

Chapter 1: Towards a Realized Eschatology: Paul Farmer as Good Samaritan

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In actual fact ... eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.¹

Jürgen Moltmann

For Christians, ethical practices like the preferential “option” for the poor are *not*, in fact, optional.

In a nutshell, no one gets into heaven without a letter of recommendation from the poor.²

Nathan Mitchell

Introduction

I am honored to join the esteemed theologians who have written essays in this book to honor Paul Farmer’s prophetic witness and contribution to theological ethics. I believe that much of what we recognize in Dr. Farmer’s life and work was shaped in large measure by Christian ethics, theological thought, and, of course, his deep personal faith. My essay is perhaps less scholarly than many included in this book and takes a decidedly more personal and narrative approach, given my long-standing relationship with Dr. Farmer. I was his spiritual director for sixteen years (his “interior

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 16.

² Nathan Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 37, 42.

decorator” as he liked to joke), and he was among my closest friends. I was fortunate to work closely with him as his Chief Advisor for over a decade at the institutions where he faithfully served.³ I also had the privilege of writing a biography about him for Liturgical Press’s People of God series.⁴ Thus, some of my reflections and anecdotes in this essay are personal and first-hand, and I often refer to Paul by his first name, as this seems most appropriate. The theological underpinnings of this essay are based on my observations and exposure to Paul’s cosmology, if you will, and the worldview and moral framework he carefully pieced together to guide his life.

It is no mystery why Matthew 25:35–46 was selected for the Gospel reading at Paul Farmer’s funeral Mass in Miami and his Memorial Service a week later in Boston.⁵ In this passage, which describes the Great Judgment Day, Jesus tells the crowd exactly who is going to inherit the Kingdom of God and the reasons why this is so. He lays out the corporal works of mercy and closes with an explanation that does not lack clarity: “Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me.” As I said, no great mystery there. Nor is it a great mystery why Paul’s favorite Scripture passage was the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 10:25–37), the equally dramatic narration in which Jesus describes what it means to show mercy and what is demanded of us to live in right relationship with our neighbors.

In this essay, I explain the ways in which the parable of the Good Samaritan, coupled with the corporal works of mercy as presented in Matthew’s Gospel, are the hermeneutical keys to understanding Paul Farmer’s religious imagination, the day-in, day-out expression of his moral life, and in turn, the unceasing demands he freely placed on himself. These

³ These institutions include Partners In Health, Harvard Medical School, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and the United Nations Office of the Special Envoy to Haiti.

⁴ Jennie Weiss Block, *Paul Farmer: Servant to the Poor* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018).

⁵ There were numerous memorial services for Dr. Farmer held around the world including Haiti, Rwanda, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Malawi, and Peru.

two passages from the New Testament obviously imply a Christian ethic, and one can certainly make the claim that Paul Farmer's moral life was grounded in Christian ethics. However, in this essay, I wish to pursue a different line of thinking and consider how Paul's interpretation of these seminal passages—directives to living the Christian life, if you will—created in him an eschatological orientation made manifest in two particular and complementary ways. First, his entire corpus of writing and his life's work among the destitute was directed towards a realized eschatology, that is, the bringing about of the Kingdom of God in the here and now. Second, he understood his calling to serve as an "antidote to despair"⁶ to those who are suffering or losing hope. He was, as I often liked to call him, an "eschatologist," that is, a hope-giver to everyone he met—from destitute peasant farmers to heads of state. Paul understood that "Christian hope's statement of promise ... must stand in contradiction to the reality which can at present be experienced."⁷ Paul understood that "Everywhere in the New Testament, Christian hope is directed towards what is not visible,"⁸ and he believed that hope could "prove its power," and eschatology could "formulate its statements of hope in contradiction to the present reality of suffering evil and death."⁹ It was this promise of an unseen hope that gave him the motivation to move forward towards a vision of a hope-filled future and, in turn, the courage to spend his entire life working untiringly to build the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

I begin with an exegesis of the Good Samaritan parable, highlighting the ways in which this passage influenced Paul's moral and spiritual life. I then take up the topic of Paul's views on accompaniment in relation to Jesus's directive to "Go and do likewise." In the next section, I offer a few anecdotal observations and stories that describe Paul's spiritual life at the intersection of suffering and hope. The essay closes with a look at Paul's

⁶ The expression is taken from the PIH mission statement which can be found in its entirety in footnote 16.

⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 19.

eschatology, which I argue was both, to use Moltmann's words, "revolutionizing and transforming."

Throughout my years working with Paul, I was often privileged to represent him, and at his direction, to speak for him, so I am confident in saying that he would be humbled and thrilled by this book for several reasons. He much admired theologians and often said that if he ever got another degree, it would be in theology. In the last months of his life, he had just started on a reading course in theology.¹⁰ He had a great interest and practical concerns about the moral life and thought carefully about what he referred to as "AMC's—Areas of Moral Clarity."¹¹ When he heard the title of the book, his face might redden from the neck up at being called a "prophet to the peoples," as often happened when he was embarrassed, and he would have had lots of good questions about theological ethics. While he would be the first to point out that although he was not a theologian, he was drawn to theological thought and was deeply interested in gaining access to theological language. Never a week went by that he did not call to ask a theological or pastoral question across a wide range of his topics. Paul once told me, "You have shaped the latter half of my life."¹² While this lovely compliment is no doubt exaggerated, I believe he meant that his experience in spiritual direction and partnering with a theologian in the workplace gave his religious imagination a home, so to speak. It gave

¹⁰ A few of the first books in Paul's theology reading course were *The Shape of Catholic Theology: An Introduction to Its Sources, Principles and History*, by Aidan Nichols, OP, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology* by Dermot Lane, and *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, by Avery Dulles, along with Alister McGrath's introduction to the history of Christian thought and some spiritual reading. Paul was so funny — he kept calling me to say, "I am behind in my theology readings ... I am so sorry." To which I would reply, "You really can't be behind as there is no schedule." Although he was, in his mind, "always behind," he was very much enjoying the readings and had many good questions about the material.

¹¹ Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, the Man Who Would Cure the World* (New York: Random House, 2004), 101.

¹² Paul Farmer, Text message to the author, October 26, 2021. (Sadly, this was Paul's last birthday among us.)

him access to a language and thinking that resonated with his deepest longing for communion with God and neighbor and acknowledged and tapped into his interior life. And while there were never any easy answers, access to religious language and theological thought was a means to engage and ponder the many profound and piercing questions—both theological and practical—with which he grappled on a daily basis.

