

Life in the Struggle: Liturgical Innovation in the Face of the Cultural Devastation of Disaster Capitalism¹

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IN THE SPRING OF 2006, SEVEN MONTHS AFTER hurricane Katrina enveloped the coast of Louisiana submerging 80 percent of New Orleans under water,² I travelled with a group of young adults from my church in North Carolina on a mission-relief trip to join in on the recovery efforts. Partnering with a local urban ministry, we descended upon the Central City district, working by day in one of the surrounding communities most affected by the floodwaters. Our church team was one of thousands of such groups to converge upon the city in the wake of the storm to assist in the process of cleaning up and rebuilding. Even seven months afterward, most of the city was still in shambles.

When the levees broke, the ensuing flood killed over 1,800 people, wreaking \$108 billion in damage and displacing hundreds of thousands of residents.³ Driving through, I remember block upon block of vacant houses, a black high-water stain nearly touching the roof still evident across their façades. Spray-painted letters and symbols were scrawled on the front of the homes, the remnants of the National Guard's sweep of the neighborhood checking for bodies and pets in the weeks following the hurricane. It was a somber and hauntingly empty place; too still, too deserted. Amid such devastation, our team was tasked with pulling everything out of the houses and gutting them completely, as the first stage of clean up and restoration post-disaster.

The desolation of these previously lively neighborhoods is hard to illustrate, and working within these homes was quite disorienting. We were not just removing waterlogged, rotten, and moldy dry wall, but

¹ A draft of this paper was presented to the Liturgy and Ethics interest group at the annual gathering of the Society of Christian Ethics in New Orleans, LA, on January 6, 2017.

² Campbell Robertson and Richard Fausset, with video by Alexandra Garcia, Margaret Cheatham Williams, and Andrew Blackwell, "10 Years After Katrina," *New York Times*, August 26, 2015, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/26/us/ten-years-after-katrina.html.

³ "Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts," *CNN Library*, August 23, 2013, www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/us/hurricane-katrina-statistics-fast-facts/.

also exhuming the personal belongings of the occupants in their absence. Family pictures, drawers of underwear and silverware, closets filled with shoes and clothes, couches coated with hardened mud, sodden mail and other individual and private possessions—we carted it all out and tossed it into one of the multiple construction dumpsters that lined the streets. We generally joked and laughed as we worked, trying to keep things somewhat cheerful so as to take our minds off of the circumstances and the demands of the job. But I distinctly remember feeling shamefully voyeuristic, melancholy, and somewhat disturbed by the intimacy and intrusiveness of this task. One could not allow oneself to dwell long on the raw fact that what we were now discarding as waste had only recently been the fixtures of someone else's life. Though we were convinced we were helping, it became unclear to me exactly who we were serving as we labored to clean up the ruins of the prior occupants. And it is in light of this experience that I want to investigate the character of Christian service and work amid devastation.

In this essay, I argue that the church will need to learn to practice a more robust liturgy if it is to survive capitalism's devastating impact. Furthermore, I will contend that even relief efforts like the one I participated in and described above, while widely engaged by congregations, are not capable of resisting the forces of capital to shape human relations, and indeed often get co-opted by its circuits. As a result, if the church is to survive the cultural conquest of capitalism, it will need to cultivate a liturgy interfused with a counter-politics. Beginning from the destruction of Katrina, I make this argument in three steps. First, I analyze the cultural devastation unleashed by the response of what Naomi Klein has called "disaster capitalism."⁴ Illustrated by the artistic ethnography of David Simon's HBO series *Treme* (2010-2013) and other post-Katrina reports, I describe how pro-market proponents seized upon the event to further their objectives, setting out a renovation process that only added to the devastation suffered by local communities. To help develop an analysis of this situation, I turn to Jonathan Lear's examination of the Crow in *Radical Hope* in order to begin to theorize the problems and possibilities of moving forward given the destruction. Second, I contend that the church also faces a moment of cultural devastation evidenced post-Katrina in the reality of dissolution, closure, or accommodation to free-market principles in the recovery and rebuilding. Looking to Lear here again, I argue that the emaciated prospects and actions of many churches post-Katrina parallel those of the Crow as described by Lear. Finally, following Lear's suggestion that practical wisdom in the face of devastation must be ironic, I theologically and politically augment this notion with a more

⁴ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007).

critical and adversarial understanding drawn from Kierkegaard's view of the church militant in order to argue for the renovation of liturgy so as to make it capable of struggling against the rising tide of free-market forces. I point to the expanded liturgy of churches engaged in the practices of congregation-based community organizing and cooperative action research which enables them to struggle against the disaster of capitalism for the recovery a more independent and restored ecclesial culture.

DISASTER CAPITALISM AND CULTURAL DEVASTATION

Reconstruction was necessary after the storm. But the process of rebuilding that took place in New Orleans quickly became one-sided in favor of profits. In hindsight, there is some truth to Mayor Mitch Landrieu's claim to "have completely turned [the city's] story around," except that the lion's share of the benefit has gone to investors and the business sector.⁵ Unprecedented profits and opportunities have been created for some, while the same process has meant compiling losses for others. The latter has been especially true for the city's poor and middle-class African Americans, 100,000 of whom over a decade later still had not returned. What has emerged in the wake of Katrina are in fact "two cities" divided even more starkly than the old one. One New Orleans seems to be galloping toward revitalization; the other has been thrust into renewed poverty, displacement, crime, unemployment, and uncertain housing. According to the latest census data, New Orleans now ranks second in income inequality among American cities, with the disparity tracking along racial lines. The city's black households, who represent roughly 60 percent of the population, for instance, earn only 46 percent of what their fellow white residents receive.⁶ Though the overall population has decreased with the diaspora, almost a quarter of New Orleans's residents live below the poverty line, as do nearly forty percent of its children. At the same time, it has become a boomtown for new development and start-ups, attracting a slew of investors and young professionals seeking to seize on a city now so open to profit-making ventures.⁷ The population of those over twenty-five holding less than a high school degree has decreased nine percent, while the percentage of that same group with a bachelor's degree has increased ten percent, effectively achieving a population exchange.⁸

⁵ Robertson and Fausset, "10 Years After Katrina."

