in the abandonment of Jesus by God. On the cross Jesus had shouted out this abandonment in a loud voice, using the complaint of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." The death of Jesus is an "event" in God, where, according to Mark, God abandons Self in Jesus. The tomb only shows the extent of the abandonment. The Greek scripture uses the verb *paradidonai* to express this abandonment. Shockingly *paradidonai* also means to give up, to betray, to surrender.

12 In Mark's gospel the word *paradidonai* – to abandon – occurs a number of times. In 9.31 we read, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed (abandoned) into human hands..."

⁹ Pambrun, "Systematic Theology and Scripture," p. 165.

¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, tr. by A. Nichols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), Allen Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001). See also Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*. Tr. M. Kohl (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1990).

Who is the abandoner? Is it not God? The same verb occurs in 10.33: “The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priest and the scribes...” Again who hands Jesus over? Of the two hundred and forty-one times that the Scriptures use *paradidonai* in two-thirds of the cases, God is the subject. God is not a passive bystander in the death of Jesus. God is the prime agent but in Jesus paradoxically also the prime patient. With this the notion of abandonment takes on a radically new meaning. Here we do not have a surrender of one will to another. Here is an ontological abandonment. Our human abandonment to God is a testimony to a prior abandonment of God in the person of Jesus. Of this the cross and the tomb are the warrant.

13 To this the resurrection of Jesus attests. It does not take away what happened in the death and burial. The retention of the wounds in the resurrected Jesus emphasizes this: the crucified One appeared to the disciples. His death is not erased. It entered fully into his resurrection. God comes to glorious self-fulfilment through a shameful death and inexorable burial. Here it becomes proclaimed that:

14 “God was in Christ; and therefore even in his ambiguous life and godforsaken death, no less than in the clarity of resurrection, this was God’s humanity. From birth to burial, God has been among us, with this man, in this man, as this man: the self-expression, in the event of a human life, of who God is. Where this person has gone has been God’s locus and who he has been God’s identity; what he has done, God’s action; what he has suffered, God’s passion; and – dare we say and think it? – how he has died, God’s perishing.”¹¹

15 In this light his death and burial become an agonizing question. Why did God abandon the Son Jesus, why did God allow these inhuman forces to destroy him and to make the boast that the proclamation of the kingdom of God was without power? Here is God abandoned to the power of darkness and inhumanity, the ones who would unmake creation into its opposite: God’s desire that humans not be. Why was God’s Son Jesus consigned to the tomb? Why did death enter into the depth of life, making life so threatened and fragile? Who is the God who abandoned Self in death and refusing to erase the traces of death in the very being of God?¹² Why the need for a divine absence in the tomb for God to be God? Is this the “humbler yet” of the Christological hymn in the Letter to the Philippians (2.6-11)? Is this the gentleness of God’s power that honours the separation, the space to live, of the first creation? Here sin – as a mythical force of evil – manifests its depth as a death wish of humanity. The Romans and the Jews were only the historical perpetrators; history followed in their footsteps. It is this death that God shared in the tomb.

16 Theology in the 20th century has sought to think this death and burial through the notion of *kenosis*, the self-emptying of God. For a long time under the influence of the Greek metaphysical notion of the impassibility and immutability of God, the notion of a divine abandonment, suffering, humiliation or self-emptying of God was

¹¹ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, p. 82.

¹² Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale*, p. 52.