While Paul is internationally known for his work as a physician, it is important to note that he was also an accomplished anthropologist, trained to search for meaning in all things. He was a most careful observer and interpreter of cultures, people, places, and events. Both his visual and sensory perceptions were acute; he paid careful attention to every small detail in observing others and their circumstances. Paul's search for meaning was intense and central to his identity, and, as he matured, this search for meaning was linked to the development of his religious imagination and his interior life. And, until the end, he believed that what ultimately gave his own life meaning was service to his fellow humans.

As is well-known and evident in his writings, liberation theology held a privileged place in Paul's thinking and praxis. In *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights and the New War on the Poor*, he wrote an entire chapter applying the principles of liberation theology to medicine and health care. He builds a strong case, through the use of multiple case studies that show the positive impact that applying an "option-for-the-poor" model of medicine had on patient outcomes.¹³ He notes, "It is my belief that liberation theologians, in advocating preferential treatment for the poor, offer those concerned with human rights a moral compass for action."¹⁴ Throughout his entire career, he continued to rely on the work of liberation theologians, including Gutiérrez, Boff, and Sobrino, and these scholars are often cited in his books, speeches, and articles. He often expressed his gratitude for their work and its meaning to him.

¹³ See Chapter Five of Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 138.

Liberation theology continues to be, for me, an inexhaustible font of inspiration. I see the spirituality associated with it as, at the very least, aspirational: any of us can aspire to be better—but only if we seek to attack contemporary poverty and to remember that we live in one world, not three. Nothing that I’ve seen from plague to famine to flood to quake, could persuade me otherwise.¹⁵

Although PIH is a secular organization, its founders¹⁶ grounded their work in language and concepts borrowed from liberation theology, beginning with the opening line of their mission statement: “Our mission is to provide a preferential option for the poor in health care.” The organization describes its mission to be both “medical and moral” and based on “solidarity, rather than charity alone.” The PIH model insists that the lived experience of persons living in poverty be given priority and used to guide decision-making and planning.¹⁷

The influence of Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP, on Paul’s intellectual and personal life cannot be overstated. As a young man, it was Fr. Gustavo’s writing on poverty and structural sin that helped Paul understand what he was encountering in Haiti and, in turn, guided his methodology, praxis,

¹⁵ Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutiérrez, *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 19.

¹⁶ Paul’s cofounders at Partners In Health are Ophelia Dahl, Todd McCormack, Jim Yong Kim, and the late Tom White.

¹⁷ The PIH Mission Statement (found at www.pih.org/our-mission): “Our mission is to provide a preferential option for the poor in health care. By establishing long-term relationships with sister organizations based in settings of poverty, Partners In Health strives to achieve two overarching goals: to bring the benefits of modern medical science to those most in need of them and to serve as an antidote to despair. We draw on the resources of the world’s leading medical and academic institutions and on the lived experience of the world’s poorest and sickest communities. At its root, our mission is both medical and moral. It is based on solidarity, rather than charity alone. When our patients are ill and have no access to care, our team of health professionals, scholars, and activists will do whatever it takes to make them well—just as we would do if a member of our own families or we ourselves were ill.”

and advocacy efforts. A decade later, Paul finally met the man he referred to as his hero and mentor in Peru. Over the years, a deep friendship grounded in respect and affection developed. While Paul and Fr. Gustavo were of two entirely different worlds, they were of one mind and one heart. The book that Paul and Fr. Gustavo coauthored together, *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutiérrez*, brought great joy to both of them. Their days together at Notre Dame working on the book was a graced time. Both men loved the quiet days with time for long conversations and meals together with friends and students. They offered a lecture together entitled “Reimagining Accompaniment: Global Health and Liberation Theology” in a packed DeBartolo Hall. Fr. Gustavo celebrated Mass on Paul’s fifty-second birthday in the historic Log Chapel at Notre Dame. Everyone gathered in the little chapel knew they were experiencing something very special. Paul considered Chapter Five, “Conversion in the Time of Cholera: A Reflection on Structural Violence and Social Change,” in this book to be among the best of his writings, and the interview in this book between these two great men is both historic and inspirational.

During the pandemic, Paul worried greatly about Fr. Gustavo, concerned that he was at great risk given his age and health conditions; he repeatedly asked me to check on him. In the last months of his life, Paul had several dreams about Fr. Gustavo and made me promise that we would go to Peru to see him as soon as it was possible to travel. Needless to say, Fr. Gustavo was deeply saddened by the death of his dear friend.

I will not add further comment on liberation theology, as I have written about it elsewhere and other contributors to this book have done an excellent job of describing Dr. Farmer’s use of liberation theology from various perspectives; suffice it to say I know Paul would be grateful that this topic was given the attention it deserves.

Paul Farmer as Good Samaritan

With gratitude for permitting me this personal approach, I now turn to an exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan. This passage, and Paul’s

unfailing devotion to the corporal works of mercy, were, if you will, the “organizing principles” of his moral life and, in turn, his actions.¹⁸ In a speech at Union Theological Seminary, Paul explains his commitment to the corporal works of mercy.

Partners In Health is a secular organization but all of us believe in the corporal works of mercy, which are laid out clearly enough in the Gospels. These are not vague injunctions; they are precise. Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Clothe the naked. Shelter the homeless. Visit the sick. Visit prisoners. Bury the dead.¹⁹

These commands became, in fact, our guiding philosophy. ... Although we have tried to master the language of international health and sustainable development, and although we have learned much in doing so, I still believe we’ve learned more by returning to these first principles, laid out so long ago in the Gospel according to Matthew.²⁰

The Good Samaritan parable and the corporal works of mercy captured Paul’s imagination from the time he was a young man, although he was reluctant to publicly share the influence these passages and other social justice-oriented Scripture passages had on him for he feared that his faith and interest in spirituality²¹ would be misconstrued or perverted. He often

¹⁸ This is not to suggest that these were his only organizing principles; he studied and read widely and was influenced by multiple disciplines and philosophical categories. However, justice, mercy, and equity are the consistent themes by which he evaluated any belief systems and judgments about the actions of others.

¹⁹ Paul Farmer, “Who Stands Fast?” Union Theological Seminary, Union Medal Acceptance Speech, New York, NY, December 6, 2006, in Paul Farmer, *To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation*, ed. Jonathan Weigel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 187.

²⁰ Farmer, *To Repair the World*, 188.

²¹ Paul’s interest in religion was not in any way a secret; his family and friends were aware that he was a person of faith and there are numerous references to Paul’s religious leanings in Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*.

