

The Shock of Easter

Thomas G. Long
Cambridge, Maryland

The original disciples were shocked into bliss by the Resurrection—and they never recovered.

Dom Sebastian Moore O.S.B.

The theologians who gathered in the nave of Westminster Abbey in 1643 to reform the English church soon encountered an embarrassing problem. Eventually they would produce an impressive array of theological literature, including the legendary *Westminster Confession of Faith* and two catechisms, plus a cluster of other significant theological documents. But in the middle of their deliberations one member of the assembly raised a pesky and impertinent question: “What is God?”

The question was prickly, uncomfortable, the embarrassment in the room palpable. Here they were, distinguished divines, propounding away confidently about the things of God—God’s eternal decree, God’s Holy Scripture, God’s will, God’s church, and other theological profundities—only to be jerked back on the leash by the most elemental of queries: What exactly are we talking about here? What is God?

Who among them had the chutzpah to venture an answer? Vanity of vanities. The very idea of God was too vast, too holy, too lofty for mere mortals to encompass in ordinary words. The name of God, so freely uttered in the debates and deliberations of the Westminster divines, now stuck in their throats. “All shrunk from the too sacred task in awestruck, reverential fear,” noted Westminster historian William Hetherington.¹ The question could not be avoided, though, so finally the assembly decided that their best shot at humility would be to ask not the eldest but the youngest person in the room to try his hand at a definition of God. Scottish pastor George Gillespie, barely thirty and unlucky enough to be the junior member of the group, stood hesitantly, no doubt terrified that the tail had been pinned on his donkey. “I need God’s wisdom,” he said, his voice surely cracking. “Will you join me in prayer?” And then Gillespie prayed, “O God, thou art a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” Someone in the gathering cocked open one eye, quickly scribbled down those words, and the assembly had its definition of God.

But assemblies being assemblies, the prayerful definition fell into the hands of a committee, and, by the time it appeared in the *Westminster Confession*, it had metastasized:

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most

holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal most just and terrible in His judgments; hating all sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty.²

It is difficult to imagine, when Moses spoke toward the burning bush and asked just who it was who had interrupted his day and dared to send him on a terrifying mission to confront Pharaoh, that the voice from the flames would have cranked out anything like this prolix divine self-definition involving body parts, passions, size, and immutability. If it had, I doubt the Exodus would ever have happened. Instead, Moses got a terse “I am who I am,” which is as mysterious as it is oblique. Whatever “I am who I am” may mean, it almost certainly implies that if the Westminster divines and whoever else might wish to know who God is, they would do well not to begin with metaphysical speculation but by watching the action on the field. God is known through what God does. It’s all about verbs: “I am who I am.” Theologian Robert Jensen gets close to the truth when he answers the question “Who is God?” this way: “God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.”³

Whoever raised Jesus from the dead and Israel from Egypt. Jensen’s radiant definition implies that Exodus and Easter shock us into a new understanding of God. It’s not as if we (or the Westminster divines) have already in place this grand understanding of a cosmic deity named “God” (“pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions”) and that the claim of Easter is, “Look what this universal deity did out there in a Jerusalem garden!” It’s not as though we must now fit the Resurrection (or the Exodus) as one more bit of data into our concept of God, but the other way around. We must now refashion our understanding of God in the light of what God did in the Resurrection.

Easter Laughter

So, what did God do in the Resurrection, and who is this God who raised Jesus from the dead? We should start with the awareness that what happened on that first Easter is, in its own extraordinary way, an enormous, laughter-producing joke on the powers of Death. “With Easter,” says Jürgen Moltmann, “the laughter of the redeemed, the dance of the liberated . . . begins.”⁴

Humor often is generated by the collision of incommensurate worlds. The collision produces at least a mild shock, and the shock electrifies laughter. This is true even in silly jokes. On one of his *A Prairie Home Companion* “Pretty Good Joke” shows, Garrison Keillor quipped, “Never say anything bad about a man until you’ve walked a mile in his shoes. By then he’s a mile away, you’ve got his shoes, and you can say whatever you want to.” The humor springs up because what starts out as a

piece of inspirational advice about developing empathy turns out to be a crass word of self-centered cynicism. The incommensurate worlds simply do not belong on the same page and they collide; the world of moral vision crashes into the flat-earth logic of the utterly utilitarian and venal, and the shock of laughter erupts.

