

**Presidential Address**  
**BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE ERUPTION**  
**OF EVIL, AND A RECKONING FOR THEOLOGY**

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Some twenty years ago my mother asked me, as she does each year, what I wanted for Christmas. Through the grace of God, I asked for a copy of my baptismal certificate. After framing it, I hung on the wall in my university office at Boston College and, more recently, at Loyola Marymount University, there alongside my framed diplomas. It is as important as any other credential for my work as a theologian. My baptismal certificate serves as a living symbol and constant reminder that I have committed myself to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, as one among the priesthood of all believers.

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This year has seen a growing sense of uncertainty, angst, and even anger; many of us feel as if tectonic plates are shifting beneath our feet. Yesterday, June 14, 2025, here in Portland, as well as in several major cities across this country, there were large ongoing “No Kings” protests and demonstrations. Such brings to my mind Pope Francis’ 2023 apostolic letter, *Ad Theologiam Promovendam*. In it, Francis urges theologians to consider that, “To promote theology in the future, we cannot limit ourselves to abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes from the past. Called to prophetically interpret the present and to see new itineraries for the future, in the light of revelation, theology will have to deal with profound cultural transformations, aware that: ‘what we are experiencing is not simply an era of change, but a *change of era*.’”<sup>1</sup> His words read presciently in our moment when we may feel that our world is in the midst of a *change of era*. Are we living at the dawn of a crucible of theology?

To be sure, we live in a time when it is no longer possible to ignore that *all* theology carries political dimensions. Without question this is so because all theology attempts to shape and direct human action. As we develop theological claims, we must confront the question, “Whose interest do specific theological doctrines and ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (November 1, 2023), § 1 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378710067 AD THEOLOGIAM PROMOVENDAM On Promoting Theology - English Translation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378710067_AD_THEOLOGIAM_PROMOVENDAM_On_Promoting_Theology_-_English_Translation).

serve?”<sup>2</sup> While always important, this question takes on greater significance in a human context of rapid, consequential, and multivalent societal change. Indeed, as theology continues to offer interpretations of God and if they are to be relevant, then the societal context in which such interpretations are offered matters immensely. As we know, theology invariably “reflects and reinforces just or unjust political arrangements,” and, thus, we must be critically aware of and strive to expose the ways in which “theological discourse reproduces inequalities of class, gender or race, and [accordingly, we must strive] to reconstruct theology so that it serves the cause of justice.”<sup>3</sup> If we do not ask ourselves, *whose material interest is being served by our theological constructs*, then our work will end up inadvertently reproducing the social conditions of the context in which it was created.<sup>4</sup> While the question, *whose interest*, is always important—with the intensifying and expanding attacks on human dignity and the common good—this question is preeminent.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit rightly commands greater theological attention in our time as evil continues to erupt and proliferate in our world. Evil today takes form in the manifold destruction of our social bonds. Baptism in the Holy Spirit emboldens Christian disciples to subvert such evil, thus making, what I call, the *charism of shared life* more potent in our world. In brief, the *charism of shared life* is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, it is the gift of love for the great community of all human beings—past, present, and future—and of love for the great community of all that comprises the natural world, again, past, present, and future. The *charism of shared life* is the potent manifestation of the reign of God in the here and now.

The first section of what follows clarifies the distinctiveness and significance of Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the ways in which it ignites passion for realizing the *charism of shared life*. Through the development of a *pneumatological imagination*, zeal for the *charism of shared life* grows. However, the recognition of and foundation of our shared life is being thoroughly undermined today by the fracturing of our social bonds, the focus of the next section. This fracturing of social bonds evinces the presence and proliferation of evil. The third and final section argues that in the face of this evil, the whole of theology finds itself at the threshold of a crucible, a time in which the nature of theological work unavoidably confronts the most severe of tests. Baptism in the Holy Spirit points the way forward. Baptism in the Holy Spirit emboldens disciples to subvert the spreading evil, making visible and affirming our love for the great community of all human beings and all of God’s creatures. In brief, what follows

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<sup>2</sup> Marsha Aileen Hewitt, “Critical Theory” in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 455.

<sup>3</sup> William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Scott, “Introduction,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 3. Or, said another way by Metz when he wrote, “Since the theology of the world is not a mere theology of the cosmos nor a mere transcendental theology of the human person and existence, but a theology of the emerging political and social order, the theology of the world must be a political theology.” Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 96.

<sup>4</sup> Hewitt, “Critical Theory,” 455-56, italics in the original. In this quotation Hewitt is citing Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 316, 315.

examines three questions: In this moment, is a greater focus on the Baptism in the Holy Spirit needed? Are we being confronted by an escalating intensification of evil? Does this time of reckoning demand of theology a reordered account of itself?

## I. THE OUTPOURING OF BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the gospels, Pauline epistles, and especially in Acts of the Apostles, Baptism in the Spirit is regularly named as related to yet also somewhat distinct from baptism with water. For example, in each of the synoptic Gospels there are passages such as "John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire'" (Lk 3:16, NRSV, used throughout). In Mark, Jesus asks his disciples, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mk 10:38-39) In the Gospel of John, the Baptizer shares "I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 1:33). And later, Jesus explains to Nicodemus, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (Jn 3:5). In addition, throughout the Acts, Baptism in the Holy Spirit remains a constant theme, such as in the passage that reads, "For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5; 11:16). Each of these suggest a relationship as well as a distinction.

Relatedly, the theme of the Holy Spirit and oneness or communion is evident in the Epistles. In 1 Corinthians we read: "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). And elsewhere in the epistles, baptism implies an entry into Jesus' death and resurrection: "When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12). These passages imply that Baptism in the Spirit portends a greater weightiness or intensity.

Before turning to the questions, 'What does Baptism in the Holy Spirit mean?' and, 'How is it particularly significant today?' recall that the scriptures impart that during the fifty days after Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, and before Pentecost, the disciples are fearful, doubtful, uncertain, and even timid. They hid behind locked doors (Jn 20:19-29). Yet, on the day of Pentecost, when they are gathered in one place waiting, wondering, and praying, the Spirit is poured out on them. They receive the Holy Spirit and are transformed. The disciples begin to act boldly, with zeal and courage. The fear that paralyzed them no longer does. They are fearless in the face of death, fearless in the face of evil (Acts 2:14-40, 4:8-12).

