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Tom Beaudoin

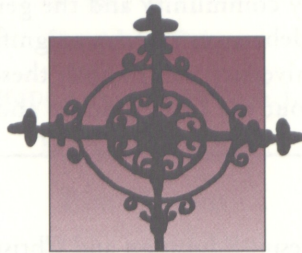
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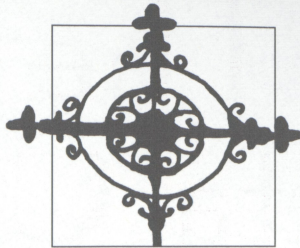


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Santa Clara Lecture

Santa Clara University, Nov. 4, 2001

THE COST OF ECONOMIC DISCIPLESHIP: U.S. CHRISTIANS AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM¹

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*Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather,
Heston M. Beaudoin, 1908–1995*

I. Introduction: A Theology of the Present

This lecture represents one inaugural movement in my attempt to articulate a theology of everyday life. Such theology centers on the question: From inside the nearly unspeakable and complex mundanity of everyday life, *how* do we know God in freeing each other? What interests me is letting theology use the experiences of everyday life to perform a kind of theologically-inflected cultural criticism, and then giving these critical tools back to non-academic people so that they may more deeply appropriate the mystical-political dimensions of their everyday lives. This lecture takes an introductory approach to the economic shading of everyday life, focusing explicitly on the experiences of many in the younger generations who have grown up in an increasingly globalized, “postmodern” environment.

Now although I love theological jargon as much as anyone, let me restate what I just said in more personal terms, because I am convinced that all theology has its origins in real-life quandaries. This evening's theology is provoked by pastoral and personal questions to which I am still searching for an answer. I have worked across the United States for the past several years with young adult ministries of various persuasions: Protestant, Episcopal, Catholic, and evangelical, from “liberal” to “conservative,” with a diversity of racial and ethnic identities, although my experiences have been heavily biased toward lower-middle through upper-middle classes. I make no pretensions to offering a scientific analysis of these

experiences. But I have prayed with, worked with, and listened to many hundreds of young adults as they distinguish their spirituality from their religion, display their literacy about popular media culture, and articulate often-passionately held positions regarding pluralism in sexuality, family, race, ethnicity, and religion. But there is one issue that brings many up short, about which they sense something is out of alignment, and yet they feel virtually powerless to do anything about it. It can produce defensiveness, frustration, and a deft changing-of-the-subject. Young adults will talk about sexuality more freely and self-assuredly than about this: economic justice for those who produce the accoutrements of their everyday life: the clothes they wear, the electronic gadgets they enjoy, the coffee they drink. I intuit that many young adults live with the feeling that someone somewhere may be suffering because of the way that their coffee, shoes, clothes, or computers are produced, but that many in the lower to upper middle classes are too busy, tired, or already have enough of their own “issues,” as they say, to even begin to do anything about it. Economics, not sex, remains the last great taboo topic in many of our ministries.

It would be a trite bit of moralizing for me to keep talking about this as if it is “their” problem, a problem for most young adults but not for me. But I only began to see it as my problem and responsibility in the last few years. It started when I became addicted to Starbucks' vanilla lattes and caramel frappuccinos. Somewhere along the way I read something about poor coffee farmers in Latin America who worked, albeit very indirectly, for large U.S. coffee corporations. I have a background in journalism, so I started calling my way up the Starbucks corporate chain, eventually getting an interview with one of their vice presidents. The results of that investigation were published in an article I wrote for *National Catholic Reporter* a year and a half ago.² I learned that this company, whom I had been paying \$4 a visit or more, refused to take adequate responsibility for living wages for their coffee farmers through a series of distancing measures, by employing layers of mid-level “independent” operators to relate to farmers. Not long after, I undertook a clothing inventory. I decided to inquire about the conditions under which many of my favorite clothing items and shoes were produced. The end result of this six-month inquiry was the sobering discovery that I was wearing jeans, shoes, and belts made by other young adults, usually young women, around the world working at least 50-60 hours a week for U.S.-based companies that paid the country's “minimum wage” which was rarely close to a living wage. And even more, these companies I had been patronizing for many years threw up

almost every imaginable firewall, evasion, and euphemism to keep from revealing this information to me. Not one company was proud or self-revealing about their labor practices overseas. So I am deeply implicated, though I have been as lethargic and reluctant and topic-changing as the many young adults with whom I have ministered.

So I take these personal and pastoral experiences into my theological work, and try to find a way forward. This way forward includes a look at one dimension of the cultural context in which these pastoral and personal realities are occurring. Thus, I will briefly discuss globalization and international corporate branding. It also includes attempts at creative theological thinking that will provide resources for a breakthrough both conceptual and experiential for Christians who live in this cultural milieu. For this movement, I sketch a reinterpretation of the notion of the body of Christ.

And so it is appropriate to continue this theology of the present with the contention by the cultural critic Naomi Klein that the post-Baby Boomer North American generations have grown up heavily branded. For younger generations,

“...the search for self [has] always been shaped by marketing hype, whether or not [we] believed it or defined [our]selves against it. This is a side effect of brand expansion that is far more difficult to track and quantify than the branding of culture and city spaces. This loss of space happens inside the individual; it is a colonization not of physical space but of mental space.”³

By what warrant does Klein suggest that the mental space of contemporary young adults has been “colonized” by corporate brands? To contextualize her judgment, I shall first step back and consider one signal aspect of young adult life today, an aspect that touches all generations: life under the sign of “globalization.” Doing so discloses the challenge not only to mental space, but to the concept of the body of Christ. And it occasions asking what “good news” Christianity has for Christians in the U.S. who live under this premiere sign of our times.