Easter, too, in a much more profound way involves a collision of incommensurate worlds: the world of inevitable death and cemeteries and the women who make their sad pilgrimage to the tomb of Jesus, a world of fixed limits and low horizons thrown into sudden juxtaposition with the world of the now risen Jesus, full of life and joyful greetings and assurances not to be afraid. The whole cosmos catches the great joke, and “laughter of the redeemed begins.”

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew is also in on the joke. He tells us, for example, that a gaggle of hapless temple militia were given what must surely be the unluckiest assignment in military history: to make the tomb of Jesus “as secure as you can” (Matt. 27:65). Matthew’s readers already titter in anticipation. We can picture those chunky soldiers out there by the rock sepulcher, tramping around in their heavy breastplates and clunky metal helmets, working up a sweat sealing the stone into the open gash of the tomb and then, in shifts, placing themselves dutifully to the right and left of the stone, swords at the ready for whatever might happen.

What did happen, Matthew tells us, was that on the first day of the week, two women approached the tomb in the early morning light. The yawning guards on the watch at that hour surely stiffened to attention, their hands warily shifting to their side weapons. Before they could bark, “Halt! What business have you here?” the land trembled with a great earthquake, the skies split, and a dazzlingly resplendent angel flashed onto the scene like a lightning bolt. The angel announced the astonishing Easter news that Jesus “is not here; for he has been raised” (28:6), but Matthew doesn’t even wait for the angel’s homily before delivering the punch line: “the guards shook and became like dead men.”

Who is dead, here? Who is alive? Two worlds collide. In the first, the guards, flush with imperial and sacral authority, stand confidently on the solid ground of military might, equipped with the weapons sufficient to outmatch any mortal foe, firm in their responsibility to keep the corpse of Jesus safely in the tomb. In the second, that once-steady world is rattled to its core, and the guards are left shaking along with the trembling earth while the angel preaches the world’s first Easter sermon: “He is not here for he has been raised, as he said” (Matt. 28:6). The joke is on the old, decaying world. In a blazing instant the Jesus we thought dead is now alive, and it’s the guards who we assumed to be alive who are now “like dead men,” and the reality they believe they are living in that is passing away. The first world has been destroyed by the second, and the laughter of the redeemed begins.

The great joke of Easter is one that God’s people have been rehearsing for a long time. Sarah got the joke, too, when she bore the improbable son, Isaac, the son so ridiculously untimely and unimaginable that she named him “Laughter,” because the

barren and immutable world of aging, infertility, and fruitlessness suddenly collided with the utterly improbable world of God's fullness, potency, and abundance. "God has brought laughter for me," she said, "Everyone who hears will laugh with me." And we do laugh, Sarah's laughter reverberating generations ahead to the empty tomb and eventually resounding with our own.

Who then is God? God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead and who sent a seismic shock and ripples of cosmic laughter through all time and history, bringing the mighty kingdoms of the world tumbling down like shacks on Vesuvius's hillside and establishing a new world, the true world, the world of God's kingdom.

The Coffee's Better at Starbucks

Many Easter sermons miss the joke and thereby end up downsizing both the power of the Resurrection and the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Too many Easter sermons are trapped in the confines of the old world, the world that Easter destroyed, and consequently they sound more like the halftime locker room pep talks of football coaches than the radical gospel of Easter. "Life may be hard," they say. "We may be down, but it's only halftime. Remember Jesus was down, too. He had his cross to bear, but he was rewarded by the triumph of Easter. So, keep giving your all, and never give up!" This is coach Joel Osteen on Easter, and the message is, "This is your best life now! Be the best person you can be in this world!" What this overlooks is that Easter is not a way to get along better in the world as it is but is instead the end of this world. Easter destroys the perceived world at hand, and before we sing about the joy of Easter's new reality, it is crucial to feel the shock and to see the destructive power of the Resurrection on the old reality.