What is more, Acts teaches that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is *not* a one-time event but is recorded as a recurring event throughout Acts. Both Luke and Acts make clear that the coming of the Spirit is to be "understood as a divine promise that is realized progressively, but only partially, in Acts as a whole."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 2: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1986), 29-30.

Accordingly, the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has and will continue to occur throughout history and until the second coming.

This plenary affirms that Baptism in the Holy Spirit refers to a deep personal encounter with the gifts of the Holy Spirit *already received* through the sacraments of Christian initiation, Baptism and Confirmation, yet it indicates a more mature reception of these gifts. With this deep personal encounter often comes a preeminent experience of Jesus as God incarnate as well as a personal experience of God's overflowing love that heals and liberates. This personal encounter may be accompanied by a powerful and more visceral awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit working within one's life. According to Ralph Martin: "If we were to be more precise, we would not talk of *receiving* the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, but of *renewing* the Baptism in the Spirit."<sup>6</sup> He identifies this interpretation as, "Baptism in the Spirit and Christian Initiation."

Yet, this is not the only interpretation of Baptism in the Spirit. Some theologians, for example Francis Sullivan, among others, hold that it refers to "A Special Sending of the Spirit, Distinct from Christian Initiation." This interpretation indicates that some of the baptized receive special graces from the Holy Spirit and others do not, even though all have received the sacraments of initiation. Indeed, this interpretation seems to suggest that only a select few are being sent forth by the Holy Spirit and thus, not every baptized Christian.

A third interpretation, one advanced by Peter Hocken, can be titled, "An Eschatological Outpouring for World Evangelization in Light of the Lord's Return." This interpretation focuses on the outpouring of the Spirit as signaling the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies to Israel and the culmination of the age in which we are living. Obviously, much more could be said of each of these three interpretations.<sup>7</sup>

To go deeper, the first interpretation, Baptism in the Spirit and Christian Initiation, affirms the Spirit as present and ready to encourage, prod, guide, and inspire us in our desire to know more of God. It recognizes "a release or renewal or actualization of the graces given in baptism and confirmation that have hitherto remained dormant,"<sup>8</sup> and affirms that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have remained limited in their effects because many who are baptized have a limited understanding, desire, and/or will for God.

The substance of this interpretation has been also articulated and supported by Yves Congar, notably in the initial chapters of the second volume of his magisterial work, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, where he affirms that

it is not disputed that there is only one 'baptism' and that this baptism, given and received in faith, in the name of Jesus, communicated the Spirit. What, then, is involved here?" He further confirms that "'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' is not something replacing baptism and confirmation. Rather it may be seen as an adult re-affirmation and renewal of these sacraments. An opening of ourselves to all their sacramental graces. The gesture of 'laying on of hands' which often accompanies 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' is

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Martin, "A New Pentecost? Catholic Theology and 'Baptism in the Spirit,'" *Logos* 14, no. 3 (2011): 18, italics added.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, "A New Pentecost," 21-36.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, "A New Pentecost," 36.

not a new sacramental rite. It is a fraternal gesture of love and concern, a visible sign of human corporeality (K. and D. Ranaghan, op. cit., p. 20).<sup>9</sup>

In addition, Baptism in the Spirit raises the additional questions, what is the mission of the Spirit? and how is this mission to be interpreted and discerned? The mission of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Holy Spirit are wholly consonant with one another and functionally united, and yet, according to Congar, each expresses their mission in a particular way. The mission of the Word, the Son, is visible in that the Son "who was an expression of the being of God the Father (Heb 1:3), was a human appearance of God," that is, "the personal and substantial reality of the Word made flesh,"<sup>10</sup> and there are also "invisible missions of the Word in the effects of grace through which God expresses himself and makes himself known. In the same way, there are also invisible missions of the Spirit in the effects of grace by which God gives himself in order to make himself love and to make us love all the things of his love: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (Rom 5:5)."<sup>11</sup> Significant here remains the particular way the Holy Spirit expresses her mission, making God's love known to all.

If God gives of God's self in love to all that is, to all of creation, then, all that is is interconnected through the outpouring of God's love. God's love is the origin, source and summit of the interrelatedness of all that is. The Holy Spirit expresses her mission by incessantly encouraging all human beings to love all that God loves. Accordingly, the Spirit strives to move, evoke, prod, animate, and vivify all human beings, heightening our awareness of and love for the whole of God's interconnected creation, yet acting on our love in the specific context of our lives. The unceasing and insistent movement of the Spirit strives to magnify our recognition of and appreciation of our interrelatedness extending to the interrelatedness of all that is.

Moreover, throughout the Catholic tradition many towering theologians have recognized and examined the interrelatedness of all that is. Often the Spirit is acknowledged for her essential role in animating us to make obviously visible the communion of all. For example, in his work, Irenaeus (125-202 CE) emphasizes the unity of all things in heaven and on earth, and he claims that the Spirit is the "co-instituting" principle of the church.<sup>12</sup> For Origen (185-253 CE) creation *is* the Word incarnate, a claim that leads him to describe a universal *apokatastasis*, or universal reconciliation, again affirming the interrelatedness of all that is.<sup>13</sup> Another example, in his *De Trinitate*, Augustine (354-430 CE) elucidates the Spirit as love, as both giver

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<sup>9</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, tans. David Smith, orig. pub. 1979-80 (New York: Crossroad Herder Publishing, 2015), 198. The Ranaghans have provided a clear answer to this question. The quote within this quote was taken from Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, *Catholic Pentecostals* (New York: Paulist Press, 1969), 148.

<sup>10</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 9. Congar draws on Irenaeus' *Demonstration (or Proof) of Apostolic Preaching*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*.

and gift, and as actively furthering the trinitarian communion.<sup>14</sup> Much more recently, theologians as diverse as Dietrich Bonhoeffer,<sup>15</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar,<sup>16</sup> Víctor Codina,<sup>17</sup> and Elizabeth Johnson,<sup>18</sup> among others, all affirm and examine the interrelatedness or communion of all that is.

