

Living the Death of God: A Theological Memoir, Thomas J. J. Altizer, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006 (ISBN: Hb 0-7914-6757-0, Pb 0-7914-6758-9), xviii + 192 pp., Hb \$74.50, Pb \$24.95

Reviewed by David Jasper
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For decades the work of Thomas Altizer has been utterly consistent, utterly driven. He is a preacher and a prophet whose milieu has been the world of the modern university, but his gospel has never invited conventional academic debate or exchange, though it is at the same time deeply learned and utterly embedded in the traditions of Christian reflection and literature. But his true place is on the edge, or beyond, hovering over the abyss which is both dark and light, the abyss of the apocalypse that is at the heart of everything he writes. *Living the Death of God* is a kind of autobiography, but as an account of a life it sets Altizer all the more firmly in the tradition of St. Anthony of Egypt (as we come to know him through his *Life by St. Athanasius*), Meister Eckhart and Friedrich Nietzsche, on the one hand, and on the other, the great epic tradition in literature, to which he obsessively returns, the tradition of Dante, Milton, Blake and Joyce.

Altizer is a man truly haunted by God, all the more so as he insists upon the central event of the death of God. Like every radical theologian, he is deeply Christian and utterly Christocentric, and above all a celebrant of the narrative which subverts and reverses the conventional narrative of the Christian Church as it is mapped onto the Bible. He adopts the language of theology to overturn the triumphalist claims of the Church and its theological claims in, to use one of his oft repeated phrases from Nicholas of Cusa, a *coincidentia oppositorum* that inhabits paradox. It is a dark vision, and like to drive one close to insanity. It has its deep connections with Karl Barth – also a preacher and narrator – but is finally almost his opposite, and finds its deepest expressions in the descent into hell and the darkest impossibility of the eucharist. Altizer is the priest whom the Church could not endure, the prophet doomed to be misunderstood, not least because his very language itself is an extraordinary achievement as an enactment of his theology, at its most extreme in another recent work *Godhead and the Nothing* (2003), where it becomes a medium that is almost non-referential, liturgical and ritualistic, itself a descent into the depths that is hardly to be borne.

Like all great thinkers, Altizer exists on the edges of and even beyond the possibilities of thought and the history of human thinking. Like every prophet, he is the last, standing on the verge of nothing. And yet it is impossible even to begin to understand him and his theological narrative – which he calls his ‘voyage’ – without recognizing his debt to Hegel and Heidegger, as well as the Bible and Barth, and Dante and Joyce. To see with Altizer’s eyes is to gaze into the terrifying depths of the self-portraits of Van Gogh, a vision hardly to be endured by those of us who trip through the world on lighter and ultimately less committed theological toes. There is something utterly and inevitably relentless about *Living with the Death of God*. It does not seek agreement or even understanding of the reader. It seeks only an acknowledgement of “the deep interior desert of our world” (183) from which all else springs. This is finally a deeply Old Testament vision, which is at the same time Christocentric, though looking backwards into the darkest mysteries of a divine absence that is absolutely present in its haunting and unbearable absence at every moment and in every thought and deed. It is a radical vision that is as ancient as religion itself and the deepest evil

– a haunting by God who is beyond thought, yet invades every thought, beyond ethics, yet directs every ethical move possible, beyond sight, yet is the deepest subject of every artist. Above all, the death of God is celebrated in a sacramental vision that holds before us the utterly defeated and abject body of the eucharist as the only possibility of joy at the heart of darkness. Only the epic poets have dared to give this expression, and Milton was, as Blake perceived, of the Devil’s party and *therefore* a true poet.

Altizer’s life is a deeply moving and utterly compelling account of a life lived in the darkness of the death of God. He is himself a remarkable poet, like all prophets, and this is one of his most accessible works. His language spins a genuine enactment of the descent into hell as finally the only possible journey we can make. He is touched on his journey by other remarkable figures – Mircea Eliade, Robert Detweiler, and D. G. Leahy. But finally he is always alone, as we all must be, and he is one of the brave souls who fully acknowledges this at an absolute cost. Like the Fathers of the Desert he does not flinch to fight the demons of his solitude, touching upon the deepest truths of the religious traditions of the West and the East, but always far out in a desert beyond even their articulation. Time will reveal him as one of the truly great spiritual teachers of the present time – but no true teacher is recognized or understood early or at once. He is speaking an apocalyptic language that is yet hardly born, and thus hardly to be heard let alone comprehended. It cannot compromise, speaking to our time and yet not of it. In a final and necessarily unpublished chapter of his Memoir, Altizer bids his final adieu. It begins with a catastrophic event, the burning of his house in May 2004, and his own experience of pain both spiritual and bodily. It could not have been published, his most profound theological statement that must also be utterly private and solitary. It is a theology enacted in the body, and therefore one of the most extraordinary statements of Christian insight in our time. I doubt if it will be recognized. Living with the death of God, Altizer – I hope he will forgive me – sometimes reminds of Sebastian in *Brideshead Revisited*, lost in the desert monastery and lost even to the world, but of those, as his sister says, who “are very near and dear to God.....No-one is ever holy without suffering...”