II. Global Capitalism Within Globalization

The literature on globalization is growing just as quickly as the world is shrinking. Indeed, the notion of a shrinking world is central to many interpretations of it. Sociologist Malcolm Waters draws on the work of Roland Robertson and Anthony Giddens to argue that globalization has

two complementary basic aspects: First, an accelerated concrete interconnectedness and interdependence exists among individuals, societies, and cultures of the world. This is evidenced in the domains of politics, economics, and culture. For Waters, the

“...security of employment for an Australian sheep shearer...might be affected by trends in Japanese fashions, the 'Millennium' round of WTO negotiations, [or] the cost of synthetic fibres which is in turn determined by the price of oil which might in turn be determined by American military intervention in the Persian Gulf, and the extent to which the Australian government accepts prevailing global ideologies of marketization and privatization.”⁴

Second, a generalized “consciousness of the global whole” is increasingly present.⁵ For example, I received email from students who were involved in the Tianenman Square massacre, not afterward, but while it was happening. Or consider the fact that a majority of young Catholics today hold that Catholicism is not necessarily a more direct route to heaven than any other major religion—which is certainly related to growing up with a consciousness about religious pluralism projected against a mental horizon established daily by movies, media, Internet access, and 24-hour news about religious practices around the world, a consciousness that includes some awareness, however diffuse, about the Dalai Lama, not to mention the Jewish and Muslim leaders who have assembled on the media stage with John Paul II.

In elaborating these two aspects, Waters draws on Roland Robertson's and Anthony Giddens' notions of “relativization” and “reflexivity” to argue that what is characteristic of a globalized world is that humans in one locality are forced to define themselves, their social values, their institutions either in sympathy with or reaction against other self-understandings, social values, and institutions around the globe. In this regard, Sharon Parks has recently argued that the most salient cultural factor in the formation of the imagination of young adults is globalization.⁶ We have before us the first generation of emerging adults, living what is perhaps the most critical adult stage of their life, coming to maturity within a global culture.

In the midst of making a point about the importance of travel to young adult faith, Sharon Parks tells a revealing story. It is of a young adult from the United States doing volunteer work in Nicaragua. He related that local youth asked the volunteers for “...*memorias*, gifts of remembrance,

otherwise, they threatened, they would not remember us." What one young man wanted most of all from his U.S. acquaintance was the Nike cap that the volunteer was wearing. "My refusal to give it to him," he reports, "had hurt our friendship."⁷ Though the meanings associated with this Nike cap are undoubtedly different for the two young men, if not also overlapping, the noteworthy datum is that the swoosh on the cap itself has become a global, cross-cultural symbol for youth identity.

This is not to say that relativization of all local cultures is always beneficial for everyone involved. Naomi Klein, for example, details a galling imbalance in standard of living, health care, and working conditions between young adult women in the Philippines—making "Nike running shoes, Gap pajamas, IBM computer screens, and Old Navy jeans"⁸—and the lives of many of the purchasers of those products in the United States.

Waters argues, optimistically, that an intensification of globalization goes together with an intensification of localization, as local cultures relativize themselves in the face of global social, political, economic, and media forces, and in response either accept those forces or reject them in favor of a countervailing local culture. A dehumanizing and commodifying globality can prompt a rehumanizing and anticommodifying local response. Thus, a globalized world for Waters is not necessarily a homogeneous world. It is multicentered, highly differentiated, and chaotic.⁹ The fundamental global values for and against which all will increasingly define themselves are "tolerance for diversity and individual choice."¹⁰

And while I shall not dwell on it in this lecture, it is important to remember that these dual aspects of globalization are not without a history. They are bound up with the effective history of European and U.S. expansion and colonization, on the one hand, and the infinitely assimilative logic of capitalism on the other. Is it any wonder that the language of the Internet is (U.S.) English, and that the television station watched by most youth around the world, MTV, is but one part of a larger economic empire that includes many other media and publishing corporate holdings?

One key dimension of globalization, then, is economic. Capitalism has the power to override local norms and resources in its "logic of accumulation,"¹¹ wherein the scale of production must continually rise. It also expands globally through its "logic of commodification"¹² in which consumption must always increase. In the words of Juliet Schor, "The market

imperative is bigger, better, more...The rising standard is a national icon, firmly rooted in the political discourse. For those who don't want to change what they have and are comfortable with a static lifestyle, the market offers limited choices. It is geared to newer and more expensive products. It is perpetually upshifting...relentlessly unidirectional, always ascending."¹³

Waters argues that capitalism has taken on new characteristics in the last few decades as it has become globalized. "In a globalized economy, the factors of production are so fluid and mobile that they are detached from territory and circulate through space as if it is boundless. Under this scenario, land, that most territorialized and spatially fixed factor of production, reduces in its significance to an infinitesimal level."¹⁴ One could well argue against Waters that the land for tax-free work zones so crucial to multinational corporations who produce goods in the so-called third world is far from insignificant. Waters does admit that one stubborn feature of the global economy is that "territory still has a hold on labor." Labor that, unlike images, products and lifestyles, has not necessarily shared in the upscaling, fluidifying and freeing effects of globalization. Waters argues that

