

A Comment on Crucifixion Imagery as Seen from “the Kingdom”

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「神の国」から見た磔刑像における一考察

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Abstract

An image carries worlds of meaning, an image provokes and invokes, pushes and pulls, scattering ideas within the viewer even as she sows understandings into it. In this few religious representata can match the depth (on both sides of the process) like those of the crucifixion of Christ. Yet such implantings inevitably yield determined (horizon-*ed*, boxed in and blocked) experiences, and these we have received now for two millennia. I think we may have missed something. The below is therefore an attempt, a movement, towards a re-examination of some of the key originary “kingdom” teachings in search of what Yeshua himself may have sought to accomplish – quite apart from his death – and then in that light further explore how an alternative ideational description of the embodied cross might pave the way for an interpretative conceptual set that could better align the phenomenology of crucifixion iconography with the content of the “kingdom” message.

Keywords: Christianity; crucifixion; iconography; image; interpretation; Jesus/Yeshua; “the kingdom”; phenomenology

要 旨

^{イメージ}像は意味の世界をもたらす。観者の内面に拡散的な思念を生起させると同時に呼び覚まし、押し出しでは引き戻す。まさにそのとき、観者は像に対して理解の種を植え込んでいる。像と意味との関係から考えると、キリストの磔刑像と同水準の深度を有する宗教的な表象は（像から感受するだけでなく、像へ付与する印象の深淺から考えても）まず存在しない。とはいっても、そのようにして理解の種が植え付けられると、どうしても固着的な（四方を囲まれ、特定の地平に限定された）経験しか生み出しえない。そして、我々は今日においてなお、2千年にもわたって、同じ経験を受容しつづけているのである。我々はなにかを見失ってしまったのではないだろうか。本稿では、元より「神の国」に存在していた教えの核心を再考する。そのプロセスにおいては、イエス（イエシュア）が真に達成しようとしていた事象—それは彼の死とはまったく関係がない—を考察する。そうして、具現化された十字架に代わる理念的な描写が、いかにして解釈上の集合概念の形成へとつながりうるかを探究する。それによって我々は、意識における体験としての磔刑のイコノグラフィーと、「神の国」が有するメッセージの主旨とを、同一線上で把捉することが可能になるのである。

キーワード：キリスト教、イエスのはりつけ、図像学、象、解釈、イエス・キリスト / イエシュア、「神の国」、現象学

1. (Re)Turning

It has been argued, and this will provide the starting point for our work in what follows, that due to the psychological penetration and subsequent effects thereof that a concept can elicit on and from its bearer, such may be determined to have a degree of realism that might at first blush seem impossible from the ethereal elements involved.¹ Ideas, it is after all commonly thought, are mere mental phenomena, passings not existing anywhere in the world, and certainly not nearly as concrete as the symbols which express or point to them – but this, it was asserted, belies the case. An idea can and often does become the foundation for innumerable actions, for entire lives, livelihoods, ways of being, through which the root abstraction(s) continually manifests; but these manifestations are not the whole of it either: for not only the praxis of “done in the name of”, but also the doxastic of simply “name of” is determinatively ontic in its own right, and flows out into individually embedded situations via myriad ways and means. Yeshua (“Jesus” in our Anglicized version of his Hebrew/Aramaic name; in the below we will use the more proper and literal spelling), moreover, was nothing if not an idea-dealer (a notion narcotic), and his crucified portraiture has likewise been laden with intellections that have piled and piled over the centuries. Not the least of these is the interpretation of the crucifixion as a necessary “atonement” or “sacrifice” à la one of the Temple offerings, required for the remittance of others’ (all of our) sins. I think, though, that taking the embodied cross in this manner has led us away from what Yeshua himself sought to achieve, that it has blinded us or covered over the core (revolutionary) ethical aspects of the wandering Jewish sage’s discourse. In keeping with the potency of an idea, and the reality it creates, let us therefore take up a spade and turn (*re*-turn, turn again) to the man’s own “kingdom” teachings and attempt to unearth what this buried image might rather impart under a shifted hermeneutics, to tease out the tension between the messages therein and the iconographic legacy ostensibly recalling such that modernity has inherited. If we can learn to perceive these representations of Yeshua hung through a fresh set of eyes, what might result? How may our social lives pivot in pair? We will seek to push through the walls – hemming us in – of the received, and stand instead on the hilltops which the words strode.

2. “Kingdom” Come

Robert Funk was the founder of a group of Biblical scholars that included both professional clergy and lay academics, calling itself the Jesus Seminar.² Their mission was to study the teachings and deeds of Yeshua in order to ascertain with as much confidence as possible what were and were not likely to be historically accurate. Of all that has been attributed to the man who lived in first century Palestine and

¹ See my forthcoming “Bloodying God: Crucifixion and the Image”, in *Image, Phenomenon, and Imagination in the Phenomenology of Religious Experience*, Libri Nigri series, ed. by Martin Nitsche and Olga Louchakova-Schwartz, series editor-in-chief Hans Rainer Sepp (Prague, CZ: Baum, 2021); see also relatedly (although in the context of studies on the self) Chapter 6: “Metaphysics and Time: The Reality of a realist self and its (re-)making” in Andrew Oberg, *Blurred: Selves Made & Selves Making* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic, 2020).

² Information on this group, now defunct, may be found here: “The Jesus Seminar”, *Westar Institute*. < <https://www.westarinstitute.org/projects/the-jesus-seminar/> >. Accessed June 17, 2020. Together the Seminar has produced three main works, while many of its members have also published research independently. The primary reports are: *The Five Gospels* (1993; the four canonical Gospels plus the Gospel of Thomas), *The Acts of Jesus* (1998), and *The Gospel of Jesus* (1999).

wrote nothing down himself,³ what did he really say and do? In a listing of the group's results of probable authenticity, one can find many parables and aphorisms (including proverbs, caricatures, et cetera, among other proclamations), totaling ninety-six in number.⁴ Based on these, Funk makes a series of suggestions on how Christian theology and church structure (bearing the contemporary situation in mind) might be brought more into line with the actual (or anyway more probably actual) views expressed by Yeshua whom – we should remember – never set out to found a new religion himself.⁵ In some ways a listing such as this might be thought marginally misleading if Yeshua did not mean to promote or create anything along institutional lines, but Funk appears focused on the practicalities involved in taking present circumstances simply as givens. These ideas include:

