

“This book is the monk’s lectio of a lifetime. As prior he knows of what he reports: we imitate Christ Jesus by washing feet. In return we know the God who gives us birth.”

—Meg Funk, OSB, Our Lady of Grace Monastery,
Beech Grove, Indiana

“No one has taught me more about faith, calm, and clarity in the service of humanity than Cyprian Consiglio. What a grace it is to have his open-hearted wisdom and his unswayable spirit in the world, teaching us how to live for something larger than self and deeper than dogma.”

—Pico Iyer, author of *The Art of Stillness*

“After decades in a contemplative hermitage, Cyprian Consiglio has come to know God as intimate, infinite love, available to anyone willing to take Christ’s path of self-emptying. At a time when too many Christians cling to the image of God as a thunderbolt-flinging Zeus or devote themselves to lesser gods entirely—money, military might, political power—Consiglio offers a joyful, compelling vision of what is possible when human beings encounter divine reality. *The God Who Gave You Birth* is a marvelous and potentially life-changing book.”

—Paula Huston, author of *One Ordinary Sunday:
A Meditation on the Mystery of the Mass*

“*The God Who Gave You Birth* offers a timely, accessible, and delightful reflection on the theology of *kenosis*—the self-emptying of God in the incarnation, which the church is called to emulate like yeast that ‘acts by disappearing’ and salt that ‘acts by dissolving.’ It is a gifted teacher who can explore complex theological concepts in refreshing and accessible ways, and Fr. Cyprian has done just that. His book gently but unapologetically explores the Christian mystical tradition on its own terms, not in isolation from other contemplative traditions, but in a way that celebrates Christianity’s distinctive contributions. His creative use of Scripture, hymnody, psychology, and Christian symbolism are gently woven together to create a sustained exploration on the meaning of *kenosis* for the modern contemplative.”

—Fr. Vincent Pizzuto, PhD, University of San Francisco,
and author of *Contemplating Christ: The Gospels
and the Interior Life*

The God Who Gave You Birth

A Spirituality of Kenosis

Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam



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*To my Camaldolese sisters and brothers,
monks and oblates, and especially the monks of
New Camaldoli who honored me with
being their servant*

*You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;
you forgot the God who gave you birth.*

Deuteronomy 32:18

Zeus and the priests of Baal

Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge
with mildness,
and with forbearance you govern us;
for you have power to act whenever you choose.¹

One day some years ago I was leafing through a wonderful children's book, D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths*, which I loved as a child. Although well into my adult years, I enjoyed reading it again, remembering how captivated I was by all these myths when I was a kid. But when I got to the page about Zeus, as I looked at the colored drawing of this greatest of the gods, it suddenly occurred to me that so many Christians talk about God not as Jesus introduces God to us, but more as if God were Zeus! The image of Zeus in the book could have been one of the images of God the Father that I have seen on great church ceilings and in illustrated Bibles, sitting on top of a mountain, irritated, jealous, and a little capricious, shooting down lightning bolts and causing earthquakes just so we remember how awesome He is.

Some of the ideas about God that we get from the Jewish Scriptures could play into this mentality, if we take the

1. Wis 12:18.

stories literally. For example, there is the graphic story in the First Book of Kings about Elijah having a contest with the priests of the Canaanite god Baal to see if their god or the God of Israel would be the one to accept a sacrificial bull.² The priests of Baal go at it first, and they call on the name of Baal from morning until noon, until they were worn out, limping around the altar that they had made. All the while Elijah is taunting them, saying, “Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” The pagan priests then cut themselves with swords and lances until blood is gushing from their wounds, and they rave on and on but, alas, no response.

Then it’s Elijah’s turn. He surrounds the sacrificial bull with trenches and piles up wood around it, and then fills the trenches with water and pours water over the wood too, just to make it as impossible as could be. Yet when he calls on the name of the Lord, fire falls and consumes the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust—and even licks up the water in the trench!