"...symbolicized markets are moving beyond the capacity of states to manage them...The economy is becoming so subordinate to individual taste and choice that it is becoming reflexively marketized and, because tokenized systems will not succumb to physical boundaries, reflexively globalized...[In a] global economy, world class is displaced by a world status system based on consumption, lifestyle, and commitment."¹⁶

Robert Schreier has wisely cautioned theologians that simplistic "blanket demonization[s] of capitalism" are unhelpful,¹⁷ and I have no intention doing so here. This demonization often takes the form of moralizing about young people and "consumer culture."

III. Corporate Branding Within Global Capitalism

This moralizing, whether by academics or ministers, expresses a humid mixture of condescension, guilt, and envy regarding the way that many people seemingly disregard economic justice in consumption in everyday life. However, I agree with Karl Rahner.

"The church should be one which defends morality boldly and unambiguously, without moralizing...We are moralizing if we expound norms of behavior peevishly and pedantically, full of moral

indignation at a world without morals, without really tracing them back to that innermost experience of human nature, which is the source of the so-called principles of natural law and which alone gives them binding force; we are moralizing if moral principles are not traced back to that innermost core of the Christian message which is the message of the living Spirit, the message of freedom from merely external law, the message of love which is no longer subject to any law when it prevails.”¹⁸

Indeed, where U.S. Christians have become aware of the underside of globalization, often the discipleship demands placed on them seem *extrinsic*, experienced as commands from outside them. Even for self-styled progressives like myself, liberal guilt can still be experienced as juridical. How do we come up with a more persuasive theological approach to economic discipleship? I shall try to develop a non-moralizing theological interpretation by returning to Klein and gathering together some threads from her study.

Klein's book is a journalistic report that interprets globalization in the everyday life of young adults, and focuses on the prevalence of corporate branding. One central thesis of the book is that these brands have achieved a new level of centrality in the self-identity of younger generations in the U.S. and Canada. It is important to note that *No Logo* does not attempt to be a theological text. She argues that an increasing predominance of corporate branding over everyday life is made possible through recent accelerated changes in the way these global corporations work. Global corporations increasingly associate economic success with outsourcing, downsizing, and distancing from commodity production. More and more, they attempt to disassociate themselves from earthbound issues like workers, wages, unions, and factories, in favor of their construction of an ethereal brand-image—a globally recognizable logo that will symbolize an attitude, a feeling, a value, a lifestyle, while avoiding conjuring up any images of the earthly origins of the products that bear the logo. The logo should float freely above any of the material conditions of its production and maintenance. In this development over the past few decades, global corporations compete in a contest wherein “whoever owns the least, has the fewest employees on the payroll and produces the most powerful images, as opposed to products, wins the race.” Klein calls this a “race toward weightlessness.”¹⁹

“A select group of corporations...attempt[s] to free itself from the corporeal world of commodities, manufacturing and products to exist

on another plane. Anyone can manufacture a product, they reason...Such menial tasks, therefore, can and should be farmed out to contractors and subcontractors whose only concern is filling the order on time and under budget...Headquarters, meanwhile, is free to focus on the real business at hand—creating a corporate mythology powerful enough to infuse meaning into these raw objects just by signing its name.”²⁰

Klein goes on to argue that,

“...after establishing the ‘soul’ of their corporations, the superbrand companies have gone on to rid themselves of their cumbersome bodies, and there is nothing that seems more cumbersome, more loathsome corporeal, than the factories that produce their products.”²¹

Many superbrand corporations own few or none of their own factories today. They contract out to brokers who oversee such gross materiality. “Transcendent meaning machines” practice “corporate transcendence,”²² separating the brand as ideal experience or lifestyle from the commodity and its earthly associations—the who, what, when, where, how, and why of its material production.

IV. Docetism, “Secular” and “Christian”

Seen through the eyes of Christian theology, there is a theological subtext here. Namely, it seems that from the perspective of the corporate elevation of the brand or logo, corporeal bodies (particularly the lesser members) are essentially disposable. The dense materiality of the human elbow grease behind the logos, all the sewing, stitching, cutting, assembling, is an “accident” when compared to the “substance” of the brand. The messy cares of the bodies that give these logos material life, such as wages, health care, savings accounts, humane working conditions, are essentially separable from the brand itself. At best, bodies are a necessary evil to be dealt with as minimally as possible, with surgical gloves and masks, and only occasionally. What is most important is that a brand become associated with a lifestyle by transcending the concrete and particular history of its means of production, both as a matter of business strategy and in the perceptions of consumers.

Insofar as Klein is correct, I propose that there is a strong potential congruence or consanguinity between the reification of the brand in our economic order and an everyday docetism that is already a typical feature of Christian life.²³ I simply want to theorize here that it is, in part, such

an hospitable congruence that has informed Christian apathy about our participation in global capitalism. Insofar as this is the case, overcoming docetism is part of a theological response to this indifference.