- 1) Understanding Yeshua as a secular sage⁶
- 2) Adopting an unmediated relationship with God and thereby taking the priesthood and clergy as against Yeshua's teachings; moreover, as mentioned above, accepting that Yeshua himself did not seek to establish either a church or a mission, and that the later institutions of power and hierarchy that developed were imposed upon his teachings for justificatory purposes⁷
- 3) Asserting that no one anywhere can have any claims to special privilege⁸
- 4) Eliminating external rewards and punishments; there are only intrinsic ones⁹
- 5) Completely abandoning the notion of a blood atonement, of Yeshua as the "sacrificial lamb" required to appease a grudge-bearing God¹⁰

A particularly interesting result of meditating on just these five points of Funk's full twenty-one (he calls them his "theses") is that it becomes clear how an adoption of them completely shifts the experiential effects crucifixion imagery may have; or, at least, it contains the power to do so. Here Yeshua was foremostly a person like you or me, wiser perhaps, freer certainly, his death the result of political and social forces and sought by neither his adherents nor himself.¹¹ If this is so, then the picture of his execution

³ There is a line of argument that no man called Yeshua ever existed at all – that the entirety is pure legend, a phantom summoned by the person who became Saint Paul in order to root his own teachings more authoritatively. However, the consensus among New Testament scholars appears to be towards an actual historicity of the figure, albeit this to various degrees and manners depending on the views of the academic in question.

⁴ See pp. 326ff in Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: Polebridge Press/HarperCollins, 1996); see also, of the Jesus Seminar's publications listed above, *The Gospel of Jesus: According to the Jesus Seminar* (Salem, Oregon: Polebridge Press, 1999).

⁵ In this he very much parallels his earlier forebear reformer Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha.

⁶ Funk, *ibid.*, p. 302.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 311.

⁸ E.g. "chosenness", "sole holders of the ultimate truth", et cetera; *ibid.*, pp. 311-312.

⁹ E.g. afterlife concerns, worldly gains, et cetera; *ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 312; on this point also John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006).

¹¹ This is not to discredit the position of Yeshua's death as ultimately being a noble self sacrifice, but instead to shift its perspectival focus – from the man's own point of view – to that of an accepted end rather than that of a desired end, and moreover as a dying that was suffered through without the (pre)hindsight yielded by the resurrection addendums of the gospel narratives. Even if we maintain a high(er) Christology in which Yeshua completely foreknew the resurrection (Funk would no doubt dispute this), phenomenologically as "fully man" his anguish would not thereby have been lessened; on these and related queries (written from a rather high Christology, on my own view), see the compelling Emmanuel Falque, *The Guide to Gethsemane: Anxiety, Suffering, Death*, trans. by George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

accordingly transforms into what it probably was witnessed as at the time: a gory tragedy. Furthermore, if all of the agonies and pains were not to (transactionally) win heaven for a fallen humanity, then the awe I may take in perceiving his broken body risks degenerating into a kind of – or an outright, not merely a “kind of” – grotesquely masochistic *schadenfreude*. Yet is a conclusion such as this one intellectually acceptable? Is it tolerable? The thoughts are so jarring, so at odds with the received interpretation and cultural heritage, that they seem incredible, even offensive. What believer, of whatever type or to whatever degree, could accede to them – and where is the beauty of faith? If we take Funk’s “theses” as valid and accordingly transform the conceptual framework around this most central of Christian iconography, then does looking on a crucifixion image therefore call instead for an attitude of indifference in order to avoid misinterpretation, or at least in order to put some distance between the ingrained traditions and a more historical figure of Christ? We might be mentally tempted in this direction, perhaps even find it appealing, but such betrays the phenomenology many of us feel on a viewing, whether purposive or accidental. To perceive the occupied cross must do more than leave us neutral; emotionally, even only empathically, it is far too prodding.

In the below necessarily brief and selective glance at the breadth of “the kingdom” preaching (very much of which we must pass over; our focus here is philosophical as regards the image-experiential rather than theological), let us also try to slightly dip into the frameworks and associated mindsets of the milieu Yeshua moved within during his time and place, attempting to reach back from our own embeddedness to that era, to the women and men that surrounded him and the ideas they carried as real and meaningful, and hence too reality- and meaning-generating. Perhaps we can approach a view of the crucifixion through eyes that approximate their own. We need not endorse Funk’s suggestions as cited in order to do this, but maintaining them as possibilities may prove helpful.

Whether or not Yeshua was an apocryphal preacher (and there is contention on this point too), and whether or not his listeners pined for an evacuation of Roman imperial forces from their lands or merely shrugged their shoulders at the political circumstances of the day, what seems a sure truism then, now, and five hundred millennia from now (if we are still around), is that human animals project their hopes into the future, optimistic to a fault, and ever craving for a “better than”. We might call the (presumed) coming glory “utopia”, we might call it “social justice”, we might call it “commune”, or we might call it “the kingdom of God”. In Yeshua’s day it was this last, but not only for him, and not only for then. John D. Caputo situates the same yearning (the inner burning) as that which one may feel for the Event, and for being readily accepting of such; in his analysis Yeshua’s teachings are a “to-come”, a situation that does not “exist” but “calls”, a set of prescriptions that “express the multiple hopes and desires that we want to keep as open-ended as possible so as not to block their future, lest we prevent the event and close off the incoming of what is coming.”¹² Thus “the “kingdom”, as Yeshua unveiled it on this understanding of the message, always beckons one to do better, to get closer, nearer both to it and to its perceived satisfaction and fulfillment of a life as lived.

Simultaneously with this gesturing hand and its urging onwards, however, is Yeshua’s pronouncement

¹² John D. Caputo, *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional* (Salem, Oregon: Polebridge Press, 2016) p. 85.

that “the kingdom” is indeed already present,¹³ that it actually does “exist”, and it does so right in this instant, all around, we simply have to open our eyes to see it (“see” it comprehendingly and comprehensively; in Heideggerean terms we might say it is to-hand, yet still awaiting its at-handedness.) A logion from the non-canonical Nag Hammadi text *The Gospel of Thomas* – which has been dated to the middle of the first century or somewhat later,¹⁴ making it possibly the oldest of the gospels – contains this teaching:

Saying 113: His followers said to him, “When will the kingdom come?”

[Yeshua replied] “It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, ‘Look, here it is,’ or ‘Look, there it is.’