This story would be comical if it didn’t end so gruesomely; at that point Elijah has the people seize the priests of Baal, and he slaughters them in the Wadi Kishon.



Our ideas about God and religion tend to match the stage of our own maturity and the level of our own consciousness. Developmental psychology tells us that we human beings begin life with a magical view of the universe, and so we also have a magical view of God and religion. (God is the Wizard of Oz and I am Harry Potter.) Then we tend to move into a more mythical way of thinking, followed by what developmental psychology calls rational, pluralistic, and integral views of reality, and so rational, pluralistic, and integral views of God and religion. This can apply both to individuals as well as to entire cultures.

We need to keep in mind that a story like the one above from the Book of Kings comes from the obscure magical-mythical age of the Jewish tradition, sometimes with just the slightest thread of connection to history. One of the most fascinating things about this era is the understanding of God and “the gods”—capital “G” God as opposed to small “g” gods. According to the mentality of that time there *were* all kinds of gods with a small “g,” and often the stories we hear from that era are about whose small “g” god is bigger and stronger. So here in the Book of Kings we have a battle between the (small “g”) god Baal and (capital “G”) God who is, in a sense, the (small “g”) god of Israel.

It’s a battle of the gods!

You see, we monotheists don’t necessarily deny that there are other gods, in the broadest sense of what a god is. A god is any supra-human being or power that we worship. A “god” in this sense could even be fame or power. A “god”

in this sense could be wealth, for instance, which is nearly personified in the gospels as the greedy demon *mammon*. Remember St. Paul too exhorts his readers to put to death, among other things, greed, which he says *is idolatry*.³ “You shall have no other (small “g”) god before me,” says God (capital “G”). In other words: do not worship *anything* but me. We agree with the prophet Muhammad about that, at least: *la-illah ha il-Allah*—“There is no god but God”; there is no *lah* but *Al-lah*—God. The only real Divine One is God, the one who Abraham met. In Islam Muhammad thought he was calling people back to the revelation of Abraham. And when he conquered Mecca he destroyed all the images of the deities that were in the Kabbah (every one, that is, except for a fresco of Abraham and a painting of Jesus and Mary, interestingly enough).

So many of our world government and economic leaders, even those who profess some form of monotheistic religion, obviously worship other gods—the power of the economy, military strength, fame—and even use, or misuse, the name of God or credit God with whatever is gained. This is a perennial tendency. It seems as if even when Constantine decided to decriminalize Christianity in the fourth century, it was because he thought that the (small “g”) god of Christianity had helped him win a battle, rather than the Roman gods. Catholic mentality hadn’t changed much by the six-

3. Col 3:5.

teenth century, when the church credited Our Lady of the Rosary with helping the so-called Holy League win a battle against the Ottoman Turks at Lepanto in southwestern Greece.

It's a very primitive mindset, one that has not yet caught up with the revelation of Jesus, who didn't win military victories or start trade wars or bully his way into anything, but showed only the power of sacrificial love, crucified love, emptiness. We have to be careful when we hear stories like these to not take them as an exhortation to fall back into that magical-mythical and pre-Christian mindset, as if we were talking about a small "g" god who is going to give victory to our football team over someone else's team, or who we hope is going to give us luck in the stock market.

Instead, we need to think of God as Jesus introduces God to us.

We Christians might be tempted to blame this magical-mythical view of God on the so-called "Old Testament," the Jewish Scriptures, and the image of God we catch there. Yet there are a variety of images of God offered in the books of the Jewish Scriptures as the people of the first covenant themselves grew in their understanding of who God is. In the Book of Wisdom, from a much later era than the Book of Kings, already there is a pretty evolved idea of who and how God is. Although sovereign in strength, God judges with mildness and governs with forbearance because God has power to act whenever God chooses. That calls to mind one of the best pieces of advice I ever received about leadership.