Because the Spirit's mission is to encourage a consciousness of the interrelatedness of all that is, the Spirit is, accordingly, co-creator of the church. In discussing the Spirit's work of co-creation Congar makes a key clarification in how we are to understand this work, noting that through the Spirit, Jesus remains actively present to us throughout history and does not leave us orphans. Moreover, he claims: "This activity of the Lord with and through his Spirit cannot be reduced to a mere making present of the structures of the covenant proposed by Christ while he was on earth, that is, before he ceased to be visibly and tangibly present. *It is the source of a new element in history.*"<sup>19</sup> Congar invites us to consider: what is this *new element* in history? Throughout Part I of his second volume, he argues that the "The Holy Spirit Makes the Church One" and that the Spirit "Is the Principle of Communion."<sup>20</sup> Relatedly, he argues that the Spirit is central to each of the four marks of the church from the Nicene Creed, as we know, "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." Even so, since Vatican II there remains an outsized emphasis on the ecclesial dimensions of the Spirit. Even Congar's magisterial work, argues Codina, comments almost exclusively "on the action of the Spirit in our personal lives and in the Church."<sup>21</sup> Yet, several biblical passages suggest that the Spirit moves in history and in the cosmos.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the Holy Spirit continually acts in the world, in history, and in the cosmos, as a source animating communion, animating forgiveness and resurrection.<sup>23</sup>

Relatedly, the Holy Spirit acts dynamically through the imagination bringing about greater communion with God, with one another, with all of creation. In John McIntyre's words: "The Holy Spirit is God's imagination let loose and working with all the freedom of God in the world and in the lives, the words and actions, of the men

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<sup>14</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Trinity – De Trinitate*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), Book XV.

<sup>15</sup> John de Gruchy, "Introduction: The Development of Bonhoeffer's Theology," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*, ed. John de Gruchy (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1987), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Vol. III: Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Víctor Codina, *Creo en el Espíritu Santo: Pneumatología narrativa* (Bilbao, España: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Elizabeth A. Johnson. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol 2, 12 italics is mine.

<sup>20</sup> The first quote is the title of Part I of the second volume of Congar's *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. And the second is a portion of the title of Chapter 2 of Part I.

<sup>21</sup> Víctor Codina, *No extingáis el Espíritu: Un iniciación a la Pneumatología* (Bilbao, España: Editorial Sal Terrae, 2008), 161.

<sup>22</sup> Codina, *No extingáis el Espíritu*, 162.

<sup>23</sup> Codina, *Creo en el Espíritu Santo*, 25.

and women of our time."<sup>24</sup> The Spirit works by incessantly prodding all human beings to develop a more capacious *pneumatological imagination*, an imagination that arises from encounters with the dynamism of the Holy Spirit and an imagination that ardently loves the great community of all that is.

Said differently, the Spirit, who infuses the world and animates all creatures, including human beings, may be understood as the *Interpreter Spirit* who constantly seeks to reconcile all of us to one another through ongoing processes of interpretation, bringing all into greater communion with God, with one another, with all creation. In other words, the Interpreter Spirit incessantly seeks to build the *beloved community*, another term for the Reign of God.<sup>25</sup> In sum, the mission of the Holy Spirit is to encourage greater consciousness of, commitment to, and love for our interrelatedness, by animating the development of a *pneumatological imagination*, an imagination that enables humanity to realize and actualize the *charism of shared life*. Indeed, the *charism of shared life* is not simply one among many gifts of the Holy Spirit, it is *the* gift of the Holy Spirit that holds pride of place. Baptism in the Holy Spirit animates an ardent desire to concretely realize the *charism of shared life* in this time and in this place.

While the Holy Spirit animates the *charism of shared life*, this charism is actualized most consequentially in the face of evil, evil in the form of forces that seek to destroy community, destroy human beings, and destroy all that constitutes the common good. A discussion of this evil follows.

## II. BREAKING SOCIAL BONDS, THE ERUPTION OF EVIL

Since we met in June of 2024, many among feel as if they no longer recognize the world we live in, a kind of dread and for some even outrage has set in, brought on by escalating injustice. As mentioned above, it is as if we *all* live on a geological fault line, with tectonic plates rapidly and roughly shifting beneath our feet. The varied and numerous changes have come on so fast that it is difficult to make sense of and effectively respond to what is happening. The numerous changes collectively are leading to the destruction of our *social bonds* and, thus, the destruction of our *trust* in social institutions and in one another. For those who live in the *periferias*, in the peripheries of our world, acute suffering is escalating. Four examples illustrate this point.

First, throughout 2025, US government attacks on immigrants have sharply increased in intensity and become far more numerous and widespread, destroying families and traumatizing children. The US government has targeted Latina/o immigrants, as well as other immigrants, using them as scapegoats for all manner of social problems. This has resulted in Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE's)

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<sup>24</sup> Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 123. The quote is from John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1987), 64.

<sup>25</sup> Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, orig. pub. 1918 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 121-142, 297-319. See also Daniel G. Lang, "Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King, Jr., "Christian Realism, Pacifism, and the Beloved Community," *International Relations and Diplomacy* 8, no. 1 (2020): 1-13.

militarized style of workplace raids in businesses in Los Angeles and elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> in the random, unlawful deportation and incarceration of immigrants like Salvadoran Kilmar Abrego Garcia, among others,<sup>27</sup> and in the terrorizing and abuse of children.<sup>28</sup> This echoes and amplifies the reign of evil, terror, and death that began with the US government's family separation and detention of tens of thousands of migrant children at our southern border which reached a new level of terror in the late 2010s. During this time, US officials separated Mexican and Central American children from their parents and families, traumatizing these children certainly for decades to come, perhaps all their lives.<sup>29</sup> These attacks severely damage children and, further, they sow seeds of suspicion and hatred targeting immigrants, creating the perception that immigrants are a social pariah to be scorned and that they are essentially criminals.

