

**SAVING (CATHOLIC) HIGHER EDUCATION:
CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES OF HOPE
AND RESILIENCE**

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INTEGRATED RESPONSE

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SUSAN ABRAHAM – INTRODUCTION

That the news is bad, regarding Catholic college closings is evident. Rather than rehearse the statistics and metrics regarding enrollment, financial and institutional pressures in the United States, this paper presents a rhizomatic reading of postcolonial, anticolonial and antiracist theoretical materials which present possibilities for the future direction of higher education. While I am not specifically engaging Catholic universities as such, it is important to remember that the particularity of Catholic higher education institutional identities is entangled with the state of higher education in general. Further, I take a global view, through theoretical, theological, and literary materials, laying the foundation for a different view of preparing the global citizen of tomorrow. With Charles Mills’ understanding that “all social structures are political and reflect the reproduction of political power and advantage,”¹ I argue here that higher education institutions are mirrors of the larger culture, replicating all the power dynamics of the larger culture. This reality calls for a prophetically counter cultural stance that is aided by a sophisticated reading of cultural politics, by focusing on temporality, rather than geopolitical and racially unstable categories. Additionally, as Nancy Pineda-Madrid requested, I take one idea from postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, to focus on postcolonial temporality as a critical dimension for cultural politics. To assay a tentative definition of social salvation from such a temporal

¹ Charles W. Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Time,” *Time and Society* 29, no. 2 (2020): 298.

perspective, I will say that social salvation is a negotiation of temporal imaginations about the past and future to speak prophetically and critically to the present time.

My reading foregrounds cultural materials, to *highlight* the political and to *suggest* the theological. I do so because the US context (including the theological academic context), is obsessed with the cultural and its power dynamics, like other ethnoreligious contexts. I also acknowledge the work already being done by colleagues at CTSA in this regard. This paper is simply an appendix to those conversations. I write as an administrator-faculty of seven years, straddling multiple roles in a small legacy institution. While I certainly hope to sound more than merely an administrator, I will speak from my professional and personal social location as a Catholic (Syro Malankara) immigrant from India-now-US citizen, academic dean at a progressive Christian seminary, in Berkeley, California. Progressive seminaries in the United States are the canary in the coal mine of higher education, particularly as it relates to theology and religion departments. That is, culturally, the health of seminary education in the United States parallels the health of academic departments of theology and religion because its health correlates with the cultural influence and significance of religion and theology.

As Mills argues, when speaking of time, it is critical to remember that the human experience of temporality is simultaneously social and political. He writes:

“Radicals want to claim that the social structure itself is “political,” in the sense of reflecting political power and advantage. . . . [Hence] the Social life of time will be intimately entangled with the political life of time. As creatures at least partially material...we are always located in both space and time. So, if there is a geopolitics, a politics of space, then clearly there should also be a Chronopolitics, a politics of time.”²

Mills further argues that we all have “time maps” that we operate from, and taking a closer look at contested times will provide a different perspective on racialization and colonialism. Such time maps are everywhere, including in current management manuals. Yann Cramer, for example, asserts that an understanding of the Greek concepts of *chronos*, *kairos* and *aion* are critical for innovation management.³ In his management parlance, these terms, “without their esoteric meanings,” can be usefully applied to management of innovation.

Since both radical political theory and some current business practices use theorizations of time and temporality, I think it opportune to bring such a consideration to the topic of the salvation of higher education. I believe that academic higher educational institutions, including Catholic ones are experiencing time sickness. That is, there are multiple and contradicting notions of time in play that are becoming increasingly unwieldy and difficult for institutions, sickening them. Tracking these contradictions of

² Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Time,” 298.

³ Yann Cramer, “Aion, Kairos, Chronos: 3 time-concepts to master in innovation management”, *InnovToday*, November 1, 2018, <https://innovtoday.wordpress.com/2018/11/01/aion-kairos-chronos-3-time-concepts-to-master-in-innovation-management/>.

temporality adds a significant dimension to other analyses of identity that are more commonplace in the academy. Helping manage multiple temporalities could be strategic for those of us who are navigating the headwinds of financial, enrollment and loss of cultural significance in our institutions. The prevalence of anxiety at all levels in academic institutional life (and its impact on individual mental health) needs further development. The fear of death and ending, which are existential concerns are exacerbated by climate change, racial strife, political, religious, ecclesial and theological polarization. Time is out of joint, as the bard declared centuries ago.

Institutional and personal time sickness was intensified by the pandemic. Worldwide, the pandemic forced a profound rupture in our experience of time. Using the familiar categories of *chronos* and *kairos*, Siobhan Kattago in her essay "Ghostly Pasts and Postponed Futures: The Disorder of Time during the Corona Epidemic,"⁴ asserts that the disruption between *chronos* and *kairos* was that of being caught between ordinary time and the time of the crisis of the pandemic (the lockdown).⁵ At the same time, the pandemic was also an experience of being caught between *chronos* and *aion*, with its sense of an eternal present (temporarily closed).⁶ We can all recall what the initial years of the pandemic did to all of us. Many of us in institutions facing closures or cuts move through similar temporal disruptions and disturbances.