Rather, the father’s kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it.”¹⁵

Here it is, now, “spread out upon the earth”, surrounding, supporting, composing our ordinariness; what is required is only to live it, to be it. This implies both a perspectival shift and a behavioral adjustment; nothing that seemingly lies beyond our power though, nothing that requires an apocalyptic end-of-creation great trumpet blow and the descending of heavenly chariots.

At the same time – here again a simultaneity of nuance, another fold within our regal conceptual *origami* – “the kingdom of God” is a full negation of the everyday, of business as usual. Caputo calls it “the contradiction of the ‘world’ (*cosmos*), which is the order of power and privilege and self-interest”;¹⁶ and it is perhaps in this where the audacity of the crucifixion as a symbol for “the kingdom” message most forces its way to the fore, if only we would pause long enough to take note. A rebel executed, after all, appears far more supportive of the “world” as an authoritative and enforcing system of structures than it does an overturning of such, and it is only in the reading of the cross as a marker for a heavenly “A ha! In letting you kill me, now I have you!” interpretative stance (which is an “atonement” understanding established by later generations, not a “kingdom” view as espoused by Yeshua) wherein we might find some measure of a claimed “victory” to be present. This, though – as Funk emphasized – is to fully miss the person himself. If we therefore were to assess what is really going on in “the kingdom”, what form would the stretched and hung flesh take?

Unfortunately we have grown so accustomed to apprehending the icon of Yeshua killed as foreground to his pedagogy, as a foreknown and inevitable end towards which he himself purposefully strode the entire time, an indicator of the transactional “sacrifice” he purportedly represented (and then all of that through the additional lens of the resurrection tales), that it tends to disrupt and block off, to blind us from “seeing” the breathtaking revolution that was really being encouraged in “the kingdom” and its annihilatory

¹³ This is perhaps akin to the notion of holiness being fully unrealizable in historical terms while we are nevertheless expected to act as if it could be (or already is), which became normative in Jewish tradition; see the “Essays” section to Parashat Korach (comprising Numbers 16:1-18:32) in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Travel Edition*, ed. by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut (New York: CCAR Press, 2005), p. 1013.

¹⁴ See the chapter introduction to the same in Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer, eds., *The Gnostic Bible: Gnostic Texts of Mystical Wisdom from the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, rev. edn (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2009), pp. 43-44.

¹⁵ Marvin Meyer, trans., *The Gospel of Thomas: Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, rev. edn, intro. and notes by Marvin Meyer, inter. by Harold Bloom (New York: HarperOne, 1992), p. 63.

¹⁶ Caputo 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 48; emphasis in the original.

not/no/non/never towards the developed line of standard human history, to our species' whole mode of social being and edifice. This man took to speaking and announced that things untouched were just fine, do not worry, love each other and trust the divine, tear down or disregard the formations of hierarchy and the walls they have erected between you and God, between you and you – and it ended in a bloody shambles. What may the graphic representation of that shambles really depict? We know the intuitions it prompts in us, but again these are based on the “atonement” and not “the kingdom”. Could our reactions be otherwise?

Caputo's deconstruction of the call found in “the kingdom”, with its here-now and how-it-might-be, contains too the very practical consideration that we ought to, in his words, “Make no mistake, there is only one world, in the sense of what [Martin] Heidegger calls ‘being-in-the-world,’ but within it the kingdom and the ‘world’ are its tensions”, and that “the issue is not so much with what name we are to call God, but what the name of God calls for, what it calls upon us to do.”¹⁷ Here we are, already where we should be, there is no need to long either for pearly gates to open in the sky, nor for a fiery destruction followed by a re-created planet. The point is not even a theological (or metaphysical or ontological) one, it is rather the most eminently “nuts and bolts” type of concern we have, namely: What am I to do (or, in only slightly more abstracted terms: How am I to live?)? There is, though, a re-making and a renewal to be found, but it is one of our own, it is the “kingdom” that Yeshua urged upon us – each of us – to fashion.

In their introductory comments to *The Lost Gospel Q* (a document reconstructed by scholars from common material found in the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke (whose roughly contemporary authors did not know of the other and thus the many overlaps are strongly indicative of each independently using a common literary resource)), the translators and editors Mark Powelson and Ray Riegert write that, “He [Yeshua] speaks in Q of a new age and a higher form of happiness, and calls upon his listeners to follow, even when that means breaking family ties and sacrificing possessions. It is everyone's responsibility to bring this new age, this realm of God, into being.”¹⁸ In the circumstances of first century Palestinian life, or indeed twenty-first century anywhere life, the sundering of traditional allegiances and rejection of accepted notions of ownership and property are clearly revolutionary proposals, as a single exemplary portion of the famous “Sermon on the Mount” (attributed to Yeshua) denotes through an encouragement to restraint against aggression (not only a passivity but a surrender), a non-retaliation for wrongs received, and a free redistribution of goods. Compare the following words, first from Q, and then its equivalent from Matthew:

Q15: When someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer them the other cheek, too.

When someone takes your coat from you, let them have your shirt as well.

Give to everyone who asks. And if someone robs you, don't demand your property back.¹⁹

Matthew 5:38-42: ³⁸You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” ³⁹But I say to

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 37 and p. 39, respectively.

¹⁸ *The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus*, trans., footnotes, and ed. by Mark Powelson and Ray Riegert, pref. and consulting ed. Marcus Borg, intro. by Thomas Moore (Berkeley, California: Seastone, 1996), p. 28.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 48. A footnote remarks that being hit on the right cheek would typically involve a backhanded strike, which culturally would have been doubly as insulting as a palm forward slap.