Reviewed by Brannon Hancock
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Why is the academic world so inhospitable to theology today? Of course, this is true of the church, too, which apparently leaves theology without a home, but perhaps theology has always been most deeply homeless, an abandoned orphan in the world, and most abandoned where it is seemingly most needed. (23-4)

Living the Death of God, Thomas Altizer’s most recent work, might be mistaken for a eulogy at theology’s funeral. But his vision is more hopeful than despairing: “it remains my hope that theology is even now being reborn through its own death” (17). Citing St. Augustine as his “deepest theological master” (65) and *The Confessions* as his “favorite theological book...a book fully uniting theological and meditative thinking” (30), Altizer follows a path less chosen than predetermined. He has now made his own confession, which is itself a union of theology and meditation. He has made this confession not to any priest, and not in the hope of absolution, but in writing, and addressed to any and all with ears to

hear and eyes to read. The reader is swept along with him on his theological voyage – a voyage which has not yet reached its end.

I hope this journal's name allows ample room for what will unfold here between the three voices in this conversation – Jasper's, Altizer's and mine – and I feel deeply honored to be included in this interlocution. Altizer's "theological memoir" is a strange and wonderful book. Like all true theology, it is rife with paradox. It tells the story of a broken man who is exemplary of all broken humanity. Like Altizer's earlier books, it invites communion and conversation but resists description or simple summary and refuses to be reviewed in a conventional fashion. In fact, there is a certain irony involved in attempting to review a book that is itself a re-viewing of a theologian's life and work which looks ahead while looking back.

In a day when so much that passes for or poses as theology is reducible to cultural studies, sociology of religion, or some other second-order discourse *about* theology, Altizer's language sounds primal, which is why it is so utterly foreign, so unsettling. He has no desire to be part of "a toothless theology, a theology wholly incapable of giving offense, and perhaps for that very reason it is now irrelevant and lifeless" (24). Is it tragic, then, (or is it comic?) that Altizer is so often dismissed by the theological mainstream as irrelevant, a curio of an anarchic decade quickly fading from memory? Reading the early "controversial" works of Altizer's contemporaries – e.g. Gabriel Vahanian, William Hamilton, Harvey Cox – one encounters, in varying degrees, reflections upon culture that to the contemporary reader feel dated, the polemics of an age of protest and revolution that have since been domesticated by the forces of capital and empire. But make no mistake: the death of God is not, for Altizer, a mere cultural phenomenon or intellectual maneuver. It is an actual, ontic event in the life of "Godhead." It is this, the very facticity of the death of God, after which nothing remains unchanged, that sets Altizer apart from his fellow radical theologians of the 1960s.

In the exhilarating opening chapter, "The Calling," Altizer describes his upbringing in the American South, the shadows cast by his family's history of mental instability and by the overbearing legacy of his ancestor Stonewall Jackson, for whom Altizer was named. He also chronicles key experiences in young adulthood, including his disturbing "epiphany of Satan." In one of the book's most memorable passages, he recounts: "I could actually feel Satan consuming me, absorbing me into his very being, as though this was the deepest possible initiation and bonding, and the deepest and yet most horrible union" (4). (It is difficult to know whether Altizer's self-indentification as "the world's leading Satanologist" displays his deft showmanship – an inside joke, perhaps? – or if he writes this with a straight face!)

This epiphany of Satan parallels his later "conversion to the death of God" which he experienced as "the act and grace of God himself" (8). He explains: "I could not then name that God who is dead as Satan. But I could know God as the God who is truly dead, and at bottom I knew that this was a genuine theological understanding of God, and one demanding a transformation of theology itself" (9). Perhaps here we can sense the roots of Altizer's apocalypticism, for these early experiences in his theological voyage were clearly revelatory and revolutionary for him both personally and spiritually.