It was this: “When you have real authority you don’t need to grab for power.” That’s God. God has real authority and so doesn’t need to jealously *grab* for power nor make sure that we human beings always feel like powerless little peons, as Zeus and the other gods are always doing to mortals.

The late, great Catholic novelist Flannery O’Connor described her age in this way: it is “‘an unbelieving age but one that is markedly and lopsidedly spiritual,’ at once ‘an age of searchers and discoverers,’ and ‘an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily.’” And it has a “kind of sub-religion which expresses its ultimate concern in images that have not yet broken through to show any recognition of a God who has revealed himself.”ⁱ

If that was true in the mid-twentieth century, how much truer is it now in the twenty-first? Our job is to show the world God as Jesus reveals God to be.

this is what God is like

There is a marvelous exchange between the apostle Philip and Jesus in the Gospel of John. Philip says to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” And I love Jesus’ reply to him. Jesus said, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father!”⁴ You want to know what God

4. John 14:8-9.

is like? Jesus says. I'm what God is like! If you've seen me you've seen God! This is what God is like and this is what God does: God travels light, God is merciful, God forgives and reconciles, God heals, God brings people to an understanding of their own dignity, God overturns the wisdom of this world, the wisdom of expediency and usefulness and power and authority, and instead rules with love, with mercy, from within and from behind, through service and what looks like weakness—the very opposite of what all the success seminars teach us. God is someone who washes your feet. God is not afraid to be broken up and crushed like wheat and grapes and passed out as a meal to be consumed. God is crucified love, unconditional acceptance. As our Muslim sisters and brothers say, God is *ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*—All-Merciful, All-Compassionate. As our Jewish forbears would say, God is a veritable womb of mercy.

That's what Jesus was like; that's what God is like.

Saint Paul's definitions of Jesus are the ones I rely on the most if I need to succinctly explain who we believe Jesus to be, even though they are sometimes more like riddles or Zen-like *koans* than formulas: "He is the image [*ikon*] of the invisible God," Paul writes in the Letter to the Colossians, and "in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."⁵ This is an amazing assertion, that this is what God is like, wrapped up in a Palestinian Jewish man who walked dusty

5. Col 1:15, 19.

roads and ate and drank with other human beings. And this is our justification for gazing at the image of Jesus—“If you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father!” It’s the reason we spend so much time mulling over the Scriptures, especially the gospels, to catch a better glimpse. There’s an old piece of wisdom that says we become what we gaze at, and that’s why we mull over the Scriptures too, not just to figure out Jesus, but to figure out who we are, to become what he was so as to do what he did, and even greater things, to carry on the work of the reign of God. As Jesus was the image, so our tradition tells us that we are the “image of the image.” And Jesus’ beloved disciple John tells us clearly that “we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”⁶

Jesus shows us that the very nature of God is unconditional compassion toward the human world. The very nature of God, as the liturgist Nathan Mitchell wrote, is “love without an opposite,” unimpeachable love for creatures and creation. God is the One who cherishes people and makes them free. God’s *will* is always and only a willing of good. God’s *power* is always and only a power exercised on behalf of those who need it—the poor, the outcast, the despised, the marginalized, the wretched and lonely, the abandoned. We have to view everything else from the optic of the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus, who shows us that God is

6. 1 John 3:2.

neither angry nor vengeful—precisely because God has no “ego” to defend like the gods on Mount Olympus do.ⁱⁱ

That’s what ought to come to mind when we read these words in the Book of Wisdom: “Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose.”⁷ Or as Psalm 86 sings, “For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, / abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.”⁸ That’s the good news.

to act by disappearing

There are two parables in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus uses to give two very important images of the reign of God.