Second, our social bond with all creatures of the natural world and with planet earth have been under attack for some time. For decades now, scientists and scholars have called our attention to the ways human expectations and patterns of consumption shaped by unrestrained capitalism have seriously damaged planet earth, limiting and compromising its life sustaining processes, including its ability to sustain human life. Indeed, today the term "Capitalocene" signifies the onset of the climate crisis produced by the ongoing expansion of unbridled capitalism. More recently, a change in US government policies have destroyed much-needed environmental protections that took decades to achieve.<sup>30</sup> Now, at an accelerated rate, planet earth continues to grow warmer and these higher temperatures have led to much more severe weather patterns around the globe and a much dryer climate.<sup>31</sup> For example, in January of 2025, the city of Los Angeles experienced apocalyptic wildfires, fourteen in all, the two largest

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Kim Tong-Hyng and Russ Bynum, "Raid nets 475 people at Hyundai site in Georgia," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 2025, A5; Andrea Castillo, "Region's migrant arrests top 1,600 in June," *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2025, A5; Brittny Mejia, "'You're scared to be brown,'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2025, A1; Raul A. Reyes, "Alligator Alcatraz, the Florida concentration camp," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 2025, A11; Melissa Goldin, "Numbers dispute Trump's claim that he targets 'worst' immigrants," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 2025, A1; Zurie Pope, "ICE raid map finds racial profiling," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 2025, B3; Jenny Jarvie and Gabrielle LaMarr LeMee, "L.A. raids go beyond 'worst of the worst,'" *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 2025, A1, among many other articles.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Robin Abcarian, "The absurd persecution of Kilmar Abrego Garcia," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 2025, A15; Brittny Mejia, "Deaf, mute, terrified – and shipped to Texas by ICE," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 2025, A1; Wendy Fry, "ICE release deaf immigrant after months," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 2025, B2, among many other articles.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Marsha Griffin, Alan Shapiro and Julie M. Linton, "Family separation 2.0 compounds the trauma on children," *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 2025, A13; Jenny Gold, "In response to L.A. raids, parents prepare for the worst," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2025, A1, among many other articles.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob Soboroff, *Separated: Inside an American Tragedy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> One group that has worked for over twenty years on environmental issues, *Catholic Climate Covenant*, has seen much of their decades long work to protect the environment rolled back with the current administration's policies. See <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>. I am grateful to Elizabeth A. Johnson for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>31</sup> Ian James and Sean Greene, "Fresh water is disappearing and much of the world is getting drier," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 2025, A1.

burning for twenty-four days straight. The Palisades Fire began on January 7 and by the twenty-seventh of the month, it was still only 94 percent contained. At that time, more than 23,400 acres had been burnt and more than 6,800 structures destroyed. The population living in the area that was burned was more than 121,000 people. The other large fire, the Eaton Fire, began on January 8 and by the twenty-seventh, it was 98 percent contained, with more than 14,000 acres burnt and more than 9,400 structures destroyed. The population living in this area was more than 141,000 people.<sup>32</sup> In response to the Los Angeles wildfires, those with the means to do so can at least potentially attempt to rebuild their lives in Los Angeles or elsewhere as they wish. However, the poor have few choices; they either end up homeless or are forced to relocate far from Los Angeles. Relatedly, the air quality for those living in Los Angeles has declined because of these fires, and, of course, this impacts the economically poor more severely. The blessings of the earth, like clean air, are no longer available for everyone to enjoy.

Moreover, our social bonds are increasingly strained between generations. Many middle aged and older adults have enjoyed the benefits of a mature capitalist economy, and this older population will, for the most part, pass on well before the damage done to planet earth severely impacts their quality of life on earth. In contrast, younger adults in their twenties and thirties will inevitably confront the consequences of climate change and a damaged earth, one far less able to sustain flourishing lives for human beings. Today, younger adults are questioning what kind of world will exist in twenty or thirty years. Will there be a world that can sustain them, much less any children they may have? Will the world of the future be able to sustain children born today? Is bringing children into an increasingly diminished world an expression of love for them? Is it compassionate to have children? While these may seem vexing and even absurd questions, many young adults consider them to be prudent and deserving of consideration.<sup>33</sup>

A third example is found in the US government wholesale attack on US universities and colleges and their commitment to academic freedom and critical thinking. These attacks break down our social bonds in that they undermine the free and open pursuit of research contributing to the growth, improvement, and prosperity of humanity. This kind of research is undermined through the government's weaponizing of the availability of research grants. Increasingly, government grants funding various university research projects are only available to those universities and

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Laura J. Melson, "24 Hours That Changed Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 2025, A1; Hannah Fry and Brittny Mejia, "Altadena's Black residents hit harder by fire, study says," *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 2025, A1; Corinne Purtill and Rosanna Xia, "Blazes may worsen ocean pollution," *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 2025, A1; Tony Briscoe and Ian James, "Safety worries amid toxic cleanup," *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 2025, A1; Nathan Fenno, Melody Gutierrez, and Paige St. John, "Escape from the Palisades," *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 2025, A1; Ian James, "How climate change worsened wildfires," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 2025, B1.

<sup>33</sup> Timothy Wainwright, "Living Faithfully in an Age of Ecological Crisis: A Maximus-Inspired Vision for Gen Z," (master's thesis, Loyola Marymount University, 2025).

projects which support the current administration political agenda.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, universities (and other types of institutions and businesses) with a commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Anti-Racism (DEI/AR) are losing millions of dollars.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, the banning of books has been yet another strategy employed by the US government. This strategy has been used to target books advancing critical race theory, gender studies, studies in racism, critical readings of history, LGBTQ+ studies, and more. Indeed, former CTSA president, Bryan Massingale had his book, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*,<sup>36</sup> banned from the US Naval Academy Library. Furthermore, 381 books addressing gender, sexual identities, and racism have been banned from this same library.<sup>37</sup> The Naval Academy's library, at the order of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, has decided that Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is banned, while Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is not. The library is keeping on its shelves all books that defend white power and white supremacy.<sup>38</sup> Again, these attacks sow seeds of hatred and distrust targeting any person who is not white, causing a serious breakdown of US society and its diversity. These strategies encourage and support a US version of apartheid or the encroachment of an even more nefarious outcome.

Fourth and finally, violence against woman because they are women represents one of the most malevolent attacks on our social bonds. Women of color disproportionately experience these attacks. There exists a social imaginary or tacit mindset that ranks human beings, ensuring that men and women experience being human as part of a human hierarchy. The Christian tradition has played an outsized role in influencing the so-called legitimacy of this ranking. As Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite makes clear,

The Christian theological contribution to violence against women was specifically to charge women as 'disproportionately responsible for sin.' While Genesis origin stories imply this, it is the New Testament narratives where this particular theological connection is

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<sup>34</sup> Jaweed Kaleem, "Trump order stokes campus anxiety," *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 2025, B1; Michael Casey, "Plaintiffs in suit say Trump's campus crackdown has silenced scholars," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 2025, A14.