⁶ Robertson and Fausset, "10 Years After Katrina."

⁷ "Charts Show How Katrina Changed New Orleans," *National Geographic*, August 29, 2015, www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/08/150828-data-points-how-hurricane-katrina-changed-new-orleans/.

⁸ US Census Bureau's Data Center, factfinder.census.gov/faces/tables/servlets/ProductView.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_1YR_DP03&prodType=table.

For author and activist Naomi Klein, post-Katrina New Orleans is a vivid instance of a new phase of pro-free-market oriented policies she terms “disaster capitalism.”⁹ Having emerged in the Bush-Cheney era, and shaped by the neoliberal economic theories of Milton Friedman and his Chicago School disciples, this approach attempts to seize on catastrophes (natural or human-made) in order to privatize the public sphere. She likens such catastrophic events to the psychologically disorienting shocks of torture techniques meant to immobilize, confuse, and overwhelm a subject, thereby disabling the normal regulatory functions.¹⁰ From this angle, a crisis like Katrina presented a blank slate upon which corporate goals could be pursued unencumbered by normal social and political constraints, “using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering.”¹¹ In privatizing profits and socializing costs, social programs and public services were gutted, each turned over to private contractors in a feeding-frenzy of money-making enterprises. For instance, having made its name in Iraq, Halliburton’s KBR division landed a \$60 million contract to rebuild military bases affected by the storm. The mercenary group Blackwater landed a lucrative gig protecting FEMA workers. Parsons, an engineering giant, scored a major deal to rebuild bridges, and similar corporate contractors received \$3.4 billion in remunerations to provide mobile homes.¹² Other private companies, from funeral conglomerates charged to retrieve bodies to consultants and homebuilders, have gorged themselves at the public trough, receiving tens of billions in government contracts and tax breaks for their often shoddy if not fraudulent services.

In what Klein calls “a domestic laboratory” for conducting this distorted experiment, the process of recovery has become a true *speculator* sport with little regard for the impact on most of the city’s residents.¹³ Private industry has raided much needed resources, appropriated assets, and captured the city’s future prospects. Entertaining “no interest in repairing what was,” the aim has been, instead, to create a capitalist “New Jerusalem.”¹⁴ Upping the ante on the capitalist mantra: “Après moi, le deluge!,” the motto of these 21st century marketeers has become “Je suis le deluge!”¹⁵ Everything old has passed away, behold everything is being made newly profitable!

Beyond the assault on public funds and programs, this hyper-capitalist agenda has also sought to alter the demographic, geographic, and

⁹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 5-8.

¹⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 18-20.

¹¹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 9.

¹² Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 519.

¹³ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 519.

¹⁴ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 10.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York, Penguin Books, 1976; reprint 1990), 381.

social constitution of the city. Refashioned in a capitalist image, according to Klein, the result has been the establishment of a “disaster apartheid.”¹⁶ The details on the ground were quite startling. The public school system was entirely disassembled: 123 city schools prior to the storm reduced to just four afterward.¹⁷ Thousands of teachers were terminated, forced to seek lower-paying, less secure charter school positions. Other government employees were fired or furloughed, even as job prospects for average persons plummeted.¹⁸ Coincidentally, a coordinated effort to erase many of the city’s low-income neighborhoods was launched, demolishing at least 4,500 units of affordable housing to make way for new projects aimed at attracting tourists, creative young professionals, and corporate revitalization (\$471 million was spent to repair the Superdome alone). Many lower and middle-income residents were not allowed to return. For instance, Iberville—located near the French Quarter and the Central Business District—ten years after the storm had only 0.1 percent of its pre-Katrina households. A perfect metaphor for the intentional way the city has tried to leave the poor and disadvantaged behind: public transportation is currently operating at only thirty-five percent of the pre-Katrina level, while the fleet of downtown streetcars so appealing to tourists and city developers has been expanded to facilitate the revitalization of downtown and to promote gentrification.¹⁹ Meanwhile, as noted, the business start-up rate has accelerated to sixty-four percent above the national average.²⁰

The struggle to define the new New Orleans is decisively falling on the side of the capitalists, for as Klein states, not only was survival determined by one’s ability to afford to escape—in the aftermath, the city being resurrected increasingly takes the shape of “two very different kinds of gated communities”: one desperately deprived of resources and relentlessly restricted and the other a bastion of affluence whose privilege the state is made to serve.²¹ Restoration and rebuilding orchestrated by pro-market theories and policies have altered the city’s basic composition. Such “revitalization,” as one observer put it, has meant “replacement of the neighborhoods that existed before

¹⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 517–30.

¹⁷ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 6. Regardless of what one thinks of charter schools, the transformation is alarming, especially given the extent to which schools function as anchor institutions within communities.

¹⁸ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 519–22.

¹⁹ Megan French-Marcelin, “Gentrification’s Ground Zero,” *Jacobin Magazine*, 28 August 2015, www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/katrina-new-orleans-arne-duncan-charters/.

²⁰ “Charts Show How Katrina Changed New Orleans,” www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/08/150828-data-points-how-hurricane-katrina-changed-new-orleans/.

²¹ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 530, 532.

Katrina with something whiter, wealthier, safer, and less heavily populated.”²² That is to say, profits have determined the people, process of reconstruction, possibilities, and public policies for the new city.

A depiction of the toll disaster capitalism has taken on the local communities and culture of New Orleans is captured in David Simon’s HBO series *Treme*, a dramatic ethnographic rendering of citizens seeking to rebuild the city.²³ At the center of *Treme* is the story of a band of Mardi Gras Indians, led by Albert “Big Chief” Lambreaux (played by Clark Peters). Chief Lambreaux is head of the Guardians of the Flame, a tribal-krewe of this unique subculture of black residents. Incorporating the dress, dance, and chants of native peoples, Mardi Gras Indians order their lives around their annual Mardi Gras and St Joseph’s Night public marches, the preparation for which sets the rhythm of their way of life. A tradition that traces back to the assistance provided by native peoples to escaped slaves and freed blacks, these krewes are intensely tight-knit and secretive, leaving them particularly vulnerable at a time of such devastation.²⁴ In a city no longer visibly recognizable, the show follows Chief Lambreaux’s attempt to reconstitute his people’s way of life in the face of mass diaspora, cultural extinction, and the impediments of a corporate-led recovery process. Amid the privatizing raid, Simon’s series illustrates that the rebuilding of New Orleans after Katrina is at base a struggle for the survival of prior, alternative forms of life.