“felt alienated from faith as it is portrayed in this country,”²² and he did not want his faith to be co-opted and used by others for their own purposes. What I can say with some certainty is that the organizing principles laid out in these passages are the ones that stood the test of time, and in later years of his far-too-short-life, he openly embraced and often spoke publicly about these Gospel passages, in both secular and religious circles. This is just one example from an interview in the *Wall Street Journal* published a year before he died in an article entitled “Paul Farmer’s Fight Against ‘Medical Deserts’ of the World:”

For a man who spends much of his time fighting the medical status quo in slums and prisons, Dr. Farmer is unexpectedly upbeat. He says that his sense of humor runs in his family.

But he is also buoyed by his faith. In his 20s, when he was shuttling between building clinics in Haiti and earning degrees in medicine and anthropology from Harvard, Dr. Farmer found inspiration in liberation theology, a sometimes-controversial Catholic movement focused on public activism to help the poor. His office at home in Miami, Fla., where he lives with his wife, Didi Bertrand (with whom he has three children), is cluttered with gifts of religious iconography. He says he feels guided by Jesus’s teachings on the corporal works of mercy, which include caring for the sick, clothing the naked and burying the dead.²³

Paul called me right after the interview to tell me that he talked about his faith with the reporter and sent the woman interviewing him a picture of the wall with his religious iconography. However, when the story ran,

²² Paul Farmer, “Spirituality and Justice,” Spirituality and Justice Award Acceptance Speech, All Saints Parish, Brookline, Massachusetts, April 27, 2008, in Paul Farmer, *To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation*, ed. Jonathan Weigel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 211.

²³ Emily Bobrow, “Paul Farmer’s Fight Against the ‘Medical Deserts’ of the World,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 2021, www.wsj.com/articles/paul-farmers-fight-against-the-medical-deserts-of-the-world-11614962934.

the *WSJ* did not use the photo, and he seemed a little disappointed that his religious art collection did not make it into the news.

In a speech at Trinity Church in Boston in March of 2009, Paul referred to the Good Samaritan as “everyone’s favorite parable.”²⁴ He then proceeded to read the entire passage to his audience. After his Scripture reading, he said, “I think you can all see where I am going with this, and that’s to a certain line in the Scripture: ‘But, who is my neighbor?’” “Who indeed?” he asks. He spent the rest of his talk answering the question of “who is my neighbor” raised in the parable by drawing on his own global experience, and urging the audience to take “Jesus’ definition of neighbor seriously.”²⁵ In just this short speech, he named the country of Haiti as neighbor, those who are tortured at Guantanamo as neighbor, and those who have committed great crimes as neighbor, as well as those without health insurance and those living in dire poverty who have been victims of military occupations.²⁶ He calls for a “‘tidal wave of justice’ to sweep over our world,”²⁷ and his final words to the group were, “But when we link our desire to care for strangers, as the Samaritan did, to a knowledge of history and a commitment to truth, we can do great things.”²⁸ He closed his talk with the poet Seamus Heaney’s hopeful words:

So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.²⁹

²⁴ Paul Farmer, “Is it Possible to Give Faith-Based Initiatives a Good Name?” Presented at Trinity Church, Boston, March 15, 2009.

²⁵ Farmer, “Is it Possible to Give Faith-Based Initiatives a Good Name?”

²⁶ Farmer, “Is it Possible to Give Faith-Based Initiatives a Good Name?”

²⁷ This expression is taken from Seamus Heaney’s poem “The Cure at Troy,” which Paul read as part of the speech.

²⁸ Farmer, “Is it Possible to Give Faith-Based Initiatives a Good Name?”

²⁹ Farmer, “Is it Possible to Give Faith-Based Initiatives a Good Name?”

In all my years with Paul, I never once saw him exact any revenge on anyone no matter the circumstances, and when he saw pettiness in others, he would just shake his head and then jokingly say, “Umbrage . . . it will be taken!” He really did live on the far side of revenge where he believed in miracles and cures and healing wells (if he heard this comment, he would insist that I add that he also believed in antibiotics and vaccines!)—all of which were part and parcel of his eschatological vision. And, while I am not sure that the Good Samaritan is “everyone’s favorite scripture passage,” it surely was Paul’s favorite—its inspiration colored his moral life and practice, giving him the license he desired to view everyone as his neighbor.

The One Who Showed Mercy

Found only in Luke’s Gospel, the storyline of this parable begins as a response to a question posed to Jesus by a lawyer. “Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus’s reply was straightforward. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.” The lawyer perseverates and then asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” In response, Jesus tells the story of a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who was attacked by robbers, badly beaten, and left “half dead.” Hearers of this story in ancient times would have known that the road between Jerusalem and Jericho was a very dangerous one for travelers as it winds between limestone cliffs with numerous hidden caves, and attacks by Bedouin robbers were known to have occurred on the road.³⁰

The first one to see the wounded man was a priest, who quickly passes to the other side of the road, ignoring the suffering man. Next, a Levite came by; he saw the beaten and bleeding man, and he, too, moved to the other side of the road.³¹ The next person to come upon the injured man

³⁰ Taylor C. Smith, “Parable of the Samaritan,” *Review and Expositor*, 47, no. 4 (1950): 427.

³¹ Some scholars, such as Michel Gourgues, R.J. Karris, and J.A. Fitzmyer suggest that the priest and the Levite represent the religious leaders of Judaism; these are leading examples of law-observant people that do not aid the man for fear of being defiled. If they were on the way

was a man from the region of Samaria. Using a Samaritan in this situation is loaded with meaning. Samaritans and Jews had been at odds with each other from centuries of conflict, and this man would have been seen as a foreigner on the margins of society, outside of the covenant, perhaps of questionable character, and would likely have aroused some suspicion. However, Jesus surprises with yet another great reversal in the Christian narrative. Luke tells us, “But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.” He stopped, tended to the injured man’s wounds with oil and wine, which were considered salves and antiseptics in the ancient world. He then picked the man up, put him on his own donkey, and took him to an inn to take care of him. When he had to leave, he gave the innkeeper money to take care of the suffering man while he convalesced and told him he would soon return and reimburse him for any expenses he might have incurred. Jesus then asked, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” To which the lawyer replied, “The one who showed mercy to him.” And Jesus verifies his correct response by directing him to “Go and do likewise.”