One mustn't mistakenly believe that Altizer has never had any affection for the church. In fact, he offered himself in service to the church, but was turned away. After a "failed" psychological evaluation, the Episcopal church refused to accept Altizer as a candidate for ordination. Fortuitously, a mentor encouraged him to pursue a theological

rather than a priestly vocation, advising him that the former “could most effectively be conducted outside the church” (4). What was the source of the church’s antipathy toward Altizer? It could not, at this early stage, have been his *theology*, which during his tenure at Emory University (1956-68) would incite scandal, outrage, and death threats. It is as if the church disapproved of his very person.

This is peculiar, for as far as I can tell, Altizer is no demon. He is simply – at least as far as orthodox Christianity is concerned – an unabashed heretic. He knows this to be true: “It is not insignificant that theology has so resisted our profoundest visionaries. All of them have been truly and comprehensively heterodox, [and] only here can we discover the deepest heresy, and discover it in the very depth of such vision” (11); and later: “I often wonder if I am a deeper heretic than my more distinguished peers, and even wondered if it is possible to be a genuine theologian without being a heretic” (95). It should come as no real surprise, then, that the same Anglican tradition that has more recently given rise to a movement known as “radical orthodoxy” should have utterly rejected one so radically heterodox. And perhaps it is equally unsurprising that Altizer would mistake his calling for a traditional priestly vocation, for any who have met Altizer will attest that he is indisputably gifted as a preacher; a true preacher who preaches uninvited and without sanction, even in the absence of a pulpit.

A born preacher, Altizer claims he wasn’t born a writer. In a sense, his becoming a writer is synonymous with his becoming a theologian. The early process of finding a voice as a writer and theologian required, paradoxically, the purgation of self, the losing or even negating of his own voice so as to allow “Voice” to speak. This is nowhere more evident than in *The Self-Embodiment of God* (1977), which Altizer claims is his best book. However, he confesses that “it is not truly my own...it is a book which in a genuine sense wrote itself” (30). His very struggle to write *The Self-Embodiment of God* demonstrates the possible impossibility, and the irreducible necessity, of genuine theology.

The Voice that emerges from *The Self-Embodiment of God*, and thereafter consumes Altizer and his writing, is not unlike those ancient, crazed prophetic voices “calling in the desert” (cf. Is. 40:3; Mark 1:3). The desert has always been a place for exiles and wanderers, traversers and transgressors. But, as David Jasper has explored at some length in his recent work *The Sacred Desert* (2004), this is precisely what makes the desert a *sacred* place: a place for silence, solitude and self-purgation, but also a place for communion – “a place of meeting.” Even so, the desert is no place for a member of “proper” society to spend any amount of time.

There is, however, nothing proper about Altizer. When “even the writing of the word “God” is a violation” (30), he cannot avoid being inappropriate. Like all prophets, there is no proper place for him or his message. Like John the baptist, Altizer announces the coming of God incarnate, which for him is the negation of transcendence, or at least that transcendence which is opposed to immanence and embodiment. Overcoming this dichotomy, God’s sacrificial death instantiates the union of transcendence and immanence in what Altizer calls the *Total Presence* (1980) of speech and of that absolute immanence which swallows up absolute transcendence once and for all. Yes, the desert is just the place from whence such a voice as Altizer’s might come. But neither should it surprise us, then, that his voice would seem marginal – ex-centric – from the standpoint of “proper” contemporary theology.

Altizer admits to having little choice – in the memoir, he speaks often of destiny and his “ever fuller commitment to predestination” (2) – in the matter of his vocation. It seems to

have chosen him more than he it. If indeed his is “a fully kenotic or self-emptying theology” (12), then it is a theology which cannot and should not be thought of as “his own.” It is a theology wherein God empties Godself, and one that can only be written as the theologian empties, piece by piece, his own self as well. This kenosis makes possible the (re)union of Word and Spirit that Altizer began seeking at least as early as *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966): “Above all, the radical Christian seeks a total union with the Word, a union abolishing the priestly, legalistic, and dogmatic norms of the churches, so as to make possible the realization of a total redemption, a redemption actualizing the eschatological promise of Jesus” (pgs. 25-6). This is, as David Jasper has suggested, a Christocentric theology indeed, where Christ’s crucifixion is precisely that which, in traditional theological terms, marks the condition of possibility for the redemption of the created order wrought by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Perhaps it is Altizer’s Protestantism, or perhaps his obsession with apocalypse, which inclines him to prefer the image of the crucified and “cosmic” Christ of Calvary to the image of God in a manger at Bethlehem.