This central tension is on display even from the series’ very first scene. As a group of haggard, black residents gather to play a street parade, the viewer is left to question whether this march is in fact a jazz funeral for the old city or a return of New Orleans’ rich practice of “second lining.” Second lines, historically, were an integral part of

²² Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 50.

²³ *Treme*, named for French hatmaker Claude Tremé whose wife’s family had owned the land, is a small neighborhood that borders the French Quarter of New Orleans. It is one of the oldest African American communities in the United States, home to a population of free blacks who originally purchased lots there once they were made available. The neighborhood became a rich cultural crossroads, producing jazz, Creole cuisine, and unique forms of dance. See Rick Jervis, “New Orleans Neighborhood Boasts Rich History,” *USA Today*, February 20, 2012, usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-02-20/new-orleans-treme-neighborhood/53179674/1. The HBO series and its representation of New Orleans is not without its critics; see Rolf Potts, “*Treme*’s Big Problem: Authenticity,” *The Atlantic*, November 27, 2013, www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/em-treme-em-s-big-problem-authenticity/281857/; and Robin Andersen, *HBO’s Treme and the Stories of the Storm: From New Orleans as Disaster Myth to Groundbreaking Television* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

²⁴ Dan Baum, *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death, and Life in New Orleans* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 20.

the communal life of local neighborhood groups, which served a critical (if overlooked by outsiders) role for inner-city residents. These groups often raised funds for social aid or unforeseen expenses and funerals, took care of neighbors in need, and supported the community's social activities such as youth sports teams.²⁵ In their second line parades, bands (or main line) lead a host of walkers and dancers (second line) in celebration of the neighborhood identity, or when organized as a jazz funeral, to send off a fellow musician, family member, or friend.

As its central plotline, the show revolves around whether the city's citizens will be able to recover their cultural practices and traditions after the storm's devastation and amid the assault of the newly unleashed forces of disaster capitalism. What will be left of the culture and the people who have made New Orleans, New Orleans? Will only a pastiche of their culture survive in a city entirely reconfigured? Or, will the people be able to innovate and improvise so as to counter the winds of catastrophe, alienation, and commodification? As a leader of his community, Chief Lambreaux embodies this collective anxiety and counter-struggle, recognizing that, as he says, "Sometimes the battles worth fighting are the ones you know you're going to lose." Throughout the series he, his family, and his people confront the real possibility of their annihilation as they come to grasp the breadth of the devastation and the challenges of recovery.

The full brunt of the dire situation can be felt by the viewer as the first season comes to an end. Chief Lambreaux sits locked in jail after being beaten by police for occupying the Calliope Projects (near Iberville), a housing project the city condemned and planned to tear down. Incarcerated, he does not mask on Mardi Gras and is left alone, occupying his cell. Moreover, another colorful figure of the first season, Creighton Bernette (played by John Goodman), a Tulane literature professor whose YouTube broadcasts document the scope of devastation and maladroit response of public leaders, succumbs to his growing despair with the neglect, corruption, and media misrepresentation, ultimately committing suicide. Representing adherents to the old city, Bernette's demise signals the wider situation confronting New Orleans' culture and citizens. Disaster has turned to devastation; what was before has seemingly met with extinction.

The collapse of traditions cinematically represented in *Treme* is developed more theoretically by Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, which explores the response of the Crow people as they confront the end of their way of life under the leadership of their last great chief, Plenty Coups. Lear begins his study

²⁵ Campbell Robertson and Katy Reckdahl, "Celebrating, in Spite of Risk," *New York Times*, May 14, 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/05/15/us/new-orleans-parades-celebrating-in-spite-of-the-risk.html.

by reflecting on a comment of Plenty Coups that has strangely captured him. When interviewing the chief at the end of this life, Lear tells us the chief's friend and biographer Frank Linderman could not get him "to talk about anything that happened after the Crow were confined to the reservation."²⁶ As he continues reporting Linderman's account, "Plenty Coups refused to speak of his life after the passing of the buffalo, so that his story seems to have broken off, leaving many years unaccounted for." The chief would only say, "When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened."²⁷ It is this statement that captivates Lear and which becomes the point of departure for his query into the impossible possibility of how a people goes on when their history and tradition have come to an end and their way of life is no longer intelligible.

Facing the westward expansion and scorched-earth hunting practices of white trackers, the Crow confronted the reality of the loss of their entire way of life. With buffalo populations decimated and tribal rule shattered by U.S. governmental encroachment, Lear recounts the Crow met with more than merely a contesting perspective. Instead, they found themselves faced with complete cultural devastation, having "lost the concepts with which they could construct a narrative."²⁸ In other words, their constellation of life-orienting practices was not only under attack but the very field of meaning within which these practices could be understood was eviscerated. To continue to perform them quite simply made no sense; to do so could only be problematically nostalgic.²⁹ Made more explicit by Lear's discussion of the Crow, the fundamental question of post-Katrina New Orleans comes into view: will the dual catastrophes of the storm and the rebuilding process so devastate indigenous, alternative traditions that their practice no longer makes sense in the new city? Has their future been foreclosed, only to be inscribed as thinned out and commodified cultural artifacts for tourist viewing in the reconstructed capitalist metropolis?

DISASTER CAPITAL AND ECCLESIAL CULTURAL DEVASTATION

Like the rest of New Orleans, churches did not escape the storm unscathed. In fact, many were fighting for their own lives. The Catholic Archdiocese, for instance, suffered an estimated \$288 million in damage to its properties. With insurance covering only thirty five

²⁶ Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

²⁷ Frank B. Linderman, *Plenty-Coups: Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 311, quoted in Lear, *Radical Hope*, 2.

²⁸ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 32.