I would like now to turn to explain, in some detail, my claim that this parable, coupled with the corporal works of mercy, are the hermeneutical keys to understanding Paul Farmer’s religious imagination, the day-in, day-out expression of his moral life, and in turn, the unceasing demands he freely placed on himself. In this parable, Jesus introduces two contrasting archetypes: two religious leaders with high social standing in the community and an outsider, a person clearly known to be on the margins of society. For his entire adult life, Paul strongly identified with the figure of the Samaritan, that is, the ones who find themselves on the margins of society. This identification with those on the margins began when he was an undergraduate at Duke University, when he volunteered at the nearby

to or from Jerusalem for the purpose of service in the Temple, they would have been concerned about coming into contact with a corpse which would render them ritually impure for a period of twenty-four hours (Leviticus 21:1–4).

migrant camps, working with a “social justice nun with sensible shoes,” as he often fondly referred to Sr. Julianna DeWolf. Seeing firsthand the poverty and lack of personal agency that was the way of life for these good people and their children moved him deeply. These encounters opened his eyes to injustice, touched his gentle heart, troubled his conscience, and sparked his intellectual curiosity about why such circumstances exist. His identification with those on the margins was strengthened, both viscerally and intellectually, in his early years in Haiti after college and his years training as a physician and anthropologist. It was during this period of his life that he came to embrace and prioritize those on the margins as neighbor and friend.

As is well known, Paul came from very humble beginnings. He lived with his parents and five siblings in an old bus parked at a campground in central Florida. The bus did not have a bathroom or running water, and the family did not have a telephone or a television or any of the trappings of middle-class life. While Paul and his siblings were aware that their situation was unorthodox and at times quite inconvenient, theirs was not a marginal existence. Their family life was stable. Their parents were loving and intelligent, and they provided the children with moral and spiritual formation as well as the opportunity to pursue their interests and education. Paul was intellectually gifted, and thanks to full scholarships at two leading universities, he received a world-class education and enjoyed great success academically and professionally. He was named a university professor at one of the most prestigious universities in the world and authored or edited over a dozen books and hundreds of scholarly articles. He was viewed as a visionary world leader and often referred to as a “nonprofit celebrity,” drawing big crowds whenever he gave lectures or presentations. He was the subject of a bestselling biography when he was only forty-five years old and was the recipient of many prestigious awards and honors. He loved and was devoted to his many friends and colleagues in this elite world, and he entered willingly into the world of accomplishments and prestige, mostly because he knew this would offer him the opportunity and ability to better serve. However, for Paul, the

margins were his preferred social location or, as he would often say, his “true North.” He was intent on seeing the “view from below” and felt he learned the most from listening to his many friends and colleagues socially located on the margins. In *Pathologies of Power*, Paul explains that beyond reviewing a large body of information about the distribution of disease within a population, exploring clinical characteristics and treatment regimens, he was committed to “*elicit the experience and views of poor people* and to incorporate these views into all observations, judgments, and actions.”³² He notes that failing to honor the experience and views of the poor in designing strategies to respond to disease is a terrible error.³³ When Paul expressed these views in 2005, they were radical ideas. Over time, at PIH and beyond, his “option-for-the-poor” approach has significantly and positively influenced the delivery of services in resource-poor settings.

Paul was not naïve about the cost of aligning himself with those on the margins. He once told Tracy Kidder that he knew he was “fighting the long defeat” but he was committed to “making common cause with the losers.”

I have fought the long defeat and brought others people on to fight the long defeat, and I am not going to stop because we keep losing. Now I actually think sometimes we may win. I don’t dislike victory. ... You know people from our background—like you, like most PIH’ers, like me—we are used to being on a victory team, but actually what we are really trying to do in PIH is make common cause with the losers. We want to be on the winning team but at the risk of turning our back on the losers, no, it’s not worth it.³⁴

His strong identification with those on the margins is tied to the Good Samaritan parable in two ways. The first reason is evident; he admired the Samaritan, himself a person on the margins, for responding to the wounded man’s need, and he knew that was exactly the kind of person he

³² Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 146.

³³ Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 146.

³⁴ Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, 288.

wanted to be. The second reason is more nuanced and significant and relates to the line in the passage that explains how the Samaritan man felt when he came upon the suffering man: “But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him” (Luke 10:33). The common English translations for the Greek word used in this passage are “pity” or “moved with compassion.” However, this translation falls short and does not fully communicate the meaning of the Greek word, which is derived from a word that literally means “guts” or “inner organs.”³⁵ In the ancient world, the “inner organs” were regarded as the seat of the tender affections such as kindness and tender mercies. These gradually came to denote the seat of the affections; hence, equivalent to our heartfelt emotions. The use of this word, in the original Greek, would have conveyed to those hearing it a much stronger connotation than “pity,” more along the lines of a deeper, gut-wrenching reaction—a physical, visceral response that perhaps would have made one sick to their stomach.

The proper translation of this word is significant because it exactly describes the deep emotional and gut-wrenching experience Paul felt *every time* he encountered a suffering person. Even after years of exposure to too many varieties of suffering to list, he never developed any detachment. He was always overwhelmed with gut-wrenching compassion for the person in front of him. Over time, he grew experienced at hiding or just internalizing this reaction, which in many, if not most instances, was appropriate. Most of his patients, and even his students and coworkers, were likely comfortable with a sincere show of compassion, not so much with a leader who is overwhelmed, sick to his stomach, and on the verge of tears. Rather than fleeing from these harsh and disturbing feelings, Paul never turned his glance away from the suffering or lonely other, even when there was little or nothing that he could do to relieve their pain. More than

³⁵ The Greek noun (neuter) σπλάγχνα (*splagchna*) refers to the internal organs, especially the “nobler entrails”—the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys. (With gratitude to Jose David Padilla, OP, and Andrew Del Valle, OP, for their assistance and insights on the Greek translation.)

anything, he wanted to “go and do likewise.” More than anything, he wanted to be just like the Good Samaritan, the one who showed mercy. In a very real sense, this gut-wrenching compassion was a purifying fire and an ongoing source of conversion in his life.³⁶

Accompaniment as Holy Interruption

This past summer, I heard a young Episcopal priest, Rev. Kellan Day, preach on the Good Samaritan parable. Of course, my thoughts turned to Paul because I knew this was his favorite passage. It helped that her preaching was beautiful and eloquent, and I found Rev. Day’s insights meaningful, especially because her thinking gave me greater insight into the ways Paul practiced the art of accompaniment. Accompaniment was a central theme in Paul’s life and work; he often wrote and spoke about the topic. At a commencement address at the Kennedy School of Government called “Accompaniment as Policy,” he told the graduates:

“Accompaniment” is an elastic term. It has a basic, everyday meaning. To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end. There is an element of mystery, of openness, of trust, in accompaniment. The companion, the *accompagnateur*, says, “I’ll go with you and support your journey wherever it leads. I’ll share your fate for a while—and by “a while.” I don’t mean a little while.³⁷

Paul and his coworkers fashioned and extended the idea of accompaniment in multiple directions. For example, the community health workers at Partners In Health are called *accompagnateurs* and are trained to understand their work as more than distributors of medicine or

³⁶ I share this insight with a bit of trepidation for it was a frequent topic in Paul’s spiritual direction; however, I believe he would be comfortable with this level of disclosure, especially if it would be helpful to the reader.

