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**THE TERRITORY UNDERFOOT:
A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON PLACE**

A THESIS

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by

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To Jim and Jeannette

Abstract

In this reflection on the nature of “place,” I suggest that theological reflection has failed to engage the imagery and imaginative sources that are shaped by local tradition and bounded by place. This is a critical aspect of Christian theological thought. That horizon of significance which Christians call “The Kingdom of God” is found in scripture through the particular lived realities of the people encountered and spoken to. In a very real sense, the religious imagination is not otherworldly, but indigenized and vernacular. It is in the play between the horizons of significance, such as the large language of meaning provided by the Christian tradition, and the particular soils of lived experience that religious life is vitalized.

This work includes a reflection on place as both a figurative and literal meeting between the teaching of Incarnation as a horizon of significance in Christian thought and the specific soils where the lives of the faithful are incarnated. As well, it includes a review and assessment of Mircea Eliade’s understanding of sacred space as related to *place* and the *poetics of space* developed by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. Through these theoretical approaches, a specific case of the meeting of horizon and particular soil is explored in the writing of the Kentucky poet and essayist Wendell Berry. Berry’s work is assessed as a form of liturgical language in the sense that it is in service to and reflects particular people struggling to maintain a vital local culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In Orthodox Christianity, the liturgical act of making sacred space centres on the building of the Holy Table, the altar constructed of wood, wood that is the Tree of Life and the very wood upon which the Incarnation is crucified. In the continuous reading of scripture through the liturgy, the totality of human nature and experience, as understood in Christian tradition, is gathered and bound in its deepest reality to the Kingdom of God in incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. In the call to the faithful to be present to what is divine, the Holy Table becomes a place of presence to the world, the place of places.

Here, in the late twentieth century it has become common to speak of sacred space and places, perhaps spoken in confession that we have lost our places. The evocative images are those of cabins and forests, water and rock, places where we experience the numinous and enchanting. If inspired in sacred space, we resignedly return to mundane profane space in the workaday world. In the Orthodox understanding, these personal images are a curious dividing of reality, between the profane and the Holy, the ground of being in which we are aware of ourselves and the wholly other. The liturgy in the Orthodox Church, with the church itself an

icon of creation, is to help us to see that there is no opposition of sacred and profane space—they are one and the same. Sacred space, the place of attentiveness, the place of presence calls us from this fractured vision into the present, to free us from a world only constructed in our own image.

When I first read the essays and poems of the American essayist and poet Wendell Berry, it did not occur to me that his work and writing can be regarded as a struggle to sanctify space, a type of secular liturgical act calling readers—and surely Berry himself—to presence, to the place of attentiveness. Berry is articulate about place and by his concerns, expressed in poetry and prose, we can see a path of recovery, an *anamnesis*, a latter day “unforgetting” of the gifts of the ancient liturgy. This paper considers the importance of *place* in Christian theological thought and takes a specific example in the writing of Wendell Berry. Presence, as illumined by the Orthodox liturgy, stands in prophetic judgement on the ways we are not placed and present to the world. I suggest here that Wendell Berry’s writing on place is a secular act of a similar order, both prophetic and restorative. The Orthodox making of sacred space calls us to a clarity of vision about the Creation in which we live and of which we are a part. This is where Wendell Berry’s work resonates with the Orthodox liturgy, though it may seem an odd and unlikely echo.

What is meant by the term *place* is complex. *The Oxford English Dictionary* dedicates a few pages to the term, of which one definition is “a portion of space in which people dwell together.” That definition approaches what I mean, but it is far more than that. It is the space where people dwell, but it is also the complex of stories, images, common

knowledge and history that comes together over generations. With those accretions, space becomes a place and becomes meaningful space. When it takes on thicker and deeper meaning it is transformed into something holy, and that recognition cultivates a deeper regard for the particular localities we live in. When speaking of *place*, it is perhaps useful to think of it as a verbal, an analog of the word *dwelling*, an activity embedded in human culture, giving words and ways so that local life might be aware of itself in its fragility, complexity and resiliency. To my mind this is a religious activity, the work of seeing what is concrete and real, not abstract and illusory.

I think upon this as someone who lives in a part of the world where most of us have only settled recently, a world with the dew still on it, at least for those who are not descendants of the First Nations people. We have barely had time in the four or five generations of settled immigrant communities to reroot and find ourselves at home and "placed" in this landscape. The era of modernization accompanying settlement has made placing ourselves more problematic. We also have settled in a place that is culturally pluralistic, different than traditional cultures where the particularity of place and kinship sit in relative stability. Most of us live in and between real, imagined and remembered places.

The Orthodox liturgy moves to bind the textures and fragments of human experience into a whole. I find this liturgical act compelling not as it illuminates a cosmology and an understanding of the human person in ritual act, but because it speaks to that spatial dimension of the Christian story which is often neglected for the temporal. Because it is a tradition I am not familiar with, I come to it like a visitor to a foreign country and upon

returning we see differently our own tradition, worship and liturgical setting. If one's childhood is on the Prairies, as mine was, the wideness and weight of space is both a call to presence and an absence in the seeking for God. The ancient liturgy is a contemplative place, a place of recognition and a stillpoint not easily entered into in the busyness of congregational life.

I suggest that theological reflection needs to be informed and actively shaped by local tradition and bounded by place, imaginatively responsive to a shared local culture, as complex and diverse as that may be. As Kathleen Norris points out in her spiritual geography *Dakota*, the commitment to place is really a commitment to exploration because, "[i]f you're stable, if you know where your commitment is, you can afford to explore your fears, you can afford to open up to the rest of the world," and be subject to continual conversion and change.¹ She writes from a place not unlike our own, whose history has been spotty in terms of stability

This attention to the local requires ways of naming and binding our experience together in this part of the world, in myth and metaphor. In a new landscape with a pluralistic culture, such as that of Western Canada, the possibility of shared imagination, somehow sustained by common words and language is a difficulty. Northrop Frye stated that the typical Canadian use of language has been argumentative, perhaps a consequence of the isolation of small towns with several different churches and cultures, each with its particular set of propositions.² If this is so, it is a legacy of many subtle factors. But from whatever root, Canadians have often dwelled in a sense of opposition to each other. The result is a

militant use of words and a delay in taking up the metaphorical and imaginative dimensions of our language. We are young and we have not yet had many poets or listened to the ones we do have. Without the security of cultural traditions rooted in a place, our words do not quite live in their soil. We need to consider not just how to reconstitute a sense of places, but in most cases make them for the first time. It is to this challenge that I submit this work.

Many Christian communities have taken seriously calls to justice and renewal in contextual theologies to stir them from complacency. I wish to explore a different path. This is the possibility of theological conversation deepened by a reflection on landscape, language, history and tradition, moving more deeply into the images of one's place. This is only a beginning. While the real can be revealed in the backyard given proper attention, it is the garden of my own Christian imagination that I seek to enter and tend.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Through the period in the West we refer to as “modernity,” *place* has been a neglected category and reflection on place and issues of local world have no great currency, often regarded as parochial. Until recently, much of the theological enterprise has ignored this path of deliberation, yet Christianity’s essential doctrines and beliefs suggest its centrality in deepening the lives of the faithful. Much of the Christian tradition has embraced the historical and therefore the linear and temporal dimensions of being. Yet, the spatial is present and prominent in the scriptural framework and it is my hope that a melding of the Christian story with a reflection on one’s place will lead towards a revitalized and indigenized theology, one that I believe is truly contextual. It is to this end that I consider the making of meaningful space in theory and analyze the work of Wendell Berry as a contemporary expression of this making, a form of liturgical language. What is significant about choosing a poet such as Berry is that he is hardheaded and demanding when it comes to words. As one of the People of the Book, and an adherent of a religion of the Word, I find that I can be careless and inured to the importance of words, mistaking novelty and verbiage,

in worship for example, for truly incarnational language. I base this study on the theological understanding that the local and the close at hand are *ancilla*, servants to the Incarnate.

This study is a part of a personal journey which has unfurled over the past five years. It occurs to me it is more a form of confession and *kenosis* for my own carelessness. Through the last ten years I have moved around a great deal related to study and work. As I recall this movement— months in the Caribbean, a school year in Quebec, a few months in Calgary, summers in Banff— it seems to me it has occurred with rather insouciant ease and at times a lack of regard for family and friendship. Six years ago I came to Edmonton to take work that required frequent travel around Western Canada. It was shortly after this that I happened on the writing of Wendell Berry through the guidance of my teacher and colleague Daniel Bogert O'Brien. This resulted in a conversation over three or four years on the theme of place. No matter the explicit theme of his essays and poems, Berry's work speaks about locality and I found this striking: it was not only the possibility of living in a place with some intent, but also that this was, to me, an uncommon virtue whose recovery I might explore and entertain. I have heard it said that the most radical act in the late twentieth century for university-educated, somewhat career orientated, middle-class persons such as myself would be to live one's days, from birth to death, in one neighbourhood and the same dwelling. That statement and much of Berry's work refer to what has been a feature of traditional cultures; that is, a deep sense of the geography, physical and human, in which one subsists. A regard for locality does not require immobility, but means that one moves aesthetically, with the senses sharp and attentive, through a place. For myself, I would say

this sort of sharpness and acuity has not been well-honed. While my travels to places have intentionally been longer than whistle stops, it takes time in any place to be able to see it well. However, it is also true that passing one's life in one locale is just as likely to result in the dullness of unreflective familiarity and a myopic homeblindness. Travelling and seeing other cultures and locales helps us to see our own more clearly. Although it has been historically true for much of humanity, I do not see staying in one place as the point. With a concern for cultural and spiritual life, being "placed" is significant in achieving the stability that allows real exploration to occur. I also see this as a comment on the false dualism between the particular and abstract. There is a penchant in contemporary society for forms of nostalgic tribalism and immodest and nonsensical abstraction, but little attempt to bridge the genius of the particular and abstract and to understand that neither exists in any health without the complement, understood theologically as the immanent and the transcendent.

It should also be noted that I write not only out of a particular encounter with the writings of Wendell Berry, but I share with him in that privileged category of "Anglo-Saxon Protestant Heterosexual Men."³ I refer you to Berry's poem on this in the notes. Putting aside this categorisation, along with the cardboard boxes and packs of my travels, I still understand myself as firmly rooted by my grandparents' and parent's lives in smaller Western Canadian prairie towns and cities. My allegiance and affection is with those places and sensibilities, where neighbourliness is an article of faith (if not always a practice) and where community hall dances and jellied salads are forms of communion. Yet, it is also true that the young of my middle-class world grew up with the understanding that one would

leave the place they grew up in and not necessarily return, partly the implicit influence of the 3Rs of rural and small town life: reading, writing and Route 21. In my childhood years, until the time I was ten years old, a smaller Saskatchewan town bestowed upon me a sense of belonging and place which I can still reflect upon and for which I have great fondness. I see this background as pertinent to this study, for settlement in the communities of the Prairie provinces has been a wonderful laboratory for understanding the nature of place. On one hand, most people have arrived with traditions that have been planted in other landscapes and now in the process of transplantation in different soil and with neighbours of different cultural backgrounds. On the other, this has resulted in a new culture with an emerging sense of place, a dynamic between current and former places of dwelling. It is towards understanding these forms of cultural memory and living tradition that shapes my current work with museums in Alberta.

Paralleling this sense of place that comes from childhood and adult vocation, I also have less knowledge and understanding of my grandparents and great grandparents and the places they came from than I would wish. Not living in proximity to them has meant that I come to them as echoes in my parent's lives and by walking through some of the places in which they lived. This is by no means uncommon among my generation. I recently discovered that while I have always had a strong sense of my immediate family as firmly planted in the United Church of Canada, this affiliation is tenuous from a generational point of view: my grandparents were Anglican and in the case of my mother's side came to the United Church for lack of Anglican presence in the town where she grew up. Family matters

aside, I am concerned with the poetic and imaginative dimension of the human community in this part of the world as it struggles to name itself and its experience in relation to the great religious traditions that define it.

In chapter 3, I consider placelessness and the need for roots and horizons in human communities. This shows the degree to which we have departed from that which is human scaled and sensible, losing the play between the particular and the abstract. In chapter 4, I explore a fuller understanding of Christian incarnationism and its relationship to the local, its "placedness." The presence of the Incarnation is a local story, steeped in the images and landscapes of the provincial. This analysis suggests a course for theological reflection that is neither abstract nor triumphalist but aware of its boundaries in local memory, images, history and experience. In Chapters 5 and 6, I consider the theoretical aspects of meaningful space in the study of sacred space by Mircea Eliade and the intimate spaces created by language, through Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space. We can consider in what ways meaningful space can still be spoken of in this era. Because space becomes place by the accretion of words, deeds and traces that give us meaning, we look at the imaginative dimension of this suggested in Bachelard's thinking. It stresses the importance of language and image in considering what is concrete and real. In effect, *re*-placing requires *re*-minding and *re*-imagining.

With these theological and theoretical considerations, I turn to Berry's work as a particular example of the theory, especially where his work brings together a concern for place and poetics and reflects the themes of Christian theology. I conclude with a

consideration of what the theory and Berry's writing suggest for theological reflection. A common thread running through these themes is the prophetic voice that rises in reflecting on place; not my voice, but that which makes vivid the gap between what one professes and does. I welcome this as part of this exploration for it calls me into the present. It reminds me of the illusions and idols that can be created in such an attempt.

Chapter 3

Placelessness

The scientists were saying that by science man was learning more and more about himself as an organism and more and more about the world as an environment and that accordingly the environment could be changed and man made to feel more and more at home.

The humanists were saying that through education and the application of the ethical principles of Christianity, man's lot was certain to improve.

But poets and artists and novelists were saying something else: that at a time when, according to the theory of the age, men should feel most at home they felt most homeless.

Someone was wrong.