²⁹ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 97.

cents on the dollar, the already declining Church incurred an \$105 million loss. As a result, it was forced to close 30 parishes “driven ... by the reality that many post-Katrina neighborhoods have too few Catholics to support a parish.”³⁰ One of the casualties on the chopping block as part of the downsizing was St. Augustine Catholic Church in the Tremé neighborhood. One of the nation’s oldest African American churches, the Archdiocese only agreed not to completely close it after the story went public, causing a broad uproar. In the end, a shell of itself, the historic building was kept open, but only one Mass a week continues to be offered. What was once a worshipping community has become primarily a tourist stop for sightseers.³¹ Across the Archdiocese, similar stories could be told, even with serious funds coming in through outside groups and Catholic Charities (about \$107 million in total). In the wake of the storm, one-fifth of Catholics were displaced. Twenty-one of its parish schools were shuttered.³² Substantially reduced, the Catholic Church found itself beleaguered in the historically Catholic city.

Other denominations and churches fared much the same. Diminished numbers and extensively damaged or destroyed structures have made rebuilding difficult. Many have become “commuter churches.”³³ Though several have sought to play a role in the recovery, they have found themselves challenged with the task of reconnecting their own congregations first. The storm had scattered their people, wrecked their buildings, and consumed their neighborhoods, and the market-driven restoration efforts were not primarily focused on reconsolidating communities.³⁴ Hence, substantial recovery for these churches and people remained grim. Small-scale or superficial renewal has seemed more the norm, as accommodation is made to fit the priorities of the construction of the new New Orleans. A fitting example is offered by one congregation in the nearby town of Biloxi, MS, which was able to rebuild and even upgrade their sanctuary with \$4 million in funds raised by the selling of an adjacent property to a casino.³⁵

³⁰ Bruce Nolan, “Catholic Church Quantifies Katrina Damage,” *The Times-Picayune*, July 26, 2008 available at: www.nola.com/news/article_f38d3cdc-ba35-5f9e-80fc-2e848034e6a0.html.

³¹ Leslie Eaton, “In Storm’s Aftermath, Catholics Close Parishes,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/02/10/us/nationalspecial/in-storms-aftermath-catholics-close-parishes.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share.

³² Bruce Nolan, “Catholic Church Quantifies Katrina Damage.”

³³ Kate Royals, “Churches Struggling to Rebound,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 23, 2015, on.thec-l.com/1Jd7fuI, accessed on December 17, 2019.

³⁴ Donald E. DeVore, “Water in Sacred Places: Rebuilding New Orleans Black Churches as Sites of Community Empowerment,” *The Journal of American History*, 94 (2007): 762–63.

³⁵ Kate Royals, “Churches Struggling to Rebound,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, August 23, 2015, on.thec-l.com/1Jd7fuI, accessed on December 17, 2019.

Katrina's devastation, and the disaster of the response to it, not only created challenges for congregations and parishes as they sought to recover, but on a deeper level the event evidences an insidious process of cultural devastation that has been advancing for some time. The destruction of the hurricane has merely made obvious a hollowing out that has already begun in the life of the church in its acculturation to the flows and priorities of capitalism. Simon's *Treme* depicts this ecclesial situation indirectly through a somewhat surprising absence within the series. The viewer is struck by the fact that, beyond appearing sparsely as a background prop or the site of mere perfunctory actions, the church plays no role in the story. This is even more jarring given the rich religious heritage of the city. A tangential interaction between some of the street musicians and a few young volunteers from a church group does occur in the first season, giving a nod to the scores of these work teams that converged to aid on the troubled city. But much like the relief team I traveled with, it is clear that their service-tourism is driven as much by disaster porn and the erotica of New Orleans as it is by a sincere desire to help residents rebuild. Despite the fact that the city's culture has been deeply shaped by liturgical markers—Mardi Gras, Lent, Easter, etc.—what remains of these practices lacks substance and meaning. The ruins of a gutted ecclesial tradition have been subsumed within capitalist cultural production.

We may shrug this absence off as a prejudice of Simon and his writers were the obvious fusions of Christianity and capitalism not so pronounced throughout the relief process. In fact, in the minds of many champions of the capital redevelopment regime, the devastation of the storm and the capitalist response were all too easily integrated. As New Orleans congressman and neoliberal proponent, Richard Baker, put it, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."³⁶ Even within circles where the embrace of capitalism is not so blatant, churches have been coopted by the aims and flows of the process. Exposed by the event of the storm was a prevalent capitalist and Christian fusion, one fostered by a certain spiritual disposition that subtly blends capitalist mechanisms of

³⁶ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 10, 4. Klein goes on to suggest later that disaster capitalism and its complement of disaster apartheid bear a natural consonance with Christian millenarianism. Speaking on this relationship, she says, "This may also partially explain why so many Bush supporters are Christian end-timers. It's not just that they need to believe there is an escape hatch from the world they are creating. It's that the Rapture is a parable for what they are building down here—a system that invites destruction and disaster, then swoops in with private helicopters and airlifts them and their friends to divine safety." See Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 530.

“creative destruction” with images of divine providence and apocalyptic destruction.³⁷ Renewal and betterment have become the objective, even if this means that working-class and poor neighborhoods and their communities must be discarded. Enthralled with capitalist new creation, Christianity so acculturated has only imbued the antics of disaster capitalism in New Orleans, belying its own internal undoing and distortion.

One political theorist has gone so far as to describe this troubling cultural fusion as an “evangelical-capitalist resonance machine.”³⁸ No simple or linear structure, the fusion of ideas, practices, dispositions, and future expectations captured in this term aim to emphasize its nature as an active and living system, one that has expanded beyond just evangelical camps. A powerful, but flexible, assemblage of mutually informing and catalyzing beliefs, doctrines, and moral axioms, its outlook now infuses—like evangelical tenets—various denominational communities. As these “diverse elements infiltrate each other, metabolizing into a moving complex,” its rhythms and vibrations generate certain patterns of social and political engagement.³⁹ Within such a resonance machine, Christianity comes to share many core affinities with capital, consolidating into an echo chamber of impulses that intensify and bolster one another. The result, accordingly, is a “large cultural constellation” based in a “shared spirituality” or mutual ethos that coordinates “individual and collective dispositions to judgment and action.”⁴⁰ Socio-political Fall narratives combine with a general low anthropology to form a stereoscope of resentment bolstered by myopic individualism and a pervading mistrust of collective work. At the same time, conversely, the market is viewed “as either the most beautiful site of uncertainty and creativity the world has seen since its

³⁷ Cf. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 83: meant to refer to the innovative episodes in which devastation opens the field for a new phase of development, Austrian-American economist Joseph Schumpeter deployed the term “creative destruction” to describe the fundamental motor of capitalism. As he puts it, capitalism is a process “that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one.”