³⁷ Paul Farmer, “Accompaniment as Policy,” Harvard Kennedy School of Government Commencement, Boston, May 25, 2011, in Paul Farmer, *To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation*, 234.

record keepers. They combine good clinical care with robust accompaniment that includes complex wraparound services like food, water, housing, and transportation. When Paul served as President Clinton's Deputy in the United Nations Office of the Special Envoy to Haiti, our policy work included developing a set of "Accompaniment Principles" to influence how billions of dollars were spent for the delivery of foreign aid in resource-poor settings. Paul always advocated that accompaniment must be linked to what he called "pragmatic solidarity."

Pragmatic solidarity is different from but nourished by solidarity, per se, the desire to make common cause with those in need. Solidarity is a precious thing: people enduring great hardship often remark that they are grateful for the prayers and good wishes of fellow human beings. But when the sentiment is accompanied by the goods and services that might diminish unjust hardship, surely it is enriched. To those in great need, solidarity without the pragmatic component can seem like so much abstract piety.³⁸

Paul interpreted the closing words of the Good Samaritan passage, "Go and do likewise," in light of his vocation as a physician. To him, this made his own path to showing mercy clear, and he knew, early on, with great certainty, that his life would "be dedicated to accompanying the destitute sick on a journey away from premature suffering and death."³⁹

In her homily, Rev. Day offered a quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his book entitled *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*. Paul was a big fan of Bonhoeffer. He admired Bonhoeffer's deep faith and courage. When Paul received the Union Medal from Union Theological Seminary in 2006, Bonhoeffer's question of "Who Stands Fast?" was the theme of his acceptance speech. In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer presents a number of ministries that he claims are important in the building of community. Several of these ministries, in my opinion,

³⁸ Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 146.

³⁹ Farmer, *To Repair the World*, 239.

have great merit, including “the ministry of holding one’s tongue” and “the ministry of listening.”⁴⁰ The ministry Bonhoeffer mentions that called Paul to mind is the “ministry of helpfulness.” In this ministry, Bonhoeffer says,

We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man fallen among thieves.⁴¹

He goes on to say that often “Christians and even ministers frequently consider their work so important and urgent that they will allow nothing to disturb them. They actually think they are doing God a service in this, but actually they are disdaining God’s ‘crooked yet straight path.’”⁴² In her homily, Rev. Day calls these encounters “holy interruptions.” She told her congregation, “God’s crooked yet straight path is before us every single day. God’s interruptions are on our doorstep trying to cancel our plans.”⁴³ From years of observing him in action, it strikes me that Paul’s practice of accompaniment was entirely dictated by an openness to God’s holy interruptions. Paul was unfailingly gracious, but this stance was more than just good manners. Sometimes his lack of self-importance was pretty spectacular and, truth be told, could be a bit aggravating to those trying to manage his extremely busy schedule, assist with his demanding workload, or help with coordination at events. He never acted like he was in a hurry. He would often stop to talk to a stranger or a student or a person that he had not seen for a while. He treated a janitor the same way he treated a

⁴⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1954), 91, 97.

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 99.

⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 99.

⁴³ Reverend Kellan Day, “Homily,” Presented at Church of the Incarnation, Highlands, North Carolina, July 10, 2022.

prime minister. He would give whomever he was speaking with his full attention for as long as the person wanted to chat. Often the person would ask him for one thing or another—career or personal advice, to sign a book, to write a letter of recommendation, to call their mother’s doctor to confirm a diagnosis, or to come to their child’s Girl Scout troop to give a talk. He always tried to accommodate their request, however large or small. This often meant that he ran late or piled up an impossible list of things to do or just did not attend to things that others deemed “important” in a timely matter

Every time Paul gave a talk or lecture, hundreds of people would wait in line for hours to have their books signed or get a picture with him. I remember one evening at a book-signing event in California. The organizers of the event came and told me that we had a “hard stop” at 7:30 p.m. because we had to leave to go to a dinner party. They told me that I should let Paul know that he would have to stop signing books at 7:30 p.m. “sharp.” I was thinking to myself, “the chance of that happening is zero percent,” but I just smiled and said, “I will see what I can do.” We left for the dinner party at 8:55 p.m. after the last book was signed.

With his patients, the sky was the limit. I remember going to three grocery stores to find the kind of jelly he promised to bring an older lady in Haiti (we finally found it!). And everyone who ever worked for Paul will tell you about the countless cell phones, iPads, watches, Bibles, nail clippers, textbooks, and the many other requested items he cheerfully dragged in heavy suitcases all over the world. While Paul could be exacting, crisp, and focused on clinical or academic matters, he was never rushed with his patients. He sat for hours in clinics and hospitals, often quietly on the side of a bed, listening to the narratives of his patients’ lives, the ears of his heart taking in their pain and their hopes and, in turn, trying to find solutions for their wants and their needs. Bonhoeffer makes the point that the reason people do not want to engage in these holy interruptions is because “They do not want a life that is crossed and balked.”⁴⁴ Crossed and

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 99.

balked. While I probably would not have thought to use these exact words, they are indeed appropriate because they made me see that Paul willingly and intentionally gave himself over to a life that was “crossed and balked” because he knew that is what it takes to be a good *accompagnateur*, to be the one that shows mercy. Paul’s good friend, Jesuit Jim Keenan, defines mercy as “the willingness to enter into the chaos of another person’s life.”⁴⁵ Paul recognized that to show mercy and to fully enter into the chaos of another person’s life would mean a life that was crossed and balked, full of holy interruptions.

Rev. Day told her congregation that sometimes, a homeless woman, whom their parish had committed to help, interrupted her.

As a young priest, I must confess to you, I often viewed them as untimely and inconvenient. I can see that every time I allowed myself to be interrupted led me to places where my heart was further cracked open. ... Those interruptions led me straight to the gaping wounds of our world and straight into the arms of an agonizing mercy. And if I had ignored those interruptions, if we, dear parish, had ignored her, we would have missed Jesus himself.⁴⁶

Had I heard this homily when Paul was still alive, I would have asked her for a copy to send to him. We would have discussed it in detail, and her thinking would have deeply resonated with him. He would have liked the Bonhoeffer reference, but mostly it would have validated what he already knew so well—that holy interruptions are the crooked but straight path to accompaniment of the lonely other and the doorway to enter into the chaos of another’s life.