seen as highly rhetorical and improper language. God's perfection implied that God did not really share our condition: only the humanity of Jesus suffered, only Jesus in his humanity died. It did not affect God. And if in theological language it was said that God shared our human condition, it was said that it was "transferred improperly ... to his divinity."¹³ The distinction of the two natures in Christ hardly permitted one to take seriously a kenosis of God. Even the early attempts of Lutheran theologians to probe the extent of the kenosis did not dare to cross the threshold of a real self-humiliation or self-emptying of God. They continued to insist that God's own self could not have been changed in the incarnation or in the death of Jesus. To take God's self-emptying and weakness seriously was seen as too provocative and hence the language was designated as a poetic genre of Christian rhetoric. It was too outrageous to be real. Kenosis pertained to Jesus' humanity not to divinity. Even when taken more seriously, the self-emptying meant that in Jesus the divine attributes were concealed or not used; they were not renounced or divested. Currently kenosis is understood clearly as a divine emptying but the self-emptying is not a removal of the divine, rather it is a redefinition of God. God does not cease to be God. God's self-humiliation is an expression of the pleroma, the fullness, of God. Or, to say it more strongly, the kenosis is the pleroma. Here the fullness of God is revealed, not as something passing in the life and death of Jesus and then put aside in the resurrection, but as the ontological reality of God.¹⁴ There is no other God than was disclosed in Jesus. What was disclosed in Jesus in his gruesome death and decomposing burial is not alien to what God has always been. In his human condition of the self-emptying death and god-less burial of Jesus we are before the eternal, triune God. Here the vulnerable, the negated, the weak, and the conditioned so inherent in Jesus' death and burial become a strange signature of God. It is in this sense that the Word was with God from the beginning or that the Word was God. (John 1.1)¹⁵

17 The resurrection reveals to us therefore not only the glory that was Jesus from the beginning, but even more so the immense mystery of God in the death and burial of Jesus. Here the identity of God with the dead and buried Christ which seems like a

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Book I, Question 9.1.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, p. 175 In his ASC of December 29 Leo Dehon wrote: "He (the child Jesus) is your God: He is so strong, but in order to save you He embraced your weakness; and He is so gentle that He humiliated himself to love you." (Paris: Ed. Casterman, 1909, Vol II, t. IV, p. 573.

¹⁵ This is at the heart of the theological revolution initiated by Karl Barth in his magisterial *Church Dogmatics*: the full identification of God with the story of Jesus. As Lewis writes, "A skull-shaped site of harrowing, diabolic execution and the cold, sepulchral resting place of a victim's cruelly punctured cadaver: what bizarre locations to begin conceiving the being and nature of the universe's Maker, Lord, and Savior!" *Between Cross and Resurrection*, p. 197. See also J. Moltmann's groundbreaking Trinitarian turn in understanding the event in God of the death and burial of Jesus. Theologically only as Trinitarian God is it possible for us to think the death of God as an event in God. The overly unitarian position of Augustine and much of the Western tradition is unable to think the death of God.

collusion of God with the very powers that killed Jesus, is revealed as a mysterious presence God's Spirit of love. If there was, as Lewis says, a collusion of God in the absence of God¹⁶, the resurrection is a divine hollowing out of the real power of death and sin. It is done from within, not from without. Here all appearances become deceptive: death becomes life-giving, absence is Spirit-filled presence. In the depth of human misery and experiences of total absence, God is present. Here hope finds its strength. God reveals Self in the depths of absence. This is not some sort of ethereal rescue from absence and death, but a tangible involvement in human carnality and temporal frailty. The abandonment is the symbol of the immensity of the dance of love that is the Trinity within human life at its grittiest. In Exodus God revealed the Name of God to be "I am who I am" or "I am who I would be" (Ex 3.14). I will be who I will show myself to be in history. That is who I am. Here this is repeated. This is the God who is. "God so loved the world," John wrote, "that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (3.16)

18 The story of the death and burial are at heart stories of an identity of God that the Letter of John has called Love. God is love, the First Letter of John (4.8) says. Here too the death and burial redefine not only God but also love. What becomes of love that allows for such an abandonment? What becomes of God's providence if it is so linked with the abandonment of God by Godself? If for God's own Selfhood there was a path of self-abandonment and death, what does it mean to humans to follow with their own spirit of abandonment? Is this the only way in which the kingdom of God will come?