<sup>35</sup> Byron Tau, "Education crackdown at commuter college," *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 2025, A6; Jonathan J. Cooper, "How Trump is weaponizing the government," *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 2025, A2; Erwin Chemerinsky, "Why California universities must fight Trump in court," *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 2025, A13

<sup>36</sup> Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010)

<sup>37</sup> John Ismay, "These Are the 381 Books Removed From the Naval Academy Library," *New York Times*, April 4, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/04/us/politics/naval-academy-dei-books-removed.html>; John Ismay and Kate Selig, "Naval Academy Takes Steps to End Diversity Policies in Books and Admissions," *New York Times*, March 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/28/us/politics/naval-academy-diversity-affirmative-action.html>.

<sup>38</sup> John Ismay, "Who's In and Who's Out at the Naval Academy's Library?," *New York Times*, April 11, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/11/us/politics/naval-academy-banned-books.html>.

made, such as in 'First Timothy 2:12-14' that reads, 'I do not allow women to teach or to have authority over men. They must keep quiet. For Adam was created first and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and broke God's law.'<sup>39</sup>

The impact of this mindset has found expression in varied forms. Indeed, the work of John Paul II in his theology of the body presumes that a benevolent patriarchy can encourage respect for women that is sufficiently beneficial for all. What his work does not critique is the operative ranking of human beings implied in a benevolent patriarchy. Indeed, this work attempts to sanitize the ranking of human beings. Such ranking can and has contributed to minimizing the heinous evil known as femicide, the systematic killing of women because they are women. Femicide is *the* most extreme form of gender-based violence; it is the killing of women in large numbers; it is a form of killing that is notably brutal and sexualized; and it is killing in which perpetrators routinely experience impunity. It almost exclusively targets Brown, Black, Indigenous, and Asian women. What is more significant, femicide functions symbolically as a threat to all women, in particular any woman of color who challenges the very existence of a human hierarchy.

The evil of femicide exists in the United States as well as around the globe.<sup>40</sup> In the United States, femicide remains an invisible evil. Small pockets of scholars, some activists and a handful of communities are working to bring femicide in the US to public attention, but generally the US public remains unconscious of this US violence and killings motivated by gender. Such killings are, for the most part, perceived to be a problem in other countries but not in the United States. For example, in the United States as a whole, 60 to 71 percent of all Native Americans and Alaska Natives live in urban or rural areas that are *not* tribal land. Murdered and missing Native American women are *not* primarily reservation tragedies. The 2018 publication, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: A Snapshot of Data from 71 Urban Cities in the United States*, was written by Annita Lucchesi (Southern Cheyenne), a University of Arizona doctoral student, and Abigail Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), and produced by the Urban Indian Health Institute, a division of the Seattle Indian Health Board. It acknowledges more than 5,700 reports of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, yet "the US Department of Justice missing persons database has only reported 116 cases. The majority of these murders are committed by non-Native people on Native-owned land. The lack of communication, combined with jurisdictional issues between state, local, federal, and tribal law enforcement, make it nearly impossible to begin the investigative process."<sup>41</sup> As a result, femicide continues with little to no public awareness or outcry. Reliable demographic information is difficult to come by.

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<sup>39</sup> Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield: Christian Theology and the Global War on Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 129.

<sup>40</sup> For a theological discussion of femicide, see Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Theologizing in an Insurgent Key: Violence, Women, Salvation*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2022); Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011)

<sup>41</sup> Annita Lucchesi (Southern Cheyenne), PhD-c, and Abigail Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), MA, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: A Snapshot of Data from 71 Urban Cities in the United States*, Urban Indian Health Institute, Seattle Indian Health Board (October 2018),

It spreads because perpetrators conclude that some women's bodies are economically more valuable dead than alive, or, that women are, in the words of Achille Mbembe, "a species of life whose value is extra-economic, the only equivalent of which is the sort of death able to be inflicted upon it. As a rule, such death is something to which nobody feels any obligation to respond. Nobody even bears the slightest feelings of responsibility or justice toward this sort of life or, rather, death."<sup>42</sup> The eruption of femicide is a quintessential example of necropolitics.<sup>43</sup> Femicide destroys the shared humanity of women and men, breaking our social bonds at the most fundamental level.

While the onset of any one of these four examples can significantly damage our social ties, collectively, they encourage one overarching goal. The goal is the breakdown of our social bonds and of society, the destruction of our shared humanity. Any strategy that foments distrust, discord, fear, and chaos, and that brings on the collapse of long-trusted social institutions, encourages within each of us an enmity toward one another and distrust of each other. Distrust amplifies differences among us and deepens the entrenched divisions separating us. Of course, there are many *other* current examples of societal breakdown, each deserving attention, each equally urgent and terrifying. As always, entrenched divisions lead to greater suffering for the *anawim* among us, that is, the poor, the lowly, the humble, and the vulnerable whose trust in God remains steadfast even amid more heightened difficulty.

Collectively these four examples signify an ongoing *sociocide*. Sociocide means destroying society, particularly by killing the social institutions, conventions, and infrastructure that create and sustain society in both public and personal spheres, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> In the 1980s, Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, coined the term, "sociocide," which he understood to be the intentional destruction of a society's social infrastructure. It refers to the killing of the social. Sociocide, while related to widely recognized terms such as "suicide, homicide, fratricide, regicide,...and,...genocide," does not necessarily mean the killing of one or many human beings. Sociocide, according to sociologist Keith Doubt, "means to kill society. [It] is the murdering of the social encompassing matters pertaining to human solidarity:

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<http://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>; See also Indian Affairs Department of the State of New Mexico, *New Mexico Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives Task Force Report* (December 2020), [https://www.iad.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NM\\_MMIWR\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_WEB\\_v120920.pdf](https://www.iad.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NM_MMIWR_Report_FINAL_WEB_v120920.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran, orig. pub. 2016 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 38.

<sup>43</sup> Definition of Necropolitics: "To a large extent, racism is the driver of the necropolitical principle insofar as it stands for organized destruction, for a sacrificial economy, the functioning of which requires, on the one hand, a generalized cheapening of the price of life and, on the other, a habituation of loss. This principle is at work in the present-day process by which the permanent simulation of the state of exception justifies "the war against terror" – a war of eradication, indefinite, absolute, that claims the right to cruelty, torture, and indefinite detention—and so a war that draws its weapons from the "evil" that it pretends to be eradication, in a context in which the law and justice are applied in the form of endless reprisals, vengeance, and revenge." Taken from Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 38.