The Resurrection was not merely some good thing that happened one day, like the title screen of a scene in Monty Python's movie *The Life of Brian*: "Judea, AD 33, teatime ..." It is instead the unmasking of the present reality, the world we assumed was permanent, the world of business as usual, the world of inevitable death. Easter is an earthquake destroying the reality we thought could never change, a world in which dead people stay dead and in which some little tyrant is always placing guards in the cemetery to make sure it remains that way. Easter is a lightning-bolt-illuminated flash forward to that time when "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). The joyful good news of Easter is an obituary and a birth announcement combined: the old world has passed away and the new has come.

This is why, I think, the Gospels let us know that the first response of those earliest eyewitnesses was not joy but fear. Laughter and joy would come, but not before there was fear, not fear because they had seen a ghost, but the sudden rush of fear like when you wake up in a strange city somewhere, disoriented, unsure of where you are and what time it is. When the glory-filled presence of the risen Jesus appeared to them, the seemingly solid ground on which they were standing suddenly

melted away. Easter means that the world in which they (and we) thought we live and move and have our being, is but an illusion, exposed as a lie in the light of the new and real world disclosed in the Risen One. Easter demands that we let go of the assumed and assured world. Easter calls for a change of citizenship. The frightening demand, the more-astounding-than-can-be-imagined invitation, of Easter, is to leave the familiar but dying world behind and to enter the new, unexpected, and uncertain world revealed in the Resurrection. A New Testament scholar friend, in a slightly profane moment, uttered truth, I believe, when he said to me, “More than likely, the early witnesses to the Resurrection didn’t respond by exclaiming ‘Holy Awe!’ but ‘Holy Sh*t!’” What now? Who are we? What do we do? How do we live when the world we thought we knew has passed away in a flash of lightning?

The Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann claims that the church, in so many ways, has turned away from Easter’s new reality, choosing not the new world revealed in the risen Christ, but instead choosing to reinforce its standing in the old world.⁵ Christianity reinvented itself as “a major world religion,” and as a major religion set down in an increasingly secular world, it has debated two options, Schmemmann argues, for understanding its mission.

The first is say to the secular world, “We can help you be at least a little more religious. That’s our mission, to add a few religious motifs to the symphony of the world.” The church acknowledges that the secular society is in charge of delivering the big stuff: economic stability, justice in the law courts, military security, and all the other essentials of a functioning society. “But,” the church pleads, “there’s more to life than that. Don’t forget that human beings have spiritual needs, too. We can help with that!” When the world growls back, “What spiritual needs?” we have a hard time coming up with anything. Ethics? Health? Truth? Justice? If we’re honest, there is not a single virtue, Schmemmann says, “that would be ‘basically’ different from what secularism at its best also proclaims and offers ...”⁶ Even when we retreat to the tiny landscape of inner peace, we soon confess that all the help we can give derives from borrowed therapeutic models. How can the church offer any unique help? Even our convivial coffee hours are outstripped by the community and the java at Starbucks.

Years ago, I had a colleague whose ministry was serving as the chaplain of a large department store. We would tease him unmercifully by coming up behind him and making the little chime sound that big department stores in those days used on their public address systems: “Ding! Calling the chaplain ... men’s accessories.” Schmemmann deflates the tease, though, when he points out how many of us have signed up to be chaplains in the world’s department store. We float through the present society like pious ghosts wafting through housewares, sporting goods, and lingerie, but we are operating in an environment that is controlled by the values and goals of the secular age. We intone our invocations at the employee banquets, but the show is run by Macy’s.

The second option, Schmemmann says, for the church in a secular world is to pump fist over the arrival of secularity, celebrate it as the world coming of age, the maturity toward which the faith has always leaned. Christ has knocked down the wall between the sacred and the secular, and the mission of the church has been transformed entirely into protest songs and ethics. We are called to join in solidarity with the most enlightened forces of our time to build a world of justice and peace. We don't separate ourselves from others as people of Christian faith, but instead lock arms with all others of good will who work for justice and to translate the gospel as a command to be human beings living entirely for others.