LIVING OUT OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD'S ABANDONMENT

19 In the Letter to the Romans the event of God in the death of Jesus is translated into an economy of grace. This is not what tradition has understood to be created grace, but Uncreated grace. Here we encounter the Spirit of God. In light of the event in God of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christianity proclaims that the old has passed away and that all things are new. (Rev. 21.5) That is the outcome of the "raising" of Jesus, the overflow of divine love poured out by God's Spirit breaking through the empty and dark tomb of Jesus. This Spirit inaugurates a new law. The new creation is at its core governed by another rule. It is the rule of superabundance or excessive graciousness. This is the economy of "how much the more" of Romans 5.17. It is not as if sin is no more, or death or failure. The economy of grace leaves sin and death in all their seriousness but in the Spirit they are surpassed, just as the death and burial of Jesus, the Son, was surpassed – in the Hegelian sense of sublated – in the resurrection. Sin and death remain but they are hollowed out by a grace that goes immeasurably beyond.

¹⁶ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, p. 86.

20 This Easter message of the outburst of the Spirit in history requires two qualifiers. On the one hand the “surpassing” of the tomb of Holy Saturday by the revelation of God’s perichoresis of love of Easter Sunday did not mean the suppression of the tomb. The tomb with all it entails still marks our history. The impenetrability and massiveness of evil remains a gigantic obstacle to faith and hope for a great part of humanity. A Christian response to glory of the resurrection must take seriously the assault on this glory in the horrific events of history that make this glory inaccessible for growing numbers of our contemporaries who have turned their back on hope. On the other hand there are the witnesses among Christians for whom the hope has not ended. They give testimony through their lives that in face of the darkness of events of recent history, the prayer of praise to the triune God can still rise from their lips. These qualifiers suggest how this abandonment is lived in our time.

A) The tombs of recent history

21 It is not possible to call to mind all the tomb events of the past one hundred years that in their massiveness seem to pale the tomb of God and to make it lose its evocation. The self-abandonment of God in the death and tomb of Jesus seems insignificant in view of the senseless muddy tombs of the millions who died in World War I, of the random executions and deportations of millions of Russians sacrificed to doctrinaire whims of Lenin and Stalin, of the Shoa deaths of six million Jews, of the indiscriminate cruelty of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, of the genocides of Armenians, Cambodians, Ruandan Tutsis and Sudanese Darfurians. The volume of so much anger and so many tombs has left many shell shocked.¹⁷ Emil Fackenheim asked whether anyone who had been a victim of Auschwitz was still capable to be a witness for God. The language of the tomb in our time is derived from Picasso’s Guernica or from the painful language in Paul Celan’s *Todesfuge* (1945), a poem recalling a fugue played by Jewish fiddlers as fellow Jews were led to their execution or as other Jews were digging their own graves. As this text with all its allusions is almost impossible to translate, I will give another briefer taste of the contemporary incapacity to be witnesses of God. The poem dates from 1959. It is untitled.

*There was earth inside them, and
they dug.
They dug and dug, and so
their day went past, their night. And they did not praise God,
who, so they heard, wanted all this,
who, so they heard, witnessed all this.
They dug and heard nothing more;
they did not grow wise, invented no song,*

¹⁷ For a provocative analysis of anger and violence in Western culture see Peter Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit. Politisch-psychologischer Versuch* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006). Sloterdijk makes a case that Judaism and Christianity are deeply imbued by the sanctification and glorification of violence in the image of the angry God.

devised for themselves no sort of language.

They dug.

*There came then a stillness, there came also storm,
all of the oceans came.*

*I dig, you dig, and the worm also digs,
and the singing there says: They dig.*

O one, o none, o no one, o you (O einer, o keiner, o niemand, o du)

Where did it go, when it went nowhere at all?

*O you dig and I dig, and I dig through you,
and the ring on our finger awakes.¹⁸*

22 Much of the current theological reflection on the self-humiliation and abandonment of God in the first part of the article was already a response to the impenetrable voice of God in the Shoa. Christians realized that the God tinged by the Greek philosophical tradition required a biblical overmake. Whether this revamping of the image of God by listening more seriously to the biblical narrative of the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus is sufficient for our time remains to be seen. The word from the tomb of Jesus has hardly penetrated Christian consciousness. For many, also Christians, the experience of the loss of transcendence in a sort of “death of God” in the practical sphere of life has deposited them in, what Charles Taylor has called, the “immanent frame.”¹⁹ By this he means the insistence in our secular age on interiority, an emphasis of our inner selves (our intimacy, personal commitments, feelings, individuality), in contrast to other times in which the outside, the cosmic or natural order received foremost attention. This state of affairs has made it increasingly difficult for many to be attentive to a word of transcendence. Is defenceless love capable of breaking through?