What is docetism? An ancient polemical charge by some Christians against others, docetism is the denial that Jesus was fully human. Docetic thought holds that Jesus did not really suffer, did not really eat and drink, was not truly a human being in the robust sense in which we commonly think of ourselves as embodied human beings, with emotions, appetites, desires, passions, and bodily limitations. Its linguistic root is the Greek *dokein*, “to seem” (as in Jesus only “seeming” to be human while truly being a divine spirit). On the one hand, one can find scriptural evidence for a docetic Christ, such as in Jesus passing through locked doors, walking on water, seeming not to need to eat, or slipping, ghost-like, out of sight.²⁴ At the same time, many scriptures contest this docetic interpretation when they emphasize Jesus' specific human emotions, the physicality of his eating, the palpable reality of his wounds, or other concrete sufferings of his body.²⁵ It seems that from very early on in Christian tradition, many Christians had difficulty accepting Jesus' full humanity. And yet such denials short-circuit both the fullness of the incarnation and the possibility of our salvation as fully human, psychosomatic beings. If Christ were not really fully a human body, that would seem to imply God's definitive judgment against the goodness of the body and seem to reverse the original intrinsic goodness of God's creation, of which embodied humans were the apex in Genesis 1. Docetism is not merely an historical curiosity, of course. One could also trace its metastasization throughout Christian history, incarnating itself in various forms of denial of Christ's full humanity from the first to twenty-first centuries, or in various dualisms that deny the original intrinsic and redeemed goodness of the human body.

Now I want to propose that it is one thing for Christians to accept Jesus' humanity conceptually, and another to act in mundane everyday life in a way that affirms Jesus' humanity, what could be called a “performative” acceptance. Let me give an example: There is much evidence that young Catholics today are largely illiterate about much of the resources of Catholic tradition, even of such “recent” events as Vatican II.²⁶ But when such illiteracy is discussed, scholars are usually talking about conceptual illiteracy. Yet there are other kinds of literacy. Young Catholics manifest a *performative* literacy of the Council every time they act so as to endorse the Church as the people of God, the value of religious liberty, social jus-

tice, or ecumenism. This performative literacy does not need to have been inspired exclusively or self-reflexively from the Catholic Church to count as “Catholic.” The Church's teachings themselves on each of these issues were influenced by “dialogue” with surrounding “secular” cultures.

It is particularly to this performative realm that I wish to attend. For the congruence between corporate branding and Christian docetism that I wish to propose is manifest performatively, that is, by the way in which Christians live out their assumptions and commitments about the dignity of the human body. A performative docetism would then be a style of living that presupposes Jesus' humanity is essentially separable from or somehow “secondary” to his divinity. A performative docetism is a rejection of the fully incarnational character of Jesus' life. Though human bodies may sometimes seem frail and distracting and the source of infinite hindrance, the paradox of the incarnation is that the “Word becoming flesh” *elevates* human bodiliness by revealing it for Christians to be the definitively privileged mode of God's self-disclosure.

The point of this docetic discourse has been so that I can introduce here the notion of economic docetism at the congruence of corporate branding and everyday Christian docetism. By economic docetism, I mean Christian participation in the economy that denies the facticity, holiness, or potential revelatory character of our bodiliness or the bodiliness of others. I mean Christian participation in the economy that denies our body as the existential locus of our sufferings and pleasures, our human dignity, the fullness of our humanity. In short, economic docetism is the use of economics to abbreviate our living of our full Docetism, whether conceptual or performative, is not new. It is perhaps the most persistent weakness, not to say heresy, not only in Christian doctrine but in Christian life for twenty centuries. What is new is that economic docetism takes new forms today: separating a brand from its production, the finished product from the human makers and material processes of its creation, the idea of a product from the human, bodily, earthly locations of the product's production. An economic docetism tempts Christians to agree with the president of one branding agency who traded on a body-spirit separation when he proposed that “Products are made in the factory, but brands are made in the mind.”²⁷ Economic docetism is a performative diminishment of Christian participation in Jesus in the present, by way of economic practices that endorse an abbreviated materiality, an overemphasis on the transcendent meaning of the brand. In other words, there is a strong potential congruence or isomorphism between “corporate tran-

scendence” and what we might call docetic “corporeal transcendence.” And is it too much to suggest, after 11 September 2001, that economic docetism in a globalized world can become a form of international violence perpetrated with the assistance of many U.S. Christians? This often occurs today through a denial that the body is essential to human flourishing, and a presumption that the sufferings and pleasures of some bodies are *less important* than others.

Due to this congruence between Christian docetism and the reification of the brand, what is needed is a theology of economic discipleship for a global capitalist world.²⁸ As I suggested earlier, if it is to be persuasive in the church, such a theology must treat the following conceptual-experiential cluster: what it means to be a body, to be a member of the body, to have a body, to have a share in Christ’s body.