Walker Percy, *The Message in The Bottle*

In the preface to his book *Morality and Imagination*, Yi-Fu Tuan reminds readers that his discipline—geography in its broadest sweep—strives to understand “how human beings have created *homes* or *worlds* out of nature.”⁴ Theology is about making and receiving meaning in the world, towards an understanding of the human-Divine economy. This is the making of a dwelling place, the meeting of heaven and earth. In this way, there is a common task for the theologian and the geographer. Tuan writes that the geographer is also

“committed to interpret[ing] the meaning of human attachments and aspirations.” In the epilogue of his book, Tuan suggests that being moral and imaginative “calls for attention to the *real*.” In seeking the nature of the relationship between human beings and the Divine, theologians seek for that which is real, the bedrock and ground of being. This is not scientific fact, but the Kingdom of God, which brings us to poetry, music and dancing and the bush aflame on the sacred mountain.⁵

For Plato, only the eternal forms were real. Aristotle sought the real by the particular. Much Christian doctrine holds that only God is good and real. Renaissance humanism found the real in moral laws, while early modernity fixed on natural law and the mechanistic regularities of the cosmos. Modern science makes a claim to facing the facts, calling us to live in a world free of superstition. However, the passion for collection and classification carried to extreme becomes a positivism and rejects the realness of the unseen. The question of the real in theological terms revolves around *discernment*. The job of seeing those things that are *real*, which may not be empirically verifiable, and seeing those things which are fact but not *real* is a paradox of the work of theology as a discipline. It means seeing what is for what it is, and seeing it all as the realness of life, some of it life-giving and some of it moving away from that fullness. Discernment is not a bifurcation of those things which ought to hold our attention and those which are misleading but seductive, like shiny pieces of worthless metal. It is an experiential discipline which reflects on the possibility of wholeness. In practical terms, we need our efficiencies and in daily life we speak and act in the dualities that are our inheritance. This is necessarily so, yet it can cultivate a functional dullness.

In this part of the world, as empty and vast as it seems, we have often overbuilt with carelessness and irresponsible fantasy in our determination to make a home of this part of the world—West Edmonton Mall standing as an icon for such projects. We live in a sort of hyper-reality which disrupts the possibility of focusing on the particularities of a place, so dispersed are the concerns of work, eating, sleeping, and leisure, as we move along roadways from a place that looks much like the destination on the other side of the city, past strip malls and supermarkets, looking much like their cross-town counterparts. There is no focus for the *real*, for we have lost a sense of what that would be like and how we might recognize it. To me, this is largely a matter of being engaged in direct sense experience and not captured by specifically modern means of perceiving and movement (mechanical and electronic, for example) which are matters of convenience and commercial intervention. These are generally not sensitive to local knowledge and tradition.

University of Montana philosopher Albert Borgman speaks of a counter to this hyper-reality which he describes as *eloquent reality*, or *focal reality*:

Focal reality [my italics] is simply a placeholder for the encounters each of us has with things that of themselves have engaged mind and body and centered our lives. Commanding presence, continuity with the world and centering power are signs of focal things. They are not warrants however. Focal things warrant themselves.⁶

The tomato grown and nurtured by hand in familiar soils, rather than produced hydroponically or as commodity from a faraway factory farm, retains the vigour and possibility of focal reality. The plastic tomato loses it.⁷ Borgman writes that focal reality remains alive in the practices of nature, craft and art entrusted to human care. The focal

practices “are heirs to immemorial traditions.”⁸ Focal reality carries particular names, names for particular places, particular people, and particular stories. It resists “the scattered and forlorn.”⁹ Kathleen Norris refers to “Plains speech,” which she writes of as “... nearly devoid of ‘-isms’ and ‘-ologies,’ tend[ing] toward the concrete and the personal: weather, the land, other people.... Language here still clings to its local shading and is not yet totally corrupted by the bland usage of mass media.”¹⁰

We can understand focal reality as a foil to what the Swedish speak of as *hemmablinda*. “Homeblindness” is the difficulty of seeing and regarding the significance of our places in the world, of failing to grasp the meaning (and the implications) of our cultural memory, imagination and history in the cradle of the natural world. It means being released to simply see the complexity of our places and to be called to deepen our identity in those places. It asks us to see ourselves as nurtured by and belonging to particular places. To be cured of homeblindness is to discover that living in a place is less guided by the muse of inspiration and much more by the muse of realization, not by ecstasy but by the communal tasks that shape daily life. It is a making, not a feeling and in this regard may lead us to a discourse on what it is to dwell in a place. It is a sense of belonging which is not about blood and family, though it does not discount this, but is the meeting place of the particular people, structures and objects which one comes to understand as resonating with larger meanings. Local events participate in the drama of myth and archetypes.

To think about place and to see our places, we need to define place on a human scale. Perhaps it is something like what one can walk over in a few minutes or an afternoon or what

one can have real affection for, capable of caring for with one's hands and heart. Wallace Stegner writes that, "... to human perception, a place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it..."¹¹

Compelled by the need to heal our vision and live in that which is real and not completely given over to illusion, we will continue to seek meaningful space and place. This healing requires a revision of our abstract and mechanistic conceptions of the worlds. The task is particularly acute for North Americans where many of us are largely unplaced people, by virtue of coming to our places short times ago, by not living in a human scaled place and detached from the literal ground of our being. Less and less we draw on our immediate places as "a source of food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation, or sacred inspiration."¹² We are often unfamiliar with the places from where those things come and lose the possibility of seeing how our consumption and production affects those in other places. David Orr, author of *Ecological Literacy*, points out that we live in an architecture of displacement, where strip malls, nondescript apartment buildings, freeways, and concrete and glass towers, bordered by homogenized housing, do little to draw out rootedness and responsibility in a place. Eventually, all becomes abstract and fragmented, "real estate" to be traded and commodified. This can easily turn into a polemic about the decadence of cities, but it is much more a matter of noting that modern cities, which I distinguish from pre-industrial cities in other places and times, are a peculiar animal. Cities are integral to understanding place and sacred space. The founding of ancient cities was based on the ritual ploughing of a furrow which defined its boundary and thus gave it a horizon of significance

in which it defines itself. Because there was a distinction between what is inside and what is outside the boundary, there was a way of defining experience and within that space people lived and left the traces of their dwelling. But when something is paved over, it loses this possibility and this distinguishes much experience for those in modern cities. For most, excepting the privileged, the modern city is not discrete space. It appears to me that it is only older neighbourhoods, and those which have in some way rejected uniformity, where cultural space begins to appear again, in spite of city planning and development.

I want to be clear that I am not vilifying cities for being composed of many different cultural realities; it is the many layers and complexities of these which make for a dynamic and vibrant existence. This enhances identity and rootedness in a place. It is rootedness in a cultural identity that allows for the meeting of many different cultural realities and for the taking up of the other. Nor does mobility result in rootlessness. Those away from the physical and spiritual places and centres of meaning are far from being consigned to a meaningless existence. One only has to encounter diaspora communities to understand that this is far from the case. Being able to rub the memory and experience of two places together is often a more vital life. A place can provide a horizon of meaning and a horizon gives one a place to stand and, in some sense, roots. There is a relationship between placelessness and meaninglessness, if we understand that place increases the possibility of rootedness which orientates one to horizons of meaning. We become humanized in having access, by existence, story, and memory of places that are rich with historical meaning, where the smell of struggle and celebration are thick in the air, where vows have been exchanged and

promises kept. It is through these stories, shaped by our encounter with each other and the natural world, that we come to dwell in a place.

The classical Roman sense of *religio* (with the stem *lig-*, denoting binding), suggests the devotional act asked of us. It is a form of ligature, a binding and an obligation, a way of being religious. It requires rigorous attention to the ground of our being, for it is what holds us together. Raymond Hart writes: “What one was *negligent* of shows itself as *religent*, as affording religation.”¹³ If we are prodigal in our places, blind to them, “religation” is close at hand, a cultivating of sensibility that calls us to presence. But as much as this asks for a binding to place, the real issue is the re-binding, the dialogical tension between place and reach, or the wandering. Homeblindness is a stretching and wearing of the old bonds and a *re-ligation* that comes to renew them. As Raymond Hart notes, “(b)ecause religion *ligates*, it makes for duty, the fixed, the conservative; because it *re-ligates*, it makes for release, change, radicality.”¹⁴ Prophetic words address this concern and maintain a tension in the desire for homeland and the desirability of the wilderness. For the people of Israel, it is in landlessness, when the possibility of having *place* seems most remote, that the stage is set for the boldest possibility of newness. Displacement is the moment of possibility, when the covenant becomes renewed.

Being rootless and with no place—without horizons of significance—is a form of contemporary slavery, akin to “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness” used by Alfred North Whitehead and described by Lewis Mumford:

The abstract intelligence, operating with its own conceptual apparatus, in its own self-restricted field [is] a coercive instrument: an arrogant fragment of the full human personality, determined to make the world over in its own oversimplified terms, willfully rejecting interests and values incompatible with its own assumptions, and thereby depriving itself of any of the cooperative and generative functions of life—feeling, emotion, playfulness, exuberance, free fantasy—in short, the liberating sources of unpredictable and uncontrollable creativity.¹⁵

In his 1991 Massey Lectures entitled *The Malaise of Modernity*, political philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of “inescapable horizons.”¹⁶ He evokes the *dialogical character* of human life, that is, that we become more fully human, more capable of understanding ourselves and defining our identity by acquiring what Taylor calls “rich human languages of expression.”¹⁷ Taylor defines this as language in a broad sense, including the expressions of art, gesture and love. His point is that no one acquires these languages of “self-definition,” outside of exchanges with significant others. The making of human identity is dialogical in nature and is not the product of an abstract intelligence.

One of the interlocutors in the dialogue that gives each of us languages of expression is the place in which we dwell. Towns and villages exist and are “homeplaces” to the degree that there is a shared language and vocabulary in which to speak of the interests which maintain the community. No places exist until we are able to speak of them, to have a grammar of communal interest. To understand what one sees as pertaining to communal interest also determines perception itself. When we speak of human identity and communal interest, we wish to speak of who we are. In the colloquial we speak of “where we’re coming from.” This defines the “backgrounds of intelligibility” in which we more fully understand

our identity as human beings. Taylor notes that things take on significance against these “backgrounds” and one’s identity is meaningful to the extent it resides in one of the rich languages of expression and is not chosen by the individual. Meaning, Taylor wishes us to understand, is not a matter of choice. In choosing a background, we deprive and deny significance; choice itself becomes the legitimator.

Human beings live from places and historically have lived from relatively local situations to draw their daily sustenance.¹⁸ I want to suggest, drawing on Taylor’s description of these horizons of significance, that articulating a sense and appreciation of *place* is a support and *ancilla* to these languages of expression. We can surely choose a place where we have no previous history or understanding and may eventually find it becoming meaningful and part of a language of meaning. But we might seriously consider what choosing one’s place implies for community and personal identity, removed from considerations of the dialogical nature of cultural memory, historical experience and tradition. Suppressing the considerations of being-in-place is to lose at least some part of the dialogue rooted in the place. The dialogue becomes thicker and more meaningful, though more complex, when it continues through several generations who are able to pass on the cultural inheritance in the context of a place. For each of us, there are pre-existing horizons of significance, as Taylor writes, and this points to things that are more significant and those things which are less so. Intentionally committing to a place, though it is not familiar, is a commitment to the stability that can provide the possibility of exploring while staying placed. But leaving a place always involves abdicating memory (some of which is surely painful), because memory resides not

just in the minds and hearts of the people who live in a place, but it lives around them, in the streets and lanes, in the furrows of the field and in the improvements and destructions of human enterprise. The place is the stage sustaining, shaping and being shaped in the dialogue with the human and other communities that reside in a place. It speaks of the human place in the world because it is a palimpsest of what has been done there. And the people who live in a place are, to some degree, a palimpsest of the place, its marks are on them. One is both incarnate in the place and makes the place incarnate.

From this reflection on placelessness, and to some degree rootlessness, we can understand place as a matter of horizons of significance. A denial of place tends to erase boundaries and sensibilities which are contingent for rootedness. Rootedness does not imply immobility, but means that the person recognizes a horizon which roots one into some particular soil, whether they live there or not. A true horizon will root us in a particular place, which we recognize as enabling us to belong to something. Ivan Illich tells us that "rootedness has something to do with the full awareness that we bear asymmetrical complementarity within us, that we are one insofar as we are the meeting of two that fit but aren't mirror images."¹⁹ It means the recognition of a place where a community understands that heaven and earth meet, where a horizon touches soil, that one is rooted and in place.

Chapter 4

Incarnation

The village of Markerville sits on the bank above the Medicine River, a tawny ribbon etching the fields of west central Alberta, eventually dissolving into the Red Deer River. Homesteaders from Iceland came to the district in the late nineteenth century and it is here where the Lutheran Church constructed in 1907 by the early community stands. Some of the settlers, arriving via Pembina County, North Dakota were agnostics of some conviction and critical of what they regarded as the conservatism of the Lutheran Church. Nonetheless, they called a pastor from Iceland to serve them. After several Sundays spent sermonizing to the largely vacant pews of the little church, the pastor informed the community that should they require him for funerals or weddings, they could find him working his own fields.

A few miles to the north of Markerville lived a poet and primary voice in the critique of the church, Stephan G. Stephansson. An insomniac, he worked by lamp and candlelight, writing poetry that spoke not only to these people who now found themselves in an unfamiliar land, but to those still at home in Iceland. Writing in a new landscape, the memory and landscapes of Iceland were vivid for him, the sum of the poet's past not in this

place but in another. By most accounts, it is Stephansson's words that have given a voice to the community's experience in that part of the world, while the church remains largely unused.