A deeply modern thinker, Altizer does not follow the rules of modern theology, which prefers philosophical systems to the explosive poetics of genuine theological utterance. He explains why his work must unfold as it does:

I am often asked why I do not write a systematic theology, but actually I have been writing a systematic theology throughout my theological career. What is commonly unrecognized is that a truly new theology demands a new theological language, new theological categories, new theological schemas, and new theological forms, hence it will be wholly unlike all established systematic theologies. (21)

If Altizer appears unlike those modern “systematizers” that his hero Nietzsche so despised, this is because he is working out a new type of theological thinking, founded not on presence and reason, but on absence and paradox. Of course, these provide no proper foundation for any system previously conceived, but again, this impropriety should not surprise us.

Nietzsche’s madman’s declaration of the death of God – God’s murder, really (“it is we who have killed him”) – is central to Altizer’s narrative of the death of God. Is Altizer’s account of the death of God a *metanarrative*, the likes of which have fallen under postmodern suspicion after the critiques of Lyotard and others? Must every “small narrative” be legitimated by and critiqued in light of the death of God? Indeed, Altizer admits to feeling alienated by the theological discourse that characterizes our “new world” (21), but is this perhaps because the God whose death has incessantly haunted him has become obscured in postmodernity? Altizer is clearly concerned with the Christian God, the God incarnate in Jesus Christ; the God who, in Altizer’s lifetime, has passed through the death camps and the apocalyptic conclusion of World War II – events often blamed at least indirectly (however unjustly) on Nietzschean nihilism – and the myriad horrors since.

My guess is that, for Altizer, the God whose death we must not mourn but rather celebrate is the God who stands silent as Jesus is crucified on Calvary; who seems equally indifferent to the sufferings of Auschwitz and Buchenwald; the God Elie Wiesel’s *Night* identifies as “hanging here on this gallows” in the limp body of a innocent Jewish boy. It is the death of any God who *could* intervene but doesn’t. Such a conception of God has recently led John Caputo to theologize about *The Weakness of God*, rather than God’s sovereignty or strength. This God exists only as an event “to come,” which is the condition of the possibility of faith. It is a name (“God”) we give to that in which we hope but about

which we can never have any certitude. But I sense that Caputo and Altizer are actually working along quite different trajectories. Caputo's postmodern atheism is rooted philosophically in the elusiveness of Derridean *différance*, and is only "Christian" (certainly not exclusively so) insofar as the person of Jesus points toward the weakness of the *idea* of God. In contrast, Altizer's atheism is uniquely modern (not, I think he would agree, *postmodern*) and is distinctively Christian, rooted in the crucifixion, the Bible, and the eucharist. In fact, we might suggest that the real difference between Altizer's theology and that of orthodox Christianity is that Altizer is unwilling to allow theological constructs to "smooth over" the interminable problems created by the uniquely Christian conception of God. He refuses to flinch away from the truth he finds at the heart of the Christian narrative: that God in fact and irreversibly dies on the cross of Calvary. So while for Eckhart, man's highest calling is to take leave of "God" for the sake of God, for Altizer, God has not only "taken leave" of us, but has in fact *died*, and has died *for our sake*, to liberate us from God.

In the book's Foreword, Mark Taylor – who names Altizer "The Last Theologian" – observes that Altizer "cannot imagine a death that is not a resurrection" (xviii). Taylor is right: for Altizer, "rebirth can only come through death itself" (17). The death of God names that God whose kenosis is revealed in the cross of Christ. In this sense, Altizer's is a genuinely *Christian* atheism. If this is so, what fundamentally separates Altizer's "radical theology" from, for example, Jean-Luc Marion's conception of *God Without Being* (1991), wherein the name of God is stricken out as the God-who-is-love empties Godself of being on behalf of humankind? Is this altogether different from what Louis-Marie Chauvet (who is a "radical Catholic theologian" if ever there was one) propounds in his monumental work *Symbol and Sacrament* (1995) as the "presence of the absence" of God, mediated to us in the eucharistic liturgy? Might Marion and Chauvet be regarded as "Christian atheists" in Altizer's sense of the phrase? Does the production of such work even from those within Catholic Christianity indicate that there is indeed room within the traditional vestiges of the Christian faith for a theological vision like Altizer's? I hope at least the latter might be true.