you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.²⁰

While there are interesting differences of terminology here (the subtleties between Q’s “take your coat” versus Matthew’s “*sue you and* take your coat” strike me as thought provoking), the overall common ethical and behavioral thrust can perhaps be summarized by a comment from another Biblical scholar who acted as consulting editor on this volume of Q, namely Marcus Borg: “The sayings in Q most often speak of the way or path that Jesus taught, a way deeply subversive of the dominant cultural consciousness of his day, and perhaps of every day.”²¹ In walking this path, power is revoked, powerlessness is praised, and reversals of all manner are made paramount; again, the general picture cleanly emerges from a simple set of phraseology, *viz.* Yeshua’s various “first last/last first” descriptions of the new order “kingdom” social relations.²² These are alternative abstractions – viewpoints – by which, in holding them, one may freely build a(nother) concrete lifestyle from within the confines of the environment one finds oneself in; the task may be difficult, and possibly more so for some than for others, but it is there, waiting to be embraced and enacted, ready to be brought into being. On this aspect of a construction, in the “Bloodying God” article referenced above,²³ the argument is made that an idea (on its own) can carry enough substance such that it attains to the creational, to a “world”-building for its bearer²⁴ within the world outside one’s window: in the present discussion this would involve working towards realizing “the kingdom” from within the default of the already everyday, from up and out of one’s (unchosen) embeddedness (i.e., to continue referencing the Heideggerean framework, from out of that into which we are “thrown” at birth).²⁵ This type of ideational “faith community” (of whatever faith, or even the faith of no faith) is therefore not a withdrawal from the (regular) world of being-in-the-world, rather it is the establishment of a (conceptual) “world” in the form of a

²⁰ Taken from *The Go-Anywhere Thinline Bible with the Apocrypha*, New Revised Standard Version (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

²¹ *The Lost Gospel Q*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²² See Matthew 19:30, “But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”; also from Matthew 20:16, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”; and Mark 10:31, “But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.” (Note how the perfect parallel here of Mark 10:31 with Matthew 19:30 gives this phrasing of the statement much more authoritative historicity.); finally Luke 13:30 renders it as, “Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”; New Revised Standard Version, *op. cit.*

²³ Oberg, “Bloodying God: Crucifixion and the Image” (forthcoming), *op. cit.*

²⁴ That is, in the sense of Heidegger’s “world”, indicating the full confines of one’s embeddedness (mental, but of course situational, historical, environmental, epochal, educational, socio-economical, et cetera), which greatly affects one’s comprehension of one’s place and is an extension of Edmund Husserl’s “horizon”; this is not Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world” as in our day-to-day, vernacular “world”. That latter, ordinary “world” is what I mean by the final phrasing of this sentence: the “world outside one’s window”. Apologies to non-philosophers for our field’s at times overly obtuse terminology! For some introductory inroads, see Edmund Husserl, *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, intro. and ed. by Donn Welton (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999); David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl*, 2nd edn (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2013); Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, rev. and for. by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2010); Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: Key Selections from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking*, ed. by David Farrell Krell and for. by Taylor Carman (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); and Richard Sembera, *Rephrasing Heidegger: A Companion to Being and Time* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007).

²⁵ See especially Section 2 part C. *The idea and its reality* in Oberg, “Bloodying God: Crucifixion and the Image” (forthcoming), *op. cit.*

new/other psychological being-thus that lies within the broader confines of a biological being-as.

In the light, then, of this “kingdom” message we have received as accredited to Yeshua, its applicability and practicality, and especially its only too admittedly unverifiable nature (we can guess at its authenticity merely to degrees of likelihood), consider a further Caputo-ean provocation: “The narratives of the New Testament are more true, not less true, because their truth is beyond the truth of correspondence. Truth is not a correspondence with being but its parabolic intensification beyond being’s achievements.”²⁶ The case could be made that it matters not in the least whether anything recorded in the narratives have actual historicity to them; what does matter (and matters greatly) is what we might choose to erect upon their revelations, and such structures are notional, ours to take and “see” via whatever means may stimulate, be they cross-based imagery or otherwise. If the idea behind an image is changed then the felt reality generated by that image alters as well – and with that, quite possibly, a life. Thus the once doubtful question, “Yet can we really be internally prompted to strive for ‘the kingdom’, absent any ‘atonement’ style negotiation thoughts, by the vision of a crucified corpse?” must be met with an “Absolutely, yes.”

Here we may be reminded of another picture and another personage, often depicted at the foot of the executed Yeshua, or weeping over his dead body freshly taken down, or – and certainly these must be the greatest in number amongst the many artworks that have survived in the collective Western heritage – as a young mother holding her child in arms: naturally this is Mary, herself (narratively at least) a paradox, the “container of the uncontainable” as she is described in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.²⁷ In the truths of the empirically untrue, in the truths revealed through the non-referential tales of the Annunciation, Nativity, et cetera,²⁸ we find in Mary – in the words of Mary DeTurrís Poust – a “scared girl, knowing what awaits her if she ends up pregnant and unmarried, freely choos[ing] to say ‘yes’ to God.”²⁹ A submission, a surrender; and this too is “the kingdom”, this is exactly what Yeshua calls for from his followers: personal abandonment not only *of* the familiar but also *to* the divine, which Mary demonstrates quite probably better than any other character could. Again DeTurrís Poust: “Without knowing all the reasons or what the eventual outcome will be, she agrees.”³⁰ She does not know, cannot know, but purely says to God, “You have me, I will do it.” Who amongst us has not taken a (“kingdom”-esque) leap like this at some point in our lives, be it for whatever reason – secular, religious, otherwise – aimed at whatever objective? We understand how she feels and how she responds. Through her we feel that this trust, this faith, it may just work. It is surely this aspect of Mary’s general approachability that so endears and attracts – beholds – believers and non-believers alike. Yeshua, even presented as crucified, might have this emulative effect too if we are able to move away from intuitions of awe, bafflement, and/or worshipful gratitude, and take instead a less exalted view of the man merely as a man during the time amongst his companions about which we read in the gospels (canonical and non-canonical, and moreover regardless of whether or not we antedate or postdate that period with a nonhuman existence for Yeshua). To perceive him as a person who, like Mary,

²⁶ Caputo 2006, *ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁷ Caputo 2016, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Not a few dare to puncture even deeper and label these “wholly fictitious”; yet that in no way removes or reduces their potency, nor their meaning-making qualities.

²⁹ Mary DeTurrís Poust, *The Essential Guide to Catholic Prayer and the Mass* (New York: Alpha Books, 2011), p.99.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 99.

also said yes throughout his struggles with God, as someone who did indeed so struggle, as someone who had to work for everything he promoted, and who felt throughout the undertaking the carrying of the weight of “the kingdom” message, of speaking it and of having it truly be *heard*: taken to heart and not merely to ear.