First of all he says that the reign of God is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in a field, “the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs.” And the reign of God, he says, is “like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote that this is how the church “seeks its mission in the profane world that surrounds it: to be yeast that acts while disappearing.”ⁱⁱⁱ As a matter of fact both of these images, the seed and the yeast, act by disappearing, by dissolving, by

7. Wis 12:18.

8. Ps 86:5.

9. Matt 13:31-33.

dying. What a strange and powerful image for an individual, a community, the church—to act by disappearing.

Von Balthasar is writing here about why the church would go “beyond its confines” toward its separated Christian brothers and sisters, as well as to the Jewish people and non-Christians, explaining that this is “the movement of a self-emptying of God and Christ,” so that it could be what he calls a “disinterested church,” meaning a church that doesn’t seek its own glory, but the glory of its Lord and union as love. To be like a seed that falls into the ground and dies, to be like yeast in the dough, to act by dissolving and disappearing. And yet, as Jesus also says about the seed in the Gospel of John, if that seed dies “it bears much fruit.”¹⁰

This is what it means to be church, to be a follower of Jesus, to be like God: to imitate the self-emptying of God and Christ.

And so it is for us. We are supposed to be like yeast, too, like a seed that dies. We could add one more image that Matthew recounts Jesus saying: we are supposed to be like salt, the “salt of the earth,”¹¹ yet another element that acts by disappearing and dissolving. But in that dissolving, in dying, in a sense, the earth gets flavored, the dough is raised, a great bush rises up. The “profane world” that surrounds us, in which we are immersed, gets lifted up *by our very presence*, even if that presence be a silent hidden one. Saint

10. John 12:24.

11. Matt 5:13.

Thérèse of Lisieux, from her hidden life in the Carmelite monastery, described it this way: “In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things,”^{iv} like yeast in the dough, like salt in the earth, like a seed that dies.

One other use of this image of the seed or the yeast: we could think of our humanity, too, even our very bodies, as the field or as the dough. And God has planted a seed in that field too; God has put yeast into the dough of our being—the Holy Spirit, who, as Paul wrote in the Letter to the Romans, is “poured into our hearts,”¹² into the very center of our being, and brings the whole of our being to its glory from the inside out. Rather than being like Zeus—jealous and angry, tossing lightning bolts down from the sky—I think God is more like yeast, who in some way dissolves inside us as the Spirit so that we might share in the divine nature.

The influential Spanish Indian theologian Raimundo Panikkar wrote about this dissolving and disappearing in regard to the Eucharist. Before turning to theology, his first degree was in chemistry. He uses a verb that describes a chemical process—“volatilize,” which means to evaporate or disperse like a vapor—as a metaphor for what God does for us, in us, as Eucharist. If we take the sacramental language of this most fundamental Christian rite literally, in

12. Rom 5:5.

consuming the consecrated host and wine we claim to be “eating God.” We receive and swallow God definitively, Panikkar says, and what follows then is a sublimation of God’s own self, “according to the chemical connotation of such a concept.” And God volatilizes, “changes into a gaseous state of function, of horizon, of ideal, of mystical dimension.”^v

This is God’s own *kenosis*. God becomes something in us.

Christ consciousness

The phrase “Christ consciousness” has worked its way into modern vocabulary, similar to the idea of “the universal Christ.” This is no doubt due to Christianity’s rubbing elbows with contemporary spiritual movements that show a keen interest for contemplative practice, particularly as taught by the Asian traditions with their practical disciplines such as yoga, and various forms of meditation with roots in Buddhism. I am somewhat hesitant about the phrase, not because it is not a valid concept but, first of all, because I am afraid that it is sometimes used to force Christianity to make sense in Buddhist or Hindu terms, while in the mean time dismissing some of Christianity’s core tenets. Secondly, I’m afraid that some folks dismiss the vocabulary of Christian mystics as somehow less enlightened because Christian mystics do not articulate their experience in the same way that some Asian mystics do. Someone told me once, for instance, that if St. Teresa of Avila had been as

enlightened as Shankara, the eighth-century Indian mystic and philosopher of non-duality, she would have expressed her experience in the same way that he did. This seems to needlessly dismiss the great Spanish saint's own experience. But perhaps even more practically, I am hesitant about this phrase because one could get the impression that "Christ consciousness" is something that can be achieved by just the right technique, the right posture, or the right words in the right language.