B) The power of hope

23 On the face of it, it is difficult to answer the question of whether love is capable of breaking through. In its two-thousand year history Christianity does not appear at first sight to be the community on earth that guarantees love’s capacity. In its massive institutional structure it appears like a spent force, particularly in Western culture.²⁰ Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the West lived as if there was no God. In part this is due to the Church as witness of God. It is too often an ambiguous proclaimer of God. It is not clear to the world what God it proclaims. It is certainly not an

¹⁸ In John Felstiner, *Paul Celan. Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995) pp. 149-150.

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) p. 539.

²⁰ On this score Peter Sloterdijk is brutal in his assessment of Christianity in the West. In our secular culture, he says, Christianity is no longer wanted, even more so no longer plausible. Christianity is too imbued, he holds, with resentment in its teaching on the last things with God as an angry and vengeful judge. *Zorn und Zeit*, especially Chapter 2.

unequivocal attestation of the self-abandonment and humility of God. One thing becomes certain after listening to the story of the death and burial of Jesus. If the Church is a symbol and witness of God's humility, we ought not to look for spectacular deeds. The authentic symbol of the Church was given in the gesture of the widow of the Gospel who gave her last pennies (Luke 21.1-4). To the disciples what she had done was insignificant and obscure. To Jesus she was an example of selfless giving. The Church is a summoned community. It is a respondent to the propositions of meaning that come to it from the Scriptures. It is to lead a summoned existence, summoned by the event of the cross, summoned by the immemorial word of God. Like Moses or like Jeremiah or even more like Mary, it is to be an exception in the world; its identity and selfhood is not of itself. It is always and continuously from an Other. It means that it is not ever settled in itself. It is always in the state of being summoned by the other, by the Gospel, by the poverty and brokenness of the world. Its identity is its care of the other, its listening to God.

24 That is why its hope is never to be confused with optimism. To believe in the never-ending of love does not mean that we believe that love will vanquish all in history. Christian hope is not an optimism that somehow history will overcome anger or victimization or violence. As Lewis says, "Hope itself embraces the proposition that evil may increase, death have its day of triumph, and history be terminated."²¹ If we take seriously the burial of Jesus, Son of God, we would have to grant that love may well remain powerless and without visible impact. Hope is made of stronger stuff.

25 A powerful example of this is found in Jonathan Lear's book entitled: *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*.²² Lear examines hope through the story of the Crow people of the Western United States. Their culture was a warrior culture, based on bravery. That culture fell apart with the extinction of the Buffalo. By the end of the 19th century, the Crow ended up in a reservation. Two decades later, one of their chiefs, Plenty Coups, described what had happened to the Crow people: "When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened." Lear's book is about these last four words: "After this nothing happened." Plenty Coups was not talking about the psychological depression of his people. He meant it literally: nothing happened for the Crow people. What had given them life – the buffalo – what had given them excellence and honour, was gone. Their culture had disappeared. All the things that were crucially significant for them were gone. It was not that they were forbidden to hunt the buffalo; the buffalo were no longer there. There was nothing any longer that was meaningful. Everything that could be meaningful had died. The Crow people lost the concepts with which they could construct a narrative. They could no longer tell their story because the story no longer

²¹ *Between Cross and Resurrection*, p. 261.

²² (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

had a point. If in earlier time the virtue of courage, the act of bravery, was what counted for them, it now no longer did... The Elders had nothing to teach, nothing to pass on.