Altizer's theological works consistently push the limits of language to a breaking-point rarely approached elsewhere. Compared with these, *Living the Death of God* is Altizer's most readable work to date, and serves as a stunning (not to mention enjoyable) introduction to his life's work. As its subtitle suggests, *Living the Death of God* is truly "A Theological Memoir." But Altizer's works are not strictly theological in an academic sense; they are also religious, even spiritual, writings. The religious (*re-* + *ligare*, "to tie, fasten") consists of those rituals and beliefs that bind persons together. David Jasper has suggested that Altizer's writings are in fact "liturgical," in that they are not meant to be understood or intellectualized but to be performed and participated in, *entered into*. Liturgical language is mute prior to enactment, and this enactment is participation in communion. In this sense, perhaps Altizer's writings are even *sacramental*. Whether he views his own work in this light or not, a trace of this eucharistic vision is glimpsed in Altizer's "final" chapter, withheld from publication but shared amongst his friends: "theology...is only real in its enactment, and an enactment in the here and now. In this sense and in this sense only, every theology is a corporate theology, but here the church is the very body of the world..."

Living the Death of God looks forward whilst looking back as he undertakes the renewal of his own past. It is a genuine *anamnesis* and therefore an extended prayer. Reflecting on *anamnesis*, Altizer suggests that "prayer and liturgy are not a backward movement of remembrance or memorial, but rather a forward movement, and a forward movement finally directed to apocalypse itself" (149). If apocalypse entails revelation, a

revelation that is at once a veiling and an unveiling, does Altizer seek to reassert the primacy of this apocalyptic event from which modern theology has become so alienated? Eucharistic “real presence,” which may or may not be what Altizer calls elsewhere “total presence,” is an “apocalyptic presence, and one not confined to the *missa solemnis*, but universally present in a *missa jubilaea*. Here is an ecstatic celebration which is the celebration of life and body itself” (153). It is the kenosis of God, first in Creation and later in the Incarnation, brought to completion in the “it is finished” at Calvary, which frees us from the anxiety and bondage of that satanic God who demands satisfaction and sacrifice.

In an attempt to gather up the pieces of these disjointed reflections, let me conclude by highlighting the almost always overlooked *communal* character of death of God theology:

While I have published many books, never before have I had such an overwhelming sense of a writing that is a consequence of a genuine theological community, and while that community includes far more than I can name, it is nonetheless a genuine community, and if only in that community theology is truly alive today. (x)

Altizer’s memoir has been written at the encouragement of and, one senses, as a gift to his friends, his own theological community. Must this sort of community replace the church for the radical theologian? Or perhaps the more interesting question is: Can a church of the death of God exist? Can a community, an *ecclesia*, assemble around such doctrine as this? Before we answer in the negative, let me again assert that Altizer is not categorically anti-ecclesial, for he confesses his belief that “there truly is a communion of the saints, and the saints are everyone, or everyone who is alive,” and he reminds us that “theology is truly a communal enterprise” (48). To Altizer, in this life we are all bound together (*ligare*), inextricably and precisely, by the death of God. Some celebrate it; others bewail it; still others simply ignore it. Some live through it; others live in denial of it; some simply “live it.” Altizer’s living has demanded a writing, a perpetual and ceaseless writing, one that will be brought to an end only by his death. But it is a writing that demands a reading (*legere*), a reading that binds us to the text and to each other as we gather around the text; a genuinely *religious reading* (in Robert Detweiler’s sense of the phrase). This reading will survive him, even as he has survived the death of God.

Response by Thomas J. J. Altizer
New York

David Jasper’s response to my memoir is profoundly intimidating, and intimidating if only because of its calling forth of what the memoir might have been, or perhaps could have been if its author had been or could be the author who is here evoked. This is a challenge that I cannot possibly meet, but perhaps an all too indirect rejoinder might be possible, and one speaking of what Jasper understands as a reversal of Christian narrative. I understand such a reversal as occurring in the very creation of the synoptic gospels, a reversal coming about by way of a transformation of the Christ of Passion into the Christ of Glory, and even if the synoptic gospels as opposed to the fourth gospel do center upon the crucifixion, this is muted if not overshadowed by their overwhelming emphasis upon the Christ of Glory, and one in full continuity with the whole world of Hellenistic mythology and religion. Now the great exception to this in early Christianity occurs in its liturgical life, a truly unique liturgical