For those of us who belong to minoritized groups—racialized people, gendered people, queer people, trans people—time is always disturbed and disrupted. We are always in lockdown—caught between *chronos* and *kairos*—or, we are always temporarily closed—caught between *chronos* and *aion*. In lockdown, the "grammar of how time is articulated by distorting past, present and future" is violently disturbed, while in temporarily closed contexts, "the indeterminacy of the duration of time" is deepened. In both cases however, there is a heightened sense of the time of "now," or the present.⁷ Achille Mbembe points out that the present global economic context creates "its own temporal regime."⁸ Here, precarity is the norm: "the becoming Black of the world."⁹

⁴ Siobhan Kattago, "Ghostly Pasts and Postponed Futures: The Disorder of Time during the Corona Epidemic," *Memory Studies* 14, no. 6 (2021): 1401-1413.

⁵ Kattago, 1402

⁶ Kattago, 1404

⁷ "When most activities are temporarily closed, it is as if we are stranded between *chronos* as chronological time and *aion* as eternity. With the pandemic, everyday patterns of life increasingly exemplify what François Hartog has defined as the regime of presentism. The antithesis to futurism, the experience of time as presentism denotes the temporal duration of a continuous present tense. Presentism is the 'sense that only the present' exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of the unending now." Kattago, 1404.

⁸ Achille Mbembe, "The Becoming Black of the World," in *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2017), 3.

⁹ Mbembe writes: "...In the era of neoliberalism, capitalism and animism—long and painstakingly kept apart from each other—have finally tended to merge. The cycle of capital moves from image to image, with the image now serving as an accelerant, creating energy and drive. The potential fusion of capitalism and animism carries with it a number of implications for our future understanding of race and racism. First, the systematic risks experienced

Thirty years ago, Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, pointed to the “enunciative present,”¹⁰ as a reality in the lives of colonized lives, speaking of course to the eternal present of racialized and colonized reality. Nevertheless, racialized and colonized beings are not without power, as they are aided now by the ghosts of their pasts and their dreams of the future. Bhabha’s “enunciative present,” in contrast to the presentism tracked by Kattago is a negotiation of the multiplicities and binaries of temporalities, disciplines, methods, histories, geographies and ideologies. Its primary concern is to highlight how the postcolonial love and care of the self may not be sundered from the love and care of the other. Another concern of the enunciative present is to attempt to gather the fragments of life, including the temporal, the intellectual, the creative, the spiritual and the affective. Consequently, above all, it seeks alliances and solidarities as a key dimension of the enunciative present.

TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER – RESPONSE 1

Chronopolitics¹¹ dominates higher education. Tenure is defined temporally and in relation to those without tenure. And so there are those with tenure and without tenure; pre-tenure and non-tenure; full-time and part-time; one-semester contracts, one-year contracts, three-year contracts, and the gold-standard, evergreen contracts. Rights and privileges shift accordingly—access to sabbaticals, number of course credit hours taught, premium teaching days and times, the list continues. Susan’s call to reflect on chronopolitics and the “time sickness” of higher education is vitally important.

For Susan, our time sickness is a racialized one born of Empire, where time is seen as linear and progressive, and centered on an advanced Euro-American “civilization” that defines the academy. What does this mean for higher education in general, and

specifically by Black slaves during early capitalism have now become the norm for, or at least the lot of, all of subaltern humanity.... Such practices borrow as much from the slaving logic of capture and predation as from the colonial logic of occupation and extraction, as well as from the civil wars and raiding of earlier epochs. Wars of occupation and counterinsurgency aim not only to track and eliminate the enemy but also to create a partition in time and atomization of space. In the future, part of the task of empire will consist in transforming the real into fiction, and fiction into the real.” Mbembe, “The Becoming Black of the World,” 4.

¹⁰ “The enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance. The struggle is often between the historicist teleological or mythical time and narrative of traditionalism—of the right or the left—and the shifting, strategically displaced time of the articulation of a historical politics of negotiation.” Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35.

¹¹ I will follow Susan in drawing on Charles W. Mills in my use of chronopolitics. For Mills, chronopolitics concerns the “temporal dimensions” of power relations between groups or the representation of those power relations (through narratives of causality, meaning, morality, seniority, and so on). Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Racial Time,” 299.

Catholic higher education in particular? Temporal entanglements¹² are laden with power, and ongoing colonial temporalities function to maintain a hegemonic status quo—even as higher educational spaces become more diverse.