The sentiments Rev. Day expressed in her preaching would have given language and explanation to Paul’s own experience. He would have read

⁴⁵ James F. Keenan, SJ, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 3.

⁴⁶ Day, “Homily.”

her homily multiple times, probably shed some tears, and he would have treasured her closing words in his heart for a long time:

So, let yourself be interrupted. Look for people making claims and petitions on your lives, look for all those in proverbial ditches. Watch for the crooked straight path to appear—and it will appear. And the next time a guttural compassion overcomes you, don't cross the road to the other side. Draw near, instead. Tend to your neighbors and their wounds. And if you do, you will find Jesus there waiting for you.⁴⁷

Life at the Intersection of Suffering and Hope

I noted earlier that Paul was a hope giver; his sense of hope was contagious and one of the reasons so many people were drawn to him. However, he did not peddle a shallow optimism or faux sense of cheerfulness or subscribe to, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “cheap grace.”⁴⁸ Paul had a very well-developed theology of the cross. He instinctively understood that a “theology of the cross is the reverse side of the Christian theology of hope.”⁴⁹ Paul knew that any authentic Christian hope begins by turning towards the Crucified One who took on the form of a slave and emptied himself with a radical outpouring of love. Moltmann makes the point that it is hope's statement of promise that stands in contradiction to the reality of the present, and thus hope does not seek to illuminate the reality which exists but the reality which is coming.⁵⁰ It was the reality of what was to come, the reign of God as described by Jesus, that motivated Paul Farmer to work tirelessly to bring about the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

⁴⁷ Day, “Homily.”

⁴⁸ Quoted in Jennie Weiss Block, OP, “Introduction,” in Farmer and Gutiérrez, *In the Company of the Poor*, 9.

⁴⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 5.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

Paul would often send me pictures of his patients to ask me to pray for them, to tell me how they were doing, to ask me to get something for them, or to send money to their families. Most often, these photos and messages were at the intersection of suffering and hope, where Paul radically experienced both sides—the cross of the Crucified One and the light of the Risen Lord—at the same time. Moltmann goes on to further explain that a theology of the cross is intended to make a theology of hope more concrete, and to add the necessary power of resistance to the power of its vision to inspire to action.⁵¹ Two of the last communications I had with Paul about his patients in Butaro, Rwanda, in the weeks before he death well illustrate Moltmann's point.

On February 6, 2022, Paul sent me a video of a man named Faustin with the following message: "Please add Faustin to your prayer list. There is still a sliver of hope."⁵² Ten days later, he wrote to me late at night to say, "We lost Faustin at midnight."⁵³ He sent two pictures; one of himself with Faustin's father—Paul looked so tired in this photo, standing next to Faustin's grieving father with a surgical mask under his chin. The next photo showed four men carrying Faustin's coffin draped in white. Sometimes it took a long time to take these pictures in. A day later, I asked Paul how he was doing. His response: "I know that you know. I'm okay deep down and love this work so much, but this was a real setback after weeks of slow improvement."⁵⁴ When I told him that I was grateful for his accompaniment of the family and the excellent treatment and care Faustin received, he responded, "His dad said the same thing so many times. He reminded me of you and the ministry of showing up."⁵⁵ Moltmann's view of a theology of the cross entails "comprehending the crucified Christ in the light and context of his resurrection, and therefore of freedom and

⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 5.

⁵² Paul Farmer, message to the author, February 6, 2022.

⁵³ Paul Farmer, message to the author, February 16, 2022.

⁵⁴ Paul Farmer, message to the author, February 17, 2022.

⁵⁵ Paul Farmer, message to the author, February 18, 2022.

hope.”⁵⁶ It was to this promise of freedom and hope that Paul gravitated as he encountered again and again the crucified Christ present in the suffering of the poor people that he served. He sought to make his presence and the actions he took on their behalf a sign of hope, for “unless it apprehends the pain of the negative, Christian hope cannot be realistic and liberating.”⁵⁷

On February 19, 2022, just two days before he died, Paul sent me a picture of a small girl in the children’s cancer ward. She looked serious, or perhaps sad, and her beautiful little face was swollen, perhaps from her meds. He was sitting on the bed with her, and she was sitting in between his outstretched arms. He was wearing an African shirt, and he was smiling. His message to me: “Add Josiane to your prayer list.”⁵⁸ In his next message, he was annoyed because Josiane had to go all the way to Kigali for a CT scan. He wrote, “She is getting staged today if she tolerates the stupid trip to Kigali. You remember our strategic priorities from years ago? Cancer care and the scanner? Well, we got the hard part done but dithered on the scanner.”⁵⁹ A few hours later, he cheerfully told me that she made it back safely. A day later, another picture arrived of Paul, one of the nurses, and little Josiane. I studied the picture for a bit and then told Paul, “She is smiling—she loves you.” He wrote back, “I think it’s mutual. She told me she’s been watching me see another young person with cancer every day and was wishing I would see her too.”⁶⁰ Thirty-six hours after I got this message, Paul was dead. Amidst the chaos in the days following his death, I wondered if little Josiane was upset because her new friend had not come back to see her. A few weeks later, I asked Sheila Davis, the CEO of Partners In Health, to ask how little Josiane was doing on her upcoming trip to Rwanda. I had thought of her and looked at her picture so many times after Paul’s death. Sheila wrote and told me that Josiane died just a

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 4.

⁵⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 5.

⁵⁸ Paul Farmer, message to the author, February 19, 2022.

⁵⁹ Paul Farmer, message to the author, February 19, 2022.

⁶⁰ Paul Farmer, message to the author, February 20, 2022.

few days after Paul and that she knew that Paul was there to greet her with open arms. I am sure this is true, but nonetheless, my first thought was that I was relieved that at least Paul was spared having to watch her die.

It so happens that these two stories in the last weeks of Paul's life were about patients that died, but I must also mention that there are just as many, if not more, stories about patients that were receiving state-of-the-art medical treatment in the poorest places in the world, many of them recovering from illnesses they would have died from before their time. Paul was especially proud of the stories that told of saving the lives of millions of mothers and fathers, all of whom were given the gifts of seeing their children grow up. Before PIH built the hospital with a cancer ward in Butaro, there was no cancer treatment available to poor people in the entire region. Paul was very proud of these extraordinary accomplishments. He loved to see his patients thrive and survive, and many patients became good friends over the years. But always, it was to those on the margins, to those who were suffering or despairing or in need to whom he first turned his attention, always trying to bring hope, healing, and help in its many forms, including the material. To so many, just his mere presence brought hope and peace.