³⁸ William E. Connolly, *Christianity and Capitalism, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 39-67. While Connolly’s theorization of this assemblage has the advantage of allowing us to see it as more dynamic, flexible, and contingent, another powerful historical account of this fusion between capitalism and Christianity is presented by Kevin M. Kruse in *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

³⁹ Connolly, *Christianity and Capitalism*, 39-40.

⁴⁰ Connolly, *Christianity and Capitalism*, 2. Connolly locates the primary source of this resonance within what he calls an ethos of “existential revenge” that, for him, characterizes evangelical culture, an outlook maybe best manifest in the popular *Left Behind* novels. The team I joined, however, I think shared a more practical and narrowly charitable set of impulses informing our relief efforts, focusing us more on the activity of cleanup and immediate assistance rather than broader forces.

creation by God, or as a civilizational necessity to be compensated by the calmness of the centered family, the Christian church, and the nation. Or both.”⁴¹ The result of this cultural interfusion, however, is a subtle ecclesial devastation through the submission of the church to capitalism’s cultural dominion.

The increasing resonance of Christianity with capital has gutted our ecclesial culture, leaving it—much like the Crow or the sub-cultures of New Orleans—precariously close to extinction. Church liturgies have become so hemmed in and distorted by the shifting conditions and circuitous flows of pro-market structures that members no longer have the concepts, communities, or wider practices to make a life of following Christ intelligible. Given this situation, repetition of these rites only colludes with capital in a vicious feedback loop that facilitates the demise of the church’s practices and its way of life. Set to pro-capital frequencies, acts of worship and mission only serve to conform the faithful more and more to capitalist circuits. As evidenced by post-Katrina New Orleans, this condition characterizes not only those churches aligned with the Religious Right but encompasses nearly all ecclesial communities, Catholic and Protestant, liberal and conservative, high and low alike.

Such accommodation to the forces of capitalism was on display in the messages of many preachers and spiritual advisers after the storm. This is not to dismiss the multiple congregations that organized relief efforts but to suggest that, to the extent that their witness never reached the level of political or social challenge, they remained substantially muted. More frequent was the attempt to provide words of consolation or inspiration for somber evacuees and traumatized residents. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the surreal scene in the Houston Astrodome in the days following the hurricane. As disoriented survivors huddled in the arena, Bishop T. D. Jakes and Oprah Winfrey took turns publicly addressing the growing crowd with messages of naïve encouragement. Apparently oblivious to the “patronizing” theme of his homilies, Jakes reiterated a prosperity gospel, proclaiming to the gathered mass of storm victims that God rewards the faithful and blesses those who work hard and remain optimistic.⁴² Backed by the nods and assurances of his fellow celebrity, who offered her own vapid semi-spiritual truisms, Jakes assured the destitute and grieving audience that this was a test for true believers as well as a providential judgment on sinners. The prevailing refrain of the address was “Just trust in God. Everything is going to be fine.”⁴³ Celebrities like Jakes and Winfrey were not the only religious figures to offer similar kinds

⁴¹ Connolly, *Christianity and Capitalism*, 29.

⁴² Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 71.

⁴³ Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 72.

of messages, as the predominant ecclesial response sought to console, inspire, and encourage.⁴⁴

A similar message was on display even in the relief efforts of congregations that came to aid. For instance, capitalism's cooptation of Christianity can be identified in my own mission team's work. Sharing a certain spiritual disposition with the capitalist axiomatic and its neoliberal assemblage, our Christian ethos—while promoting service and relief—also tended to downplay more holistic and long-term considerations and promote a crudely simplistic view of humanity that rendered us incapable of discerning the more sophisticated and supple systemic forces at work. Good intentions notwithstanding, our cleanup efforts only seemed to cooperate with the process of accumulation-by-dispossession that animates capitalism and which was certainly at work in post-Katrina New Orleans.⁴⁵ The uneasiness some of us experienced doing this disposal work was, I think, deeply connected to our own faint intuition of what was really going on, a subtle vibration of dissonance yet to be curtailed within the prevailing assemblage. Even in such catastrophic situations, it is odd to trash a family's personal belongings in their absence. Like a faint tremor at the edge of our understanding, such feelings registered, possibly, the exhaustion of a truly Christian response given the internal destruction of our ecclesial culture. Was it any wonder that the church was so starkly absent in the ethnographic depiction offered by *Treme*?

THE PROSPECT OF CULTURAL RENOVATION

As detailed above, the church, just like the residents of New Orleans after Katrina, faces the real possibility that its way of life has collapsed. That is to say, the current cooptation of ecclesial life—just like the deep reconfiguration of New Orleans—by capitalism poses the question of whether this has engendered the end of its peculiar history and culture. Facing such a dire situation, it also raises the question: what does it mean for a culture to face the prospect of its own exhaustion? How are people to find a way forward when what has been is destroyed—and will not be restored? What happens to a way of life when its history seems to have come to an end? How is it to go forward—or is this even possible? Let me begin to answer this by turning back to Lear's discussion of the Crow.

⁴⁴ See Melinda Daffin, "The Katrina Sermons: What Spiritual Leaders Say about the Storm," *The Times-Picayune*, August 29, 2015, www.nola.com/news/article_c48e3887-30f7-5a8b-960f-64080c6effbd.html.

⁴⁵ "Accumulation by dispossession" is a notion I take from David Harvey to describe a particular set of neoliberal structural practices that win benefits for those at the top by redistributing income and property from those at the bottom or the commons. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 160.