26 Yet, one day the Crow people did find a new plot. It came to Chief Plenty Coups by way of a dream. The dream was about the end of the way of life of the Crow. However, it also promised a kind of survival, if they could listen “like a Chickadee”, to learn from others and find new ways of going on. He found his new plot when he listened to the story of Christians about Jesus and his death. In the midst of devastation he found an unexplained hope. The Crow took the dream as a promise that they were under the protection of God— a sort of blind faith that if they went ahead, and listened, they would find life. Such is the power of hope which is not explained by anything tangible. Christian hope is grounded in the event of Jesus’s death, burial and resurrection. It is a hope in the God of love.

ABANDONMENT IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

27 The paradox of hope in a Christian context is its emergence out of a depth that is humanly inexplicable. In this article we have presented it as originating in the death of a condemned Jesus and in the bleakness of the tomb. As we said, its difficult self-annihilation was not taken away by the resurrection. That is the meaning of the showing of the wounds in his hands and feet and in his side after Jesus is risen. But the resurrection narrative also gives other indicators that the story of Jesus does not end there. Particularly in the Gospel of John the resurrection is also the sending of the Holy Spirit. For John the risen Jesus is present in the Spirit. “He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (20.22) The breath of God that in the first creation brought the first human to life, now restores that breath by bringing to life a new creation in the disciples. It is the same breath that he breathed forth on the cross as the gasp of death: “And he gave up his spirit.” (19.30) After all, for John it was from the pierced side of Jesus that the blood and the water of the new creation flowed forth. For John it was from the dead Jesus that the new creation dawned. All creation is affected by this event.

28 What happens here is not a static once-for-all event. That is why the role of the Spirit is so important. For what is this new creation about? If we read John’s Gospel, it is clear that it is about the new commandment to love as Jesus loved. This love, we have been told, is a mirror of the Father’s love. Jesus demonstrated this love particularly in his death. Now it is the task of the Spirit to make this love fruitful in the followers of Jesus. There is no other way that we can know this love. The Spirit’s indwelling makes this love immanent in the believer. For the believer this indwelling Spirit does not lead to a slavish imitation of repetition of what Jesus did. It is best approached by what the philosopher Ricoeur has called a mimesis, a refiguration.²³

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) especially Chapter 2.

The Spirit is the source of the refiguration of the love of Jesus in the works and activities of the believer in history. That is why Jesus tells his disciples that it is good that he leaves. It is to set the Spirit free for the new creation. The Spirit will continue Jesus' work allowing the disciples to perform even "greater works than these" (John 14.12) It means that his work of love is now placed in the hands of a community whose task it is to refigure the world: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14.15) In other words, the Spirit is an enactment of Jesus in their keeping of the commandment of love.

29 This love is not presented as a virtue or an action – to use Aristotle's term, an excellence. This love is agape. Agape is God's Uncreated love. It is of an infinitely more elevated order than any action we can produce. It is a word metaphorically reaching out into the inner workings of God. Ricoeur calls this agape-love hyper-ethical.²⁴

30 This love does not operate prescriptively. It is not a commandment in the strict sense of the word. It is beyond a do-able and as such hyper-ethical. It is also poetic in as much as it cannot be reduced to a single do-able. Hence when the scripture says: "This is my commandment that you love one another,"(John 15.12), it is not an imperative that can be translated into an obligation. For how can one be commanded to love someone?²⁵ Love is not a commandment as it is found in Books of Leviticus or Deuteronomy. It is the love of the Song of Songs. In the Song of Songs, the lover says to the beloved: "Love me!" This is how the commandment of love also operates in John. Jesus says to his disciples: "Love me!" Love me with the love with which I love you. Here the imperative becomes poetic.²⁶

31 It is the Spirit's task to help humans enter into this circle of love. The Spirit constantly reminds believers of Jesus in all the new situations in which they find themselves. The Spirit's task is to deepen and enacting creatively in the lives of the followers what love, revealed in the story of death and burial of Jesus, would do. The Spirit is the enabler of the believer making him or her capable to refigure life in imitation of Jesus. This is not an act-by-act repetition. It is a creative memory of Jesus in contexts that the first century could not have dreamed. It will not be the armchair Christian who can predict what this creative mimesis will look like. Only those who are actively engaged in situations will know of what this love is capable. That is why as Jesus says: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you." (John

²⁴ *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit. Amour et justice*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1990) p. 8.