While "friends affectionately accuse Dr. Farmer of being pathologically optimistic,"⁶¹ his generally cheerful demeanor is not to be conflated with his understanding of the cost of believing in Christian hope nor to suggest that he did not have times of sadness or interior struggles. Paul was an extrovert; he loved the company of friends and was fun to be around. He had a quick wit and a great sense of humor, and he could be very entertaining. When I asked his friend, Fr. Jim Keenan, SJ, for a comment for Paul's obituary I was writing for the *National Catholic Reporter*, his comments captured Paul's spirit and presence perfectly. "From the very first time I met Paul some twenty years ago, I always thought of him as playful; it was that playfulness that made him so accessible. By that playfulness, he made you believe that you were fun to be with. He helped

⁶¹ Bobrow, "Paul Farmer's Fight Against the 'Medical Deserts' of the World."

you, wherever you were, to laugh. That playfulness was infectious.”⁶² Jim went on to say, “I am not trying to romanticize his work or his death. To know Paul, was to know a man who faced disease and death more than anyone we knew. He was fearless and, if, for instance, you read his book on Ebola, you knew how incredibly courageous he was.”⁶³ While Paul was playful and cheerful and so much fun to be with, he was also a very serious person with a deeply contemplative side. As he matured and grew in wisdom and grace, the need for time apart to read, to think, and to pray increased, as did his need for long periods of silence.

While I never saw Paul despair, he was no stranger to lament. He had a profound interest in theodicy, although not necessarily to seek an answer to the age-old question of why God allows suffering, especially of the innocent. He knew that this was a mystery beyond knowing but nonetheless worth pondering. His interest was somewhat academic, although not dispassionate. In *Pathologies of Power*, he notes that this book is his attempt to consider an anthropology of suffering with a “cultural inquiry into the ways that people attempt to explain the presence of pain, affliction, and evil.”⁶⁴

In an essay Paul wrote in *Via Crucis: The Way of the Cross*,⁶⁵ he reflects on the questions surrounding theodicy and suffering by asking, “How long is the way of the cross? Is it a journey with a destination?”⁶⁶ He finds looking at Bourguignon’s stark and intense drawings of the stations of the cross while he is in rural Haiti between the third Sunday of Lent and Good

⁶² James Keenan, SJ, to the author, February 23, 2022.

⁶³ James Keenan, SJ, to the author, February 23, 2022.

⁶⁴ Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 28.

⁶⁵ This publication contains a series of hauntingly beautiful paintings and drawings by Paul-Henri Bourguignon. The series was exhibited at the Pontifical College Josephinum, the Ohio governor’s mansion, and in several churches. The series is owned by St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Upper Arlington, Ohio. The poems in the volume were written by Edward Lense, and the accompanying text was written by Erika Bourguignon. The foreword was written by Arthur Kleinman, and Paul’s essay is a reflection at the end of the book.

⁶⁶ Paul Farmer, essay in Paul-Henri Bourguignon, *Via Crucis: The Way of the Cross* (Worthington, OH: privately printed, 2013).

Friday a “painful exercise.” He laments, “The answer to the question—how long the way of the cross—is not at all clear, at least not to me. Here in Haiti, where the *Via Crucis* stretches out in all directions as far as the eye can see, the sorrowful dimensions of the ‘good news’ and of Christ’s example seem more compelling than do the joyful ones.” As Lent draws to a close, he asks the plaintive question, “Is Lent ever really over? Will we contemplate the *Via Crucis* and seek its modern significance in the great and unmerited suffering of others, especially the poor? Structural violence, unwarranted suffering, misery, and premature death—most of it experienced by the poor—continues unabated.”⁶⁷ His essay closes with a haunting question: “How long then is the *Via Crucis*? From this vantage point, there seems to be no end in sight. We have little left but our faith, battered and bruised, to suggest that there will be an end to the suffering that is not our own.”⁶⁸ This little-known essay was not published widely, but it but was very important to Paul; every year during Holy Week, we would get it out and read it together. Throughout his writings, there are many references to theodicy and the “vast topographies of pain”⁶⁹ he witnessed in others as well as his own deep feelings. He sometimes mentioned that others did not give much notice to these topics. In many ways, this is understandable, as people looked to Paul as a hope giver, for consolation, motivation, and for inspiration.

Nonetheless, “vast topographies of pain” were never far from Paul’s mind. Had *The Wall Street Journal* run the photo of his religious iconography, one would have seen multiple images of Our Lady of Sorrows for one of the ways he contemplated the “vast topographies of pain” that often surrounded him was through his great devotion to this image of Mary, the Mother of God. Our Lady of Sorrows brought him great comfort and consolation as he sought to fully enter into and manage his life at the crossroad of suffering and hope. Paul had hoped to write a

⁶⁷ Farmer, essay in *Via Crucis*

⁶⁸ Farmer, essay in *Via Crucis*.

⁶⁹ This phrase is from Kathleen O’Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

book about his work that would subtly acknowledge his devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. Taking from the prophecy in Luke 2:35 (“and a sword will pierce your own soul, too”), he planned to call this book *Swords of Sorrow*. I was saving an icon of Our Lady of Sorrows to give to him for his birthday. I will always wish I had given it to him the last time I saw him.

At this juncture, it seems appropriate to add three points. First, I have greatly exceeded the suggested length of this chapter, and yet, there is so much more that I want to say. I hope I have at least scratched the surface on the topic of Paul’s eschatological orientation, and that I will have further opportunity to explore this subject. Second, I regret that space does not permit me to say more about Paul’s enduring dedication to the corporal works of mercy. I think this short story will explain why. A year or so after I met Paul, I went to Boston to attend a seminar with him. It was mid-November and quite chilly. When I saw him, he was shivering in the cold, as he was only wearing a suit jacket and a thin sweater vest. (I later came to find out it was his only suit!) At the lunch break, I ran over to a very nice department store and bought him a good winter coat and threw in a nice cashmere scarf for good measure. He thanked me profusely for the coat and scarf, and I was so happy that he looked nice and warm. Three weeks later, I met up with him again in New York City to attend an event where he was receiving an award. He arrived a little late, sans coat, and again was shivering in the freezing cold. I timidly asked where his coat was, and he said, “I had a cab driver a few weeks ago and he didn’t have a coat or any money—so I gave him all the money I had on me and the coat.” He paused for a few seconds and then earnestly said, “We’re supposed to clothe the naked, right?” All I could do was nod, and think, “Yes, indeed, Paul, we are supposed to clothe the naked,” knowing full well that I would probably never give my coat to a cab driver. I went and got him a new coat and scarf. It was the first of many coats that I would get him over the years, each of which, he in turn, would give away to a stranger who needed a coat. Being friends with Paul had many blessings, but experiences like this were at the top of the list. The most extraordinary thing about this little story is that I (and everyone who knew Paul) can easily narrate similar stories about

him. Every single one of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, along with his ability to articulate the theological and pastoral understanding of exactly what he was doing. Third, given that I have presented Paul in a very positive light, he would insist that I mention that he was far from perfect. Like all of us, he had quite a few faults and “issues”—to use popular parlance. He would be the first to laugh and say that his faults were “TNTC”—medical jargon he liked to use meaning “too numerous to count.” To his credit, he was aware of most of his faults, and conversion of heart and habits were often on his mind. While he would be grateful to me for presenting him so generously, he would not want any of us to deny his full humanity, which surely includes his less attractive attributes.