<sup>44</sup> Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 61-62, 113, 132, 137, 144.

family, social institutions, gender, ethnic, racial, and national identity."<sup>45</sup> Overall, Doubt's research on sociocide focuses on its relationship to wars.

More recently, in his 2025 book, sociologist Charles Derber clarifies sociocide specifically in relation to what is transpiring in the United States. He describes it as the destruction of "the personal and social relations in the workplace, household, and civil society—that support democracy and preserve the very existence of social life. Sociocide is an existential threat to the very survival of society itself, breaking down social connections, networks, and associations—forms of social capital—that are the fabric of a society and the foundation of democracy."<sup>46</sup> He further argues "that sociocidal forces are impacting people of all classes, races, and gender orientations in America, where sociocide has become a universalizing systemic threat."<sup>47</sup> In our national context, we are experiencing a "melt down [of] our collective social institutions like the workplace, the family, and the community. . . [that is a] burning down the social bones that keep a society together. The result is sociocide, an increasingly disconnected society lacking a 'we' and focused on the survival of the 'me.' It opens the door wide to political authoritarianism...[brought on by] the breakdown of social cohesion and civil society essential to democracy."<sup>48</sup> Derber's work addresses sociocide in relation to the political, or better said, in relation to *policide*, the destruction of the political. My own work on sociocide has been in relation to femicide and the development of a theological response.

Societies can thrive when members share a widely held commitment to a normative orientation such as *justice* or the *Golden Rule*. Broadly speaking, a normative orientation serves to establish trust among members of a society which, in turn, helps to preserve social order.<sup>49</sup> For protection against force and fraud, people within a given society give up, or at least significantly limit, their right to use force and fraud. Short of this kind of exchange human life becomes brutish and violent, accordingly life spans are shortened. When society is destroyed what is demolished is people's trust in their shared normative orientation and the security it provides.

Sociocide, the destruction of society, is advanced by attacks against not only specific groups of people but also by attacks on bonds of trust between people, by attacks on our *humanitas*, our disposition toward compassion and sympathy for others, by attacks on our shared pursuit of what is true, good, and beautiful, and by attacks on our drive to know more of ourselves, more of one another and more of our world. Sociocide breeds fear, mistrust, isolation, loneliness, and suspicion. It advances through the fomenting of ever greater experiences of chaos that overwhelm. With so many attacks on so many fronts happening relentlessly and rapidly, a kind of paralysis sets in leaving most human beings exhausted and unable to respond. Over time, chaos, exhaustion, and the enduring threat of terror and trauma can leave many longing for

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<sup>45</sup> Keith Doubt, *Sociocide: Reflections on Today's Wars*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), 1. See also Keith Doubt, *Understanding Evil: Lessons from Bosnia* (New York: Fordham University Press), 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Derber, *Bonfire: American Sociocide, Broken Relations, and the Quest for Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2025), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Derber, *Bonfire: American Sociocide*, 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Derber, *Bonfire: American Sociocide*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Doubt, *Sociocide: Reflections on Today's Wars*, 3.

order and peace, ready to compromise democratic freedoms, thereby paving the way for an authoritarian, autocratic leader and for a police state that re-establishes order and seeming calm.

Of its very nature, sociocide signifies the intensification of evil. Recall that Augustine, Aquinas, and most Catholic theologians claim that evil is not something in itself but rather is the privation of the good. Therefore, as sociocide grows and gains momentum, becoming more entrenched, this phenomenon represents an escalation of evil. Obviously, the experience of evil invariably causes suffering, which likewise surges with the varied attacks on our social existence. Notably, sociocide represents a sustained assault on every one of the ten principles of Catholic Social Teaching.<sup>50</sup> This escalating and multifaceted destruction of our social existence is *the* predominant evil of our time. And arguably, nothing provokes terrifying uncertainty like the experience of evil.

Every time humans are confronted by evil, it demands some reckoning of us, yet to attempt as much represents a problematic challenge for two fundamental reasons. First, evil of its nature resists complete comprehension. As Richard Bernstein observes: “Interrogating evil falls in the space between two extremes. We cannot give up the desire to know, to understand, to comprehend the evil that we confront. If we did, we would never be able to decide how to respond to its manifestations. But we must avoid the extreme of deluding ourselves that total comprehension is possible.”<sup>51</sup> Evil’s capacity to entice and command human attention results, in part, from its incomprehensibility. We stand transfixed in our disbelief, frozen, seemingly unable to respond until we fully understand the evil growing all around us, a pursuit which always frustrates.

Second, the banality of evil, that is, the experience of evil arising from thoughtless and/or bureaucratic-rule making and enforcement that renders evil’s appearance as neither monstrous nor demonic. The import of this insight is that, in the end, *it is not necessary for human beings to be motivated by evil in order to commit evil acts*. Hannah Arendt has much to teach on this point. As Dana Villa clarifies, Arendt’s

notion of the “banality of evil” was no pithy attempt at characterizing either the Holocaust or the actions and motivations of the perpetrators in general. It was, rather, a descriptive concept she was “put into possession of” when confronted by Eichmann in the flesh at his 1961 trial in Jerusalem. It was, in other words, the product of her *judgment of a particular* ---Eichmann. ... [S]he drew the following conclusion: extreme wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction are not necessary for an individual to aid the

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<sup>50</sup> The ten principles of Catholic Social Teaching are: (1) Dignity of the Human Person; (2) Common Good; (3) Solidarity; (4) Preferential Option for the Poor; (5) Stewardship of Creation; (6) Subsidiarity & the Role of Government; (7) Participation; (8) Rights & Responsibilities; (9) Economic Justice; (10) Peace. See Kenneth R. Himes, et. al., eds., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 228.

performance of *infinite* evil. It was Eichmann's "extraordinary shallowness," his one distinguishing characteristic, which led Arendt to name an evil that required neither exceptional wickedness nor depravity, but only a profound lack of thought and judgment. "The banality of evil" named *Eichmann's* evil, not the evil of the perpetrators or the Holocaust in general.<sup>52</sup>