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit*, p. 14.

²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit*, p. 20. See also my "Between Philosophy and Theology: Ricoeur's Testimony of the Self" in *Between the Human and the Divine: Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics* (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2002) pp. 122-137, especially pp. 132-133.

16.7-8) The Spirit will not disclose something entirely new but continuously points back to Jesus.²⁷

DEHONIAN ABANDONMENT

32 It is not my intention to do a hermeneutic of the texts of Leo Dehon and to explain the concept of abandonment in Leo Dehon's historical and cultural context. Others have done so already and it does not need to be repeated here. But it is possible to show that the development of the notion of abandonment in line with the self-abandonment of God in the person of Jesus in cross and burial is not an eisegesis of the founder's writings. Dehonian spirituality has been from the beginning grounded in the pierced side of Christ. For John's Gospel the story of the piercing of the side of Jesus out of which flowed blood and water was key to his understanding of the Word that became flesh. It best represents the evangelist's entry into the mystery of God in the dead and lifeless body of Jesus on the cross. Leo Dehon, as is well known, entered into the mystery of the Heart of Christ through Mother Ulrich and Sister Ignace during his years of chaplaincy at their convent in the 1870s. Through the years he developed his own approach to the Heart of love.²⁸

33 Unfortunately, the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus – in part because of the ambiguity within the Dehonian tradition²⁹ – too quickly turned away from the mystery of God's love to the perceived spurning of this love by humanity. Jesus became the spurned lover. Jesus was the abandoned lover. The major emphasis of the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus became the consolation and reparation of the spurned lover. It emphasized the infinite distance between God and humanity and left too often unsaid what the love of God made us capable to do. Before the God of infinite love, human capability withered away in guilt and insignificance. Frequently this experience of infinite distance was translated not only in moral terms but also in ontological terms. Our finitude as creatures became part of the fault that infected humans. The divine-human exchange tended to become an exchange of unequals emphasizing human incapacity rather than the infinite desire of God that we humans be. Even though the French School of spirituality could not be accused of the ontological mistake of placing the fault with our creatureliness, it was tainted by a cultural and spiritual pessimism which required the anéantissement of the human will before God. It placed too high an emphasis on the denial of the self, as if there is a deep lack in the very constitution of the human self. It did not see the new creation; it saw mostly the debasement of the human.

²⁷ Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000) pp. 117-127.

²⁸ See my "*Faith in the one who loves me: The spiritual legacy of Leo Dehon* (Milwaukee / Toronto: Priests of the Sacred Heart, 2007) pp. 23-25.

²⁹ I refer here particularly to the incompatible spiritual approaches of Leo Dehon and André Prévot. See *Faith in the one who loves me*, pp. 22-23.

34 Leo Dehon did not escape the spiritual current of his time. He imbibed the spirituality of the French School in his own life and his writings. For this reason, the spirit of abandonment within Leo Dehon's spirituality remained mainly an asceticism of the will before the divine will. However, the hermeneutic of Leo Dehon's faith in Christ in the Constitutions of the Congregation of 1982 opened up another avenue that those who studied his writings discovered as the real tenor of his charism.³⁰ Their creative interpretation of our spirituality placed it more in line with the dance of love of the Trinity. In number 2 of the Constitutions the grounding faith experience of Leo Dehon is presented through his most frequently quoted scripture text: Galatians 2.20. As presented in the Constitutions it reads: "I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." With this text the new Constitutions brought to life for the Congregation a new perspective centered on faith in the love revealed in the self-gift of Jesus, the Son of God, in his death.³¹