It interests me to think about Stephansson's joining of words in an unknown country and the effect of that for his fellow West Icelanders. The act of homesteading is not only a challenge to the body, but to the mind and heart. To come to a place where there are no human associations with previous generations makes it strange, foreign, without familiar expression. On one hand, all promise and possibility lie before us: we catch a glimpse of the new Creation, but at the same time it is unformed, veiled by uncertainty and chaos. To come and settle, to bring words and the Word as Stephansson and the Church did to a place is to retrieve it from the a darkness which exists in the minds of those waiting for words to name the experience. Like Stephansson, we often find ourselves limited to the practices and vocabulary of another place and struggle to fill the breach between old culture and new vistas. It requires cultivating ways of attentiveness which bring us into places of Presence, where horizon and soil meet. It is when we are present and attentive that we understand the meaning of incarnation.

What is it to be incarnated in a place? What does it mean to have arrived in a place? I approach these questions with the understanding that human culture can only be spoken about meaningfully if it takes seriously a need for roots, *cultivating* a regard for the Creation of which it is a part. This is by no means a struggle faced only by those in this part of Alberta, or the Canadian West in general. It has been suggested that the problem is more

acute in the extremes of climate and the vastness of the landscape, that this landscape is “particularity intractable to the imagination ... tough to humanize.”²⁰ If it has been a struggle to indigenize literary fiction in this part of the world, then indigenizing theological reflection will be equally arduous. Neither we nor the first settlers have with us “the earthy virtue of place” in that

We were torn from the bonds to the soil—the connections which limited action, making practical virtue possible—when modernization insulated us from plain dirt, from toil, flesh, soil and grave ... [b]y virtue we mean that shape, order and direction of action informed by tradition, bounded by place and qualified by choices made within the habitual reach of the actor; we mean practice mutually recognized as being good within a shared local culture which enhances the memories of place.²¹

This combination of pluralism and modernization represent a significant challenge for shared and virtuous life in this part of the world. With this challenge before us, I want to begin to think about incarnational theology as a matter of place. I think of a placed theology as being vernacular. The word “vernacular” implies “rootedness” or “abode” from its Indo-Germanic root, *vernaculum* being the Latin signifying that which is “homegrown,” “homebred,” “homespun.”²² We tend to think of the vernacular in reference to speech, the idioms, words and turns of phrase that spring from the speaker’s own ground, as opposed to that which is constructed or fabricated elsewhere and transported in. I want to use it here in that sense and in its older meaning to begin to speak of a theology that is relig-ative because it is embedded, though not confined in aspects of local life, an arrangement of reciprocity in a place with those who live there. It suggests a hospitality between people and a place, forming the constitutive complementarity just as the meeting of heaven and soil. This is a

response to much of modern theology which either overlooked or rejected the *realia* of culture as insignificant or anachronistic. As implied earlier I propose that we seek this not by revisions of creation or natural theologies, but by that which is central and critical to Christian tradition, the key christological perspective of incarnation. By starting here, we have a form to work within, a symbolic template and palette, a place. Creation-centred theologies are counterparts in thinking about how God can be considered to be incarnate in creation and in particular locality. Sally McFague's *The Body of God* is a recent and excellent example of this way of thinking. In her work, McFague uses the idea of the embodiment of God in Creation to consider a range of theological issues, an organic model which she regards as neglected for the past several centuries of Christian thought. Her principal concern is with the contribution that theology can make to the planetary and ecological crisis of our day. The value of her work is evident in that she brings together the perceived oppositions of cosmological science, Christian thought and patriarchal metaphors of the divine into what she calls a "new functional cosmology suggest[ing] that we have been recentered as God's partners to help life prosper on our planet."²³ In the chapter entitled "At Home on the Earth," McFague sees a recognition of discrete space as significant. Discrete space, or what I will call "place" is a necessity for bodies and therefore a necessary aspect of reflecting on incarnation. She sees consideration of space as a democratic notion where humans are placed on par with other organisms. She also sees space as helping articulate the connection between ecological and justice issues; in ruining soil and water, "turf wars" ignite. Finally, understanding space as place allows Christians to move out of otherworldliness and

to love the Earth, seeing this as the body of the cosmic Christ and that we ourselves were made for this world. McFague's consideration of sin as a refusal to accept our place because it distorts relationship with each other and with the natural world is helpful in what I am trying to understand here.

I see this particular study as diverging in that McFague sees her theology as attending to a "planetary agenda." I refrain from such language, finding it immodest and unhelpful for the issue at hand. I seek to understand a different sensibility that does not mention those large abstractions which I cannot see, feel, hear or taste. While the implications of this study may touch those concerns, I seek the very particular language and understanding that is modest, humble and shows an example based in the practice, language and memory of a place with a particular natural and cultural history. Creation-centred theologies as I have encountered them are useful, but I choose an apophatic route here.

By the Incarnation, I refer to that act of God's entering into an earthy and subsisting friendship with those friends of ours in Nazareth, a move of the Divine into space and time, in a particular place and time. The story of the Incarnation is a truly local story, in which the Jesus of history walked the byways and footpaths of Galilee to become the Christ of Faith. Without personalizing the natural world or dissolving into it, Jesus lived in the presence of a place. The Jesus of aphorism and parable is local character and itinerant preacher, who is "homeless" but knows what it is to dwell in a place. He draws on the stuff of the place to proclaim the presence and the anticipation of the Kingdom of God. Mustard seeds, wheat,

vineyards, lilies of the field, figs and farm hands are the images and objects of his language, spoken in local dialect, colouring his startling talk with the images of the landscape.

In this standing in a place, however, we do not find what is usually meant by "sacred space." The doctrine of the word-made-flesh is a critique of holy places and preoccupations with purity laws. It seeks a different type of recognition. The centre of holiness, meaningful space, is where the Christ appears, or more accurately, where the presence of the Christ is apprehended and identified as a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. W.D. Davies states in *The Gospel and the Land*, "that where the Glory had appeared among men, all physical forms became suffused with it."²⁴ We encounter an important ambivalence here, for while it is fair to say that the Christian view spiritualizes the *realia* of land, Jerusalem and temple in Judaism, thereby rejecting these as the sole places of holiness, the Gospels are witness to something that cannot be spiritualized; it has a historical and a geographical dimension. The Christ of Faith is only so with that complement which allows it to be constituted, the Jesus of History.

To enter into that conversation is to feel the guttural situations in the Gospels that resonate with our lives: the dusty, treacherous road to Jericho is also the road that opens our eyes to the ultimate and causes us to ask "Who is my neighbour?" Looking for the signature of an infinite God, we find it in what is near at hand, seeable, hearable and touchable and yet difficult because it is a present challenge. But it is imaginable, in the Christian tradition, because the absent holiness of the transcendent is transformed and recognized in the holiness of the immanent, in Christ, a replacement of the reliance on temple sanctity.²⁵ This vision of

the whole is born of the particular experience of one who has a language for the local, who is a “saunterer” through a place, on his way to Jerusalem. He has seen and knows its soil and is part of it in seeing its struggle and sharing in its story.

If the kerygma of the Gospels is both a response to a particular history and is an imaginative vision which counters that history, embedded in a particular Jesus, then this calls for a theological vision which speaks both concretely and imaginatively to people in a particular place. Glimpses of the Kingdom of God reflected in parables give a locality to the kingdom, a quality of “nowness” and “hereness,” manifest in the lives of those who are present to the ordinariness of daily life and its struggle. We can see these particular communities as the microcosm of the total of all such communities, a macrocosm constituted in the “gatherings of two or three” in the name of the Christ. By this we understand the Kingdom of God to have a primary local and placed significance (*hexis*) that works in reciprocity with a secondary, universalizing inclination, that which is the horizon of perception, the Kingdom of God.²⁶ To collapse one into the other is a dilution and a trivializing which dismantles a relationship in which neither exists without the other; they have a constitutive complementarity. In the christification of holy space, Christianity takes up an even more concrete locus—the body of Christ, understood first in the earthly presence of Jesus and secondly, as significant for Christian communities. The Christ comes through the will of the holy to dwell in each particular place. Meaningful spaces are the dwelling place of the holy. In this way we see the Incarnation not simply as historical event, but as a process of dwelling, a means of making a home and of giving stability for the commitments

of community. The fleshly, vital activity of dwelling continues in the post-Easter community. Its work is to see in their local context the metaphors for presence taken up by Jesus in the people, flora and fauna of first century Galilee.

Our particular philosophical traditions are generally not helpful in thinking about locality. It is beyond my ability and the scope of this thesis to outline the legacy of those philosophical traditions which do not hold the paradoxes of the finite and the infinite together and constitute the other. By this paradox and mystery we are compelled to enter more fully in space and time, to clear our eyes and ears to see the kingdom in our placed history. This asks theologians and philosophers to take on a new task, something which has not been clarified by those in the Western traditions, something which calls for a "grounding" of this thought and reflection in the soils of a particular place with respect for the horizons of Christian understanding. This will counter abstract speeches about the planet Earth and the neglect for rooted historical traditions, local knowledge and character. To have a regard for one's place, chosen or native, is to begin to incarnate the possibility of drawing together the horizon of significance of the Christian story and the specific soil on which one reflects and saunters. This is central to Christian understanding. In Roman Catholic liturgy, until the mid-1960s, the Latin words *Et verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis* (The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us) were spoken at the conclusion of the Mass during the last Gospel. Here, we consider another metaphorical meaning of incarnation in the frame of place, which leads to locality taking a form and imaginative "place" in the minds and hearts

of the faithful. To know a place is not only a matter of concrete experience with it, but the joining of this with reflective observation, and with active participation in the life of a place.

Chapter 5

Sacred Space

The shape and forms of the land are places of meaning for humans, as if our senses are meant for this apprehending. The river, the mount, the plain, the cave, the woods all have inherent qualities that speak to the human concern for the sacred. Some of these are clearly places of perspective, the mountain peak as the place of divine communication, or the river's receptiveness as a source for life, a symbol of fecundity. The art historian Simon Schama has written about this in *Landscape and Memory*, exploring the geographic forms and the imaginative landscapes that shape our sense of place, of homeland. Schama's thesis is that the Western imagination has been substantially influenced and symbolically identified with nature and place, in spite of claims that the break between the human and non-human is part of this legacy.

Encountering the sacred in *a particular place* is fraught with tension, for it suggests that the sacred and profane are different. In classical Hinduism, for example, the idea of the local presence of the deity is foremost: it is said that "a place without a temple is an arid waste," that the temple must be consecrated to the local deity, shaping what has been called,

“the symbolism of being there.”²⁷ The symbolism of being there speaks of the primacy of place and the local deity takes on a universal dimension *because it is there in that place*, that is, it is universally sacred by being-in-place and participating in the ordering of the universe. Yet in classical Hinduism, there is the tenet that the divine exists anywhere but within the temple. This duality, with its polarity of local concrete imagery and a role in the transcendental geography of the world, points to an understanding of the centre existing as a literally geographic concept, but that it must also have an interior dimension. This duality has not been the dominant symbolic concern in Western traditions and is often viewed as a crude and primitive symbolism that is cast off as the religious tradition becomes less primitive. Kee Bolles comments that it is as if “the will of God and his decisions have been elaborately discussed and, apart from some mystical circles, the presence of God got the worst of it.”²⁸ But if this symbolism of being there is a present and enduring tonic note in Hinduism throughout its history, such a symbolic world may explain partly the relatively resilient ability of Indian culture to conserve itself in the aftermath of colonization.

The prevalent notion of sacred space is that of an inherent or intrinsic quality which becomes apparent through particular physical and aesthetic qualities evoking an affective response. But sacred space is not solely this. It can be established through the foundational narratives of a culture. The land of Israel is a gift, given by Yahweh, entrusted to the community and is deemed sacred space. Sacred spaces can also be established through a sign, as when an animal comes as a messenger of the divine. The occurrence of religiously significant events functions this way; Mohammed’s ascension to heaven from the Rock at

the Temple Mount then establishes that place in Jerusalem as the place of pilgrimage. This sacrality is greatly intensified by the significant events in the memory of the other peoples' of the Book. Places also become sacred as ancestors and holy beings are consigned to the ground. The grave, or otherwise, the presence of relics constitutes a point of contact between the living and the dead, a communion between generations. Even in the individual journey, such as my own, the place where my great and great-great grandparents lie, just outside the town of Vermilion is not just another mile marker on the highway. Though I know little about their lives there, the place is distinguished for me by reality of their living and working there, picked up by a great grandson's wrestling with what their lives mean to the lives of those who follow.

It is to Mircea Eliade's conception of the *sacrum*, sacred space, that we look as a way of thinking about the reconstitution of meaningful space. For Eliade, "if the world is to be lived in, it must be founded." In works such as his earlier *Patterns in Comparative Religion* and *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade describes sacred space as that which:

implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.²⁹

This irruption is not an act of individual will, but a ritual act that participates and recreates the mythical acts that found the world. For Eliade, this irruption, which rescues us from the *acedia* of space that is homogeneous and non-discrete, rises out of human longing to live in a world of eternal reality. We seek to find a point of orientation, an *axis mundi* and find our place in the world. Part of the work of coming to inhabit and dwell in a place, is to seek the

real through ritual and myth. It is as if one is participating in the creation myths, and that the settling of a place, the establishing of a point of connection, indicated by cultivation or building or recognition of a significant object, reflects the mythological creation of the world. Eliade points out that this cannot be interpreted as abstract action, but rather an act which "precedes all reflection on the world" and our place in it.³⁰ This is to say that the only way one lives in a world that is recognizable as a "world," with horizons of significance, is in its definition and the revelation of it. Other lived experience begins when a centre of meaning exists. For Eliade, "the sacred is tantamount with being-in-place. The sacred is the place, and is attained when one is ultimately in place."³¹ This apprehension of the hierophany is born of the desire to live in an objective reality, "to not be paralysed by the never ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion."³² Whether the irruption of the sacred is evoked or comes as a sign, it crystallizes a moment of absolute reality, giving a horizon and an orientation which end the anomie that comes without that centre.