V. Resisting Docetism: Phenomenology and the Body of Christ

One of the most appropriate concepts from the scriptures for our purposes here is the “body of Christ.” I want to give a very brief indication of this concept and move on to constructive interpretations. Paul uses the symbol “body of Christ” to describe the way in which Christians are unified while retaining their unique diversity. We each have our own unique gifts to put to use for the larger Christian community, and we need only locate ourselves as the foot, hand, or eye and we will be able to live in harmony with the other members of Christ’s body, neither trying to do another’s function, nor absconding from doing our own seeing, grasping, or walking (or dancing), in service of the larger body. The body of Christ is a resolutely communal concept. Members are not defined in and through themselves but as members of a more fundamental organon, Christ’s body.²⁹ Being appended to Christ attaches Christians also to each other. Paul writes that “We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”³⁰ Baptism is the foundational incorporation into Christ’s body: “In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”³¹ The Eucharist is a source in daily experience for further incorporation. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”³²

But if the body of Christ is a communal concept, it seems also to presuppose a relatively well-bounded concept of the body. Taking one’s point of departure from these passages in Paul can and does often lead to the notion that to be responsible to the “body” of Christ is to care for its

other members, so that the whole body will function well. This is quite understandable, because it seems that despite its many members, the human body has clear boundaries that render it “one” body. The body is bounded by the flesh as a self-contained organon, with different members functioning in harmony. In much Christian literature and preaching, these members are imagined as those in Paul’s example, such as head, hands and feet. These members are perhaps accounted members in this model because they help demarcate the body’s surface. They form a boundary with the world and they are not the world. Note that these members are also clearly visible to the eye. On this model, even when the “church” cares for the “world,” it is a matter of Christ’s well-functioning body ambling out or stooping down or embracing those in need. The one body of Christ cares for what is not a part of this body.

I have doubts that this way of imagining the body of Christ is adequate to human experience of the way we live through our bodies. I want to suggest that our bodies are not adequately imagined as self-enclosed, clearly bounded systems of observable surfaces, no matter how harmoniously and within our individual mastery those surfaces may seem to interact. And if we need to rethink this, we perhaps will also see that if we are to keep the body of Christ as a central metaphor for the church, it will imply a responsibility to more than just the other members who are observable to the head through the eyes and whose work, no matter how good it is, marks off the church from the world.

In the end, ironically, this model of the self-enclosed body may contribute to economic docetism. Because once we rule “the world” out of the “body” of Christ, it then becomes a *problem* about whether and how serving the “world” through this “body” is faithful to this “body” of Christ. But what if the “world” is already coimplicated in the “body”? If that is the case, then caring for the body is never separate from caring for the world on which the body depends for its very existence.

So let us re-ask the question, how is it that Christians come to know of themselves as part of Christ’s body? Is it only through baptism and Eucharist? I think there is in a sense another “source” for an experiential knowing of what it means to participate in Christ’s body. That source is one’s own lived embodiment. This lived body, of course, is interpreted in and through Christ in Paul’s work. That does not diminish thinking the body, however, but directs critical attention to the structure of the key metaphor through which life in Christ and the Church is being inter-

preted in Paul. On this reading, then, human experience of the body would be partially constitutive of ecclesial life in Christ.

In my view, recent phenomenology offers interpretations of the body that potentially enrich the concept of the body of Christ. Phenomenological interpretations may do so by inquiring after the essential structures of the body, structures that are testable by their posited irreducibility to sociocultural production. I am speaking here of the importance of attending to the bedrock dynamics of the body as a fund for interpreting the "body" in "body of Christ." Phenomenology shows that there is no philosophy that does not work with what is already potentially coming to be through the body. In the words of philosopher Drew Leder, "Philosophical doctrines arise out of the life-world and attain popularity and credibility only to the extent that they harmonize with lived experience."³³ Moreover, even "historical developments" [in philosophy] can only bring to the fore, intensify, or diminish possibilities latent in the lived body itself."³⁴ I want to extend and apply this insight from philosophy to theology. In other words, all compelling theological claims are compelling in part because they develop a potential already in the lived body. This, I posit, was as true in 50 AD for Paul as it is for anyone today.³⁵ What this means is that a theology of the "body" of Christ proceeds from adequate interpretations of what it means to be and to have a body in the first place. Only after we know what it means to be a body can we meaningfully interpret the doctrine of the body of Christ and its implications for Christian discipleship today.

In his book *The Absent Body*, Leder argues for a critical development of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the human body. Leder agrees with Merleau-Ponty that the body is at the radical origins of all knowing and being, that the body mediates all consciousness, that it is not secondary to matters of reason or the spirit, but instead that matters of reason and the spirit presuppose it, that they cannot "be" without it. The body is the commonly-unthought center of and conduit for all human engagement with the world. In a postmodern intellectual world skeptical of essentialisms, Leder argues for a common cultural and historical given: the lived body. The body is an "unthematized substratum from which the world is acted upon. This transitive nature of the body is essential, inherent, a corporeal primitive."³⁶ Leder does not naively attempt to reconstruct a romantic or precritical sense of the body. It seems to me that he does not want to roll back a generation of critical work on the way that the body is "constructed" socially. Indeed, he wants to discover