Temporal power relations include the imposition of Christian ones—even at secular schools. School calendars accommodate Christian holidays, coded as winter and spring breaks.¹³ Festivities are rebranded as holiday parties and egg hunts. Christian time is visible (even if coded) and accommodated. The same cannot be said for those from other faiths. Even at schools that offer interfaith ministries, their sacred time is barely visible and optionally accommodated. During Ramadan at LMU, we get an email request to *consider* accommodating students who are fasting. We do not get separate university notifications for Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, or Sikh holy days. Eastern Christian calendars are completely absent. We want to cultivate an inclusive Catholicity but have no idea how to do it, and we marginalize the students we aim to include in the process.

I don’t know that anyone at my institution wants to be caught up in *chronos* without a deeper sense of meaning. We certainly understand that a new *aion* is emerging. But what do we do to face it, how ought we do it, and as Susan asks us, when? How do we live our mission and “seize, with Kairos, the opportune moment?”¹⁴

SUSAN ABRAHAM – PEDAGOGIES OF HOPE: LEARNING AND TEACHING IN COMPLEX TIMES

At a recent conference of Protestant Seminary leaders, President Lee Butler, Jr. of Iliff School of Theology asserted that a golden age for theological thinking has certainly passed, but reminded those present that the purported “golden age” was the age of “white steeple theology.” Such theology, highly racialized, invested in political and cultural power that was and continues to be exclusionary in multiple ways, is facing the challenge of complex time. White steeple theology formed people in particular ways and habits, and created an ecosystem in which their history, their present work and effort and their future security were guaranteed by the churches. Painfully, this time has ended. White steeple theology further, is being asked to acknowledge its ghostly racial, patriarchal and kyriarchal past while at the same time, being challenged to change, include and negotiate with different temporalities, histories and futures. The kairotic moment of the present then, is replete with opportunity. One of the critical negotiations, for example, is the one we have to make with students, especially regarding their time. Adult students, and increasingly traditional age students, are

¹² Achille Mbembe reflects on the temporalities of postcoloniality through the lens of displacement and entanglement. Displacement is not just about the dislocation of peoples in space, but time itself is displaced and “on the move,” in transit back, and forth, and between competing temporalities. Thus, there is not a singular, progressive, chronological line between the time of colony and postcolony, nor a rupture that signifies a change from one to the next. These shifting temporalities are also entangled in the postcolony, “an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures...each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones.” Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 16.

¹³ See Khyati Joshi, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2021).

¹⁴ Cramer, “Aion, Kairos, Chronos.”

simply not available at the times the academy is available. They are operating on a different time, because of financial and family responsibilities. Students increasingly ask for flexibility, for hybrid learning contexts, for synchronous, asynchronous and in person experiences. Many signal that the only commitment they may make is to a year, often just a semester. Many, further, find the semester-long development of a course and its ideas to be too demanding and seek shorter and faster courses. More than anything, they want tangible rewards in return for their investment of time, energy and financial resources. For those of us who are placed in leadership positions in academic institutions, such a sea change of academic habits brings with it chaos. We must deal with competing issues: faculty who are only available for eight months of the year, alumni who have a rosy-hued memory of college or graduate school (The old building! The dining hall! The basketball court! The dorms! The café!), donors who are clear that the money comes with strings attached and those strings get pulled every which way with extreme urgency depending on cultural and political contexts, boards bent on revenue drivers and cutting costs to address urgent financial imbalances, and new prospects wanting to know how much they can earn with the degree from the institution even before they have begun an application.

The enunciative present for institutions, therefore, is very complex, made more so by the clashing temporalities within the institution. Administrators, faculties and boards often need to speak prophetically while being financially grounded and solvent. While all must understand and be able to articulate the “why” of an institution, there are different urgencies at play when articulating the mission of an institution to different audiences. Sometimes, these issues take on an unprecedented urgency, while the traditional work of teaching, formation and research of faculty are much slower.¹⁵ Conversely, the rending of civic, political and social life demands urgent and immediate answers even as the work to reimagine, think, dialogue and write demands time and financial resources that stretch every institution. This results in a clash of temporalities, leading to severely strained relationships between faculty, administrators and boards.

As Elie Wiesel asserted in *The Gates of the Forest*, God created humankind for the love of stories. Such stories are also compelling vehicles for a contemporary theological imagination. For an imaginative primer on how to survive and continue to dream with multiple temporalities, I read Octavia Butler, a premier Afrofuturist and the foremost African American science fiction writer, whose work seems to be a chronicle of the present moment in the United States. Butler’s background is Christian (and, as she said, “Religion kept some of my relatives alive, because it was all they had. If they had not had some hope of heaven, some companionship in Jesus, they probably would have committed suicide, their lives were so hellish”¹⁶), but *Christianity*

¹⁵ Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (University of Toronto Press, 2016). As the publisher’s description states, the book focuses on the individual professor and their intellectual production. See “The Slow Professor,” University of Toronto Press, <https://utorontopress.com/9781487521851/the-slow-professor/>.