At the same time, I agree that there *is* such a thing as Christ consciousness. Saint Paul explains what it is very clearly in the great hymn contained in the Letter to the Philippians, which in the Roman liturgical tradition we sing every Saturday at evening prayer. It's known as the "kenosis hymn." "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," Paul says, "who,

though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross."¹³

13. Phil 2:5-8.

The key word here, of course, is the Greek word *kenosis*, the act of self-emptying, which will be our ongoing theme.

The other interesting Greek verb in that passage is *harpagmos*. There are various translations of it—Christ Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be “exploited,” something to be “clung to” or “treasured jealously” or even “robbed.” My favorite translation of this word, used in both the New American and New Jerusalem Bibles, is “grasped at.” Christ Jesus did not deem equality with God, divinity, something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself.

And this is how we too realize Christ consciousness, the same way Christ Jesus did, not by exploiting, robbing, or grasping at divinity by some technique or manipulation, but by self-emptying, or emptying our self.



But while we are on the topic of Christ consciousness and the universal Christ, here we bump into another slippery slope. There may be a tendency to separate Christ from Jesus. Orthodox Christianity would never completely separate the title “Christ” from the person of Jesus, even though it would carefully *distinguish* Christ from Jesus. And this is important in a way that may not seem obvious at first, specifically in regard to *kenosis*.

We might think of this *kenosis* mainly as the self-emptying of Jesus, who renounces his will for the Father’s,

even to the point of death on the cross. But the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that when Christ came into the world, he said, “See, God, I have come to do your will, O God.”¹⁴ That’s the kenosis of *Christ*. The male human being Jesus was not at the right hand of the Father from all eternity. It is the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, who was always with God and who was God, who we call the Christ, who became flesh and was named Jesus.

There is a little prayer in the Roman Rite of the Mass that is considered one of the “secret prayers,” one of the prayers that the presider can say *sotto voce*, not necessarily proclaimed to the whole assembly, that is actually one of the most beautiful prayers in the liturgy. It is also one of the few places where the Roman Church speaks boldly about our participation in divinity (although *sotto voce*!). While pouring a drop of water into the wine the priest says, “By the mystery of this water and wine, / may we come to share in the divinity of Christ / who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” Every now and then a priest will change the wording and instead say that we “come to share the divinity of *Jesus* who came to share in our humanity.” The problem is, yes, we can share the divinity of Jesus, but it isn’t Jesus who came to share our humanity. *Christ* did, when the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, became flesh, became Jesus.

14. Heb 10:7.

one with yourself,” your true self, hidden with Christ in God. In that experience of losing ourselves we are, paradoxically, “made completely and eternally real” and we know ourselves for the first time—because we are lost in God.^{xxxix}

Pie Pelicane

The evocative pre-Christian image of the *Pie Pelicane*, the holy pelican, has long been my favorite christic and eucharistic image. As best we can tell it doesn’t actually jibe with zoology, but according to legend if her chicks don’t have enough to eat the mother pelican will rip her own breast open and feed the chicks with her own flesh and blood. Please note that this is a *self-inflicted* wound. It’s easy to see why this is an image of Christ and the eucharistic sacrifice.

There is yet another use of the icon of the holy pelican, in the ancient tradition of alchemy. Alchemy has roots in ancient Egyptian iconography and the Greek magical tradition. It was an occupation of some medieval monks (for example, the fifteenth-century Swiss monk, physician, and theorist Paracelsus) and in modern times has been a fascination not only of depth psychologists, but also of even such an eminent theologian as Hans Urs von Balthasar as well. The basic pseudo-scientific premise of alchemy is that so-called base metals such as lead, tin, iron, copper, and mercury (represented by the chicks feeding on mother pelican’s breast), if exposed to enough heat, will melt down and devolve into what is called *materia prima*, prime matter,

and then those base metals can and will transmute into precious metals, especially gold.