what it is about the body that helps to make these accounts believable. He admits "large individual and cultural variations" in the uses and interpretations given to different regions of the body. Yet, he argues, "these variations are possible only within, and are limited by, the common structure of the human body. Its sensory organs, its forward-directedness, its muscular capacities, are prearticulations upon which all cultures must build."³⁷ He uses a musical metaphor to articulate this claim: "Cultural variations are always played out upon the keyboard of possibilities presented by our corporeal structure."³⁸ In short, Leder seems well within the Merleau-Pontian tradition of interpreting "corporeality as generative principle."³⁹ At the same time, Leder critically develops Merleau-Ponty's thought. Leder argues that there was a tendency in the writings of the famous phenomenologist to focus on the body as the perceiving body, a tendency that Leder argues nearly became an overfocus on perception as the key to corporeality. This focus on perception was consonant with Merleau-Ponty's later focus on the flesh as the key category through which to think embodiment.⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty's work thus tended to privilege a painstaking phenomenology of perception by way of bodily surfaces. Leder corrects Merleau-Ponty's approach by attention to bodily phenomena of presence and absence. On the one hand, Leder shows how bodily surfaces are both present to thematic experience and absent from it. When using our bodily surfaces, or tools that we attach to our body, for projects, they become absent to us to the degree that they move in ecstasis toward their project. (When using a guitar pick, for example, I am usually not focusing on all the sensations in my hand and fingers.) That is an active sort of absence. There is a more passive sort of absence that the rest of our bodily surface registers when it is not employed ecstatically in service of a bodily project. (When eating, we usually don't think about our feet.)

Further, he explores regions of the body generally left unexplored by Merleau-Ponty. Leder investigates the ways in which our "viscera" are intrinsic to "corporeality as generative principle." He finds that such regions as our lungs, kidneys, liver, and spleen also manifest their own dynamics of presence and absence, both similar to and different from the surface regions of our bodies. The basic manifestations of our viscera that presence themselves in everyday life—our breathing or our eating, for example—are themselves part of processes that are almost entirely absent from our ability to observe them, to feel them in a detailed manner, or to control them. As he develops Merleau-Ponty's analysis, he also adapts his primary metaphors. Leder turns from the "flesh," the body surface, or the

“Visible,” to the Visceral, or to what he calls the “flesh and blood.” By “flesh and blood” as a primary category for the experience of the lived body, Leder means both the surface of the body and the viscera. The body entire is “one thing.”⁴¹ One of the implications Leder draws from this is the necessity of rethinking the body-world relation. For Merleau-Ponty, the body-world relation is mediated by the flesh. I am able to perceive because of my fleshly distinction from what I am perceiving.⁴² Leder’s critical extension of Merleau-Ponty, drawing on the “flesh and blood concept” I noted just above, is worth quoting at length.

“Yet in addition to this perceptual communion of the flesh, I am sustained through a deeper “blood” relation with world. It is installed within me, not just encountered from without. The inanimate, calcified world supports my flesh from within in the form of bones. A world of organic, autonomous powers circulates within my visceral depths. Science tells me that some ten quadrillion bacteria live within my body. I cannot even claim my own cells fully as my own. In all probability, they evolved out of symbiotic relations between different prokaryotic cells, one living inside another. My body everywhere bears the imprint of Otherness.

“This encroachment of the world is renewed at every moment by visceral exchanges with the environment. In sleep I give myself over to anonymous breathing, relinquishing the separative nature of distance perception. Even waking perception is ultimately in service to the visceral. In the most basic sense, the animal looks around to find things to eat and avoid being eaten. (Merleau-Ponty’s own term suggests this significance; *la chair* in French, like the English word, “flesh,” commonly refers to meat, that which one devours.) As I eat, the thickness of the flesh that separates self from world melts away. No longer perceived across a distance, *the world dissolves into my own blood*, sustaining me from within via its nutritive powers. I am not just a gazing upon the world but one who feeds on it, drinks of it, breathes it in.”⁴³

This too-brief discussion of Leder is, I hope, enough to show that he has proposed important ways of thinking about the centrality of the body to the making of meaning. I hope further to show here that his work is productive for Christian theology. Claiming the church as the “body” of Christ, according to this phenomenology of the body, discloses the necessity of the world for the existence of the church. “Body” and “world” are then within each other.⁴⁴ Many modern interpretations of the body of Christ tend to be “flesh”-based interpretations, emphasizing bodily

surface metaphors. A turn to a “flesh and blood” body introduces the coimplication of body and world, blocking docetic uses of the concept “body of Christ.” The body itself always already includes otherness, incorporates the world. We can even say, the body *is* body only by receiving others; it lives with vital reference to an embryonic and fetal life, to the body of a mother, to the genes of its parents.⁴⁵ My understanding what it means to be a member of the body of Christ may then be disclosed to me through attending to the experience of my lived body. Leder writes,

“...My ecstatic flesh opens onto, mirrors the surrounding world of other bodies. *I am not then simply an 'I' but all that I am not, a perspective upon the universe as a whole.* Similarly, as ‘blood’...I find a consanguinity with processes that far outrun the traditional boundaries of self. It is not ‘I’ as conscious, limited thing, that first gave rise to or sustain my self, but a wider context of natural powers of which I am but a partial expression.”⁴⁶

Theology may employ such a phenomenology of the body to suggest that the ground of an anti-docetic Christian economic discipleship for a global economy is not learned by adverting to a conscious and intentional didactic lesson about “being Christian,” but is appropriated in the releasement to the body’s largely non-conscious, world-incorporating, non-intentional, intrinsic dynamics of “being human.” The body of Christ, then, would not only be imagined on the model of a self-enclosed corpus that is constituted by surface regions such as eye, ear, foot. The body of Christ, if it is truly thought through the lived body, is a body dependent upon absent regions and processes we cannot control, but that themselves coimplicate us with the world. There is no clear body/world separation. This, then, is the basic point: The body of Christ, as a *body*, only “lives” because it is dependent on “outside” processes and resources that this body cannot consciously control.