enactment, one centered in an *anamnesis* of the crucifixion, one fully calling forth the Crucified Christ as the Crucified God, and it is a communion with the Crucified God that is a uniquely Christian communion. Of course, this is invariably disguised in Christian theology, and it is all too significant that an image of the Crucified Christ virtually never occurs in patristic Christianity, a patristic Christianity that is the source of all orthodox Christianity. But it is also fascinating that there is so little liturgical theology, or so little in depth liturgical theology, it is as though this is a profoundly forbidden topic, a prohibition which Jasper casts aside.

So it is that Jasper can speak of the Eucharist as a descent into the heart of darkness or even as a descent into Hell, and it is just as such that it is the only voyage for us, or the only actual voyage now possible for us. Jasper and I are united in understanding such a descent as occurring in the depths of the modern or late modern imagination, but so far as I am aware it is only in *Finnegans Wake* that a fully and purely liturgical enactment occurs in a literary text, as here the Eucharist itself is the dominant or dominating action, and we inevitably even if all too indirectly enact the Eucharist in hearing the voice or voices of the *Wake*. The language of the *Wake* is the purest ritual language in any text, but here ritual language is indistinguishable from cosmic and historical language, a language continually enacting the execution of H.C.E. or Here Comes Everybody, and this is a liturgical sacrifice which is a Eucharistic sacrifice of the Godhead, and therefore an inversion of all given or established liturgy. This most decisively occurs in the execution or crucifixion of “Haar Faagher,” an execution which becomes most dramatic and most scatological in the television skit by the comics Butt and Taf of how Buckley shot the Russian General (346-347), a skit culminating in that tavern orgy which is a cosmic repetition of that Easter which *is* Good Friday, an Easter or Resurrection which is an ecstatic consumption of the crucified body of God.

If only by way of *Finnegans Wake* we can understand why an in depth liturgical theology is so deeply forbidden, yet Joyce is perhaps the deepest Catholic writer since Dante, although an inverse or reversed Catholic artist, and even thereby in profound continuity with Dante, the most profoundly heterodox Catholic writer until Joyce. In Joyce writing itself becomes ritual, as already occurring in *Ulysses*, and even if this is unexplored territory for literary criticism, it is ritual itself and above all a primal ritual which is most distant from our critical understanding. Now even if the *Wake* is the most difficult of all texts, it becomes immediately real when given an oral expression, an oral expression that is inevitably a ritual repetition, a ritual intonation that can actually be heard in the recording of Joyce’s own oral reading of a passage from the *Wake*. The very first pages of the *Wake* to be written, 380-382, eventually became the conclusion of Book II, chapter iii, which is both the central or axial chapter of the *Wake*, and also the most difficult and complex section of this dream or night epic. Now the cosmic mass is a dream mass, but it is a Eucharist nonetheless, and a Eucharistic feast, a feast culminating in the cosmic consumption of H.C.E. But the virtually literal center of the earliest writing in the *Wake* is a divine acceptance of eucharistic death: “I’ve a terrible errible lot todue todie tootorribleday”—a death which is not only the center of a historically cosmic Holy Week, but which is reenacted again and again throughout this eucharistic epic.

Brannon Hancock has genuine difficulty with the facticity of the death of God, although he is immersed in the *anamnesis* of the Eucharist, an *anamnesis* renewing the death of Christ in the Crucifixion, and renewing the death of that Christ who *is* God. Once again we become aware of why a genuinely liturgical theology is so deeply evaded or forbidden, for a truly liturgical theology would reenact the *anamnesis* of that Crucified Christ who is the

Crucified God, thereby and only thereby can the uniqueness of the Christian liturgy be called forth, a uniqueness which is the uniqueness of an enactment of the death of God. The incredible power of the Eucharist is fully manifest, but also and inevitably fully disguised, and most disguised in Christian theology itself, which has almost always refused to recognize the Crucified Christ as the Crucified God. But is not the ultimate power of the Eucharist inseparable from an *anamnesis* of the Crucified God, an *anamnesis* which is an enactment of that very death and that death alone, and is it this enactment and only this enactment which is a realization of what the Christian uniquely knows as resurrection? This is precisely why a uniquely Christian resurrection is the very opposite of all pagan resurrections, and even the opposite of everything that the Christian commonly knows as resurrection, just as it is the very opposite of everything that is commonly celebrated as Easter.