Alchemy, however, from the beginning was actually understood more as a metaphysical teaching than a hard science, symbolic of the journey of the soul—hence the fascination of the medieval monks and von Balthasar, as well as psychologists such as Carl Jung, who wrote extensively on it, and the aforementioned Michael Washburn. In fact Washburn says that Christianity and alchemy, along with the tantric yoga tradition of India, are three of the more important historical conceptions of regeneration in spirit.^{x1} This is the same regeneration we have spoken of—being “born again”—that happens after we die to our autonomy in our return to God, the dynamic ground of being.

According to alchemy’s use of the image of the pelican, the chicks, instead of representing base metals, now represent one’s own psychic powers or soul forces, and the pelican is a symbol of the *materia prima*. But now the prime matter is understood to be Divine Love, the soul’s forces returning to their source in Divine Love, which nurtures and nourishes them. At some point, instead of or in addition to being a symbol of a sacrificial relationship with and for others, like the real mother pelican, we enter into a sacrificial relationship with our own self, with our own inner being, and begin to sacrifice the inner powers of our own souls to the immanent and intimate love of God that is at the very center of our being. Thus we nourish the developing spiritual embryo, the new creation, within us. My

image of myself—my persona, my false self—must be changed, transmuted, and sacrificed to the developing spiritual self that is *hidden with Christ in God*. This is normally a painful experience, akin to St. John of the Cross's dark night of the soul, that will take all my inner resources. It will feel like a death, a dissolving, like a caterpillar in its chrysalis that devolves into nothing but an amorphous glob before emerging as a butterfly. Just so, out of this dark night of the soul will emerge the spiritual self, transformed through the pelican experience. *I wish to dissolve and be with Christ.*

inscendence

The late Thomas Berry, the Passionist priest and geologist (as he referred to himself), thought that we, as a human race, had done enough with our *transcendence*, and have actually done damage to God's great gift of earth, as well as to our own humanity, by the neglect of those same things that our desire to transcend has inspired. Instead he taught that before we could evolve we needed to experience what he coined as *inscendence*. Whereas transcendence is our drive *away* from the world, *away* from creation, *away* from our bodies, inscendence is the movement within, the inward movement that is needed to complement and sometimes correct our transcendence. To disintegrate all the way down to the genius embedded in our DNA and start all over again, to descend to our instinctive resources in order

to be re-invented. The bigger issue that Berry was addressing, of course, was not just individuals, but that as peoples, as nations, maybe as human civilization in general and our species collectively, from the micro to the macro, we must do so as well.^{xli}

This is what has to happen at some point in everyone's spiritual journey, like our going back to the Mother: to reinvent ourselves by going down. This is also a good description of what we are being asked to do each year during the penitential season of Lent, the forty days in the desert, stripping down to basics, just as in the ascetical life in general. It is a sinking back into the source of everything, like Jesus in the desert, like Jesus in the tomb, those times when we "trust our unknowing and during which we no longer belong to the world in our old ways, a stranger again."^{xlii} And there in the presence of the source of everything, we hope to be remade, reinvented, born again.

The physicality of all this in Thomas Berry's writing is important and not just meant as a metaphor. It's a firm belief that encoded in our DNA is the soul's code, the law written on our hearts, if you will, and the spiritual power that has been the thrust behind our evolution, in consciousness and otherwise, all along, the dynamic ground of our being and consciousness. Our *genetic* coding, that is, as opposed to our *cultural* coding: even our cultural coding must be stripped away too at some point, maybe especially, because here "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no

longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.”⁸¹ If we are reinvented, it is to make us what we have been or have been meant to be all along that perhaps got covered over by our cultural coding. But we must sacrifice our autonomy in order to rediscover it.