These explorations require a further movement into “the kingdom” as a way of life, as a being-in-the-world wherein its “unruly rule”, its flipping of existing human hierarchies and social superstructures, allows for a setting in which – as Caputo (once more) puts it – “the wondrous works of the kingdom are worked. By the impossible everything happens.”³¹ On the traditional taking of crucifixion imagery, on the “atonement” reading of such, we are confronted by the thought of what could possibly be more impossible than divinity incarnated and subsequently slaughtered? The response appears that by the notions of God transcendent nothing whatsoever – but the “kingdom” is about immanence and not transcendence, it is, as we have seen/“seen”, about this moment, about today, about – very simply – being: “be”-ing. It is the modern tragedy of the cross pictured that none (or anyway few) of these living “kingdom” ideascapes are ushered into our minds by it, and that what are instead relayed through these stories are taken to be physically/literally ontic rather than phenomenologically ontic (a history textbook instead of a music one), and are thus thereby rejected wholesale as types of magical imaginings by those many individuals who scoff (rightly) at the assertions of empiricism put forward by overly simplistic comprehensions. We ought still, though, to be gentle with every side in this tête-à-tête, for after all a truly worthy imagination requires no miracle nor magic above a single (mental) step beyond.

Another logion from *The Gospel of Thomas* has this teaching:³²

Saying 83: Yeshua said:

“When images become visible to people,

the light that is in them is hidden.

In the icon of the light of the Father

it will be manifest

and the icon veiled by the light.”³³

We might interpret this to indicate the distracting qualities that an image can have, the veiling results it can bring to buried inner truths (“light”), truths that are better described as “felt” than as “known”, truths that are “only” “truths”. Concepts and associations become laden and burdened (even burdensome), and whatever was meant is lost in the haze of the past; not only intentions but intuitions too are covered over. Yet in a re-turning back, if the necessary shift can be made to that inner, to bringing out that inner,³⁴ then

³¹ Caputo 2016, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

³² Using now a different translator; I prefer to quote from these sayings rather than from other early gospels because *Thomas*’ non-canonical status might grant it a deeper power to surprise than what is found in the New Testament, despite the text’s having become quite well known in its own right.

³³ Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Gnostic Wisdom of Jesus*, trans. and notes by Joseph Rowe, for. by Jacob Needleman (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2005), p. 45.

³⁴ Another “kingdom” teaching: the need to make the inner and the outer as one (Logion 22); see *ibid.*, and Meyer, *op. cit.*

that internal light itself dims – or overwhelms – the obscuring effects that the image had theretofore induced, and the abstract lying within is made as solid as the image affixed without. The idea takes, and gives, its reality. What is the “inner” of the crucifixion? Of our reaction to it? What may it yet be? In the next section we shall circle around, through, and between this imagery, its concept-realities, and the life and thought of Yeshua as we can (or might) know it in an effort at application. What is to be done? What hoped? Lived?

3. Witness to an (Giving) Execution

On the outer and the inner of the crucifixion rests the whole of our study, on the outer and the inner of what happens experientially as we gaze upon its reproduction, its creative depiction. This “what happens”, moreover, was argued to hinge phenomenologically on the ideational held in relation to it, on a type of “intentional inexistent” (a token that the mind takes in a “physical” sense but which is more aligned with the conceptual; e.g. the sky as a “thing up there”)³⁵ that is nevertheless filled with enough realist force to bury itself so deeply in the psyche that it aborts every other potential interpretation, that it premeditatedly (preconceivedly, *pre-conceive-ably*) disgorges that which might have been. In the tradition we have collectively received regarding the crucifixion, this is the “atonement” tale of the required sacrifice, of the blood wages paid to cover the costs of sin (original sin: theirs then, ours now, our children’s tomorrow), and this understanding is so potent that any presentation of the image – irrespective, seemingly, of the format – is likely to prompt these transactional thoughts and feelings, whether we believe them to be true or not, necessary or not, applicable or not. We are each so buried in this familiar story that any other point of view is precluded prior to its very possibility. The concept has simply infiltrated too far, our comprehensive enclosures brought too near, our notional gardens too overrun; yet like any stubborn weed it can nevertheless be drawn out, pulled up by its roots; if this is done then what may we be left with? What if Yeshua’s execution was not inevitable, but yet one he nevertheless chose to give, to give himself to? What if it were not spiritually required for redemption but was still a mark of adherence to “the kingdom”? What if – even to a believer – there was no need for redemption in the lawful sense, and no divine judgment against which nothing to the contrary of that plan for said “atonement” could occur: that is, a sacrificially avoidant (monotheistic) perception of divinity?

This now is captivating, for if we might have a Christianity without Yeshua as the lamb bound for a Levitical slaughter then countless doors and innumerable understandings of the man and his teaching spring forth, every one of which would cast its shadow on our relation with this core image of the embodied cross. Churches and museums everywhere could keep their crucifixes exactly as they are; it is we who would change. What I wish to suggest in the below towards such an end will demand some brief preparation, a touch of notional stretching, and so let us consider another logion from *The Gospel of Thomas* to help put us in the right(-ly refracted) frame of mind:

³⁵ William G. Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996); see again Section 2 part C. *The idea and its reality* in Oberg, “Bloodying God: Crucifixion and the Image” (forthcoming), *op. cit.*

Saying 98: Jesus said, “The father’s kingdom is like a person who wanted to put someone powerful to death. While at home he drew his sword and thrust it into the wall to find out whether his hand would go in. Then he killed the powerful one.”³⁶

It is possibly disturbing to imagine Yeshua making a simile like this (bracketing the question of its facticity), yet our imaged personage heavy with a load of blinding historical familiarity and received associations is a powerful one and must be effortfully put to death, and so thankfully unnerved – and reminded of where we stand in relation to this inheritance – we continue our study. The roads upon which we henceforth embark are young, unsettled, and thus call for fresh eyes and minds, for dropping every relic attached to the thought-we-knew. Once more we owe much to the clearing work of Caputo in what follows.