These acts of seeking the sacred can be understood as the establishment of temple, as suggested by the description of Orthodox liturgy in the introduction. But it is misleading, I think, to see it as purely or primarily a matter of external, physical space, outside the embodied reality of the faithful. In the Shaker hymn "T'is A Gift to Be Simple," we sing of moving and turning until we come "round right" or find ourselves "where we ought to be." For that eighteenth-century American sect, the right place was a place where worship and work came together with hands to work and hearts to God. The Shakers maintained two

simultaneous visions of the ideal community, an earthly and a heavenly sphere. The simplicity and elegance of their craft and of their song and dance were holy and grounded in these realities. In their daily work and rituals they cultivated the belief that both spheres were accessible to members and the intricate web of regulations concerning personal distancing and tightly proscribed community organization served to help glimpse the heavenly sphere. The rigid spatial regulation of community life was suspended in worship, releasing the faithful to a mystical, ecstatic experience, heightened by the general grimness of social organization. The apprehension of the sacred in the community is realized in "the living building" of the faithful in forms of kinetic release.³³ This example shows that while a developed sense of community space and locality was crucial to Shaker ritual, the locus of hierophany is not the temple of stone or wood but the temple of the living body of the community.

Eliade's understanding suggests that the settling and organizing of a place is a form of consecration in which a regard for exterior physical setting is a ground for the perception of the sacred by the members of a community. This may explain, in some part, the desire of many communities in this part of the world with relatively recent histories of settlement, to mythologize the lives and work of the pioneers.³⁴ Local histories which are written as what has been called "the gospels of ancestral saintliness" are a means of ordering the world in a new setting, explaining how it came into being and seeing the hard work and diligence of the pioneer as exemplary and archetypal. These stories, mythologies really, bridge the generation which recollects and values that past and the generation which has no living

memory of those times. The story is often told as moral lesson on fortitude, ingenuity and hard work in a place that is alternately regarded as the New Jerusalem and yet was harsh and parsimonious and often exploited and deserted. It is an example of how myth serves to resolve the discontinuities and rhetorical gaps of human communities to understand their existence as meaningful and redemptive.

When settlement is permanent, which was more the exception than the rule for those who first homesteaded, it represents an existential reality for the community, a decision that commits the existence and livelihood of the community to the sharing in the sanctity of the divine. The world has a centre and it is from that centre that one experiences the universe in its forms and textures. As Eliade writes:

This is why settling somewhere—building a village or merely a house—represents a serious decision, for the very existence of man is involved; he must, in short, create his own world and assume the responsibility of maintaining and renewing it. Habitations are not lightly changed, for it is not easy to abandon one's world.³⁵

This participation in the creation of the world as enacted in traditional and archaic cultures should not be interpreted as the exercising of human freedom, or as a romantic and self-absorbed act. This way of orientating oneself in the world is not, according to Eliade's theory, a self-authored act. The degree to which we recognize ourselves as part of the totality of place, self and world is the degree to which the primordial "work of the gods" is reproduced.³⁶ The "work of the gods" is a way of cosmicizing the world, giving a place a textured and apprehended difference from the space that surrounds it. Because the space is also that which suggests a centre for the world, the space represents a point of passage

between heaven and earth, the moment where one realizes a transformation, a possibility of moving from one mode of being to another. Eliade pointed to the Bethel story in Genesis to illustrate this moment when space is consecrated and ceases to be part of the formless void. In his dream, Jacob sees the ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it:

I am the Lord, the God of Abraham ... the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ... Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (Genesis 28: 13-15, selected portions)

Jacob awakes in awe and fear, understanding himself at the house of God and the gate of heaven. He takes the stone that had been his pillow, anoints it, and at that monument the place is called Beth-el, House of God.

It can then be said that sacred space functions as a focusing lens which puts the forms and objects of a place into the context of religious meaning. In Eliade's categories there is a distinction between archaic or traditional culture and the modern or secular. But he points to the religious valorization preserved by the secular in regard for one's birth place, or the family burial plot, or the locations of first romance and where one's children are born. This is to say that sacred space, for Eliade, exists for all humans and is never a complete amnesia of one's beginnings, even if defined by the stories of a private universe, one which does not identifiably draw on a religious tradition for expression or on the acts of the gods.

Eliade's approach in the history of religions has its limitations in this era; in fact, we may no longer be able to comprehend the category of sacred space. Ivan Illich tells a story of

the *sacrum* and its meaning at the end of the twentieth century in *Blasphemy: A Radical Critique of Technological Culture*. While visiting a group of students who shared an apartment, Illich noticed two pictures. The first was the blue planet, the vision of the earth from space, and the other, the pink shimmering picture of a fertilized human egg. The two circles, pasted to the refrigerator door were the same diameter. One student remarked that these two circles, one blue, the other pink, were “our doorways to the understanding of life.”³⁷

The comment struck and disturbed Illich, something which he eventually articulated on the occasion of looking again through Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and Profane*. Eliade’s idea of the *sacrum*, the sacred, quickened in Illich’s thoughts the word “doorway.” If the blue and pink circles were in some way the doorways in the popular imagination to understanding “life,” central symbols and images of the sacred for many people, then this marked an unprecedented shift in how we understand the *sacrum*, contrasted with those societies of which Eliade speaks. Eliade understands the *sacrum* as a place, an object or a locality where true otherness is encountered, a threshold or “doorway” where one approaches the transcendent. It is with the ordinary, unassisted, unmediated human senses that one comes to this doorway.

To Illich, the circles understood as *sacra* represented something unprecedented and astounding—astounding in the power and violence invoked to produce each image—tons of explosives to elevate a Hasselblad camera and the violence and tragedy of the zygote’s removal from its mother’s womb. These images were abstractions rendered by science and technology, not actual objects which one can apprehend sensibly and unaided. With these

understandings (Illich might say “distortions”) of the *sacrum* into frames, which we find ourselves compelled to see these things as constructs to be managed and made political cause. One can now claim to have seen the earth, another can claim to see the human form of a zygote. For Illich, the distinction between here and there is obliterated; there is a loss of discrete space—the picture mistaken for things we can actually apprehend with our innate senses, without technology. He wishes to make the case that the sacred is illusory and false if not apprehensible in human terms. By those images, both of which have become propaganda and organizing centres for large movements, we not only misplace the sacred but also attempt to manage it, to make “a cosmos contingent on man [sic]” in Illich’s words. The nature of meaningful place, something humanly scaled, incarnate and sensed is eliminated, rendered senseless. This distorts the meaning of sacred, creating only empty space, nothingness, not the *sacrum*.

While Eliade’s work provides an important orientation to the concept of sacred space and the making of meaningful space, it cannot be easily reconciled with the Christian understanding of incarnation. In the Christ, the line that existed for archaic religion between the sacred and the profane is abolished, the place of the sacred is suffused in temple to market and keeps the company of prostitutes and sinners. However, the space in which the Incarnation dwells is not homogenous or undifferentiated space, but becomes place by its identification with the Kingdom of God.

But problematically, Illich points out that popular distorted images have eclipsed the incarnate from the Christian imagination, evidenced in certain popular movements. This is

not the abolishment of the difference between the sacred and profane, but a distortion of the limits of human understanding and perception. His critique is that the technological society is incapable of generating the myths that make for deep and meaningful human attachment. By supplanting the activity of making the world with the divine and supplying our own images through scientific and technological intervention, we feel responsible for not only making the world, but for life itself, a modern blasphemy. This further sharpens the challenge we face in recovering a sense of place.

Chapter 6

Poetic Space

There always was a relationship between poet and place. Placeless poetry, existing in the non-geography of ideas, is a modern invention, and not a very fortunate one.

Archibald MacLeish

Alberta writer Robert Kroetsch once remarked that he grew up reading books that never spoke the names and places of his world, the rural community of Heisler in east central Alberta.³⁸ Kroetsch notes that those of us who grow up in this part of the world have missed a conversation about where we live, made vivid by oral and literary form. There is no answering the question “where is here?” giving an orientation, a horizon and meaning. It is, I think, still possible to pass through childhood without strong images about where we live coming to us in imaginative forms, telling us what has happened here and what is required to live a good life in that place.

Two years ago, I gave a book to my nephew, a book which was something of a bestseller in this part of the world. *A Prairie Alphabet* is a primer struck in the words and

images of farm life on the prairie lands of Western Canada. If you come to the letter "e," you find a fine ink portrait and the text "The engine pulls empty cars up to the elevator"; for "p," "The prairie has the pattern of a patchwork quilt"; and for "w," "We wade through the wheat waving in the wind." By his growing up on a wheat farm in southern Saskatchewan, these alliterated words will be my nephew's commonplaces, words he uses, lives in and speaks out of a wheat farmer's place in the world. This is not to say it is the only language he will have, but it is particular to that place. These are words that resound in the memory of those born and raised around the small towns and horizon-bending landscapes of the region. The book's popularity has a nostalgic tone to it; returning those now displaced sons and daughters of the prairie farm to a simple but poetic evocation of childhood; reuniting the subjects with the objects, those who lived and still live under wide skies, the fields surveyed (though less and less so) by grain elevators.

I do not expect those poetic words and images in *A Prairie Alphabet* to remain crystalline and untarnished, except for those who can cover them with a nostalgic veneer by virtue of distance. My nephew may physically leave the world where those words attend to daily reality. But the question that interests us is what is it that makes our senses sharp again to what is mundane and again makes a world salty to our taste, bright to our eyes, and surprising to our touch? Language is one means by which the awareness of the sacred can be cultivated by bringing us into attentiveness.

But a more common experience for people is being deluged with words from the world of advertising, selling and vacuous political posturing. This language exists in a "non-

geography of ideas.” George Orwell grasped the significance of this in 1942 working for the British Broadcasting Corporation broadcasting in what was known as Basic English. Basic English had a standardized vocabulary using 850 words based on written English and was regarded as a way to efficiently teach English to non-English speaking peoples, making the acquisition of the language accessible and manageable. In the last year of the war, Orwell wrote “Politics and the English Language” in which he argued that standardizing a language in no way maintains it. Orwell implied that one cannot measure out and calculate language and expect vital speech in return. Later, Orwell would take up this tendency to management and control in his novel *1984*, showing that the surest way to create “an endless and consistent hell” was to smash language.³⁹ *Newspeak* was a systematized and completely codified language, in effect, a renunciation of living words, an example of what happens when language becomes “a system or code ... a radical renunciation of language.”⁴⁰ We have words which no longer mean precisely anything, whether in common, conventional usage or in technical usage.

In his essay “Taught Mother Tongue,” Ivan Illich writes on the scale of our current language economy and the efforts that go into standardizing and commoditizing language.⁴¹ He refers to the unprecedented expenditures on what is said to whom, by whom, and to what effect. Money is spent on teaching people to speak as they ought to, so the poor speak more like the rich and the black more like the white. In effect, our “ear and tongue are groomed” by standardized language, much of it broadcast and blared, some of it tutored. The shaping of language habits parallels the training of our taste buds by fast food outlets. In his essay,

Illich contrasts the varieties of “costly language to that which comes with no cost,” that which he calls the vernacular, rooted largely outside the market:

... outside of those societies that we now call “modern European,” no attempt was made to impose on entire populations an everyday language that would be subject to the control of paid teachers or announcers. Everyday language, until recently, was nowhere the product of design, it was nowhere paid for and delivered like a commodity.⁴²

If we take up Illich’s analysis again, we are confronted with our diminished capacity to speak of what is real, to call it forth in words, in a particular speech which lives in the reality of a community. Flattened and disembedded language has no power and no place. While recovering the vernacular tongue may seem like an essential cultural task, it is possible that this experience of losing particular language in effect is the impetus to bring forth new form. We might see this in forms of sub-cultural dialect that emerge from those who have been marginalized and whose words are taken up by others—the phenomena of rap and hip-hop music come to mind. The concern remains, in Illich’s words, “[We] have lost the faculty for hearing the difference between the desiccated utterance of standard television English and the living speech of the unschooled.”⁴³

The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard proposes an aesthetic approach as a means of reflecting on the role and significance of language and place in his work *The Poetics of Space*. He pursues the question: “how does the imagination work?” As a philosopher of the poetic imagination, Bachelard sets out to develop a *poetics of space*. This lends itself as a second category for considering a theology of place and incarnation; that is, language and the

literary arts serve as an essential conversation partner and analog for constructing a placed theology.

Bachelard resists what he sees as the reductive tendencies of Western philosophical tradition by turning his attention to the poetic image. In place of the geometric and homogenous understandings of space in Cartesian logic, Bachelard asks that we attend to “the flare-up of being” that comes with the poetic image. Instead of asking “what does it mean?” of the image, one allows the image to resonate and simply to be a pathway to seeing more clearly what is real in the places we live.⁴⁴ In this sense, Bachelard is suggesting that being seized by the real depends on a turn away from the reductive, rational and instrumental approaches which diminish human sensibility towards the mysteries of being. By being present to poetic images, we may come a bit closer to seeing, perhaps for the first time, the places where the drama of our lives is played out.

Bachelard’s claim is that images that capture our attention have an ontological significance and lead to a deeper consideration and involvement in the places we inhabit. I think Bachelard is suggesting that poets have the task of expressing the concrete, that is, they give themselves over to the concrete and participate in what has been called “the scandal of the particular,” a phrase which also describes the Christian understanding of Incarnation. By trying to speak of what is ultimate and transcendent one uses the language of the finite, the local and particular, raising to regard that which is common and seemingly undistinguished. The expression of the concrete effected by the poet disrupts the ways we bind ourselves to the illusory—the public, universal languages of principle, guidelines, policy and

structure—which move to frame not only the world in general theories but also result in an idolatry around the framed picture.