¹⁶ Octavia Butler, “Octavia E. Butler: Persistence,” interview by unattributed interviewer, ed. Charles E. Brown, *Locus*, June 2020, excerpts available at <https://www.locusmag.com/2000/Issues/06/Butler.html>.

comes up short in her work. The books of Butler's *Parable* series are explorations of multiple temporalities and fine examples of the enunciative present in which African Americans can visualize a useable and livable future. In the first of the series, the *Parable of the Sower*, Butler depicts a dystopian world, in which climate change and violent racist politics have completely changed the landscape of the world. Set in the future United States, in California, Butler sketches the life of Lauren Olamina, a young Black girl journeying to Northern California from Southern California. *Parable of the Sower* begins on July 20, 2024, and the night sky is full of stars. The protagonist, a fifteen-year-old black girl recalled that her stepmother used to say that in years before, so many stars were not visible in the night sky, because of city lights: "lights, progress, growth, all those things we're too hot and too poor to bother with anymore."¹⁷ In other words, by July 2024, climate change has changed life as we know it. The *aion* is one marked by planetary destruction. The story also captures the *chronos* of often-desperate lives of the community that Lauren belongs to, ravaged additionally by drugs, gun violence and sexual assaults of women and children.

Butler wrote this book in 1993, and one wonders whether she meant it as a purview of life in the future, or a chronicle of her present, or a novel about *our* present, set in the past. The book profoundly challenges us to acknowledge clashing temporalities, while providing ways to navigate them through the experience of reading it. Lauren Olamina, the protagonist, lives in an ever-present time of lockdown and closure, moments of continual multiplicity, crisis and redemption. Aware of this transcendence of time, she responds theologically. It is not the theology of traditional Christianity of course, because in that future time, Christianity has become mired in evil. Instead, she reminds her followers to "shape God," because unnecessary suffering is the result "poor Godshaping."¹⁸ Social salvation requires better Godshaping. Lauren Olamina is a survivor, and because of the failures of traditional Christianity that failed to protect both people and the earth, she becomes the founder of a new religion called "Earthseed." She is therefore the sower. Clashing temporalities then require her to enunciate a different message of salvation, one that is grounded in the earth and one that sees human beings as earthseed: "We are Earthseed. We are flesh—self-aware, questing, problem-solving flesh. We are that aspect of Earthlife best able to shape God knowingly. We are Earthlife maturing, Earthlife preparing to fall away from the parent world. We are Earthlife preparing to take root in new ground, Earthlife fulfilling its purpose, its promise, its Destiny."¹⁹ In her case, salvation for the people of Earth requires leaving Earth for the stars, as Earth has become unlivable. What Butler has done is to wrest the narrative of time and temporality away from hegemonic temporal formations that provide no future for Black people.

In the following and even more astonishing novel, *Parable of Talents*, published in 1998, Butler exemplifies Mbembe's caution that the contemporary task of empire is to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. Butler writes of how "the pox" had changed the world forever, and that for many people living the American Experience (no American Dream for many), the violence simply intensified. In the year 2032, a

¹⁷ Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 5.

¹⁸ Psalm 115:8 reflects a sense of how we become like the God or Gods we worship.

¹⁹ Butler, "Prologue to 2027," in *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 151.

politician is running for the presidency of the United States with the slogan “Make America Great Again,” (a temporal claim), and has as followers people who claim to be from the “Church of Christian America,” who spew hate and violence against anyone who threatens their idea of the ideal citizen. Difference is intolerable to these folks and their primary desire is protection for themselves and their way of life. They also have within their ranks a more radical group that possesses things like electric collars and other restraining devices that they actively use on other human beings that they have enslaved. Since the book is a collection of memoirs, it calls to mind the use of imaginative temporality to challenge a reader’s anticipation for a linear account of narrative and experience of time and asks us to inhabit a more complex time than just a presentist one. As such, one needs to have the tenacity and the capacity to follow a narrative that surprises and shocks as it weaves through the past, present and future while challenging the reader to reimagine what is meant by self, neighbor, world, transcendence, immanence, spirituality, religion, family and nation because each occupies a different temporal reality. The first chapter of this astounding chronicle, set in the year 2032 begins thus,

I have read that the period of upheaval that journalists have begun to refer to as “the Apocalypse” or more commonly, more bitterly, “the Pox,” lasted from 2015 to 2030, a decade and a half of chaos. This is untrue. The Pox has been a much longer torment. It began well before 2015...and it has not ended. I have also read that the Pox was caused by accidentally coinciding climatic, economic and sociological crises. ... I have watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive. I have watched as convenience, profit and inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation. I have watched poverty, hunger and disease become inevitable for more and more people.”²⁰

There is much more to say about this book, and of Butler’s work as a whole. Incidentally, several African American musical artistes like Rihanna, Janelle Monáe and Beyoncé use Afrofuturist motifs in their work and in their fashion (Beyoncé specifically drawing on Butler in *Lemonade*).²¹ These artistes speak directly to our students, even if they may not speak to us. They tell compelling stories and in ways that are different than what we do.

TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER – RESPONSE 2

Susan challenges us to envision education beyond the Euro-American model. The “golden age” of the Western university is over. But that golden age never existed at all. Or if it did, it was a golden age for only a select few. The push to diversify our

²⁰ Octavia Butler, *Parable of The Talents* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000), 3-4.

²¹ See Hilton Als, “Critic at Large: Beywatch,” *The New Yorker*, May 23, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/30/beyonces-lemonade>.

educational institutions is therefore an important one, for it recognizes worlds beyond the Euro-American framework. But these attempts easily fall into another trap dominating higher education today: neoliberal market relations and competitive individualism. The result is polarization, isolation, and entrenchment.

I love my institution and believe wholeheartedly in its mission. But it is like virtually every other school of higher education: structured according to extractive and hegemonic temporalities that marginalize, deplete, and silence those living within other temporalities. At a place like LMU, these power relations are almost never framed through exclusivist language. But they can be detected in nostalgia for a university past; strategies aimed to meet current market demands; mental health initiatives superficially about *cura personalis* but really about productivity; increasing divides between tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty; "generous" extensions of tenure clocks due to COVID without reconsideration of tenure standards or the whole tenure system; DEI programs focused on calendar-based outcomes instead of mission or values.

Within endless debates about Catholicity, Susan invites us to uncover what temporalities are in play, and which ones we are privileging. And why. And for whom. An eschatological hope recognizes that our age includes the past as well as the future; it is already but not yet. An eschatological hope informed by postcolonial temporalities holds on to multiplicity for that past, and the present, and the future. The process of social salvation is one that recognizes what Achille Mbembe calls "planetary entanglement." It is a multivocal perichoresis of pasts, presents, and futures through a critical humanism²² that aims to "make [a living] community."²³ We are Earthseed, and we shape God. Perhaps ironically, this does not involve ensuring that everyone feels "at home." Instead, it is the opposite. It requires that we, as Mbembe says, "walk anew the paths of humanity in companionship with all species...to begin by recognizing that at bottom there is no world or place where we are totally 'at home,' masters of the premises."²⁴ We are sojourners together.

Let us pause again to discern in this moment. How can we resist the larger neoliberal forces dominating our higher education spaces? How can we challenge hegemonic temporalities and promote diverse temporalities where no one is "home?" How can we live our missions with eschatological hope and a perichoretic dance of past, present, and future in a planetary entanglement?

SUSAN ABRAHAM – PEDAGOGIES OF RESILIENCE

In the mid-1980s, Nicholas Lash wrote with some urgency about the responsibility of theologians to speak about eschatological hope.²⁵ While not directly about temporality or issues about time, the essay grapples with the cognitive content of Christian ideas, especially the problem of power, eschatological hope and

²² Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 75.

²³ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 229.

²⁴ Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 229.

²⁵ Nicholas Lash, "The Church's Responsibility for the Future of Humanity," in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1986), 186-201.

community.²⁶ Among his probing questions: How is a church that sees its social responsibility in terms of prophetic criticism avoid falling into the trap of a new Manichaeism?²⁷ How will the church explain in legible terms the idea of eschatological hope, the future of humanity and its complex relationship to the present?²⁸ He further challenges theological thinking to acknowledge the prevalence of sin in all of us, and our collective reluctance to think about love and forgiveness for all. Above all, he puts his hope in a church of the people that arises from shared experiences of suffering, drawing on Karl Rahner: “I find it difficult not to believe that, in the burgeoning of [base] communities—from Latin America to Africa, from Asia to the United States; communities that have grown up primarily among the oppressed, the invisible—we have the most striking single sign of the vitality of Christianity.”²⁹ In the 1980s, it was clear that the church was growing in the global South and indications are that it is continuing to do so. If growth of the church is in the global South, Catholic institutions would do well to think on a more global identity.

Contrast this view with that expressed by Ted Smith in his book, *The End of Theological Education*. Smith tracks the emergence in our time of *Homo Optionis*, and primarily in Western contexts, a “historically contingent but powerful set of social processes that operate on us, forming us as certain kinds of individuals. . . . Such an individual is a person defined by having choices” even as (specific and limited) choices and options are forced on the individual by the economic framework of neoliberalism. Church becomes a choice among other choices, becoming an example of “voluntary affiliation.” Voluntary affiliation has given rise to the “nones.” However, the typical “none” is poorer and has less formal education:

Despite caricatures that run through sermons and pop sociology, the “nones” are not primarily wealthy white urbanites skipping church to sip mimosas at brunch. They are also young Black men denied access to steady employment, white women raising children by themselves in a shredded rural America, otherwise documented immigrants for whom affiliation would be risky, queer youth who have fled families for their safety, and overworked overwhelmed people who can’t imagine what it would be like to have time to go to church and worry that they would be looked down on if they did. Even in a time of unraveling, lack of affiliation is tangled with other marginalities in tight knots of mutual reinforcement.³⁰

Nicholas Lash writing in 1986 and Ted Smith writing in 2023 have very different notions of what the idea of “voluntary affiliation” may mean. Lash, and earlier than him, Rahner, were also drawing on very different assumptions of human freedom, liberation, and social salvation than the reality of individualization that Smith is

²⁶ Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 201.