The *Paradiso* and *Finnegans Wake* are perhaps the deepest enactments of a uniquely Christian Joy, a joy which is the joy of resurrection, but a resurrection which is not an other-worldly resurrection, but far rather one occurring at the very center of existence itself. Hence it is a genuine resurrection which is most alien to our dominant or manifest theology, a resurrection which is everything but an other-worldly resurrection, and one absolutely reversing or inverting every possible heavenly realm. Now it is notable that there is no truly modern imagery of resurrection, or none which is not an image of that crucifixion which *is* resurrection, and if this occurs most forcefully and most comprehensively in *Finnegans Wake*, the *Wake* is our most purely liturgical literary text, thereby reversing itself as a literary text, and realizing itself as pure ritual itself. This is a ritual which enacts us in our reading of this text, which is just why this text above all others impels an oral reading of itself, an oral reading which is inevitably a ritual reading, and a ritual reading continually enacting the death of Here Comes Everybody. But the death of H.C.E. is inevitably and necessarily the resurrection of A.L.P. or Anna Livia Plurabelle, a resurrection which concludes this ritual epic, yet now a genuine ending is a genuine beginning, and this ritual even as every ritual begins once again, and begins once again as a ritual repetition of the death of God.

Thereby it truly is a liturgical epic, thus it reawakens primordial epic, a primordial epic itself reversed in the advent of the Western epic in *The Iliad*, and if our Western epic culminates in *Finnegans Wake*, this is a culmination that is a renewal of our primordial beginning, and therefore a renewal of primal ritual. A truly primal ritual is the ritual of primordial sacrifice, a primordial sacrifice genuinely renewed in the *Wake*, and even thereby becoming all in all, but now sacrifice is not the sacrifice of a god or a goddess, but far rather the sacrifice of Godhead itself, one not only occurring here and now, but comprehensively occurring here and now, and occurring in that unique resurrection which is the resurrection of the Crucified God. So it is that the *Wake* is necessarily a liturgical enactment, and an enactment of a uniquely Christian liturgy, a liturgy enacting the death of God, but precisely thereby enacting a uniquely Christian resurrection. Yet this is a resurrection that is the resurrection of the depths of existence itself, hence a resurrection finally ending every possible heavenly resurrection, and therefore a truly apocalyptic resurrection, and only thereby a resurrection that is all in all.

Who could imagine a liturgical theology that is an apocalyptic theology, or a liturgical enactment that is an apocalyptic enactment, or a primordial ritual that is apocalypse itself? All of these not only occur in *Finnegans Wake*, but they occur as the culmination of our interior and historical voyages, historical and interior voyages that are finally realized as liturgical voyages, but liturgical voyages enacted in the brute actuality of the here and now. If this is resurrection, it is an absolutely prosaic resurrection, or an absolute common

resurrection, the resurrection of Here Comes Everybody, and if this resurrection is only made possible by the resurrection of Anna Livia Plurabelle, it is the resurrection of A.L.P. that is finally all in all, and all in all in the depths of existence itself. Those are depths called forth by a pure ritual action, and in the uniquely Christian liturgy called forth by an *anamnesis* of the death of God, an *anamnesis* that so far from being a recollection, is an actual and immediate renewal of the crucifixion, and only thereby does it not only celebrate but truly renew a uniquely Christian resurrection.

Perhaps the greatest mystery of Christianity is the mystery of resurrection, a mystery only deepened or vulgarized in our theologies, and yet one truly celebrated in the Christian imagination, a celebration closed to our theologies, and above all closed to every literal understanding of resurrection. The Eucharist is that action which most purely realizes resurrection, and this occurs not only in the *missa sollemnis* but also in the *missa jubilaea*, a cosmic and historical mass, and thus a universal mass, or that very mass which is enacted in *Finnegans Wake*. Now the *Wake* not only draws upon mythologies and religions throughout the world, but also reenacts an extraordinary variety of rituals, and all of these coalesce in a universal mass or in the *missa jubilaea*, and this is a mass enacting the ultimate Joy of resurrection, but a resurrection that can only be enacted through an actual enactment of the death of God. That is the enactment which is a pure *anamnesis*, one that as such can only occur ritually or liturgically, a liturgical occurrence transcending all mythical or theological language, and doing so by way of that pure action which *is* pure life, and hence the life of resurrection itself.