In the face of such a catastrophic situation, Lear's account of Plenty Coups suggests that only by ironically "drawing on their tradition in novel ways" can cultures open the door to a transformation that allows them to survive.⁴⁶ With their culture in collapse, the people needed a "new Crow poet: one who could take up the Crow past and—rather than use it for nostalgia or ersatz mimesis—project it into vibrant new ways for the Crow to live and be."⁴⁷ Plenty Coups is that figure for Lear. The chief, so Lear contends, "gave the tribe new resources for thought—for practical reasoning—that would not have been available to them in any other way" by creatively deploying their own cultural practices anew.⁴⁸ Doing so required a novel vision, one capable of restoring practical reason for "a future they did not yet know how to think about."⁴⁹ As Lear states, in contrast to an attempt to try to hang on to the old way of doing things, Plenty Coups's approach "was ironic," for he saw that "the only way for a Crow to go forward was to acknowledge that the traditional way of life was going to be blown away in a storm. Only after the storm would new Crow possibilities open up."⁵⁰ Confronting cultural devastation, hope for the Crow emerged out of irony.

To move through irony implied for Plenty Coups that he "become a chickadee."⁵¹ This, of course, sounds rather odd. But Plenty Coups receives this instruction during the exercise of dream-visioning, an traditional practice of Crow leaders seeking higher wisdom and insight. To survive the onslaught of white-settler expansion and to provide a way forward for his people, he would have to follow this novel teaching even though it implied ceasing to continue with life as it was. Embracing the virtue of the chickadee, so an elder and interpreter informs him, Plenty Coups must become "least in strength" but "strongest of mind" by sharpening his perception as "a good listener."⁵² An already esteemed creature in Crow tradition, embracing the virtue of the chick-

⁴⁶ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 65.

⁴⁷ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 51.

⁴⁸ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 65–66.

⁴⁹ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 78.

⁵⁰ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 97–98. I am particularly grateful to David Toole for bringing the element of irony in Lear's argument to my attention. Toole also rightly notes that Lear's investigation is shaped by his own interest, which might betray other ways of responding ironically to the situation American Indians of the 19th century faced. As will become evident later, I want to offer my own suggestion for ironic practice for the Church in our own context that draws on Lear in a way that is also influenced by Toole. See David Toole, "Negotiating the Evidence: Christianity and the Ruins of Native America," in *Indigenous Symbols and Practices in the Catholic Church: Visual Culture, Missionization and Appropriation*, ed. Kathleen J. Martin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 117–35.

⁵¹ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 80.

⁵² Lear, *Radical Hope*, 80.

adee now, however, meant not just listening but attending to and learning from new sources outside the Crow way of life so as to discover new practices for surviving the extraordinary time. The Crow warrior way of life was exhausted; it had no future. To be Crow in the future meant ceasing to be Crow as in the past. A new kind of Crow, or way of being Crow, was needed. Hence, the irony. "Precisely because Plenty Coups sees that a traditional way of life is coming to an end, he is in a position to embrace a peculiar form of hopefulness. It is basically the hope for revival: for coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible."⁵³

In much the same way, the various characters of *Treme*, to the extent that they do, discover that the New Orleans they knew is being destroyed and that their only means of recovering their traditions is to discover new ways of practicing those traditions as a means of innovative resistance. The crucial turning point emerges at the end of season two. By this time nearly all of the central characters and their communities seem to be in a spiral of demise, a situation the murder of a beloved street musician serves to emphasize. Only the thinnest forms of ephemeral solidarity have offered any alternative in the form of jazz funerals. Chief Lambreaux is at odds with his son, Delmond, who is flirting with leaving behind both New Orleans and his father's way of life. The culinary, musical, ethnic, and communal subcultures of New Orleans are exhausted in their fight to recover their traditions against the new commercial and pro-market redevelopers. It appears the history of the old city has come to an end.

Yet, it is the annual Jazz Festival that offers both respite and inter-fuses a new ironic disposition for the series going forward. The final scene of the season depicts one of the main characters, a music-enthusiast and amateur artist Davis McAlary (played by Steve Zahn), beginning his late-night local radio shift. As he does, he gives voice to the moment, exhaustedly saying, "Anyway, New Orleans, we're all still here, aren't we. A few more home every day. And even if it isn't as it should be ... even if they make it hard, where else would we go? Who else would have us? Yeah ... you're right ... let pops tell it." Louis Armstrong's unmistakable voice then envelops the scene, singing, "Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams." All is blown away; and yet, in this same moment, the voice of the father of jazz reaches out across the wire. His song seems to breathe life into the city's spirit, enlivening anticipation of its future. A theologically-tuned viewer cannot but hear the echoes of Peter's query of Jesus in John's gospel: "To whom shall we go?" (John 6:68). It's the indelible enquiry of the destitute faithful, hoping against hope for a new future.

⁵³ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 95.

From this point on in the series, new modes of innovation and challenge begin to emerge; cultures struggle anew to reestablish themselves in the face of disaster and disaster capitalism. The turn is marked by a shift in music, out of Armstrong's song and into a new refrain that signals the change. In the third season, Annie (played by Lucia Micarelli), a friend and fellow performer of the recently murdered street musician Harley Watt (played by Steve Earle), takes up the incomplete lyrics of a song he was writing and crafts them into anthems of resistance. Each of the characters will improvise and experiment with things that are completely new as they seek to recover their traditions. They will have to take what they have known in new directions. Some fail; some get coopted; but some sustain a struggle against the forces of commercialization and commodification by expanding old practices in order to find new ways of doing them. That is, to save New Orleans implies they will have embrace practicing their traditions differently.