²⁷ Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 190.

²⁸ Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 194-196.

²⁹ Lash, “The Church’s Responsibility for the Future of Humanity,” 200.

³⁰ Ted Smith, *The End of Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 84.

pointing to. The desiccation of institutions of higher education and of religious affiliation in the US is directly related to its neoliberal culture of individualization, oriented as it is to comfort, convenience, complaint, consumption, competitiveness and the circus afforded to the privileged.³¹ Temporality here is experienced as *chronos*. Time is money. "My effort" is worth money. *Chronos*, is the way we measure worth. The temporality of these attitudes creates impossible and unlivable futures because it only provides a fantasy of a future for some individuals. The future imagined here does not contribute to the common good. There is no possible way that processes of individualization can bear the weight of an age even as it is the mark of an age. The planet cannot bear such extraction, and neither can communities or academic institutions. Take Smith's words on how neoliberalism works in universities: "In an ironic transfiguration of their own value, universities establish standards for tenure, promotion, and salary that encourage academics to neglect schools as formative institutions that they help govern and to regard them instead as places to stand as they cultivate their individual brands."³² The neoliberal context is the water we swim in. When a commitment to the common good hollows out public good, reactionary politics finds a foothold and racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia (among other dehumanizing exclusions) become more overt. If individual achievement is the sole marker of faculty in universities, the whole enterprise is headed towards doom.

Knowledge production and its limits are explored in a very creative way in another example of science fiction. Liu Cixin's *The Three Body Problem* asks a simple question, and one familiar to theologians: are human beings worth saving? Within the United States, this global award-winning series was relatively unknown until the producers of the film version of *The Game of Thrones* pictured it for US audiences. Liu's book was followed by a limited domestic release of a Chinese version TV series, available on Prime for US consumers. An entity no less than Ross Douthat in an opinion piece in the New York Times excitedly comments on the "three interpretations" of the book.³³ However, he manages to make it about the clash of civilizations, rather than the clash of temporalities that the Liu Cixin emphasizes in the novel.

A computer engineer and science fiction writer, Liu's work has garnered science fiction awards all over the world. Like Octavia Butler before him, he is the recipient of the Nebula and Hugo science fiction awards. In *The Three Body Problem*, part of a trilogy, Liu asks deep questions about the future of humanity. Once again, in a nonlinear narrative, attempting to capture the complexity of the contemporary moment, Liu asks why many human beings assume that if we were indeed contacted by an alien extraterrestrial civilization that they would behave benignly towards us, especially when our own histories of encounter with each other are shot through with extreme violence. Correspondingly, Liu's alien civilization, the Trisolarians, also known as the

³¹ See "PSR's Dean Exhorts Graduates to Defy Christian Capitalism and Nationalism," Pacific School of Religion, May 25, 2023, <https://www.psr.edu/news/psrs-dean-exhorts-graduates-to-defy-christian-capitalism-and-nationalism/>.

³² Smith, *The End of Theological Education*, 110.

³³ See Ross Douthat, "Three Interpretations of 'The Three Body Problem,'" *New York Times*, April 12, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/12/opinion/three-body-problem.html>.

San-ti, are only interested in colonizing Earth and consider human life on Earth to be like the life of bugs.

The novel is set against the backdrop of China's cultural revolution and the violence it unleashed. The novel explores social themes, but also presents the idea that science itself, as we think about it, is also heavily influenced by culture, its violences and exclusions. Hence, the certitude that scientists and researchers have about their knowledge production is challenged when relativized by a different species and their civilization's perspective. Liu's characters variously condemn humanity at large, either damning all to a fate at the hands of the Trisolarians, or narrowly thinking about the salvation of one's own family and descendants. The characters, mostly scientists, decide that most human beings are not worth saving. One of the characters in the novel, Ye Wenjie after the brutal attacks on her family by the Red Guards reads Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and notes that:

The insanity of the human race had reached its historical zenith. The Cold War was at its height. Nuclear missiles capable of destroying the earth ten times over could be launched at a moment's notice, spread out among the countless missile silos dotting two continents and hidden within ghostlike nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines patrolling deep under the sea.³⁴