Living as the body of Christ is then, on this reading, a renewed symbol for making theological sense of discipleship in the global economy. Leder writes that for the lived body, “each breath speaks of my dependency upon the whole,”⁴⁷ an utterance that is at once mystical insight, phenomenological claim, and postmodern Christian anti-docetic global-economic ethic. “The body itself,” he writes—without claiming to traverse the fields of theology—“proclaims spirit in our lives, that is, transcendence, mystery, and interconnection.”⁴⁸

One last point on the coimplication of body and world. Leder writes, "I gaze up at the stars...at the same time I know that the carbon molecules from which my body is made were forged in the furnace of dying stars. I am thus doubly connected to even the far reaches of the universe."⁴⁹

In the light of economic discipleship, I would also like to read this passage in this way: I gaze down at my comfort: shoes, jeans, socks...at the same time I know that the materials that partially constitute my comfort were forged under fluorescent lights in a large room of young women half a world away. I am thus doubly connected to even the far reaches of this planet. The stuff of my world that I use and find pleasure and comfort in, in a way different from the stars, is a part of me always already. Reading Leder in this way introduces a more explicit historical and political dimension (perhaps even mystical-political) into Leder's notion of "coimplication." (Almost all of Leder's examples are drawn from the world of nature.) Economic discipleship may then follow a new logic of neighborliness under the sign of globalization: I cannot experience the flesh and blood of those who made my goods directly, I cannot usually sympathize with them; often a screen intervenes, made of various layers of "systems of provision."⁵⁰ And so I must open myself to synthetic-human connectedness, in other words, seeing my goods as part of "one body" and looking through my "goods" to their human producers, assemblers. The body of Christ is thus coimplicated with all of nature that is *not* this body, and with the other human historical and political cultures that *clothe* this body.

VI. Conclusion: Caring for the "Non-Members"

For Christians, part of the cost of economic discipleship is the contesting of economic docetism. The Bishop of Rome remarked at a May 2000 mass homily in Rome: "All must work so that the economic system in which we live does not upset the fundamental order of the priority of work over capital. Globalization is a reality present today in every area of human life, but it is a reality that must be managed wisely. Solidarity too must be globalized."⁵¹ Recall Rahner's exhortation against a moralizing church. Part of the purpose of this lecture has been to initiate a theology that will help us come closer to that "innermost experience" by inviting young adults and all Christians to advert more consciously to the mystery of their own bodies, as a way to living the body of Christ under global capitalism.

Where does all of this leave us? On the one hand, if there is any "lesson" to be learned from this work, there can be no strong Christian disruption of economic docetism without a thorough reevaluation of the body in ministry and theology. On the other hand, where young adults are performatively resisting economic docetism, theology, and ministry have an opportunity and even an obligation to draw out the bodily dimensions of such work.

The contemporary implications of Paul's own symbol of the body of Christ may now overflow the borders of his original use of it. In 1 Cor 12:25, he exhorts the "members [to] have the same care for one another." With the help of Leder, we may see how that caring for the body of Christ means caring not just for other members, but for the "non-members" on which the members themselves depend. When the members of Christ's body continue to practice an economic docetism, it is a way of trying to escape this body. In doing so, Christians re-docetize Christ.

To conclude with the words of John Paul II, "The church will continue to work with all people of good will to ensure that the winner in this process will be humanity as a whole, and not just a wealthy elite that controls science, technology, communication and the planet's resources to the detriment of the vast majority of its people. The church earnestly hopes that all the creative elements in society will cooperate to promote a globalization which will be at the service of the whole person and of all people."⁵² Or in other words, of the whole body.

- ¹ The title of this lecture recalls (the English title of) Bonhoeffer's classic text, *The Cost of Discipleship* (trans. John W. Doberstein, New York: Harper and Row, 1954). To speak of the "cost" of discipleship is to deploy an economic metaphor for theological purposes. In this sense, every discipleship is always already "economic." To speak explicitly, then, of the cost of economic discipleship, is duplicitous, for it straightforwardly suggests that there is a sacrifice involved in following Jesus in one's economic life, while it more subtly and playfully implies that economic discipleship has its "price," is something available for "purchase," perhaps through adequate prayer or toil.
- ² Tom Beaudoin, "Tracing Justice Issues in a Cup of Coffee," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 14, 2000, p. 20.
- ³ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 1999), p. 66.
- ⁴ Waters, *Globalization* [2nd edition] (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 63.
- ⁵ Robertson in *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ⁶ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in their Search for Meaning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), pp. 207ff.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- ⁸ Klein, *No Logo*, p. 203.
- ⁹ Waters, pp. 5, 192.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 98, 104, 145.
- ¹⁴ Waters, p. 90.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ¹⁷ Robert Schreier, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1977), p. 113.
- ¹⁸ Karl Rahner, "Morality Without Moralizing," in Karl Lehmann, Albert Raffelt, and Harvey D. Egan (eds.), *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 537, 539-540.
- ¹⁹ Klein, *No Logo*, p. 4.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22. See the interesting example of this regarding Tommy Hilfiger in *No Logo*, p. 24.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- ²³ But let us not think that "secular" docetism, if I may call it that, is merely prompted by a sinful secular economic order. It belongs to the