A LITURGY FOR STRUGGLE AND ECCLESIAL RENOVATION

Like the Crow or the characters of *Treme*, the church needs to find new ways to practice its tradition if we are to survive our current state of devastation. For as Katrina makes evident, the church does not currently seem to possess the practices sufficient for counteracting the pressures of capitalism. Indeed, more so it has been subsumed within an amplifying socio-political assemblage. That is to say, greatly deactivated and assimilated, the church in America stands on the edge of complete cultural devastation, its public presence hard to differentiate from pro-market protagonists. Performing a liturgy more characterized by "nostalgic evasion" than substantial alternative, it lacks a "traditional way of moving forward" that resists this apparatus of capture.⁵⁴ From the back side of disaster, therefore, I want to look to the front side of the church, asking what kinds of liturgical innovation need be pursued if we are to resist and counteract a structure of disparity, isolation, and exploitation. In other words, if the issue for Plenty Coups (and for the Mardi Gras Indians) was how to go on when faced with the annihilation of their way of life, the issue the church confronts is how to begin to reclaim our traditional practices in ways that offer a liturgy capable of struggling against the all-consuming drive of capitalism. And this will require moving through irony too, but one that is more heightened and intense than that theorized by Lear's account of the Crow. The irony associated with the church's cultural recovery is one that must not only learn from capitalism in order to resist it but also must risk defying hegemonic versions of

⁵⁴ Lear, *Radical Hope*, 97, 154. Of course, Lear is not necessarily interested in the notion of resistance but simply in how Plenty Coups's radical act of hopeful courage allowed him to adapt in the face of such an end of history.

Christianity that find such amity with capitalism in order to go deeper into the tradition so as to discover ways of acting unfaithfully to this “resonance machine.” In this way, the disaster of the hollowing out of our liturgies by capitalism may provide, ironically, the possibility of recovering our tradition in resistance, one rediscovered anew on the streets. To get a sense of what this could look like, I want to try to triangulate a possibility for liturgical innovation amid our cultural devastation by tracing some lines suggested by Romand Coles’s recent work on *Visionary Pragmatism*, along with Kierkegaard’s attempt to recover the controversial and challenging concept of the “church militant” in *Practice in Christianity*. In conclusion, then, I will point to a community that exhibits the kind of ecclesial liturgy-in-struggle I suggest will be necessary for contesting the dominant forces of capital and allowing the church to go forward innovatively.

Let me begin with Kierkegaard, who admittedly may pose a seemingly odd addition to this conversation. But, confronting an ecclesial disaster in his own day, I think a peculiar reading of his jarring concept of the “church militant” in *Practice in Christianity* may prove fruitful for pointing us to the kind of hopeful prudence we need.⁵⁵ Kierkegaard is likely most known for his attack on Christendom, something he saw as a crisis for Christian faith and a theme taken up in this volume. What is less well-known is that he wrote *Practice in Christianity* in 1848, during a time of revolutionary changes in his native Denmark. A “popular-sovereignty parliamentary monarchy based on universal male suffrage” had deposed the monarch, and the new regime fused “a shrill, militant Danish nationalism” with Christian triumphalism.⁵⁶ Kierkegaard perceived this state as the end of Christianity; only an empty shell of civil religion would remain in its place.

When everyone is Christian, who then can be Christian? Kierkegaard insisted that the “Church triumphant” was nothing but an “illusion,” and that the critical recovery of Christianity depended upon returning to the “truth in the sense of *the way*.”⁵⁷ Hence, he calls for recovery of the “Church militant,” one that questions the established fusion of the Church and the world and in doing so recommits itself to a path of struggle.⁵⁸ Church militant was not a call to pick up the sword or to engage in violence, but to rediscover the hard path of pilgrimage by upholding the distinction between the church and the world. Confronting a church that would seem to have lost all distinctive integrity,

⁵⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 209.

⁵⁶ Bruce H. Kirmmse, “Kierkegaard and 1848,” *History of European Ideas* 20, nos. 1–3 (1995): 167.

⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 209, 207.

⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 212.

Kierkegaard discovers his call as a theologian and churchman. He locates the earnest passion that pervades his writings.

Practice in Christianity, thus, called for a “rigorousness” capable of recovering “the truth ... that as long as the Church endures in this world it is the militant Church that is related to Christ in his abasement even if drawn to him from on high.”⁵⁹ Returning to the way of Christ meant distancing oneself from the Christian state and turning inward to embrace the true path of the suffering servant, something each individual must do. Kierkegaard’s articulation of this “heterogeneity” was too internal and atomistic. His view is saturated with overly nominalist and voluntarist timbres that seem both theologically incomplete and all too consistent with emerging market categories. But I find his ironic turn here instructive because it offers a way of identifying our own cultural crisis and the ecclesial devastation inherent to it. Kierkegaard’s irony is not like the irony described by Lear. Where Lear seems to locate merely the thinnest door to the future through which only an emaciated form of Crow tradition can pass (the chickadee), Kierkegaard’s irony moves as a defiant immersion into tradition in confrontation with a culture where a thin and vacuous form of that tradition had triumphed. For Kierkegaard, to be Christian in Christendom required the irony of being Christian enough to be charged with opposing Christendom. In doing so, he hoped to introduce a shock (*scandalon*) that would break open the history within which the church and the nation are assimilated by rediscovering a church that cannot be Christian in these terms.

If irony plays on opposites to open up the possibility of the new, then following Kierkegaard, it first allows us to see how a kind of triumphant Christianity fused with capitalism is really the exhaustion of the former. Against comfort with what is, we find instead the necessity to practice a liturgy of struggle and even defiant infidelity to the faith so distorted. Yet Kierkegaard’s recovery of the church militant, while offering a helpful point for beginning in repentance, remains insufficient in and of itself.⁶⁰ For insofar as capitalism is a material force that now envelops culture, it not only sets the socio-political structures and options, but also imbues the disposition of its denizens. Thus, more

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 229, 232. Kirmmse notes—by reference to Kierkegaard’s own diary entries—the pivotal role of the events of 1848 for his authorship and his overarching project. As he argues, “The ‘study of the religious’ occasioned by the ‘political catastrophe’ of 1848 specifically led Kierkegaard to the following conclusion: that *quantitatively* the human race had erred in placing emphasis upon the *numerical* rather than upon the *single individual*; that *qualitatively* the human race had erred in claiming *unconditional power* for human social and political institutions rather than relying upon the *Unconditioned*, i.e., God; that, in other words, we have confused or reversed the roles of religion and politics, and that the only solution was to sort out this confusion.” See Kirmmse, “Kierkegaard and 1848,” 169.

⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 211.

than a purely interior and individual practice will be necessary for a full renovation of the church militant amid the reign of disaster capitalism. To be a church that can recover, Christianity requires enacting a real, material counter-politics. In order to see how we might do so, I want to augment Kierkegaard's notion with some political insights drawn from Romand Coles's discussion of how to generate new publics.