What is “concrete” in the poetic is neither physical nor an arresting or static view of a particular part of the world. The concrete is not the substantial; an experience is not necessarily that apprehended by our senses. Further, an event, which we can photograph and of which we can produce empirical evidence, is not limited to the particular amount of time in which it occurs:

Concreteness is what grasps the poet. But concreteness is never the merely private, the hidden, the esoteric or idiosyncratic ... An ancient story depicting a birth evokes a recognition that survives the ages and the journey between radically different cultures in a way that a study of ancient birthing practices may not.⁴⁵

The concrete strikes us as new, but it is what is familiar and real, re-forged in the furnace of the past and present and comes to us in a new and revitalized form. The poetic expression of the concrete intrudes upon the conventions of generalization, but it is not an iconoclasm for its own sake; the concrete can also endure and provides a touchstone for a society, a reference to what is real in its common enterprise. The poetic is the correspondence between those who write, speak or listen and the sources of imagination and memory that reside in a community.

Bachelard speaks of “felicitous” space, the space for which we have regard, for which we have “topophilia.” In Bachelard’s work we see an approach to aesthetics that moves towards recovering the rhythms of thought and perception that sharpen our vision of the

places we live in. Bachelard refrains from psychoanalyzing this capacity to imagine. He wishes to focus on the onset of the fresh, sensed image.

In Bachelard's view, the onset of the image is that which "renovates our power of seeing the world which for so long has been smothered in lazy familiarity."⁴⁶ The act of imagining is not a fugitive from the real but "the prerequisite of a redemption of the real."⁴⁷ What is shaken is not reality itself, but the blinders which prevent us from seeing. To mobilize the imagination is to seek the possibility of transformation. Images are those things which speak of qualities and properties, not tethered to the empirical and factual, nor even asking "what does it mean?" Bachelard suggests that the image needs to "flare up" in our conscious, it needs to *reverberate*, to be given the space to be seen more freshly. Bachelard is presenting what can be described as "the motive for metaphor."⁴⁸

The motive for metaphor ... is a desire to associate, and finally to identify, the human mind with what goes on outside it, because the only genuine joy you can have is in those rare moments when you feel that although we may know in part, as Paul says, we are also a part of what we know.⁴⁹

Being on the cusp of the image, the "flare up," is akin to the motive for metaphor, a moment of discovering something of ourselves in what is other than ourselves. It is the language of recognition.

What is significant in Bachelard's thought is a concern for the material imagination. He affiliates images with archetypal elements, with the "stuff" of the world: air, earth, fire and water, and besides these, he adds "house," "womb," "shell," "labyrinth," "snake" and "forest" that engage the imagination in a dialogue. He speaks of these elements of matter as

“the hormones of the imagination,”⁵⁰ and of the image as “a plant which needs earth and sky, substance and form which moves, arrives slowly, with the labour of a plant developing a new characteristic.”⁵¹ Bachelard sees this dialogue as a “meditation on matter,” a dance between the material imagination, which moves towards incarnation, repose and inertia, with a restless dynamism that is centrifugal in movement, the frenzied and discontented aspect of our imagination.⁵² In the two, the material and the dynamic, there is an essential complementarity which makes imagining and the image possible. Bachelard also makes a distinction between *rêve* (dream) and *rêverie*. The dream is a negation of reality, a flight towards the unreal. *Rêverie* denotes the act of imagining which is a constant re-creation of reality, “a guardian of the emergence of being,” that which is surreal and preserves both an iconoclasm, a refusal of the real, and incarnation, a commitment to the real.⁵³ To Bachelard, “the imagination is not a faculty which fabricates images of reality; it is a power which forms images which surpass reality in order to change reality.”⁵⁴

Bachelard’s work lends a foundation for the imaginative and aesthetic work that brings people to speak concretely and poetically about the places they live in, a counterpoint to a homogenization of space. At times, Bachelard’s thoughts on the imaginative moment seems to be that of a disembodied mind, not taking seriously the role of the human body in the experience and expression of place. He seeks to move us to the poetic moment in the particular, but may be seen as crossing into the territory of the romantic, an individual consciousness which is free of other voices and minds, of the place it lives. Imagination is necessarily embodied, educated within an ethos, within a community that is concerned with

how it cultivates meaning and passes this knowledge down through the generations. We do not have this sense in Bachelard of the imagination formed by and initiated into the disciplines of a culture, or its craft, made creative in the modesty and humility of knowing what is real in a particular place in a particular time. His uncommon encounters with reality do not suggest an uncommon awareness of background and horizon. These necessarily go together, joining personal experience into the sources of imagination held in tradition. What is important and useful for us in Bachelard's work is the prophetic stance suggested in mobilizing the imagination as a prerequisite of transformation. The prophetic "sees the dimension of the possible in the actual."⁵⁵

The judgement of prophetic language sets itself in opposition to dead, anorexic words. The stories and images called forth with these words form what has been named a "myth of deliverance."⁵⁶ Northrop Frye speaks of the myth of deliverance as a reversal or comedic turn in the predominant mythology which shapes and binds a society.⁵⁷ For example, the Exodus is the myth of deliverance for Israel's flight from Egypt. Frye notes that societies in "the limit situation of crisis" are faced with two concerns: survival and deliverance. Deliverance, says Frye, is "the expansion of consciousness or energy that we often expect or experience or hope for when we pass through a crisis of survival." This expansion of consciousness is the desired effect of the prophetic voice, energy to sustain hope and help anticipate newness. This is the eternally germinating seed in the myth of concern, which is concerned with the continuity and survival of the forms and institutions which embody the myth of concern. We can view the myth of concern as the dominant

ideology of society. Capitalism, communism and democracy have provided the framework for twentieth-century myths of concern and tend to shape what is regarded as authoritative by a society.

The myth of deliverance is especially poignant when the institutions charged with embodying the myth of concern lose perspective, and it is why we turn to art, literature and often nostalgia for an alternative vision. Words such as "conversion" or "revolution" indicate a desire for a reversal or relinquishment of the normal current of life. According to Frye, words such as "enlightenment" or "salvation" refer to the moments of illumination and recognition that come with the reversal. Frye writes that "a society ... cannot keep its central myths of concern constantly in mind unless they are continually being represented."⁵⁸ This representation of the themes, situations and archetypes of a society are a program for salvation, the myth of deliverance, which comes to us in poetry and prose. In the Hebrew tradition, the prophets are the archetypal characters who help the community face its own emptiness and futility of its myth of concern. The prophet points to the ways of deliverance, requiring relinquishment and a receiving of the new. This constant deflation of Israel's myth of concern is at the heart of the scripture; a constant erosion of the myth of concern creates the pattern of coming into exile, enduring exile, and departing from exile. The prophetic imagination reveals the gap between words and what is real, using words rooted in a community, words evocative and alive in the mouths of a people. Prophetic language is a counter language to the codified language that asserts that there are no mysteries or covenants to honour, only problems to be solved.

In Jeremiah we find the task taken up to counter the massive denial of people entrapped in the hyper-reality of the managed world. He buries a loin cloth, then digs it back up in decayed condition to symbolize the demise of nations which jettison the obligations of covenant. He breaks an empty flask at the gate of the city to mark YHWH's making empty of the people's plans. He wears thongs and a yoke about his neck symbolizing the subservience that Judah now must offer to Nebuchadnezzar; he buys land at Anathoth from his cousin, to lift the eyes of the people ahead to the day when YHWH would restore them to the land. This is not a novel or self-absorbed eccentric exercise; the prophet does not forge new symbols but turns to history and memory as a means of persuasion. The prophet reactivates the symbols that call for a redemptive honesty. The Exodus is such a call to shake people from the grip of that which deals death. It announces that it is time to see clearly, to metaphorically journey from complacency.

But the resuscitation of symbols is not enough. The prophet must also give expression to hope, though such expressions embarrass those who have put their faith in the systems of management and control. The symbol may call forth hope, but the second task is to give analogs of hope, the metaphorical dimension which gives the prophet's language a unity with hope's source:

vision is your reward
 there is new life for your labor, remembrance
 in the presence of children, eyes wide open

turning to the future
 that is also yours
 within the borders of a reality

and beyond them your descendants
 are walking freely
 by the strength of an unfailing imagination
 an unbroken integrity
 a listening dedicated
 to the words that bade them live.⁵⁹

The particularity of the prophetic voice in particular situations is what gives it a generative force. The challenge of the prophetic word points to the possibility of a new speech, filled with words that live in the presence of people and their place. If this language is advanced, so is the life of the community which moves with it. It is language knitted into the history, culture, deeds, and affections of the specifics of culture and place.

With this prophetic task before us, we look at the consideration of place in the writing of Wendell Berry, who has been called “a prophetic voice.” His poetry is not directly about this place, but his work serves as an example of a way of seeing one’s place by seeing the expression of another. In the next chapter I want to examine the ways in which this contemporary writer deals with the need of human communities to live in meaningful space, using language and story as a means of moving into greater attentiveness to the many layers of identity and story that make up a place. In this work we look for an example of the evocation of the ordinary and common to show the practice of the theoretical considerations addressed in the previous chapters. Through Bachelard’s poetics of space, we meet the poetic as a path for understanding and constructing a placed theology, a theology attentive to the words, symbols and sources of people in a particular place and their religious tradition.

Chapter 7

Place and Poetic Vision in the Writing of Wendell Berry

The test of imagination is not the territory of art, or the territory of the mind, but the territory underfoot. That is not to say there is no territory of art or of the mind, only that it is not a separate territory ... not exempt either from the principles above it or from the country below it.

Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?*

Place is a central phenomenon for Wendell Berry. The titles of his essays and novels, such as *A Place on Earth*, "Poetry and Place," "People, Land and Community" and "The Work of Local Culture" indicate the grip of this on Berry's writing and thinking. It demonstrates, I think, his determination to articulate what he means by place, as if it were a category sufficiently endangered that its status is never secure, even for the author who has dedicated his work to ensuring that the place where his family has existed for four generations is not in harm's way. His ambition of belonging to his place cuts off the possibility of speaking and writing in the abstract, or of even trying to speak of the whole of the world:

When I have thought of the welfare of the earth, the problems of its health and preservation, the care of its life, I have had this place before me, the part representing the whole more vividly and accurately, making clear and more pressing demands than any idea of the whole...⁶⁰

His writing about his place is a conscious act and requires continuing cultivation, like a bush that needs frequent pruning and fertilizing, always in the precarious position of its soil being eroded by the rush of the global or the big idea. But while the Kentucky River Valley in north central Kentucky is in some sense Berry's Jerusalem, his constant attention to this suggests the very tenuous and fragile existence of placed life in late twentieth-century middle America.

Part of the intent of Berry's essays and poetry is his desire to help make a world for himself and the people who live there—to *belong* to that place. This state of belonging is not easily described and Berry notes that words like *native* or *citizen* do not suggest that "state of belonging willingly and gladly and with some fullness of knowledge to a place."⁶¹ That world already exists, but Berry writes from a place where the centre has more recently been seen to be somewhere else, whether somewhere else is Louisville, Lexington or New York City. That it is an unremarkable countryside to the passerby makes it no less a place for those who have lived and toiled there. Berry's mentor, Wallace Stegner, wrote that "no place is a place until it has a poet"⁶² and Berry has become that for his community and place. Raising the understandings of the place to some expression gives it a discoverability to those who come after, a more textured and imaginative handhold for the next generations. In speaking of the experiences and memories of his family in the cabin on the Kentucky River

called "The Camp" place, he evokes that scandal of the particular, speaking out of the "humble exactitude of the personal."⁶³

What has interested me in telling the history of the Camp is the possibility of showing how a place and person can come to belong to each other—or, rather, how a person can come to belong to a place, for places really belong to nobody ... we are the belonging of the world, not its owners.⁶⁴

In *The Long-Legged House* Berry reflects on the ways he understands the genesis of his concern for his place. His is not the momentary consecration of the place, but the accretion of memories and events that have added to the meaning and understanding of place in his writing. The "long-legged house" is built on stilts in expectation of the flood waters that come with the rains. The cabin was built by Berry's great uncle and in this work, Berry traces the memory of the relationship with the uncle and the building of the house, as a place where one could become "deeply quiet," dwelling in the place built of lumber recovered from a house built by Berry's grandfather's great-grandfather. From the beginning, the "Camp" was a work of recovery, a resurrection of the poplar and walnut boards cut, planed and nailed by his ancestors. For Berry, very early in his life, it was a place of memory:

... it was a place I often thought about. I located a lot of my imaginings in it. Very early, I think, I began to be bound to the place in a relation so rich and profound as to seem almost mystical.⁶⁵

The "Camp" was becoming to Berry a passageway to experiences that were "not comprehended in the regularities of the other grown people." Through the essay, Berry recounts a transformation from camper to settler in the place. In the required resettling and reordering of the house with the encroachment of the spring floods, the place is made more

fascinating, a world taken over by the primordial waters and made new out of darkness and destruction. Through his teenage rebellions, pinched between childhood and manhood, the "Camp" provides the adolescent Berry "at least the dignity of solitude" and in the ensuing years of university study and marriage to his wife Tanya, it becomes a touchstone-on-stilts. In the summer of his marriage, the memories associated with the place gather once again. For the first time, he *sees* the country he had been born in and had lived in:

I think that this was peculiarly important and necessary to me; for whereas most American writers—and even most Americans—of my time are displaced persons, I am a placed person.

... my connection with this place comes not only from the intimate familiarity that began in babyhood, but also from the even more profound and mysterious knowledge that is inherited, handed down in memories and names and gestures and feelings, and in tones and inflections of voice ...