Church's own history and theology. Although "docetism" was perhaps identified as contrary to Christian orthodoxy as early as the late first century, one must not think that it has been eradicated from the Church. Indeed, one could speak of a tradition of Roman Catholic docetism that has existed in doctrine, theology, spirituality, piety—throughout everyday Catholic life—for 20 centuries. Writing the history of this tradition is not my purpose here, but we may trace its appearance in such diverse forms as some gnostic gospels, some historical forms of piety such as Jansenist Christianity, and perhaps even certain aspects of current official church teachings on sexuality. Could it even be the case that Christian ideas have supported this economic docetism—and this despite a proud and strong tradition of Catholic social teaching that would otherwise seem to indict economic docetism? Could it be that Catholic docetism has in fact seeded the ground in the history of ideas, and the social history of truth, for such a deployment of capitalism in our day to find its justification—an unofficial justification, to be sure, but a justification nonetheless? If so, this could contribute to allowing so many Christians to participate in this economic docetism without admitting any tensions with the gospel in doing so. If such a way of thinking, which can here only be indicated, withstands scrutiny, then our present capitalism, which so often is interpreted within the history of modern secularity, may be better interpreted within the history of Christian forms of experience. This would be further evidence for Foucault's provocative claim that the passage to modernity is not the story of the eviction of Christian influence from society, but instead is a story of a "Christianization in depth" (Foucault, Course of February 19, 1975, in *Les Anormaux*, pp. 164, 175, 179, cited and translated in James Bernauer's unpublished manuscript, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion," p. 28.) The Church would then be partly responsible for supporting a form of experience that is used to strategic advantage by consumer capitalism. Whether this may be shown historically, it certainly seems to be the case in the present that there is a strong isomorphism between our economic docetism and the remnants of Catholic docetism that remain in the Church today. Quite apart from the problematizing of the secularization thesis with regard to economics that such a line of thinking—here, again, only proposed and not argued—affords, the Church may be in a dubious position to preach and teach against economic docetism so long as it continues to officially and unofficially deploy a docetism of its own. And so this confrontation with the reality of docetism in our economic order is also an

opportunity to confront the docetism in the history of our doctrine, theology, spirituality, and piety that continues, however anonymously, in our present.

²⁴ See for example Luke 4:30, John 4:31-32, 8:59 and 20:19, and Mark 6:48.

²⁵ See for example Luke 24:36-43 and John 20:24-29. See also 1 John 4: 1-3, 2 John 7 and Col 2:8f.

²⁶ See Dean Hoge, William Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan Gonzales, Jr., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

²⁷ Klein, *No Logo*, p. 195.

²⁸ In addition to what I note below on the notion of the "body of Christ," I add the following reflections on such a theology of economic discipleship: A constitutive dimension of releasing oneself to Jesus as savior is a performative acceptance of the mode of being revealed by Jesus as possible for all humans: a life that becomes fully divine only in and through becoming fully human. Thus what is required for the Christian, or better, what defines Christian maturity, an ever-fuller releasement to this mysterious mode of being, is an ever deeper appropriation of the social, historical and cultural discourses, practices, and networks in which human identity and experience is caught, elaborated, even produced, disciplined, and contested. These discourses, practices and networks are "economic" when they deal with the rationalized exchange of human goods. As taking place within inescapably economic beings, Christian maturing is a function of the communal and individual appropriation of the rationalized exchanges of human goods in which one is implicated, for the sake of their humanization, which means their ordering toward the common good, affirmation of human dignity, sustenance of health and wholeness, opening of opportunity for personal and social development, and constructive realization of one's vocation. What this humanization means at any one time will unavoidably be subject to interpretation, even dismantling and deconstruction, by theological and philosophical reflection and the sciences. In these ways, salvation for the Christian is intrinsically linked to the transubstantiation of economic reality in the direction of greater human flourishing.

²⁹ See, for example, Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 6:12ff; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

³⁰ Romans 12:5

³¹ 1 Corinthians 12:13.

³² 1 Corinthians 10:17.

³³ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.125.

³⁴ Leder, p. 130.

³⁵ Indeed, note that Paul appeals to his audience's own experience of their bodies in 1 Corinthians 12:12: "Just as the body is one and has many members...so it is with Christ." This argument would be unpersuasive and incoherent without verification by self-somatic-reflection by a hearer or reader.

³⁶ Leder, p. 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ See Leder pp. 36-68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, italics mine.

⁴⁴ This is an analogous theological argument, from the resources of phenomenology, to the one that Katherine Tanner mounts from the resources of cultural studies; both have the aim and effect of dismantling the Christ-culture paradigm as the starting point for theology of culture. My argument here does so by thinking the body of Christ through the phenomenological co-implication of "body" and "world," and hers does so by showing how the resources of Church discourse are always drawn from cultural materials. See Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997).

⁴⁵ Leder, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68, italics mine.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ See Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, *World of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵¹ Alessandra Stanley, "Pope's Labor Rally Joins Mass and Rock Concert," *The New York Times*, 2 May 2000, p. A6.

⁵² John Paul II, "The Ethical Dimensions of Globalization" (*Origins* 31:3, May 31, 2001), pp. 44-45.