The late spiritual writer William Johnston wrote about something similar to this in describing the mysticism of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This is the beauty of the practice of contemplative prayer, of meditation and yoga, that we do sink into our own bodily-ness to discover that which is deeper than—and the source of—material reality, the ground of our being and the ground of all consciousness. And in this purified tranquility of darkness, as the *Cloud* would call it, “the soul goes down, down to the very center of its own being, nakedly to encounter God who secretly dwells in silent love at the sovereign point of the spirit.”^{xliii} That silent love is the *materia prima*.

devolve to evolve

We need to evolve in our understanding of who and what God is, grow out of our mythical magical mindset, and even beyond our rationality, finally discover the *Abba* of Jesus, the God of the gospels, and build a new spirituality and spiritual practice based on that knowledge of God—

81. Gal 3:28.

theo-logy, Christology, and *anthropo*-logy, knowledge of who we are as human beings. This is an urgent work: all of creation is groaning and in agony while we, the priests of creation, work this out.⁸² But in order to evolve, something is going to have to die—our old ways of being in and understanding the world, and Ultimate Reality. We will first of all need to *devolve*.

It's important to note that the interior way and the exterior way, just as the contemplative life and the active life, are not mutually exclusive nor antagonistic, just as breathing in and breathing out are both necessary. The *Pie Pelicane* feeding its young from its very flesh is a eucharistic image not referring only to Christ, nor only to the sacred species that we receive and consume. It is a eucharistic image that we are meant not only to adore, but to imitate as well, as individuals, as a community, as a church. As Pope St. Leo the Great prayed, "Change us into what we receive!" We as individuals, whose lives have been held up like the bread and wine, blessed and sanctified, transubstantiated, are now called to be broken, like the fractioning of the bread, and passed out, crushed like grapes into holy wine and poured out in love and service, emptied and become servant footwashers.

All that we have said about God-as-Mother and the *Pie Pelicane* should also apply to Holy Mother Church. We as church also, collectively, are meant to give of our very es-

82. Cf. Rom 8:22-23.

sence for the sake of others in imitation of our Lord, even if we have to wound ourselves like Mother Pelican does in the process. We as a community, as a church, are meant to become Eucharist. As a twentieth-century hymn goes:

Then let the servant church arise,
A caring church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.^{xiv}

This hearkens back to Hans Urs von Balthasar's dream of a "disinterested church," a church that doesn't seek its own glory, but the glory of its Lord and union as love. To be like a seed that falls into the ground and dies, to be like yeast in the dough, to act by dissolving and disappearing, like a mother pelican who is willing to rip her own breast open to feed her young. Willing even to wound herself to feed her young, to disappear, to dissolve, so as to nourish and flavor all that in which we are planted. Or as the beautiful Metta prayer of the Buddhist tradition has it, "Even as a mother protects with her life her only child, so with a boundless heart should we cherish all living beings." Would that Holy Mother Church would always have this heart and mind first and foremost.

Where do we find the strength to do this, to be this? From a return to our source, the sacrificial relation with our inner self and a return to the dynamic ground of our being and consciousness, *the God who gave us birth*.

One last image from Father Romuald. He ends his Brief Rule with two images of God, one very masculine and one very feminine and maternal. First of all, he says we should “stand before God with the attitude of one who stands before the emperor,” a very masculine image from one who actually knew the emperor well. But then he ends by telling us that after we empty ourselves completely, we should “sit waiting . . . like a chick who tastes nothing and eats nothing but what its mother gives it.”^{xlv}

Let’s empty ourselves, completely. And before we start to rebuild and reinvent ourselves, wait for our intimate and imminent God to feed us, to regenerate our soul’s forces, and to make of us a new creation and of our earth a new earth, not in the image of our own creation again, but in the image of God who is Jesus our Lord.