Schmemmann finds this option to be both understandable and also tragic, a devastating mangling of the gospel. Yes, understandable, because many of the better virtues of the spirit of secularity—intellectual freedom, the insistence on the dignity of all people, the quest for universal justice—are actually checks written on the bank account of the gospel. Tragic because the secularized version of these values are *verites chretiennes devenues folles*, Christian truths that “went mad.”⁷ At the core of this madness is the conviction that the mature human being lives in a world without God. Easter's true liberation is not freedom merely from immature faith but much deeper, the liberation from Godforsakenness.⁸

In a recent op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, “Why I am Still a Christian,” African American biblical scholar Esau McCaulley wrestled with the vexed question of how he could still be a person of faith given the stained history of the church and the fact that racism still courses through the veins of many American Christians today.⁹ McCaulley wrote that he was not unfamiliar with the charge that Christianity is “a white man's religion,” and he knows that, during slavery, white preachers preached to the enslaved a corrupted gospel of docility and obedience to the “master.” McCaulley's forbears were in fact enslaved on a cotton plantation in Alabama, and McCaulley maintains, perhaps surprisingly, that his continuing commitment to Christianity does not spring from working carefully through the issues in conversations and debates with his university colleagues, but, in fact, comes from his powerful connection to the faith and hope of those very enslaved ancestors:

I believe that my ancestors wrestled with the questions of faith when the evil was not literary or historical, but a material thing of flesh and blood. How did they manage to see goodness in this religion?

I think that for them, the Black church did not just provide an answer. It was *the* answer. In a world that proclaimed that the enslaver was lord of all, the idea that something more mighty ordered the tide of events that swept up their lives was the hope needed to survive the day. What if belief in the unrelenting love of God combined with trust in his power to bend history was not a tool to make chains but to break them?¹⁰

McCaulley closes his essay by reporting that his mother recently purchased an acre of land on the former plantation property where so many of his ancestors lived and died. She got the land cheaply, paying only \$500 for her acre, because the land she acquired was the old slave burial ground. His mother's purchase, he said, is a sign of trust and Easter hope. "Their bodies," he wrote,

... never finding rest on land owned by others, now repose on land purchased by their descendants. We hold it in trust for them as their due. If the hope of Christians is true and there is indeed a resurrection of the dead, they will emerge from those graves as free people, and their last moments on this side of the new creation will be spent on their own soil. That is a hope worthy of my allegiance.

There it is, the shock of Easter. It's not a trivial message that a few potted lilies decorating the church on Easter will inspire us to make life better by-and-by. It is the much more radical word that new life we yearn for has come to us as an act of God, that worlds have collided and that the world of death, the world where some are enslaved and others are enslavers, the world that foolishly believed the enslaver or whoever holds the cruel hand of power was "lord of all," has been destroyed, exposed as a lie by the revealing of the new world in which God's children will be raised in freedom and new life and Jesus is Lord of all.

Actually, the cry "Jesus is Lord!" might be made even clearer to us, argued Moltmann, if we said, "The Lord is Jesus!"¹¹ That way, the lordship of Jesus could not be misunderstood as the result of some kind of contest occurring within the rules of the power plays of the world at hand, as if somehow, in a last-minute Easter surprise, Jesus edged out Caesar Augustus, Genghis Khan, Elon Musk, and Taylor Swift for the position of lord of this world. No, the cry "the Lord is Jesus!" proclaims that there is but one real world, God's world, and, good news! The Lord of this one true and everlasting world is Jesus, the one who came to us as a servant.

As is the case for almost all op-ed essays about religion that appear in *The New York Times*, it doesn't take long for intellectual secular critics to pounce at the smell of red meat. McCaulley's moving resurrection testimony was no different. "A totally unconvincing article," snarled one reader, who went on to say,

Latching on to some concept because it makes you "feel better" has no real relevance as to whether it is actually true. I am sure many people would be happier if they convinced themselves they were going to win millions in the lottery sometime in the next ten years or that they will inherit a fortune from some unknown relative.

To be specific, there is no evidence of some supernatural entity that sometimes [or even just occasionally] interferes with natural law with an independent intelligence. That is why there are so many different religions as

none can point to any independent and objective evidence supporting the validity of its creed versus that of another.¹²