To begin we return to the beginning, to the famous “In the beginning” of Genesis, and we must go all the way back there (but of course not “historically” back, rather narratively) because the first concept to jettison is that of a creation crafted out of nothing and the resulting – almost by default – embrace of omnipotence that ensues. Catherine Keller has demonstrated how the earliest Semitic creation myths (and in this regard many of the surrounding cultures’ tales as well) emphasized a creator God working with *pre-existing* materials to forge the heavens and the earth,³⁷ not first generating the raw materials themselves (in the gender neutral usage of “they”, but also because the Hebrew *Elohim* is technically a plural form),³⁸ and certainly not conjuring up both the ingredients and then the finished product in one fell sorcerer’s swoop. God found themselves existing alongside non-living – but existing, being present – primary elementals, and thereafter set about trying to do something with what was to be found. How long this process took and how many times it had to be redone is anyone’s guess, but the ancients do seem to have thought that it did indeed necessitate a number of attempts before God got it right (or, we might think looking around ourselves, not “right” but “as good as it gets”). If God did not create out of nothing, if God made mistakes along the way and needed to re-do said creation while such remained a work in progress, then this gives way to a further diminution: that of omniscience, with its accompanying perfect foresight. Things might happen that God did not fore-allow (pre-permit), God’s will might therefore not be done, and God might not be able to prevent that, God might even be disconcerted by that. Furthermore, if extant creation yet remains a work underway – as it would appear to given the non-static nature of the observable and unobservable alike, at least from our linear perspective – then the entirety becomes transformed and whole worlds – *the* world, in its vernacular sense – open up to incredible possibilities; we

³⁶ Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³⁷ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2003); on the ancients’ imaginative thoughtscape, horizons, and “worlds” in the phenomenological senses see also James L. Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003). Note the wording, for example – even in the English translation – of Genesis 1:1-2: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” (New Revised Standard Version, *op. cit.*) Here we have as already present, lying about uncreated: 1) the earth as formless, 2) the deep, and 3) the waters. Admittedly, “void” and “the deep” are somewhat negatingly and vaguely (respectively) imprecise terms and hardly proclamatory statements along the lines of “there is a hammer on the shelf”, but such are nevertheless not indicative of the pure vacuum which we tend to imagine when reading this text (with our current Husserlean “horizon” lenses attached) today.

³⁸ Again, the “they” is used in order to avoid attaching a gender to the divine, but the technically plural form of the English too has the further advantage of invoking the Trinity, which given our context is quite appropriate I feel (although, once more thinking along technical lines, the Trinity is an orthodoxly singular concept).

human animals moreover find ourselves suddenly in the bizarre (to modernly conditioned minds) position of being co-creators since our actions clearly contribute to shaping and moulding, to transfiguring and (re) building the very “this and that” upon which we tread.³⁹ What would a view such as this imply for Yeshua and his crucifixion?

To put our situation brutally, the accepted, taught, and “correct” understanding of Yeshua as the trade-off, as a flesh and blood donation necessary to propitiate an omnipotent and omniscient (finical) divinity, has it that on the cross Yeshua could easily have “come down” as the Roman soldiers and local religious leaders taunted him to⁴⁰ at any point he wished, yet he refrained in order to fulfill his heavenly mission. Caputo, championing the “reduced” (yet not reductional, as we will argue below) position that we are considering here, writes that:

On my accounting, Jesus was being crucified, not holding back; he was nailed there and being executed very much against his will and the will of God. He never heard of Christianity’s novel idea that he was redeeming the world with his blood. His approach to evil was forgiveness, not paying off a debt due the Father [Caputo uses the traditional male terminology], or the devil, with suffering or with anything else.⁴¹

Yeshua may not have wanted to die, at least not in that way and not at that point in his ministry and life. He simply did. He got killed, hung up on a wooden cross and left to slowly and very painfully breathe his last while carrion birds circled overhead, dogs yelped beneath, and those who loved him and were unafraid (or disregarding) enough of the authorities unashamedly wept and wailed at the sight. He might have chosen to submit to this treatment: the Gospel of John gives us a scene of Yeshua on trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate wherein he does not deny what he is charged with;⁴² assuming there is a degree of empirical basis (although given John’s generally polemical character, and especially at this juncture in the book, there is probably very little (if any) factual grounding), we might find Yeshua recognizing what could happen to him but agreeing to it as befitting of the vision espoused by the teachings he had been engaged in. Whatever the case, what did occur with certitude is that we took hold of this execution image and flipped it into a strange and almost masochistic debit card payment. Our eyes today see something in the crucifixion that was unimaginable to every human being prior to Saint Paul’s introduction of the offense-exchange concept – a concept that thereafter took on a reality – a realism – that became so thickly rooted that it has blotted out all others and resulted in the binary of either full acceptance or complete rejection.

Paul, as an apostle of the early Church and as a foundational theologian for it, interjected into Yeshua’s message – which was, as we have seen, more properly focused on the now-moment and a trust therein (taking today as a gift, asking God to do what God wills through and amongst us, avoiding plans and

³⁹ The effects an interpretation such as this would have on the issue of theodicy will not go unnoticed, and the responsibility for the evil we do subsequently rightly (I think) becomes seen as falling squarely on our own shoulders. The evil that befalls us, furthermore, is probably best taken as either our fault as well, or as one more fact of this sticky, messy, random world of probabilities that we inhabit. Nothing is perfect, yes? I am grateful to Caputo’s books for stimulating such thoughts, and for the ethical calls thereby made.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Mark 15:30 and Matthew 27:41-42.

⁴¹ Caputo 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴² Relayed in John 18:28-40.

contingencies to make space for the divine: the “kingdom” as not a “where?” but a “how?”⁴³ – an overlay of the sacrificial scapegoat, as the offering required to carry the sins of the people into the wilderness,⁴⁴ thereon turning Yeshua’s demise into something the rabbi himself could not have imagined. Yeshua, in life, offered his listeners the choice of either existing in the world (this world, the literal one) through standardized relations of power (such as those that ultimately crucified him), or of dwelling instead through the reworked relations of powerlessness, of giving and forgiving, of resting and not worrying, of taking what comes as it comes. Caputo summarizes thusly:

The kingdom is not describing physical transformations of entities but the *existential transformability of our lives*, having to do with the most powerful and transfiguring figures of self-transformation, in which we and all things are made new. It has to do with the *call* that the kingdom issues, the call to be of a new mind, a new heart.⁴⁵

This offense-exchange understanding, and its parallel of a vengeful and demanding God (completely against the figure Yeshua taught to love and trust), was nevertheless not Paul’s central stance; that rather was the interpretation that in Yeshua as the Christ/Messiah, and via his death and physical resurrection (an event which Paul firmly embraced as documentary), a novel order was initiated establishing a fresh life of grace, unbound by the Mosaic Law both written and oral, and moreover no longer limited to the Jewish people.⁴⁶

Yet be that as it may, what is so striking is that what we have nevertheless inherited is Paul’s other view, his “atonement” scapegoat view, the hermeneutics of transaction, of a bloody butchering that buys off a tyrant, a crushed and ground down innocent soaking up cosmic wrath in my/our stead. Surely this is an anti-Christ-ian (i.e. non-Yeshuan) way to take the message of “the kingdom”. How is it that we have kept this as our core conceptual framework, that this is what we see/“see” when we gaze at a symbol of the crucifixion? How has this idea become our (en)structuring reality? Could it be a case of being so broken ourselves that we are drawn to brokenness? Or have we simply heard the story too many times and so stopped thinking about it?