35 Within this perspective of the self-gift of Jesus in his death as a voucher of his love, abandonment takes on the form of faith. It is not a transitive act but part of the movement of faith. Accordingly, it is not first of all an act of the will. The love which is the object of faith in Paul's saying is not first of all the love with which we love God, but the love of benevolence, the love of friendship with which God loves us. It is a creative love that makes us capable of loving God for God's own sake.³² It is a love that ennobles us and gives us our singular identity. It is to this love that we abandon ourselves in faith. This love does not immediately translate into an ethical command to love in return. This love as all love must first convince us. As between two lovers, love of the other must first overtake each one before they can begin to make it mutual. Also God's love must convince us. That is why the tradition says that grace is God's initiative. The cross and the burial are God's proof. Only when in the Spirit this love has taken root in us, does this love make us capable to love. Only then are we capable to turn to others. That is part of the teaching of the story of the rich young man in the gospel. The young man had perhaps no idea how his inherited wealth had protected him all his life. He did not know how much wealth bound him and held him in its thrall. He did not know as Jesus did how much of an obstacle wealth was to his freedom to exist. Jesus once said that it was difficult for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven - even to the point of saying it was well nigh impossible for humans to break out of its grasp. (Mark 10.23) But then he added that it was not impossible for God to overcome the obstacle. He did not mean that

³⁰ André Perroux, "Le Fils de Dieu m'a aimé, il s'est livré pour moi. Galates 2,19-20" (Manuscript, 51 pages).

³¹ In what follows I take up again what I began to develop in *"Faith in the one who loves me: The spiritual legacy of Leo Dehon"* (Milwaukee / Toronto: Priests of the Sacred Heart, 2007).

³² Jules Toner, *Love and Friendship* (Marquette WI: Marquette University Press, 2003) p. 47.

God could help to overcome the obstacle in us. He implied what was humanly impossible, God had done. God had shown how one can divest of riches. God had done it. As Paul said, although rich, in Christ, God became poor for our sakes, so that by his poverty we might become rich. (2 Cor 8.9) God had given the example of the fullness of life in his total self-gift.³³ In Galatians this making poor of God on the cross is the gesture of God to convince us that God loves us. In our Constitutions par. 9 this passage of Galatians is linked with 1 John 4.16: “We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us.”

36 In most of his writings when Leo Dehon spoke of God’s abandonment, he refers to the event of the incarnation. Our union with Christ, for him, was a union with Christ in his coming into the world. One of his favourite texts was that of the Letter to the Hebrews: “When Christ came into the world, he said, ‘See, I have come to do your will, O God.’” For Leo Dehon the *Ecce Venio* of Christ was a sacrifice of his will to the Father. But there exists also another focus in our spirituality. And that is to the death of Jesus in his pierced side. As we have shown above, the orientation to his death (and burial) is a more contextual approach to God’s abandonment. As Walter Kasper wrote in his *Jesus the Christ*, one of the great challenges of current Christology is the relation of the incarnation with the death and resurrection. Whereas in classical Christology the point of departure was the incarnation, in current Christology the point of departure is the death and resurrection. For our spirituality as well, the challenge will be to orient our thinking toward the death and resurrection. That applies particularly for the notion of abandonment.

37 Our abandonment to God is the abandonment of faith in the love that God has for me. For Paul that was the moment of salvation: the utter confidence and trust that God loves me. For Paul the cross was the warrant. For John it was the pierced side. Both reveal the depth of God’s desire for us and the extent to which love urged God to empty Self for our sake. The faith in this love is our existential foundation. Nothing surpasses it. It will urge us to be generous with God’s own generosity towards others. We will do it with God’s uncreated grace, the Holy Spirit, as our advocate and witness.

38 What is the meaning then of a spirituality of abandonment in a transitive sense? About this I point to only two of the many possible avenues. The first avenue is that of prayer. The second avenue is that of “reparation.”