What is important here is the numbing of the mind which allows for the cooperation of many thoughtless, bureaucratic minded people in the escalation of extreme evil, such as sociocide. Indeed, returning to Arendt's paradigmatic example of Eichmann, who is "a bureaucrat who claimed in his trial that he was just following orders and whose primary motivation was to move up the hierarchy."<sup>53</sup> Such a common motivation shared by so many of us can serve to numb the mind. One of the architects of the Holocaust, Heinrich Himmler, developed and frequently used axioms or catchphrases to convince subordinates that what they were doing was the right thing. He numbed his subordinates' minds with phrases like "My honor is my loyalty" or "These are battles which future generations will not have to fight again." Or with notions, such as a call to fulfill one's duty. Relatedly, the banality of evil challenges us to consider how the inadvertent participation in the escalation of evil later comes to be perceived as a "necessary evil" or an evil of lesser concern. The 2023 film, *The Zone of Interest*, illustrates this tenacious conundrum by focusing on the idyllic life of a family who lives in a beautiful home with a lovely garden just outside the walls of Auschwitz, a family whose livelihood is sustained by Auschwitz. But for Auschwitz, this family aspires to live a good and wholesome life. As Arendt presses,

It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme[.] ... It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is "thought-defying," as I said because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its 'banality.' Only the good has depth and can be radical.<sup>54</sup>

The enigma of evil requires that those who attempt to take the reality of evil seriously and then work to lessen evil's grip, must first take notice of the formidable challenge of evil's presence in sociocide. What is more, because evil defies comprehension and expands as a result of its banality, theological resources found in solitude and the development of our interior lives are necessary to resist attempts at numbing the mind, and to act publicly on behalf of our God-given social existence.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Dana R. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 40-41. Larry Gordon provided insight concerning Arendt's often misunderstood notion of the banality of evil.

<sup>53</sup> Caludio Marcelo Viale, "Royce and Bernstein on Evil," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 10, no. 1 (2013): 82.

<sup>54</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 251.

<sup>55</sup> Mark Aloysius, "The Limits and Achievements of a Politics of Conscience in Hannah Arendt" (unpublished manuscript, March 19, 2024).

### III. A RECKONING FOR THEOLOGY AND REALIZING THE CHARISM OF SHARED LIFE

Theologians must confront the crucible of sociocide. A failure to do so means the consequential nature of our work diminishes. Yet, to confront this evil means we must ask ourselves: how does theology remain awake to this moment's intensification of evil and its terrifying consequences? And, particularly in this time of an expanding abyss of despair, how will theology remain awake, at this same time, to the gift and practice of hope?

The contemporary crucible of sociocide means that theology finds itself in a time of reckoning. This reckoning presses theologians to seek out the *kairos* interruption in the midst of this moment; we must give an account of *where* Catholic theology stands and *what* Catholic theology stands for. Our time is not simply one of political reckoning but also one of theological reckoning, a time to focus more decisively on workings of God in the midst of the many eruptions and attempts to destroy all that constitutes our social bonds.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit holds the clue for this moment. In the early church, when the disciples feel understandably frightened and fearful after witnessing the gruesome crucifixion of Jesus, they open themselves to the action of the Holy Spirit who transforms how they regard their place in the world. Our own time has echoes of the fright and fear experienced by the early disciples. Baptism in the Holy Spirit rightly deserves greater theological attention because the gifts of the Holy Spirit inspire and encourage those who strive to stop the destruction of our social bonds. It is the movement and unrestrained flow of the Holy Spirit that feeds within us a desire for the flourishing of our shared life, a greater compassion and empathy for others, and a willingness to sacrifice ourselves for the greater good, encouraging the ascendancy of the greater good. Again, the Holy Spirit cultivates and nurtures the *charism of shared life* in those who remain open to the Spirit's promptings.

The disciples' experience, as recorded in Acts, offers lessons and wisdom concerning their conversion from fear that overwhelms *to* an ability to act with bold courage. Acts portrays the world as most often overrun by violence and the threat of violence and by widely held presumptions that violence, killing, and destruction is the normal and necessary means for the establishment of a new world of peace, stability, and order. Such a presumption is made to appear normal and obvious. Yet in his commentary on the Acts, Willie James Jennings captures well the contrasting vision advanced by the movement of Holy Spirit:

The Acts of the Apostles is about aesthetics before it is about ethics. It is about a God whose weapon of choice is the divine desire placed in us by the Spirit. That desire has the power to press through centuries of animosity and hatred and beckon people to want one another and envision lives woven together. Such a life never asks people to forget their past or deny their present, but to step together into a future that will not yield to the given order of isolations, but yields to the Spirit that is poured out on all flesh. ... We need people of faith who will yield to the Spirit in this present moment. God fills the world with God's own life. God fills the disciples of Jesus, and

they speak the languages of others. God fills Gentiles as well, as they too speak words of peoples not their own. God drives some into the lives of others for the sake of Jesus and the hope born of love. This is the Book of Acts for us. Welcome to the real.<sup>56</sup>

*The real* means there is no shying away from hatred and violence. That said, in Acts, the disciples come to recognize that their *desire* to see God's will realized carries transformative power.

What matters most is what God wants to see happen which is not what the disciples in Acts, or disciples today, might envision for the future.

In Acts, the Spirit of God truly directs, speaks, guides. If in the Gospel of Luke, God reveals the divine life in the Son, then in Acts the Spirit of God is making perfectly clear divine desire. Luke-Acts places us in the desire of God revealed in the Son's own yielding to the Spirit. His life of yielding becomes our life of yielding. God desires the interweaving of peoples, Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female, into one through the Son and in the Spirit.<sup>57</sup>

An authentic desire for communion with God unavoidably means a desire for the "interweaving of peoples," and not simply peoples with whom we share a vision for the world but rather, a desire for peoples with whom we would not choose to spend time, if left to our own devices. Indeed, the Spirit presses us in a direction that takes us across borders and boundaries not of our choosing.<sup>58</sup>

Our fears often tempt us to ignore the Spirit's call to live in authentic communion with God and others. First, we struggle with the powers and principalities of our time, that is, with all the monied interests and the socio-political powers that give definition to our lives and to our habits of living, all in the context of an economic empire that promises the possibility of a secure future for ourselves and our children. Yet, such a future comes about through ruthless competition with others who are deemed lesser and are killed or cheated or destroyed, a kind of necessary evil if the empire we know is to survive. The end result is sociocide for the sake of empire and the standard of living the empire provides. The struggle remains in our willingness to turn away from empire. Second, we struggle with our own internal conundrum, namely, will we or will we not yield to the Spirit? Life in the Spirit means the draining of unjust powers and privileges that are often taken for granted. In many respects, yielding to the Spirit and the authentic life in the Spirit is a function of imagination and of humility. Can we imagine for ourselves the good life independent of what empire affords only a select group of us? Can we step into the stunning vision of the world that the Spirit encourages, one centered on our lives in communion with one another, communion even with the significant differences evident among us?<sup>59</sup> Such a life together subverts

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<sup>56</sup> Willie James Jennings, *Acts*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>57</sup> Jennings, *Acts*, 254.