According to Coles, to counteract the increasing pressures and reach of capitalist logics and their market-based operations, a radically democratic alternative will need to learn from the dynamics of the system if it is to find more decisive and resilient ways to counter them.⁶¹ A key component of such a newly coordinated effort, Coles avers, is to facilitate "politics of countershock" in order to block the assault of neoliberalism on our communities and institutions as well as engaging the socio-political powers of "a new materialist politics."⁶² To generate such an alternative will require cultivating radically receptive faculties essential to building the kinds of communities capable of co-creating "a *habitus* of durable transformative patterns and interactions" for enacting "game-transformative practices."⁶³

Education is central to Coles's discussion not only because he wishes to detail the impact of neoliberal logic and capital flows on higher education, but also because education is at the heart of politics and, therefore, identifying new educative practices is key to engendering any alternative.⁶⁴ Education is formation; and like the hollowed out liturgies of our churches, Coles sees the current state of public education as debilitated. As he states: "So far, most efforts to resist the assault have been primarily defensive, seeking to restore elements of a receding status quo while leaving contemporary system dynamics and neoliberal shifts in power largely unaddressed."⁶⁵ Coles's remedy for this dire situation is the possibility of community-based action research. In order to truly resist this neoliberal tide, institutions will need to learn "to create ecologies of democratic action research that combine scholarship and community engagement." A new kind of "public work," such cooperative and participatory research campaigns can be the mechanism for constructing alternative ways forward and counter-acting capitalism's destructive ways.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Romand Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism: Radical and Ecological Democracy in Neoliberal Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 162.

⁶² Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism*, 24, 163.

⁶³ Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism*, 7.

⁶⁴ Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism*, 12.

⁶⁵ Romand Coles, "Transforming the Game: Democratizing the Publicness of Higher Education and Commonwealth in Neoliberal Times," *New Political Science* 36, no. 4 (2014): 623.

⁶⁶ Coles, "Transforming the Game," 623.

While Coles's objective is to encourage the "cogeneration of democratic publics" through the deployment of this transformative grassroots pedagogy, the church could take much from this proposal. What he calls "visionary pragmatism" seeks to cultivate a "radical democratic resonance machine" or a "resonant democratic *habitus*" capable of challenging the flows of capitalism with a densely relational mode of hopeful, practical wisdom.⁶⁷ Similarly, an ecclesial liturgy expanded and infused with "collaborative action research, public work, and political action engaged with quotidian problems in everyday life," I think, could also begin to recover tradition in a newly innovative way, serving to distinguish it from capitalist flows and objectives while emboldening it to challenge these pro-market processes.⁶⁸ To this extent, our liturgy may have more to gain from practices like community organizing than some might realize, for such action research-driven activities offer a way of co-forming our communities in more restorative and redemptive alternatives.⁶⁹

In conclusion, then, I offer a glimpse of just such an alternative of liturgical renovation in the work of the Jeremiah Group, a New Orleans branch of the Industrial Areas Foundation. In the aftermath of the storm and in the struggle to recover, this organization provided for many victims of the devastation, as Jeffrey Stout recounts, "a bridge between Christianity and democracy."⁷⁰ This began by taking the microphone back from the likes of T.D. Jakes, with his opiate message, and calling their members and leaders to caucus in the chaotic scene of the Astrodome. Gathering in prayer and mutual listening, the organization opened up space for people to articulate their pain, allowing this to then generate a sense of what they needed to do.⁷¹ Thus, working on the ground floor with people and their issues, involving them in the discernment, research, and proposal of workable solutions aimed at restoring their communities and building the common good, Jeremiah eventually convened four hundred leaders to create their own "road home."⁷² In the face of vast devastation, new rites of mourning, solidarity, and mutual commitment forged through the work of Jeremiah Group allowed the congregations involved to regain a sense of their own collective vision and to begin to work toward that vision, struggling against the tidal wave of capitalist forces. The battle has

⁶⁷ Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism*, 59.

⁶⁸ Coles, "Transforming the Game," 629.

⁶⁹ Coles, "Transforming the Game," 629.

⁷⁰ Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 21.

⁷¹ Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 72.

⁷² Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 49. See also "The Jeremiah Group Creates 'The Road Home' Program to Move 1,000 into Homeownership," www.swiaf.org/news/jeremiah-group-creates-the-road-home-program.

been uphill and victories for affordable housing, jobs, and schools intermittent.⁷³ But it has been worth fighting, and in it these churches have found a degree of independence to resist capitalism's dominion.

Only with such an enriched sense of liturgy—and the careful, attentive dedication to cultivating and developing it—can we discover a means of hopeful prudence to sustain ourselves—especially in places like New Orleans—during these catastrophic neoliberal times. Not only would this suggest the generation of new anthems and hymns to gather us in resistance as an alternative movement, but it would also necessitate the cultivation of relationships of solidarity and collective engagement to thwart the fragmentation and liquefaction of the market's creative destruction. One pertinent avenue, thus, is to have our liturgy innovatively expanded and reshaped through collaborative action research and community organizing (and vice versa). This would mean learning to incorporate the grassroots practices of one-to-ones and house meetings with a renewed theological consideration of the essential giftings of the members of the body of Christ to produce decentralized modes of ecclesial work. It would imply coordinating collective campaigns within our communities as the tangible and material recovery of that church militant sketched only vaguely by Kierkegaard. It would include a renewed understanding of the practice of baptism as a truly political re-identification that generates a shock of dissociation from state-capitalist circuits and flows so as to scramble the prevailing secular-public arrangement. The practice of Eucharist would have to take shape as a sustaining community action where the sharing of bread registers as a counter-practice and true alternative that catalyzes co-creative modes of integration to resist reification and commodification. A renovated liturgy of micro-political experiments, quotidian practices of relationship building and organizing, collective research, and constructive and collaborative alternatives might emerge to struggle against the regnant regime. It may be a struggle we are bound to lose, but it is one worth pursuing if our liturgy is to have any meaning for the capitalist future. 

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⁷³ "The Jeremiah Group Creates 'The Road Home' Program."