As a writer, then, I have had this place as my fate. For me it was never a question of *finding* a subject, but rather learning what to do with the subject I had from the beginning and could not escape.⁶⁶

Berry later described that realization as the death of ambition, the death of the effort of getting someplace and growing up, turning away from the notion that possibility only accumulates with distance from home and what one knows. He sees his country for the first time, knowing that his life is profoundly and inextricably implicated in the people and the history of the place. His advent parallels that moment in the Gospel of John where the man born blind has his eyes anointed in the mud and sweat, this time the mud and sweat of the Kentucky River Valley. He recognizes his bond to the place and is baptized in the pool of his inheritance, deciding to return to that which is most incarnate for him, the place that clothed

him in flesh. It is in that place where Berry approaches a centre, through the story of the “Camp” and his great-uncle’s gift. Berry’s writing takes up the necessity of embodiment that is wanting in Bachelard’s work. Berry carries forth Bachelard’s concern for images that have ontological significance for the community and the reader, bringing about recognition of the joining of the common and mundane with the real, seeing the false dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. The human body is a *focusing lens* in much of Berry’s work. The men and women of the countryside earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, observant of the circumstances of the fall, or at least the rigorous requirements of row cropping in north central Kentucky. The body’s labour is one of the ways that good work can be enacted and is partial insurance against the forces of excess in a place. Berry confesses his own ignorance of this in trying to create a hillside dugout with a bulldozer tractor, only to have the wooded slope above the pond slump in the cold season’s freezing and thawing:

The trouble was the familiar one: too much power, too little knowledge ...
 Until that wound in the hillside, my place, is healed, there will be something
 impaired in my mind. My peace is damaged. I will not be able to forget it ...
 The use only of our bodies for work or love or pleasure, or even for combat,
 sets us free again in the wilderness, and we exult.

But a man with a machine and inadequate culture—such as I was when I made
 my pond—is a pestilence. He shakes more than he can hold.⁶⁷

It is Berry’s lament; he paraphrases William Blake in writing: “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.” The implication of Berry’s words is that he believes that in giving up on placed, local community, a set of moral boundaries were also forfeited. He takes up this concern for boundary and its provision in language in the

people and communities he draws on in his short stories and novels. In Berry's novel *A Place on Earth*, Burley Coulter's letter to his nephew describes Brother Piston, the preacher with the weighty job of informing the family of their son's death in war. Set in the farming community of Port William, Berry pokes fun at Brother Piston through Burley's judgement on the vacant and imported pieties which Piston brings in hopes of consoling grief. There exists a gulf between a community and its servant, who cannot speak out of his familiarity with the ways and struggles of the community when they are confronted with loss and grief:

You could say he didn't have too good of an idea who he was talking to.... He never did stand up in his ache and sweat and go down the row with us. He never tasted any of our sweat in the water jug. And I was thinking: Preacher, who are you to speak of Tom to me, who knew him, and knew the very smell of him?

And there he sat in your granddaddy's chair, with his consolations and his old speech. Just putting our names in the blanks.⁶⁸

But Piston's failure to speak and touch the heart of the matter is more than a simple knowing or not knowing of the words and phrases that speak of what is beyond. In Burley Coulter's words we hear and feel the visceral reality of the son's death in those "who knew him and knew the very smell of him." For them, it is a truly aesthetic loss, in the old sense of that word, indicating the acuity of the senses, sharp and alive. But they are now denied the touch, smell, sound and sight of the dead. The people of Port William clothed him in their flesh and now take back his memory as a cloak for their grief. Because the preacher has not worked the rows of tobacco and corn with the men of the community, he has no vivid words for them to weave into the pattern of their grief. Brother Piston spoke when his task was to

listen to the grieving community and hear their words. But he does not know his place among them and fails to speak meaningfully in the moment of grief. Coulter admits that Brother Piston has “a knack for the hereafter,” but it is the knack for the here and now that will sustain the community in its loss.

In this story we find a path into Wendell Berry’s understanding of language and its embodiment, literally its incarnation, “as the most intimately physical of all the artistic means,” that which is “palpably in our mouth”, “our *langue*, our tongue”:

Writing it, we shape it with our hands. Reading aloud what we have written—as we must do, if we are writing carefully—our language passes in at the eyes, out at the mouth, in at the ears; the words are immersed and steeped in the sense of the body before they make sense in the mind. They *cannot* make sense in the mind until they have made sense in the body.⁶⁹

In Berry’s novels, essays and poems, the reader finds words and phrases drawn from the people who live in Henry County in north central Kentucky. The idioms and rhythms have a distinct colour and character as a consequence of people living long enough in the place to form the proverbs and commonplace phrases that speak of their life there, the ways in which they meet and accept the world. Berry remarks:

the most complete speech is that of conversation in a settled community of some age, where what is said refers to and evokes things, people, places and events that are commonly known. In such a community, to speak is to hear and to hear is to remember.⁷⁰

This vernacular speech is part of a conversation which “wells up out of memory and in a sense is the community, the presence of its past and its hope, speaking in the dumb abyss.”⁷¹

Simple (but not simplistic) and profound, this conversation is not self-consciously

ornamented, witty, glib or intentionally obscure, a language of insiders. It is simple and profound because it “wells up” in the need to speak of that which binds the community to something greater than itself, but which it cannot understand. In the judgement of Burley Coulter, Brother Piston’s words do not work. In this community, consolation and condolence are carried in words like “just one of those things,”⁷² common, guttural words which pass beyond human understanding into that which can only be borne and endured.

To Berry, the emergence of language that is “meaningless or destructive of meaning” is contiguous with the disintegration of both communities and individuals over the past 150 years.⁷³ Here his concern for boundary is evident, not in any rigid way, but sufficient to know the soil and people with whom one works it. Berry states that “prepared, public language” is generally sales talk, a commodification of language that increasingly eclipses the fidelity that links speech and acts. There must be, says Berry, both an *internal accounting* and *external accounting* for what we say. His concern is for the accountability of language, and the accountability of those who speak the words.

Internal speech is that which is completely particular to the community, or tends towards this. This can be self-centred expression, the language of insiders and enigmatic for those who do not speak it. Internal language ends up in meaningless sophistry as it becomes completely subjective, eventually diminished by its navel gazing. Language which is *externally* accountable attempts to consider the gains and losses for a larger community. External language diminishes as it fails to notice and respond to the relationships and

particular experiences of the people it addresses. This is language cut off from communal experience, and its presence alone is a threat to community life, the language of the expert.

The difficulty, according to Berry, is to balance and connect both internal and external speech; this is a key theological challenge. There is movement both inward and outward; the speech becomes accountable in the cross graining of these two kinds of talk. The internal is the language of people who share knowledge of place and history. To Berry, it is the “unconscious inheritance” that is transported into consciousness, “but never all the way and so it remains rich, mysterious, and enlivening.” Such speech is marked by openings like “Do you remember the time ...?” Berry calls this “community speech” and its vigour is in being able to refer to things that are visible either to the eye or in memory. This speech:

Rises up through sleep in its justness and music ... it charges its language with meaning; it adds itself authentically to its pattern of reminding ... it is original, then, not in somehow escaping its history, but, in causing its history to resound and sing around it.⁷⁴

External language is usually exempt from the consequences of its proposals, resulting in “public responsibility becom[ing] public relations.”⁷⁵ Berry tells of a stalemated hearing on the proposal to build a nuclear power plant near his Kentucky farm, just down the Ohio River in southern Indiana. The panel of engineers were reassuring and convincing in spite of the concerns of the local people. A woman rose to the microphone and asked the panel: “Do any of you live within twenty miles of here?” The answer was no. The installation was not built.

Of course, these forms of community language can become so particularized and insular that they work as a code which becomes fraternal and not communal—in the larger sense of that word, bringing about communion. While the determining of boundaries by language is necessary, it can return on itself to enforce parochialism and deny the possibility and necessity of exchange with others and encountering the stranger. Berry himself is an example of this, for he only came to see his place by travel and education, which allowed him to see other places and reflect on his own place in that cross-fertilization of ideas and practice.

When this language accounting is done, though it is never “done” in the sense of completed, it is always forced to “reckon with mystery.”⁷⁶ The tension of net loss and net gain gives birth to the structures of poetry which allows us to imagine proper relationships. This is the way poetry and rhetoric advance the borders of the imaginative world, and transform the fixed picture upon which we gaze. Both poetry and rhetoric share concern for the potency of things, and it is the prophet’s vocation to exclaim potentiality. This is the practical end of the prophetic judgement; the prophet’s rhetoric is an invocation to unknown possibility and presence.

However, Berry’s poetry contains a fuller range and expression of this community speech marked by place. It is through poetry that Berry conveys that doubleness of vision that speaks to the quickening of physical presence in the world, an awareness of the immanence of what is divine in the physical. Berry’s poetry collection, *Farming: A*

Handbook, is both a reflection and an envisioning of the possibility of the local. The relation of poetry to the art of living in a place is apparent.

In a country without saints or shrines
 I knew one who made his pilgrimage
 to springs, where in his life's dry years
 his mind held on. Everlasting, people called
 them, and gave them names.
 The water broke into sounds and shining
 at the vein mouth, bearing the taste
 of the place, the deep rock, sweetness
 out of the dark. He bent and drank
 in bondage to the soil.⁷⁷

Here, in a poem called "The Spring," Berry refers to the bond formed with the primeval waters of a place, proxy for the "saints and shrines" of an older world. At the spring, the eternal waters give a taste, a sensual identification, on one hand mundane and a necessity, but nonetheless, the very first concern of those who just arrived in a new land. Finding water and naming its source mark an arrival and the foundations of existence in a place.

In "A Standing Ground," Berry writes:

I am not bound for any public place,
 but for ground of my own
 where I have planted vines and orchard trees,
 and in the heat of the day climbed up
 into the healing shadow of the woods.⁷⁸

In "stepping back" from those who may agree with his expressed political views and social critique, Berry notes the sustenance and significance of the particular, non-ideological fruits of his labour: "Better than any argument is to rise at dawn / and pick dew-wet red berries in a cup." In the redness and wetness, we have echoes of William Carlos Williams "The Red

Wheelbarrow": "so much depends upon / a red wheel barrow / glazed with rain water / beside the white chickens." Berry has not diminished the necessities and possibilities of the abstractions of public life, but notes that the demands of the domestic are a foundation for the public sphere, in this case the particular and delicate action of going to the garden to pick the first fruits of the new day.

In "The Current," we again see how Berry makes a parable of the slogan that "you cannot go home again." To Berry, the form and template of his growing up was the farm and rural community of Port Royal, the place of his ancestors and the home of his children:

Having once put his hand into the ground,
seeding there what he hopes will outlast him,
a man has made a marriage with his place,
and if he leaves it his flesh will ache to go back.⁷⁹

By putting his hand to planting, the planter gives up his flighty "birdlife." In this he is able to simply see the tribes people who preceded settlement and the settlers from whom he is descended; with a hand in the ground, he has become a conductor of memory in that place:

The current flowing to him through the earth
flows past him, and he sees one descended from him,
a young man who has reached into the ground,
his hand held in the dark as by a hand.⁸⁰

This conducting is paradoxical; it is "quick and mortal, in timelessness," but by it, the people of the place participate in a mystical communion that redeems time, the love lost and their struggles in back-breaking labour.

Some of Berry's poetry is an inventory of the delights he finds in his world. In "The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer" he takes account of what is near at hand, which he refers to as "close mystery":

Growing weather; enough rain;
the cow's udder tight with milk;
the peach tree bent with its yield;
honey golden in the white comb;

... raspberries ripe and heavy amid their foliage
currants shining red in clusters amid their foliage,
strawberries red ripe with the white
flowers still on the vines—picked
with the dew on them, before breakfast; ...⁸¹

With the fecundity of the fields enlivened, Berry sees its inhabitants: the bodies of "children, joyful without dread of their spending," "women in loose cotton," "men, able in the heat and sweat and weight and length of the day's work" doing "the work of feeding and clothing and housing with more than enough knowledge and with more than enough love." This inventory is not made from his writing desk, but suggests the observations of a saunterer, taken by the fields, woods, and streams to declare:

What I know of spirit is astir
in the world. The god I have always expected
to appear at the woods' edge, beckoning,
I have always expected to be
a great relisher of this world, its good
grown immortal in his mind.

What the saunterer might know about "the god I have always expected" is partially but never fully revealed in the world; it "stirs" the imagination to expect "a great relisher of this world." Whether the mystery incarnate is glimpsed in the human or non-human world, it assumes the

presence, “expects the presence” and leads to imagining of “the great relisher,” a witness to the possibility of healing one’s vision and closing the gap between notions of what is sacred and profane.

The centrality of incarnation is expressed in much of Berry’s poetry, as he writes about moments of presence with the people and seeing the features of the farm and countryside he inhabits. As suggested by Bachelard, the “flare-up” of the image is allowed to be in poetic language, but the images are specific ones, embodied by his affection and knowledge of his neighbours and his natural surroundings. By his poetic meditations on incarnation, Berry draws together the very earthy images of the farming community he grew up in and returned to. A further reflection on Berry’s poetry shows his attention to other aspects of Christian tradition, namely the realities of crucifixion and resurrection, seen in the life and death of those who were his mentors. In his poetry collection, *The Wheel*, he remembers the faces and deeds of his mentors and ancestors and grieves, for in their deaths is the death of the “agricultured” man, the cultivating man whom Berry regards as determining the best of humankind’s relationship with the natural world and the ploughed fields. In his poem “Requiem,” Berry laments the death of such cultivating men:

Though the green fields are my delight,
 elegy is my fate. I have come to be
 survivor of many and of much
 that I love, that I won’t live to see
 come again into this world.

Things that mattered to me once
 won’t matter anymore, for I have left the safe shore
 where magnificence of art

could suffice my heart.

The poem is dedicated to the memory of Owen Flood, but it is Berry's acknowledgment of the fate that faces all, a calm acceptance of the deaths upon which life depends.