It's hard to know where to start. There is so much wrong here. One gets the impression that this reader, if he ever had faith, stopped growing in faith when he was eight years old and can now self-righteously keep faith at bay by skewering his leftover third-grade level misunderstandings of what Christianity is. For starters, take the idea that faith is an exercise in wishful thinking aimed at making one "feel better." The gospel of Jesus Christ, with its call to "deny yourselves; pick up your cross and follow me" is an odd formula for "feel good" self-therapy. Or how about the reader's notion that the Christian God is actually only some abstract, post-enlightenment "supernatural entity" who swings into history on a chandelier from time to time and "interferes with natural law" (whatever that is) and "independent intelligence" (whatever that is), thereby not worthy to be believed because this God refuses to saunter into a biology lab and lie down in a Petrie dish so that scientists can decide whether there is any "independent and objective evidence" (whatever *that* is) to support belief. Christian faith does not, in fact, see God as "up there" and outside the natural world, as does popular piety, nor does Christianity see God as "in" the world, like the gods and goddesses of the pagans, nor is God subject to laboratory testing and proofs. God is not in the world; the world is in God, and intercessory prayer and resurrection are baked into the world as surely as gravity and thermodynamics.¹³ On Easter the world that is truly in God became luminescent. But the *Times* reader seems smugly to believe that Christianity is, in Terry Eagleton's insightful words, "a botched attempt to explain the world, which is like seeing ballet as a botched attempt to run for a bus."¹⁴

This critical reader's views may well be reminiscent of a conversation those unlucky cemetery guards could have had as they stood at attention outside the tomb of Jesus. "Yes, yes," one of the guards may have chortled, "religion, with all those promises and commandments and rituals, may make people feel better, but in the end, what's it worth? I mean, face the facts, when you die, you're dead. Take this miserable schlemiel inside the tomb behind us. I'm telling you, when your number's up, it's up, and dead is dead." He may still have been shaking his head, sniggering with worldly wisdom, when, irony and shock, an angel arrived on a lightning bolt, the new world broke forth in all its glory, Jesus was alive, and the guards, with the world they thought was real evaporated, were left quivering among the caves, pale and stricken, looking for all the world like death.

Living as Easter Christians: "Hoping" People

Theologian Richard John Neuhaus often argued that all Christian mission is done from an awkward place and in a difficult position. We are emissaries of the kingdom of God, of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, but the world does not yet recognize this kingdom or this sovereignty. So Christians are always laboring as ambassadors of a

disputed sovereignty who have arrived at court prematurely and without portfolio.¹⁵

Christian ministry and the mission of the church often are expressed by people who do many of the same things that others of good will do. They look like all other seekers of justice. Christians serve in soup kitchens, march for racial reconciliation, labor for peace, care for the sick, stand with the poor and the weak, work to end gun violence, and strive in many other ways and with many people of differing convictions for a more loving and compassionate society. What is different for Christians is the Easter vision, the Easter hope. In the risen Christ we have already glimpsed the new world that even now is established in the life of God and is surely adventing in the unfolding of human history. For Christians, then, war, oppression, poverty, and violence are not simply evil; they are also obsolete. The world in which the tyrant reigns has already been vanquished. We have glimpsed the first fruits of this victory outside the Jerusalem tomb. We do not work to save the world. The world has already been saved by Jesus. We work instead with the Spirit who makes that redemption manifest in every corner of creation, and as we work, we do not fear what the world fears and we are ever ready to give to all who ask “an account of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

It is no accident that the ministry of Easter people is done in places of brokenness and pain. On a Sunday visit to Madras Cathedral, Czech Catholic priest Tomáš Halík was asked to read the Gospel lesson in early mass that morning. The reading was from John 20, the story of Jesus on the first Easter saying to a doubting Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

When he read this text to the congregation, Father Halík assumed that the passage was about what he had always thought it was, Jesus offering his wounds as “evidence” to a disbelieving Thomas, turning his doubt into belief. Before that day was over, however, Halík would have an experience that would open this story with dramatic freshness and, as he wrote, even revealing “to me in a new light the greatest mystery of the Christian faith: the resurrection of Jesus ...”¹⁶

What happened was that a priest friend took him that afternoon first to the place near Madras where, according to legend, the Apostle Thomas was martyred, and then to a Catholic orphanage nearby. Halík said that he was accustomed to looking suffering in the face. He had visited the sites of Nazi concentration camps, Hiroshima, and Ground Zero in New York, but nothing prepared him for what he saw at the orphanage:

In cots that were more like poultry pens lay small, abandoned children, their stomachs swollen with hunger, tiny skeletons covered in black, often inflamed, skin. In the seemingly endless corridors their feverish eyes stared out at me from everywhere, and they stretched their pink-palmed hands out to me. In the unbreathable air, with all that stench and weeping, I felt a men-

tal, physical, and moral nausea. I had the suffocating sense of helplessness and bitter shame that one feels when confronted with the poor and wretched, shame at having healthy skin, a full stomach, and a roof over my head. I wanted cowardly to run away as fast as I could ... to close my eyes and heart and to forget ...¹⁷

Suddenly Jesus spoke to him. From somewhere deep inside came rushing the very words he had read in mass that morning: “Touch my wounds! Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side ...” He heard those words anew. No longer did he hear Christ waving away the doubts of Thomas with the “evidence” of his wounds. He now understood that “all painful wounds and all the human misery in the world are ‘Christ’s wounds,’”¹⁸ and that Jesus was saying to Thomas, and to him, and to all who waver in their faith and lose confidence in the promises of Easter, to touch the wounds of humanity. By entering into the anguish of others we encounter the risen Christ anew. There in the pain and suffering is where the risen Christ is at work, where the risen Christ is to be found. Halík wrote, “If we ignore pain, poverty, and suffering in our world ... then we have no right to say to Christ, like Thomas the Apostle when he touched Jesus’s wounds: ‘My Lord and my God.’”¹⁹

Civil rights activist William Barber II knows well about finding the risen Christ among the poor and suffering. When he preaches, he often wears a dark suit and a clerical stole which reads “Jesus was a poor man.”²⁰ Barber was born in Indianapolis, where his father, William Barber Sr., a native North Carolinian, was a college educated high school physics teacher, his mother was a government clerk, and his family had a stable income and a good life. But then a friend from back in Carolina called Barber Sr. The civil rights movement was gaining momentum in the South, and Black teachers were needed to integrate the school system and to enroll their children in the formerly all-white schools. So Barber Sr. moved his family to Roper, North Carolina, where he grew up as a boy and where his mother still lived.

Coming back to Roper meant that the Barbers exchanged a comfortable life in Indiana for a life of poverty and service. Barber Sr. not only taught physics in the local school, he also preached in the tiny Disciples of Christ churches dotted across the countryside outside Roper. William Barber II learned how to preach and how to organize civil rights efforts by watching his father, but he also learned how to be an Easter Christian by watching his grandmother, whom he idolized. Every Sunday afternoon after church, his grandmother would visit someone who was ill and suffering. “We’ll be back shortly,” she would tell the family. “We’ve got to go and hope somebody.” For a long time, young William thought his grandmother, in her Carolina accent, was mispronouncing the word “help,” and that what she meant to say was that she was going out to “help somebody.” Gradually, though, he realized that she meant just what she said. In a time of suffering, she was going out to hurting people, people who were despised by the white society around them, downtrodden by the

forces of poverty, and in the name of Christ she was “hoping” them, bearing witness to the Lord whose wounds are still seen and to the Easter world that has overcome all hatred and oppression.²¹

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” he told them on that astonishing day. “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age,” he said, and the hopeful laughter and the ecstatic dancing of the liberated have never ceased.

NOTES

1. William Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh: James Gemmill, 1878), 370.
2. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 2.1.
3. Robert Jensen, *Systematic Theology, vol. 1: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63.
4. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 110.
5. See Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), Chapters 6 and 7.
6. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 108.
7. *Ibid.*, 111.
8. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 93.
9. Esau McCaulley, “Why I am Still a Christian,” *New York Times* (October 1, 2023) Section SR, 11.
10. *Ibid.*, 11.
11. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 102.
12. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/27/opinion/christianity-slavery-faith.html#commentsContainer>
13. See Janet Soskice, “God of Power and Might,” *Theology Today*, 54/1 (April 1997), 19-28.
14. Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 50.
15. See Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), esp. 71.
16. Tomáš Halík, *Touch the Wounds: On Suffering, Trust, and Transformation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 2.
17. *Ibid.*, 7.
18. *Ibid.*, 7.
19. *Ibid.*, 2.
20. Gary Dorrien, “Born to Struggle: William J. Barber II in the Shadow of MLK,” *Commonweal* 150/9 (October 2023), 14.
21. *Ibid.*, 15