Prayer

39 In prayer we make our own what Thérèse de Liseux said:

“Love breeds love; and mine, Jesus, for you, keeps on thrusting out towards you, as if to fill up that chasm which your love has made – but it is no good; mine is something less than a drop of dew lost in the ocean. Love you as you love me? The

³³ Paul Beauchamp, *La loi de Dieu*, p. 28.

only way to do that is to come to you for the loan of your love; I couldn't content myself with less."³⁴

40 It is a beautiful way of defining prayer. It is to enter into the very dance of love of the Trinity: to loan from it to raise our capacity. One of the ways of abandonment is therefore to ask God, our lover, to teach us how to love, to loan us something of God's love to make us capable to love. In what is undoubtedly its richest section, the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of prayer as gift, covenant and communion. Prayer is foremost a gift. Only as a gift, fully recognizing that "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Rom 8.26) does prayer come to its own. In humility it is ready to enter into exchange of love that is God. Prayer is also a covenant because it is the point of encounter between the human and the divine. The point of encounter is the human heart "where I am, where I live." (Par. 2563) Only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart. There we enter into the relation that is the Triune God. And finally prayer is communion. In prayer we are a partner, entering into the unity that is lived in diversity. Here we encounter the Father "who is good beyond measure." (Par. 2565) As the Catechism says,

41 "If you knew the gift of God!" The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking rises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him." (Par. 2560)

42 Prayer is our first response to the quest of love of God for us: the word of faith in the God who loves us.

Reparation

43 In the Constitutions of 1956 reparation is introduced through the historical observation that Leo Dehon thought that the "rejection of Christ's love" and "sin" were at the root of all the ills of the Church and the world. Reparation along these lines is a cooperation with Christ in the removal of the obstacles that stand in the way of Christ's love. In the Constitutions of 1982 this was found to be no longer an acceptable way of expressing a response to Christ's love. In the more historical part of the new Constitutions (numbers 1-8) the wording still resembles that of the 1956 Constitutions: "Father Dehon was very sensitive to sin, which weakens the Church especially when 'consecrated persons' are involved. He was aware of social evils; he carefully studied their human causes, both individual and social. But he saw the refusal of the love of Christ as the deepest cause of this human misery." (#4) This is made more explicit in number 7: "Thus involved with him to remedy sin and the lack of love in the Church and in the world, they shall render 'the worship of love and reparation that His Heart desires' though their whole life, their prayers, works,

³⁴ *Autobiography of a Saint*. Tr. Ronald Knox (London: Fontana, 1958) p. 24.

suffering and joys.” This notion of reparation is a variant of the theological concepts of atonement and satisfaction.

44 In the more expository section of the new Constitutions # 23-25 we are given a new definition of reparation which brings it much closer to the notion of abandonment that I have suggested above. The new meaning was first proposed in 1968 by Stanislas Lyonnet s.j. in his “Causerie sur la reparation.”³⁵ In his Causerie Lyonnet had the fortuitous insight of linking reparation with Paul’s understanding of the effect of sin on our sanctification. He quoted 1 Thes 4.8 where Paul says that sin is not only a rejection of another human but a rejection of God “who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.” In the new Constitutions this reference to the Holy Spirit was translated beautifully as a “welcoming of the Spirit.” Reparation now means the “welcoming of the Spirit.” Here a new link is created between reparation and the Trinity. Reparation becomes the welcoming of the work that the Father has accomplished among us in Christ and made interior in us through the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit installs itself “in our most intimate being, in the most secret recesses of our freedom and capacity to love.”³⁶ It repeats therefore for us in another way the central facet of our spirituality: faith in the one who loves me.

45 And so what does this faith in the love of God make us capable of? It is not just a redamatio, a love in return. In the Christian context such a love in return is possible only in the enabling love of another. Our love for the other is made able in God’s love for me. The love in return is not our initiative, a sort of rational or emotional decision on our part. Love-in-return is the gift of the lover. Love seeks our generosity not as guilty generosity but as a free gift to the other. In this way a spirituality of abandonment is ultimately a giving to God the gift that the Spirit has enrooted in our heart.

³⁵ Reprinted in *Studia Dehoniana SCJ* 7 (1973). See also A. Perroux, “Welcome to the Spirit to the Delight and Glory of God” *Dehoniana* XVIII (no. 72) 1989/2, p. 191-226.

³⁶ A. Perroux, “Welcome to the Spirit...” p. 195.