Berry's poem "Elegy" proceeds in the fashion of Dante's narratives in the *Inferno*. It is a dream vision that bridges the world of the narrator with the world of the dead. In the first part of the poem, the speaker meets the dead:

And then the beat of old footsteps
came around me, and my sight was changed ...

I passed through the lens of darkness
as through a furrow, and the dead
gathered to meet me...

As the dead gather, the first he recognizes are his grandparents, his grandfather with "knowledge of long labor in his eyes" and his grandmother:

a saver
of little things, whose lonely grief
was the first I knew; and one bent
with age and pain; whose busy hands worked out a selflessness of love.

The poem brings others back into the gathering, all of them Berry's teachers "who once bore the substance of our common ground." The circle about him has faced death, and has transcended the grief over death: "Their eyes, having grieved all grief, were clear."

Owen Flood finally appears to Berry, and the conversation between them begins with Berry handing a clod of earth to Flood:

"Wendell, this is not a place
for you and me." And then he grinned;
we recognized his stubbornness—

it was his principle to doubt
all ease of satisfaction.

"The crops are in the barn," I said,
"the morning frost has come to the fields,
And I have turned back, to accept,
if I can, what none of us could prevent."

The poem announces death and the grief that comes with it. It is the natural scheme of things, and only in this acceptance can newness come. At this point in the poem, Flood and Berry revisit a humid, hot summer's day, as a young man and a boy work in a field, the man demonstrating row techniques to the boy. Watching over this, Berry recalls Flood's praise for the boy apprentice:

"I wish," I said, "that we could be
back in that good time again."

"We are back there again, today
and always. Where else would we be?"
He smiled, looked at, and I knew
it was my mind he led me through.
He spoke of some infinitude
of thought.

In the moment of this utterance, when the conditions of thought, language, and action all seem determined and blocked in, Owen Flood prods Berry (and the rest of us) to consider the larger memory of humankind in the knitted and rooted recollections passed from generation to generation. It is this remembrance, in the grieving of what was, that Berry returns to life, a resurrection, and in this the possibility of newness is realized. The essential unity of all the generations who have passed through the hills and gullies of the Eden shale soils makes possibility possible:

Again the host of the dead
 encircled us, as in a dance.
 And I was aware now of the unborn
 moving among them....

They moved as to a distant or a hovering
 song as I strained for, but could not hear....

There is a song in the creation:
 it has always been the gift
 of every gifted voice, though none
 ever sang it. As he spoke,
 I heard that song. In its changes and returns
 his life was passing into life.
 That moment, earth and song and mind,
 the living and the dead, were one.

The song is a doxology to recall that while much is lost, much still remains for this man born to farming, and to those who resist an easy exploitation of the land and the withering of their cultural inheritance. Berry is fluent in the language of grief, a Jeremiah who personifies the grief and offers an alternative consciousness that does not belittle grief but gives it its due. This language of grief cuts through the denial of a community, engaging them in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit, a funeral of a part of them, indeed their own funeral. The challenge is to recall and recover symbols from the past of a people, bringing forth metaphors that remind the community of the death around it. In this case, the attentiveness to the life of Owen Flood is also about resurrection; having put his life into serving, conserving and preserving a place for generations to come, he has given shape to hope in the grief. This is the function of elegy, to alert the listener to what is lost and what the loss means. The

prophetic voice gives a form and a forum for hopefulness, that which grows out of the grief of what is crumbling.

The prophetic voice is nakedly articulate and particular. The prophetic evokes not the general and universal, but the local and time-worn. In Berry's poetry, the place and his rootedness in the tobacco farming culture of north central Kentucky draws on the daily experience of life there: field work, the ploughing, birth, death, marriage. Berry's recognition of life's contingency on death is well practised in his elegies. Like a Jeremiah, Berry addresses the numbness of people who do not want to know what they have been given and what the keeping of it requires. It asks for relinquishment and letting go. Berry's elegies tell us that the loss is consolable and that newness will emerge. He knows that the "likes of what is lost will not be seen again," but will be "reconstituted somewhere as soil, and will enter, through elegy, the memory and adaptive intelligence of a place."⁸²

In essays such as "God and Country" and "The Gift of Good Land." Berry becomes more polemical in stating that "the greatest disaster of human history is one that happened to or within religion: the conceptual division between the holy and the world, the excerpting of the Creator from the creation."⁸³ His critique of the contemporary church is unequivocal:

Like any other public institution so organized, the organized church is dependent on ... those economic practices that its truth forbids and its vocation is to correct. If it comes to a choice between the extermination of the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field and the extermination of a building fund, the organized church will elect—indeed, has already elected—to save the building fund ... the building fund can be preserved by crude applications of money, but the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field can be preserved only by true religion.⁸⁴

Berry's tirade against the institutional Church is evident in much of his poetry and prose as he draws attention to the complex and present incarnation of the breath and spirit of God he finds on his walks. Berry is concerned with what he calls "close mystery." that which is at once close at hand and familiar. Yet we miss seeing the fragility and beauty of the common and close by.⁶⁵

Berry's poetry and prose are replete with the places, people, things and creatures of the place in which he dwells. It is in his best work that the nature of a place and being placed takes on local imagery and becomes a doorway to understanding the deeper realities of human existence in the rural county in which he lives. Through his words, dwelling and abiding have a language which comes out of the images and work of the people and the places they inhabit. Part of the commonwealth—a term frequently used by Berry—of the people he knows is a common wisdom, almost a form of indigenized religion which is mainline American Protestantism. It is the religious vision which has been largely freed from formal theology that allows the poems and prose to take up another form fixed in the acts and people of the farming community. His poems show the affection and knowledge that sustains the community through grief and opens up its joy.

I can say with some certainty that Berry's work does not function in a liturgical sense in the Baptist and Methodist churches of north central Kentucky. But his work is liturgical in that it is truly *liturgia*, in its imagery of people at work in public, serving the other. It is bound by those concerns which make virtue possible, not the broad abstract notion of professional ethics, but that which is shaped and understood in the traditions and practices of

people who have lived through generations in a place. His work is far from romantic celebration of beautiful and scenic places, for it is limited to the Kentucky River valley that is his home. The grief of such communities, in the attrition of depopulation, is a source for his elegies, but also brings with it recognition that local culture enacted in memory, word and deed is a means of incarnating what the community itself knows and must see in itself for its survival and deliverance. The communion of work and fellowship has led to deep satisfactions and is to be handed down. Yet death is still primary fact for Berry and the spiritual obligation we have to accept this becomes the way that life becomes whole, again; registering that those who seek to save their lives will lose it and those who lose it will gain it. Here is theological language that has brought horizon and soil to some meeting in the close mystery glimpsed in "raspberries ripe with the dew on them."

Chapter 7

Conclusion

There is a wonderful chapter in Kathleen Norris's *Dakota* where she describes her relationship to a church community on the South Dakota prairie. She describes Hope Presbyterian and its twenty-five member congregation as "small, dying and beautifully alive," a congregation which has decided to stick with the old pietistic hymns which bring with them the images of seeds and wheat and planting and reaping. These are ancient images and still immediately recognizable to the congregation in its work and worship. Norris recounts the November graveside service for a member of Hope Church, where the men began to study the open grave, some of them kneeling as people gathered for the service. They were checking the frost and moisture levels in the ground, and as Norris notes, "giving a good friend back to the earth ... and looking for a sign of hope," at the same time. She wonders whether churches like Hope teach the world "in the way a monastery does, not by loudly voicing its views but by existing quietly in its own place."

Like Wendell Berry, Norris is suggesting that this communal act of relinquishing friends to the earth and looking for hope in the grave counters an impulse in modern society.

This impulse removes us from the ground of who we are, while the humility of place, where a familiar soil meets a familiar horizon, is absent and obscure in the dominant discourses of economy, politics and theology. The people of Hope see through their neighbours that the condition of and attention to soil and the health of the imagination are connected, literally and figuratively. An imagination that is not rooted in a place and in a particular soil will wither. It is to this possibility that I take up this work.

In the first section on placelessness, I looked at the relationship between place and rootedness. By rootedness I mean a state of being where a horizon of significance exists and helps a community and its members understand that soil, both figurative and literal, exists only with the existence of a horizon. Soil is the existence of substantial, known and sensed things, including that stuff which grows plants. By this meeting of horizon and soil one experiences rootedness. Rootedness is different from what we have come to call identity, that struggle of the individual to find an inner fitting upon the self. Rootedness implies that we are constituted in the meeting with others. We are constituted through complementarity, that meeting with another who is not a mirror image but fits with us. The matter of mobility is not at issue here, but the understanding of what constitutes rootedness is crucial. One's stability in a place, sustained by knowledge of and history in a place, supports this recognition of contingency.

The role of place is further illuminated through that central concern in Christian tradition, the Incarnation. In the images of the sauntering Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith we have story and parable steeped in images of the place, attending to the very real and

lived concerns of those encountered along the way. Jerusalem sits on the horizon, but we travel to it via roads of the commonplace, familiar and mundane. The divine shows forth in the common and familiar because there is a horizon for Jesus words, which we understand as the Kingdom of God. In parable, all things are placed in relation to the kingdom. This is to say that these things and places become real and exist to the extent they meet this horizon of significance. The metaphor of the horizon meeting soil is not a lens through which one is able to see what is real. It is in fact sight itself. Just as the horizon brings things into awareness, seeing the face of what is in a place moves us to the horizon, a spiralling between the immanent and transcendent, the local and global.

Because of this, we cannot understand place as a matter of sacred space as defined by Eliade. His work is helpful in understanding the nature and establishment of discrete and qualified space. Such acts, ritualized in the formation of temple or the founding of a village give an *axis mundi* for what Eliade considers traditional or archaic culture. But these “doorways” or “thresholds” to the sacred have become distorted as images, such as the circles of blue planet and pink zygote, supplant those within human ability to physically sense and those provided by technological interventions. Technological intervention has been a large part of settlement in this part of the world, and our taste for technique makes a discussion on place almost nonsensical and anachronistic.

It is at this point I turn to the relationship between language and place as the focus for a theology attentive to local image. This contrasts with language which has no geography, and works as an abstracting force ignorant of the boundaries within which meaningful

language exists. Gaston Bachelard points us into the essential and primitive nature of this attentive language, founded in the forms of nature and localized human culture. We can understand this as the need to balance dialectical and descriptive language with that which is metaphorical and foundational. Rather than analytical language, Bachelard points to the importance of developing a sort of secondary naivete as a release from the geometric and homogenous conceptions of space we have inherited through aspects of Western philosophical tradition. He suggests that language which is meaningful must be re-forged through the very concrete images which are at hand. Through this comes the "renovation" of a world collapsed by lazy familiarity. These images, bringing about poetic expression, serve in a prophetic sense, providing myths of deliverance which expand the consciousness and counter the reductive tendency of the myths of concern. It is important for theological thinking to keep these central myths before the community and to frame them in language which counters codification; it is particular and placed language which gives it force. That language values the symbolic and image over the utilitarian.

The poetry of Wendell Berry is an example of this regard for words which make sense in the mind, because they make sense and are sensical in the body. In this understanding, one can hear what is spoken and when one hears, one remembers. That such words, whether in poetry or story, are marginalized by language which has no basis in a local culture, is not in doubt. But this does not diminish the importance of these words being said and written. It is because they exist, beyond control and manipulation, in the primitive and contemplative moment, that they speak as they do. Berry's elegies, his reflections on grief and its

experience in his place, bring an attentive quality that resembles the silence of contemplation. It fashions meaning, that is, it gives form to meaning because it is unfashionable.

We can view the role of place as *ancilla* to theological reflection. It serves not only as an imaginative focus for the theological enterprise, but it also suggests a moral shape. It is clear that understanding the boundaries suggested by place leads to the possibility of virtue. It reaffirms, with Illich and friends, that virtue is that shape and order of action which is informed by the place when tradition is taken seriously. Virtue is manifest in choices which are within reach of the actor, informed by tradition and shared local culture. Such virtue "is traditionally found in labour, craft, dwelling and suffering supported, not by an abstract earth, environment or energy system, but by the particular soil these very actions have enriched with their traces." The good is linked to soil and soil is a matter of meeting a horizon. I see this emerging as a central understanding in reflecting on place.

The purpose of theological reflection is to seek the paths of conversation with what is Holy. In speaking about sacred space, meaningful space, place, we risk a casual invocation of the sacred. I do not want to follow this path; I want to walk down a more modest path, one that does not stray far from the particular, or into the vagueness of planetary and global thinking. The planet and the globe are abstractions which I cannot feel, see, taste or hear. I have spoken of humankind in this paper, but I know only my friends and family, colleagues and acquaintances. When I have had the courage and discipline to restrict myself to that which is close at hand and within reach, to that which my senses experience unmediated, I have found it good. Still, I find myself often confined to the modern modes of sensing and

moving—much of it virtual, homogenizing, removed from aesthetic experience, removed from the realm of direct sense experience. I wish to see those whom I speak with and to feel the wind on my face and brushing my hair. At moments I can clearly see that this proximity and scale gives real power to affection and to love. It seems that I have either not experienced this or have forgotten it.

In the broader sweep this paper attempts to reflect on three kinds of remoteness into which I am easily enticed. I find I am no longer truly in touch with place through the soil upon which I can stand, leave traces and draw sustenance. In the communities of faith that I know, I would say we no longer have a poetry, a common language, an imaginative correspondence in which we can participate. I am often removed from that which is incarnate, often denying the glorious limitations of the flesh, subject to the interventions of medicine and programmed recreations. Perhaps all I have suggested here is that we live in a way that guards our sense from the artificial, mechanical and electronic. This would be a first step for regaining the placed imagination, something autochthonous, springing from the ground inhabited, because that ground is recognized and known, yet still contains what Berry calls “close mystery.” “Mythology is the crop which the Old World bore before its soil was exhausted, before the fancy and imagination were affected with blight,” claims Henry Thoreau in his essay “Walking.” But this would require a new sort of marginality, and the practice of *askesis*, the spiritual disciplines of renunciation and detachment from those things and practices which isolate from our places. For myself, I have not remained in one place long enough to truly know what it is to be in a place. I have lived in a neighbourhood for a

few years which seems like a place, with neighbours who seem to have made it a place. I would have to live there a long time to know the people and stories, and to encounter that which is rooted there. But it is my wish to speak of place not as a pretender, but as one embodied in the stories and hopes of the people who have stayed. Finally, we in the Christian tradition have inherited a wonderful poetic heritage, beginning with the Psalms, prayer recited with the ages. Over the last few years I have tried to recite the Psalms through the course of the month, a poetry which reminds me of the place-world just outside my door, a restorative to vision.