Ye decides that she is going to contact the aliens, despite a message she receives from Trisolaris that informs her that the San-ti are colonizers, who will annihilate human beings. Human beings are not worth saving, she decides, and on contacting an individual San-ti, she addresses them as "Lord" and proceeds to build a virtual reality game that she will use to socialize human beings to the eventual arrival of the San-ti. The game takes players through a series of scenarios explaining that time on Trisolaris is extremely complicated, given that the planet has three suns which exert different temporal and climate pressures. Depending on which sun is closer to the planet and depending on its relative distance from the other suns, the planet is ravaged by climatic conditions that lead either to utter destruction or to short stable eras. The action of the three suns on the planet is slowly destroying the San-ti civilization and they are now looking for a future in the stars. Earth seems to them like a paradise, with a stable sun, one temporal reality and centuries of climatic peace and calm. To settle their civilization, they are willing to kill the bugs on Earth, aka the humans, and settle the planet for themselves.

Religion is not absent in the novel. Wang Miao, another character in the book sees a series of numbers marking time in his sight that seems to have no physical basis. Tormented by the countdown, which seems to be a countdown of hours, minutes and seconds to his death, he wanders around, until "his subconscious" brings him to St. Joseph's Church in Wangfujing. He hears the snippet of a hymn: Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove, and is filled with grief and sadness. Other characters pray to the Buddha and people constantly talk about ultimate questions of existence and relationship. Yet, religion seems to be utterly inadequate to the problem facing him and

³⁴ Liu Cixin, *The Three Body Problem* (New York: Tor, 2006), 270.

Earth. The book ends, however, with a reflection on the tenacity and resilience of life. Liu writes:

Look at them, the bugs. Humans have used everything in their power to extinguish them: every kind of poison, aerial sprays, introducing and cultivating their natural predators, searching for and destroying their eggs, using genetic modification to sterilize them, burning with fire and with water. Every family has a bug spray, every desk a fly swatter. ... This long war has been going on for the entire history of human civilization. But the outcome is still in doubt. The bugs have not been eliminated. They still proudly live between the heavens and the earth, and their numbers have not diminished from the time before the appearance of the humans. The Trisolarians who deem the human bugs, seemed to have forgotten one fact: *the bugs have never been truly defeated.*³⁵

His point seems clear: Life will survive (also Butler's point). These novels also raise many theological questions, the enunciative present for Liu: Why *should* we survive, or, in other words, why should human beings be saved? What is human knowledge for? How do we understand ourselves? How do we appreciate the utter gift of life? Why are we preoccupied with our singular death when the death of the whole world is imminent? How do we overcome our desires for domination, competition, control, power, status, wealth and recognition? Aren't we behaving like aliens toward each other? Who then, are the Outsiders? The Insiders? The Pure? The Impure? Who has, or what is, good knowledge? Bad Knowledge? How shall we empower our children to face the reality of planetary and human end, soon? How shall we teach them to hold firm to their humanity despite this scenario? Butler and Liu demonstrate that the imaginative construction of the future, which is also keenly attentive to the past, to critique and speak to the present is an urgent necessity for our survival, and both also agree that our religious traditions are hopelessly failing at this task.

TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER – RESPONSE 3

In my darker moments, I'm not sure that we *should* survive, or whether the dumpster fire that is higher education should be saved. But then I remember that I am falling into the trap of a "golden age" mindset. The planet—and the university—will survive, even if it is taken over by the bugs. So, the question is not whether, but how, and for whom. And let's be honest, higher education (and, yes, the CTSA) was always a post-apocalyptic dystopian reality for many of us who have to scrape together life in the interstices.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine argues that memory itself includes multiple temporalities—past, present, and future—in the present's recollection of the past and

³⁵ Liu, 388, emphasis added.

anticipation of the future.³⁶ For Augustine, memory creates an image of an object or a notion of emotions and feelings in the mind.³⁷ And so, we recall something without the body actually seeing an object, feeling the pain, experiencing the joy, and so on.³⁸

This is, of course, true to some extent. But the mind–body unity means that memory encodes on both mind and body, and the body retains memories that long have been suppressed by the mind. The body can even react very physically as if that object or event indeed were present—regardless of whether the conscious mind is aware of the past object or event. Traumatic memory is an actual re-living of the moment. The body–mind responds to the memory as if the person is experiencing the event in the present. This trauma isn't just encoded on one body, it is also passed down to future generations.

And so, of course, time and space are radically interconnected and marked by trauma. And our discussion of time is bound up with bodies. Time exhausted, depleted, exploited. Bodies exhausted, depleted, exploited. Communities exhausted, depleted, exploited. A planet exhausted, depleted, exploited.