An image may represent, it may have any number of intentions lying behind it, buried in it, but

⁴³ Caputo 2006, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ I refer here to the procedure described in Leviticus 16:21-22; see e.g. Romans 3:25: “whom [“Christ Jesus”; from the end of the previous verse] God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.”; New Revised Standard Version, *op. cit.* John 1:29 also makes a direct reference to this imagery (via the words of John the Baptist), but since scholars date the writing of that gospel as much later than Paul’s epistles (composed in the late first to early second centuries as compared with Paul’s work done in the mid-first century), Paul can be understood to take the foundational role.

⁴⁵ Caputo 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 206; emphases in the original.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* As an example (with some comments from me) of this “new order” view, yet one that still contains possible elements of the atonement view visible within it, see e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:14-17: “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. [“All” have already died; an interesting nuance here of an act done – dead and therefore re-birthed, or to be re-birthed.] And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. [If one were so inclined, one could read “atonement” into the “he died for all” here, but this is not a necessary understanding I think.] From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! [“No one” is seen from a human point of view, especially not Christ; everyone “in” Christ is a “new creation”; these are intriguing concepts and point to transformative ethics and ontologies, but aside from highlighting the apparent vanguard position Christ is given here as the first “new human” in a sense – transhuman in modern jargon, perhaps – we unfortunately cannot expound further without carrying ourselves too far off topic.]; New Revised Standard Version, *op. cit.*

ultimately any interaction becomes not what it bequeaths but what it draws out of its interlocutor, and such must have been (and be) already within. Perhaps in our suffering and agony we have needed a torn and defeated God just as much as we have a triumphant one. The world is not fair, and it quite often seems that everything is not in fact all right, nor will it be, however much faith we might muster.

Received notions are grounded in the comprehension of an omnipotent and omniscient God that seems both apart from and alien to the “*Abba* Father” intimacy conveyed by Yeshua in his “kingdom” enunciations. We may, however, move closer to the “how” of that “kingdom” by shifting our approach to one whereby God is more of an unfolding than a static permanence, a more natural role-taking that wishes to partner with creation rather than to dominate and control it, a divine that co-constructs while remaining the loving giver of gifts; but the way to this understanding is fragile and fraught. New interpretations can lead to new realities, to broader vistas and further horizons, and current images might help point the way; or they might conceal. Everything, it seems, is up to us and to the manner of our thought – may God help.

We will close our commentary with some thoughts on what a philotheology set forth along these iconographical lines could consist of, on what differing ideational associations could lead to when the crucifixion is beheld anew from the vantage of “the kingdom”. Prior to that, though, one final logion from *The Gospel of Thomas* on how delicate this balancing can be:

Saying 97: Yeshua said:

“The Kingdom of the Father
is like the woman who carried a jar of flour.
After she walked a long way,
the handle of the jar broke
and the flour began to spill behind her along the road.
Heedless, she noticed nothing.
When she arrived, she set down the jar
and found it empty.”⁴⁷

4. An Image Re-imaged

It may partly be our familiarity with pain, our own but also that of others, which causes us to cast so much into and onto the crucifixion, to take it in the way we have. There can be no doubt, after all, that when gazing upon a painting such as El Greco’s “Christ on the cross”⁴⁸ one’s heart is filled with an awe and a dread, an empathy that might have nothing to do with the “atonement” based thought “This was done for me.” The misery expressed on the figure’s face beneath the crown of thorns crammed tightly round the head, the afflicted look of the eyes cast towards the sky, the needle thin arms and emaciated body with its ribs, hips, knees so prominent in its wasted state, loincloth barely covering the waist with too little flesh to support it, blood trickling from the nail prominently pounded into the crossed feet. Who could fail to be

⁴⁷ Leloup, *op. cit.*, pp. 49 and 51 (Coptic original on p. 50).

⁴⁸ An example of the work can be found online here: “Christ on the cross”, *El Greco: The Complete Works*. < <http://www.elgreco-foundation.org/Christ-On-The-Cross.html> >. Accessed July 17, 2019.

moved by such a sight? To then affix additional associative labels such as “sacrifice”, “injustice”, “innocent”, “substitute” to this image only intensifies the excoriating mental shock of the viewing. It is small wonder that many are brought to tears, particularly believers who ascribe to a full orthodoxy and hence for whom the icon carries its complete traditional interpretative weight, that tonnage of “this for me, in my stead, punishment I deserve but can now avoid”.

To otherwise believers (and to non-believers too) though that thought and those labels will at some point surface when confronted by crucifixion imagery, particularly if raised in a context that either supports that understanding or acknowledges it as a part of the surrounding dominant culture. For example, if we have been raised in a Christian home but would not claim the faith for ourselves, then of course such would be at the forefront of our minds and the connected conceptuality would color and influence (some might claim “taint”) each reaction and affective flow. Yet even if we have been raised in a Muslim or Jewish or Hindu or Buddhist (or atheist or agnostic humanist or et cetera et cetera) home in a Western country, then although we may not be (as) likely to make the mental “for me” leap we would nevertheless be aware of it, and that mere knowledge would thereby lend its emotively causal arc to the experience. Extending further, if we have been raised in an other than Christian home in a non-Western country where Christianity is perchance a minority religion, a repressed religion, or a non-existent (as practiced) religion, still in this globalized twenty-first century we would almost certainly be aware of the story behind Yeshua on the cross since it has been so repeatedly and so widely presented throughout the history of our Common Era. The idea has created its reality and now feels inescapable, forcing the query: Could all of this really be a natural response, a default and necessary reading of an event, which grew out of a universally human condition of woe?