These then are the dimensions of being placed: a recovery of the senses, a recovery of the recognition of the soil on which one lives and a discovery of the words and poetry that will name that experience of being in place. My thesis here has been that theological reflection gains integrity by an awareness of its limits, its incarnational nature and the images at hand to lend metaphors for this. This puts theological reflection into a different light, removing it from the blasphemy and burden of making claims for an entire moral universe. This is not to say that such conversation may not tend to make universal claims, but it does not start there; there can be no real conversation with the Holy when a total perspective is claimed. What we hope for is a sufficiency of imagination and image to make us present to and reminded of the depth and complexity of reality. Theological discourse that will develop the capacity for this imagining will have a place, a sense of its particularity. This particularity will be rooted in a conviction that the Holy is not divisible in the world. We find this in the poetry of Wendell Berry. At the same time, this theological reflection will be

apophatic, unable to capture the Holy in our senses, places or in words. The call to presence in a place, in sensed experience and words, is not to overcome the mortality of our vision, but to transform it and give sight to our mortality and see the sacred dwelling in the common and ordinary.

Notes

¹ Kathleen Norris, *Dakota* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

² David Cayley, *Northrop Frye in Conversation* (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi, 1992), pp. 129-30.

³ Berry's poem "Anglo-Saxon Protestant Heterosexual Men" has its edges, but it also has the virtue of calling those who find themselves in the category back to the task at hand:

Come, dear brothers
let us cheerfully acknowledge
that we are the last hope of the world,
for we have no excuses,
nobody to blame but ourselves.
Who is going to sit at our feet
and listen while we bewail
our historical sufferings? Who
will ever believe that we also
have wept in the night
with repressed longing to become
our real selves? Who will
stand forth and proclaim
that we have virtues and talents
peculiar to our category? Nobody,
and that is good. For here we are
at last with our real selves
in the real world. Therefore,
let us quiet our hearts, my brothers,
and settle down for a change
to picking up after ourselves
and a few centuries of honest work.

Wendell Berry, *Entries: Poems* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), p. 35.

⁴ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Morality and Imagination* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press), 1989, p. vii.

⁵ Robert Walter Funk, *Jesus as Precursor* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 99.

⁶ Albert Borgman, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 119.

⁷ This deliberation on the tomato may sound romantic, but there is a cultural immediacy and complexity which is understood and seen by cultivation in "familiar soils" and absent and abstracted in the cultivation which takes place largely mediated by chemical and mechanical means. I think these transformations are significant. An excellent but brief study which gets at this is Ivan Illich's *H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985), where he traces the changing perception and symbolic severance of water as "stuff which radiates purity" to H₂O, a cleaning fluid and flush which needs to be purified for human survival. To Illich, the water that has been "transmogrified into a fluid" cannot be mixed with the "archetypal waters." They are substantively different. The change in tomato as living metaphor and fruit of the vine to managed, engineered commodity is similar in my mind.

⁸ Borgman, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*.

⁹ Borgman, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*.

¹⁰ Norris, *Dakota*, p. 20.

¹¹ Wallace Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 201.

¹² David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 126.

¹³ Raymond L. Hart, "The Dialectic of Home and Homelessness: Religion, Nature and Home," in *The Critique of Modernity: Theological Reflections on Contemporary Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), p. 40.

¹⁴ Hart, "The Dialectic of Home and Homelessness," p. 37

¹⁵ Lewis Mumford, "Utopia, the City, and the Machine," in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.), p. 10.

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi, 1991), pp. 31-41.

¹⁷ Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, p. 33.

¹⁸ Besides Charles Taylor's lucid philosophical treatment, see Stephen H. Daniel, "Reading Places: The Rhetorical Basis of Place," in *Commonplaces: Essays on the Nature of Place*, ed. David W. Black, Donald Kunze and John Pickles (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 17-23.

¹⁹ David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi, 1992), p. 197.

²⁰ Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977), p. xiii.

²¹ Ivan Illich, Sigmar Groeneveld, Lee Hoinacki, et al., "The Earthy Virtue of Place," *New Perspectives Quarterly* (winter 1991), 59.

²² Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981), p. 57.

²³ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. xii.

²⁴ William David Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 367.

²⁵ Harold W. Turner's *From Temple to Meeting House* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), pp. 107-114, considers this change, which shifts the understanding of the meeting place between the divine and human, moving to a personal form intimately connected to Jesus and replacing the physical sanctuary.

²⁶ Funk, *Jesus as Precursor*, p. 101.

²⁷ Kees W. Bolle, "Speaking of Place," in *Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Charles H. Long (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 127-139.

²⁸ Bolle, "Speaking of Place," pp. 138-39.

²⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), p. 26.

³⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 20.

³¹ Zali Gurevitch and Aran Gideon, "Never in Place," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 87 (1994), 135-152.

³² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 28.

- ³³ Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), p. 68.
- ³⁴ Joanne Stiles, "Descended From Heroes," *Alberta* 2, No. 2 (1988), 27-46.
- ³⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 56.
- ³⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 29.
- ³⁷ Ivan Illich, "Blasphemy," *Science, Technology and Society Program Working Paper*, No. 2 (State College: Pennsylvania State University, April 1994), p. 21.
- ³⁸ Robert Kroetsch, interview on CBC Alberta *Sunday Arts*, March 1995.
- ³⁹ Northrop Frye, *On Education* (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1988), p. 190.
- ⁴⁰ Frye, *On Education*, p. 116.
- ⁴¹ Ivan Illich, "Taught Mother Tongue," in *The Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses, 1978-1990* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1992), p. 119.
- ⁴² Illich, "Taught Mother Tongue," p. 124.
- ⁴³ Illich, *Shadow Work*, p. 67.
- ⁴⁴ Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 81.
- ⁴⁵ Edward Farley, "The Place of Poetics in Theological Education: A Heuristic Inquiry," *Theological Education*, 31, No. 1 (1994), 135.
- ⁴⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, trans. and intro. Collette Gaudin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 34.
- ⁴⁷ Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining* (London and Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991), p. 92.
- ⁴⁸ Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 27.
- ⁴⁹ Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, p. 33..
- ⁵⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983), p. vii.

- ⁵¹ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, p. 3.
- ⁵² Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 102.
- ⁵³ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 102.
- ⁵⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves: essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (Paris: J. Corti, 1942), p. 23.
- ⁵⁵ Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves*, p. 49.
- ⁵⁶ Frye's fullest explication on myths of concern and deliverance is in *The Myth of Deliverance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983). However, these themes appear in much of his other work, for example in his larger work, *The Great Code* (Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1982).
- ⁵⁷ Frye, *The Myth of Deliverance*, p. 8.
- ⁵⁸ Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 48.
- ⁵⁹ David Rosenberg, *A Poet's Bible: Rediscovering the Voices of the Original Text*, 1st ed. (New York: Hyperion, 1992), p. 307 (interpretation of Jeremiah 31).
- ⁶⁰ Wendell Berry, *The Long-Legged House* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), p. 173.
- ⁶¹ Berry, *The Long-Legged House*, p. 166.
- ⁶² Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings*, p. 205.
- ⁶³ Wendell Berry, *A Continuous Harmony* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 61.
- ⁶⁴ Wendell Berry, *Recollected Essays, 1965-1980* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), p. 45.
- ⁶⁵ Berry, *The Long-Legged House*, p. 24.
- ⁶⁶ Berry, *The Long-Legged House*, p. 42.
- ⁶⁷ Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 8.

⁶⁸ Wendell Berry, *A Place on Earth*, revised ed. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), p. 100.

⁶⁹ Berry, *What Are People For?*, p. 192.

⁷⁰ Mindy Wienreb, "A Question a Day," in *Wendell Berry*, ed. Paul Merchant (Lewiston, Idaho: Confluence Press, 1991), p. 31.

⁷¹ Berry, *What Are People For?*, p. 30.

⁷² Berry states that this is a commonplace expression in the district among those commiserating with each other at the death of a family member or friend. By this, Berry explained that grief moves beyond words and precise expression (CBC *Ideas*, "The World of Wendell Berry," 3 January 1996).

⁷³ Wendell Berry, *Standing By Words* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983).

⁷⁴ Berry, *What Are People For?*, p. 92.

⁷⁵ Berry, *What Are People For?*, p. 39.

⁷⁶ Berry, *What Are People For?*, p. 39.

⁷⁷ Wendell Berry, *Collected Poems, 1957-1982* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), p. 106.

⁷⁸ Berry, *Collected Poems*, p. 106.

⁷⁹ Berry, *Collected Poems*, p. 106.

⁸⁰ Berry, *Collected Poems*, p. 119.

⁸¹ Wendell Berry, *Farming: A Handbook* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p. 46.

⁸² William Decker, "Practice Resurrection," *The North Dakota Quarterly* 55, No. 4 (fall 1987), 170.

⁸³ Berry, *A Continuous Harmony*, p. 6.

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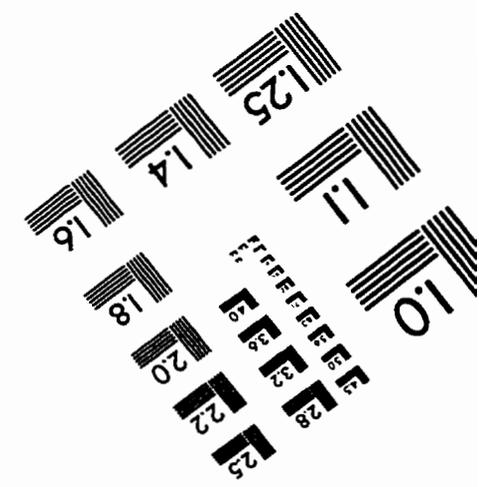
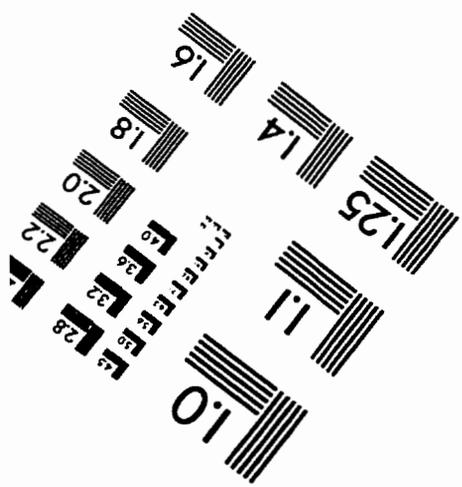
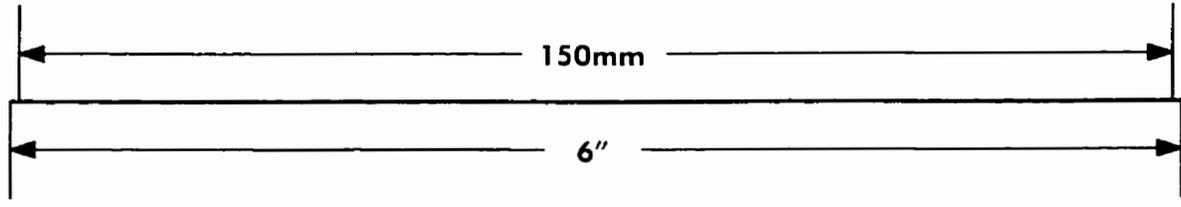
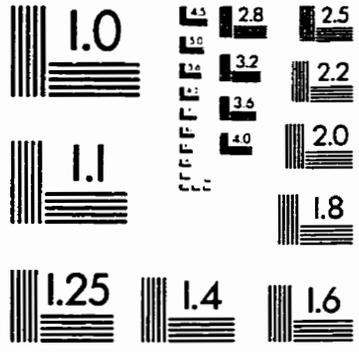
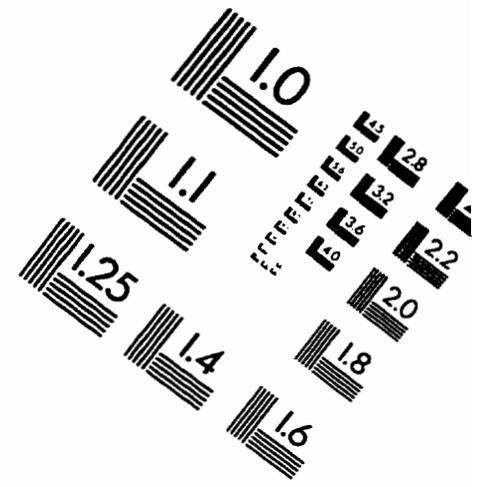
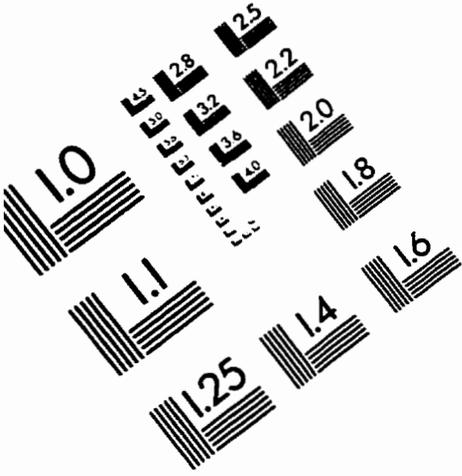
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