For Johann Baptist Metz, William Cavanaugh, and Shawn Copeland, the work of healing is rooted in the Eucharistic call to remember, to see in the crucified Christ the crucified victims of history, and then to re-member the broken body of Christ, limb by limb, person by person.³⁹ As Copeland says, the Eucharistic practice of re-membering requires “risking memory, overcoming forgetfulness, [and] collectively taking responsibility.”⁴⁰ What would it mean for a Catholic institution to reframe its educational mission through Eucharistic memory with unflinching honesty across time and space, and re-membering our multiple temporalities into healing, transformation, and liberation?

SUSAN ABRAHAM – CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that social salvation is a negotiation of temporalities, a place to create the possibility for an enunciative present, while charting an imaginative and livable future. An enunciative present is a negotiation of the simultaneous multiplicities of past, present and future, that holistically attends to the intellectual, spiritual and affective dimensions of human life. Both Butler and Liu demand that human beings cooperate with each other and with the earth for the survival of the species and for the survival of the planet. I focused on science fiction mainly because of personal predilection, and because the cultural frame of science and religion are useful ways to think critically about both. Further, as we lose students to STEM classes, conversations about the cultural frame of science may be an important angle to create an integrating

³⁶ Roland Teske, “Augustine’s Philosophy of Memory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleanore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 151.

³⁷ Teske, “Augustine’s Philosophy of Memory,” 151-152.

³⁸ Henry Chadwick, trans., *Saint Augustine Confessions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 188.

³⁹ See M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 62.

⁴⁰ Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 64.

learning context. I have also not theorized the effect social media has on the experience of time, though Liu's focus on the pedagogical potential of virtual games brings in that element.

I have emphasized that a reflection on temporality offers theologians a different theoretical and theological space to think about religion and theology, and its histories and practices. Theologians are uniquely qualified to think about complex time, a perspective that could bring another dimension to the existing analyses of cultural differences. I have only (inadequately) engaged with a couple of literary sources, without delving into a rich vein of materials and ideas from philosophy, theology, cultural theory, feminist studies and queer theory, many of which analyze the potential of temporality for its critical and constructive potential. But my tentative attempt was taking Chela Sandoval's plea seriously to bridge "the theoretical apartheid that separates disciplines today."⁴¹ Like Ted Smith, I am also much more concerned about the omnipresence of individualization processes which are death dealing to human attempts to create collaborative and shared spaces. Achille Mbembe points out in this regard that an earlier form of critique of power and capitalism is inadequate to our age where

Capital hardly needs [the laboring nomads] anymore to function. A new form of psychic life is emerging, one based on artificial and digital memory and on cognitive models drawn from neurosciences and neuroeconomics. With little distinction remaining between psychic reflexes and technological reflexes, the human subject becomes fictionalized as an entrepreneur of the self. This subject is plastic and perpetually called on to reconfigure itself in relation to the artifacts of the age.⁴²

Thus, extractive individualism is baked into neoliberalism. We are all beneficiaries and victims of this economic order. Conversely, another strand of critical reflection on individualism from African American politics asks whether certain forms of individuated politics are critical for our time today. Arguing that visions of a better society may best arise from the pew than the pulpit, Eddie Glaude asserts that to act is always to act in a world of suffering and possibility.⁴³

At the presentation at the annual convention of the CTSA, Tracy and I decided to gather thoughts from the audience. We received a windfall of thoughtful and promising avenues to explore. These are a select few of the many excellent responses. We strongly

⁴¹ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 70.

⁴² Achille Mbembe, "The Becoming Black of the World," 4.

⁴³ Eddie Glaude, *We Are The Leaders We Are Looking For* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024), 114. He writes: "I understand that to act in the world involves suffering and possibility. This is the double connection of experience: it is primarily a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection...it also involves our acting, reacting, experimenting, and tinkering with the environment; that what we do can, in fact, improve or transform our conditions for living. We are not stuck with a world where all is settled beforehand, and where we are left to sit on our hand to praise or lament. Much more is required if a better world—if salvation rightly understood is to be had." (Emphasis in the original)

feel that these probings are an organic aspect of our presentation and offer stimulating paths forward.

- What are the differences between the enunciative and annunciative present? That is, feminist and womanist praxis theologies speak into the enunciative present (coloniality) in annunciative ways (eschatological praxis).
- To save Catholic education, we need to rediscover the foundation of the Christian story. The youth thirst for spirituality to construct their human lives. Our job as theologians is to tell the Christian story compellingly. Perhaps our questions should be: What is Catholic in Catholic education? How Catholic is Catholic education?
- How is time sickness contributing to student mental health crises and problems with faculty morale?
- How does an identity rooted in the past Vatican II now get performed in the *kairos* of today?
- How do we envision communal alternatives of shared temporality to ensure spiritual and psychological health?
- What are the limits of the contemplative call to “stay in the present moment?”
- Social media seems to accelerate the experience of time, making students resistant to the slower pace of learning. How do we challenge this phenomenon?
- Perhaps we need to move beyond eschatology to apocalypse, that is, a deep sense of rupture, a break with the present for the sake of a genuinely and radically new hope.