<sup>58</sup> Jennings, *Acts*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Jennings, *Acts*, 6-7, 355.

sociocide. Such a life is what the Holy Spirit animates and is the *charism of shared life*, the Spirit's preeminent gift.

This *charism of shared life* requires a conversion if this new way of envisioning the world is to break forth. The gift of shared life means a yielding to the Spirit such that overtime we develop a pneumatological imagination, an imagination that erases the invisibility of women and of every marginalized group. The humanity of every marginalized group is shown in the bright light of the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup> Notably, it is the victims of the world's injustices who are invariably the primary subjects of this different vision of reality, of our shared life, and, therefore, the primary subjects of the hope that is God's protest against suffering. In Jon Sobrino's words, "the hope that has to be rebuilt now is not just any hope but *hope in the power of God over the injustice that produces victims*."<sup>61</sup>

To advance the *charism of shared life*, despite intensifying evil, requires great personal sacrifice, at times, even the ultimate sacrifice. The dangerous work of subverting evil means refusing to allow evil to have the last word; such action affirms evil's limit. For example, calling out and undermining the evil of femicide is dangerous work. Activists, protestors, and journalists have either lost their lives, had their lives seriously threatened, or had the lives of their family members threatened. For more than twenty-three years, Norma Andrade, has publicly protested femicide. In 2001, she lost her seventeen-year-old daughter, Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, to femicide in Ciudad Juárez. Andrade responded by choosing to publicly speak out against femicide. As a vehicle to protest these killings, to demand that they end, and to seek justice for all the daughters lost to this evil, Norma Andrade founded the group, *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* (May Our Daughters Return Home). For the public work she did, in 2011 she was shot five times and miraculously survived. She then moved to Mexico City where she was again attacked, this time by a man who slashed her face. She was targeted for her work to document the hundreds of unsolved murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, including that of her daughter. Femicide continues because impunity for perpetrators exceeds 95 percent. Between 2001 and 2024, more than 50,000 girls have been murdered in Mexico.<sup>62</sup> While individuals like Andrade may not claim to have experience with Baptism in the Spirit, nevertheless, her willingness, at great personal cost, to act on behalf of others, is consonant with those who yield to the Spirit's movement.

As such, Norma Andrade's work, along with that of many others, exemplifies the realization of the *charism of shared life*. Her work is so that others might live. The suffering she has endured as a result of the assassination of her daughter and the later attempts on her life propelled her to see the world differently. She saw, and still today

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<sup>60</sup> Willie James Jennings, "Afterword: Liquid God," in *Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Linda M. Maloney and Ivoni Richter Reimer, Wisdom Commentary Series, vol. 45 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022), 358-359.

<sup>61</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 42, emphasis in original.

<sup>62</sup> Brigitte Leoni, "In Mexico, a mother's fight against femicide," *United Nations' Spotlight Initiative: To Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls*, December 9, 2024, <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/news/mexico-mothers-fight-against-femicide>. See also Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 101, 104.

continues to see, that many other daughters and many other families are at risk. They need, and are worthy of, her courageous leadership. Without this leadership, many of them will suffer what she has suffered. Through Andrade's example, we come to see that it "is not those innocent of evil who [experience the fullness of] the life of God, but those who in their own case have experienced the triumph over evil."<sup>63</sup> And, in this case, have done so at great personal cost. While the world will never be fully rid of evil, evil can be subordinated. The subordination of evil is the realization of the *charism of shared life* because it is an enacting of "the life of the common in the Spirit," a standing for the greater whole, and not simply for me and mine.

History provides numerous examples of theologians and leaders whose actions on behalf of the greater community of all exemplify the realization of the *charism of shared life* accompanied by the practice of hope. What follows are but a few. **Karl Barth** (1886-1968), principal author of the 1934 Barmen Declaration, insisted that the church was not in any way subject to the state and, by so doing, critiqued Nazi ideology and its claim of superiority for the Aryan race exclusively. He acted on behalf of the greater community of all. **Gustavo Gutierrez O.P.** (1928-2024), by developing a method for theological meaning making that was centered on the poor and most vulnerable, also ensured a vision of theology inclusive of the greater community of all. The impact of his theological method has transformed theology around the world, expanding the vista of theological concern to include all. **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** (1929-1968), was committed to and worked tirelessly to create the greater community of all through his numerous sermons, speeches, and protest marches. On April 3, 1968, his "I have been to the Mountaintop" address in Memphis, Tennessee, offered a stirring vision of God's reign and King's fearlessness in the face of evil. The next day he was assassinated. **Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN**<sup>64</sup> (1931-2005) a dual citizen of the United States and Brazil, spent much of her life defending the rainforest in Brazil against deforestation, ever mindful of the dire impact the rainforest's destruction would have on all. She was assassinated for her work on February 12, 2005. **Rosemary Radford Ruether** (1936-2022), through her writings, consistently pushed the theological boundaries by critiquing the exclusion of voices from the peripheries. Her work demanded the inclusion in theology of not only women's voices and concern for planet earth, but also the inclusion of peoples of color, peoples of other faith traditions, peoples who are differently abled, among many others at the margins. Of course, there are many more equally deserving of mention. Each of these examples reflects a life in which some measure of fear was transformed into bold courage resulting in the subversion of evil, enabling all to see more clearly and to experience more ardently our interrelation with all others, that is our shared life.

The lives of these figures, and many more, reflect an intimate experience of the Holy Spirit, one which arguably reflects Baptism in the Spirit. Their witness illuminates the *charism of shared life* and hints at what is needed today in the endeavor to subvert the evil of sociocide.

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<sup>63</sup> Josiah Royce, "The Problem of Job," in *Studies of Good and Evil: A Series of Essays Upon Problems of Philosophy and of Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), 23, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Sister of Notre Dame de Namur