Such does seem doubtful. Countless thousands were crucified by Roman soldiers and we feel nothing for their anonymous faces and nameless deaths. Similar icons of later Christian martyrs might stir in us something akin to that felt when considering Yeshua’s broken body, but not to the same degree since with them the thought is not “for me” but rather “for him” – they died for Yeshua, for Yeshua’s memory (or so it is assumed – assigned – by us, but it also was by them). In considering that we might have to face the uncomfortable analytic step that this entire “atonement” hermeneutic was possibly only a tactic, a game of the Church Fathers to distinguish themselves and what they sought to build from the synagogues and Judaic culture and customs out of which nearly the whole of Christianity was established. The proposal was put (explicitly and/or subtly) that there is no more need for the Temple, the Law, and the many detailed practices of the Torah, because one single sacrifice has consumed the lot of the endless ritual sacrifices; henceforth another covenant and an alternative (simplified) set of rites.⁴⁹ That line drawn – and crossed – by Christianized Jews provided the schism required for the different frameworks and previously unknown authorities thereafter founded.

Another question though is now pushed on us: If purely for these historical reasons, these strategically institutionally separative reasons, then why the prominence for this (sub)reading of Paul? What would be its

⁴⁹ Regarding the Temple with its rituals and what some psychological/spiritual repercussions of its destruction in 70 CE (traumatically so) might have contributed to the resurrection accounts, see Section 2. *Searching for the authentic, stabbing at the verifiable* in Andrew Oberg, “Rereading the ‘Vineyard’ parable: Squeezing the grapes of a fresh hermeneutic for a radical ‘kingdom’ and a ‘weak’ God”, *Bulletin of the University of Kochi*, 69 (2020), 17-35.

appeal over Paul's own preferred understanding of the way of grace that Yeshua's teachings ushered in – something that itself would be creative enough of a fresh covenantal pact? Or furthermore: Why not another comprehending of the man and his “kingdom” altogether? Must we come back to our common experience of travail, to the Buddhist *dukkha* of life⁵⁰ – suffering yes, but also dissatisfaction, foundational disappointment, even a certain *je ne sais pas* – and the temptation of finding relief for that through the projecting of it onto a convenient victim? Would that really incline us towards this foisting and seizing upon of crucifixion symbology in the manner that we have? Is this whole movement merely a psychological release valve?

Some have thought so. Interpreting Yeshua's death in this transactional and sacrificial way was termed by Friedrich Nietzsche to be Western culture's “stroke of genius”, an act of outrageous self-violence done in the name of love, the germ of a collective sense of (bloodthirsty) justice that led to the confused and confusing power games played out on the world stage ever since.⁵¹ “An eye for an eye” (the legal mandate of equal punishment⁵²) taken to extremes; or instead – reading away from Nietzsche, launching out from off of him – a faux recognition (if the reader will), a pensive and forced half smile at finitude and our own limitations, a wink at the acknowledged self-deception involved in embracing suffering and mortality while simultaneously pushing both away, erecting the symbol of a dying God to make of it a figure of eternal life. We cannot face death and so we constantly present this “for us” as a token of promised immortality – which we feel guilty about but will nevertheless greedily take: a self-manufactured balm, an ingenious means of twisting (tricking ourselves) away from a bottomless grave. If all this latter is so, then have we not merely fallen into the very trap we ourselves set?

I think not; I think there is a call within the crucifixion that strikes deeper than the trepidation which a reminder of death tends to present, that beneath the body displayed the voice of “the kingdom” yet rings – on some level and in some way – urging us to take up the responsibility that is ours, to take down the flesh fastened and forge “the kingdom” already here, “spread out upon the earth”.⁵³ Yet that trap and the doubt of our falling into it is of course the core of the matter: we set this, we have taken on the image of Yeshua hung with this particular interpretive stance, and we have thereby established the reality that it itself has generated. We took this picture and made it central to our conjoined lives,⁵⁴ framed a concept around it, and from that a verity was established that poured down a foundation of such vigor that every alternative has virtually disappeared. We walled ourselves in, turned out the lights, and forgot where the exit lies. One cannot help feeling that Yeshua, he whose “kingdom” was founded on freedom from the musts and the have-tos (and too each connected worrying concern), would be heartbroken by our uncanny ability to miss the point, to fail to notice the divine love and care he so emphasized in the rush to assumptions and the yearning for a salvific portal to self-continuation. Would personal circumscription, an absolute annihilatory

⁵⁰ This is a nuanced concept but one cannot really go wrong by addressing the source: The Buddha, *The Dhammapada: Verses on the Way*, trans. and with reading guide by Glenn Wallis (New York: The Modern Library, 2004).

⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans., ed., and with comm. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967).

⁵² See Exodus 21:23-25 and Leviticus 24:19-20. It is instructive to note that in context this was actually a very merciful precedent, eliminating acts of excessive retribution.

⁵³ Meyer, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Once more this whether Christian or not: culturally and historically speaking in this modern digital age the symbology has spread to all corners.

end at one’s death, really be so bad?⁵⁵ Is not God’s abundance as proclaimed by the pre-crucified rabbinic wayfarer and as felt and known (notionally, but of course as well phenomenologically) in this life not enough?

The hermeneutics remain ours. We made and can unmake, we took and can untake this crucifixion that has been mourned as a “kingdom” cut short; it was not and is not. Yeshua’s elucidation of it was, certainly, but there can yet be a resurrection of his legacy in a more substantial way than even the legends of corporal resurrection have achieved. We can experience an understanding of the divine today via this – or another – image to a degree that is far closer to that which Yeshua sought to usher in than we have heretofore achieved, and what is necessary is only a simple clicking over of the mind. We need not rid the world of God in “the kingdom of God”, we need not rid ourselves of the thought of God held dear in renewal, we need only rid our ideational space of omnipotence and omniscience in the approach adopted to the divine, we need only comprehend God as also being subject to the whims of fate as they unravel in the manifold circumstances and trickling out of probabilities and random occurrences. God’s “way” may be up to us, “the kingdom” ours to co-build; Yeshua sought to indicate one direction. In the above backwards facing of the crucifix, we have perhaps come to realize the “why” of what this image has meant; but as Caputo informed us, “the kingdom” is really about the “how”. We may now therefore wish to turn again and ask: As seen from here, what *might* it mean?

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⁵⁵ I must apologize for this additional self reference, but I have recently written on these issues in light of Heidegger’s “being-toward-death” in: Andrew Oberg, “Approaches to finitude: Death, self, others”, *Journal of Applied Ethics and Philosophy*, 10 (2019), 8-17.

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