Revolutionizing and Transforming: Towards a Realized Eschatology

In the quote that opened this essay, Moltmann tells us, “Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.”⁷⁰ Ultimately, Paul understood that “radical conversion to solidarity with the poor, afflicted and brokenhearted are at the heart of the Christian life”⁷¹ and that all Christians are called to try to build the Kingdom of God in the here and now. He knew that, in the words of Nathan Mitchell, the preferential ‘option’ for the poor, is, in fact, not optional. He knew his calling was through his vocation as a physician and an anthropologist, and, well, he gave this life-long project his all. As Jon Weigel, one of his former students put it, “Paul is all in, all of the time.”⁷² Paul would be the first to say that he had many *accompagneurs* on this holy journey for he knew that “entering into divine life is impossible unless we enter into a life of love and communion with others.”⁷³ Catherine LaCugna claims that there are

⁷⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

⁷¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 131.

⁷² Farmer, *To Repair the World*, Introduction, xix.

⁷³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 382.

modes of relationships that reflect the truth of God's economy: "words, actions and attitudes that serve the reign of God."⁷⁴ These are the kind of relationships that Paul forged with thousands of people. With his ever-present Samaritan logic, Paul could see the reign of God preached by Jesus as a real possibility, and he envisioned a world full of the "power of God's Holy Spirit, who rules through justice, peace, charity, love, joy, moderation, kindness, generosity, freedom, compassion, reconciliation, holiness, humility and wisdom."⁷⁵ Somehow, Paul never gave up, never despaired, and never lost hope for "our wounded but beautiful world."⁷⁶ Somehow, in spite of hardship, disappointments, setbacks, and the personal and professional struggles of a complicated life, for Paul, the light of the eschatological horizon never dimmed. In fact, I believe it grew brighter in the final decade of his life.

The journey had its ups and downs, for sure, and setbacks were to be expected. But Paul's outlook was always eschatological, that is "forward looking and forward moving," even when naysayers (and there were many) told him what he wanted to do was "not sustainable" or "too ambitious" or "too expensive" or just "plain unrealistic." He bristled when some suggested a lower standard was good enough for the poor. He was not to be deterred because his favorite parable was his constant reminder that everyone was his neighbor in need of mercy. Over on the margins with his people, he dispensed the medicine of mercy. He visited prisoners, he cared for the sick, he tended the brokenhearted, he gave food, drink, and shelter to those without, and far too often he buried the dead before their time. Moltmann tells us that "The Risen Christ calls, sends, justifies, and sanctifies men, and in doing so gathers, calls and sends them into his

⁷⁴ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 383.

⁷⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 384.

⁷⁶ This was an expression that Paul often used. For example, in Chapter One, "Reimagining Accompaniment: A Doctor's Tribute to Gustavo Gutiérrez," in *In the Company of the Poor*, Paul closes the chapter by saying, "As long as poverty and equality persist, as long as people are wounded and imprisoned and despised, we humans will need accompaniment—practical, spiritual, intellectual. It is for this reason, and for many others, that I am grateful for Father Gustavo's presence on this wounded but beautiful earth."

eschatological future for the world.”⁷⁷ It was straight into this eschatological future that the Risen Christ beckoned Paul Farmer, who went with mind, eyes, and heart wide open, making his home at the intersection of the cross and hope. The outcomes of Paul’s eschatological vision do not fall short of Moltmann’s claim that eschatology is “revolutionizing and transforming” as evidenced by the international global health equity movement he built, which is grounded in nothing short of revolutionary models of health care delivery that have transformed the lived reality of millions and millions of the poorest people on “our wounded but beautiful earth.” Paul was able to communicate and share his eschatological vision (usually without naming it as such) in a compelling and engaging manner which motivated thousands of friends and colleagues who have gone forth bravely to “go and do likewise”—with extraordinary success. Paul’s abiding belief in eschatology’s power to revolutionize and transform has been, and I believe will continue to be, a source of inspiration and hope to the thousands who knew him personally and for the millions who know of him by reputation.

Paul gave his life to the least among us. He took Luke’s words in the Good Samaritan parable to heart. He loved God with his whole heart and mind, and he loved his neighbor as himself. Preaching at Paul’s funeral Mass in Miami, Fr. Jorge Presmanes, OP, explains well the God that Paul loved with his whole heart and mind.

The God revealed in this passage from Matthew’s Gospel is the God Paul believed in and identified with. For he believed in a God of pathos. A God who feels intensely, who loves passionately, and gets angry over injustice. He believed in a God who felt hunger with the hungry and grieved with those who grieve, a God who pours out mercy, and wipes away tears. Paul believed in a God who loves all but has a preferential option for the poor—not because the poor are better than anyone else; not because the poor are necessarily good, but because God is good. Like the God of pathos, Paul felt intensely for the poor, the oppressed and

⁷⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 325.

the marginalized. And that sympathy with God's pathos, that divine compassion and outrage that he felt at the injustices of the world is what motivated his life's work.⁷⁸

It was the God of pathos to whom Paul was drawn. It was the God of pathos that was his daily companion. It was this all-compassionate God that gave him the gift of endless compassion, and the God who favors the poor that quieted his upset stomach when he was overcome by the pain and suffering of the lonely other. It was the God of pathos that healed, again and again, his broken heart, and the God of pathos that filled him with the kind of hope that rejoices in the deepest of sorrows. It was the God of pathos that directed his path towards a realized eschatology. It is to this God of pathos that we commend our brother, Paul. May he continue to guide us and inspire us in death as he did in life, and for his years amongst us, we give praise and thanks.



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⁷⁸ Fr. Jorge Presmanes, OP, "Homily." Presented at Paul Farmer's Funeral Mass, St. Thomas Church, Miami, February 25, 2022.