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A Nazareth Manifesto

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For Stanley

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Prologue
The Most Important Word

This sermon, on the text John 1:1–14, was preached in Duke University Chapel, Durham, North Carolina, on December 24, 2010.

I want to describe to you three scenes that I'm guessing will be familiar to everyone here. And then I want to think with you about what these three scenes have in common.

The first is your relationship with the most difficult member of your family. Let's say it's your father. You spend some time in the stores after Thanksgiving and you find presents for most of your friends and colleagues and family. But somehow you have no idea what to give your father. It bothers you because deep down it feels like your inability to know what present will make your father happy is symbolic of your lifelong confusion about what might truly make your father happy – especially where you're concerned. So in the end you spend more than you meant to on something you don't really believe he wants, pathetically trying to throw money at the problem but inwardly cursing yourself because you know that what you're buying isn't the answer. When Christmas Day comes and your father opens the present, you see in his forced smile and his half-hearted hug of thanks that you've failed yet again to do something for him that might overcome the chasm between you.

Here's a second scene. You have family or friends from out of town coming for Christmas. You want everything to be perfect for them and you exchange a flurry of emails about who's going to sleep where, and whether it's all right for them to bring the dog. You get into a frenzy of shopping and baking, and you're actually a little anxious that you'll forget something or burn something, so the kitchen becomes your empire, and you can't bear for someone to interrupt you, and even at Christmas dinner you're mostly checking the gravy or reheating the carrots, and as you say goodbye to them you hug and say, "It's such a shame we never really talked while you were

here," and, when they've finally left, you collapse in a heap, maybe in tears of exhaustion.

Here's a third scene. You feel there's something empty or lacking in the cosy Christmas with family and friends, and your heart is breaking for people having a tough time in the cold, in isolation, in poverty, or in grief. So you gather together presents for children of prisoners or turn all your Christmas gifts into vouchers representing your support of a house or a cow or two buffaloes for people who need the resources more than you and your friends do.

What do all these scenes have in common? I want to suggest to you that they're all based on one tiny word: it's the word for. When we care about those for whom Christmas is a tough time, we want to do something for them. When we want our houseguests to enjoy their Christmas visit, our impulse is to spend our whole time doing things for them, whether cooking dinner or constantly clearing the house or arranging activities to keep them busy. When we feel our relationship with our father is faltering, our instinct is to do something for him that somehow melts his heart and makes everything all right.

And those gestures of for matter because they sum up a whole life in which we try to make relationships better, try to make the world better, try to be better people ourselves by doing things for people. We praise the selflessness of those who spend their lives doing things for people. People still sign letters "Your obedient servant," because they want to tell each other "I'm eager to do things for you." When we feel noble we hum Art Garfunkel singing, "Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down …" – presumably for you to walk over me without getting your dainty feet wet. When we feel romantic we put on the husky voice and turn into Bryan Adams singing "Everything I do – I do it for you."

It seems that the word that epitomizes being an admirable person, the word that sums up the spirit of Christmas, is for. We cook for, we buy presents for, we offer charity for, all to say we lay ourselves down for. But there's a problem here. All these gestures are generous, and kind, and in some cases sacrificial and noble. They're good gestures, warm-hearted, admirable gestures. But somehow they don't go to the heart of the problem. You give your father the gift, and the chasm still lies between you. You wear yourself out in showing hospitality, but you've never actually had the conversation with your loved ones. You make fine gestures of charity, but the poor are still strangers to you. For is a fine word, but it doesn't dismantle resentment, it doesn't overcome misunderstanding, it doesn't deal with alienation, it doesn't overcome isolation.

Most of all, for isn't the way God celebrates Christmas. God doesn't set the world right at Christmas. God doesn't shower us with good things at Christmas. God doesn't mount up blessings upon us and then get miserable and stroppy when we open them all up and fail to be sufficiently excited or surprised or grateful. For isn't what God shows us at Christmas.

In some ways we wish it was. We'd love God to make everything happy and surround us with perfect things. When we get cross with God, it's easy to feel God isn't keeping the divine side of the bargain – to do things for us now and forever.

But God shows us something else at Christmas. God speaks a rather different word. The angel says to Joseph, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'" (Matt. 1:23) And then in John's gospel, we get the summary statement of what Christmas means: "The Word became flesh and lived among [with] us" (John 1:14). It's an unprepossessing little word, but this is the word that lies at the heart of Christmas and at the heart of the Christian faith. The word is with.

Think back to the very beginning of all things. John's gospel says, "The Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God … Without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1–3). In other words, before anything else, there was a with. The with between God and the Word, or as Christians came to call it, between the Father and the Son. With is the most fundamental thing about God. And then think about how Jesus concludes his ministry. His very last words in Matthew's gospel are, "Behold, I am with you always" (28:20). In other words, "There will never be a time when I am not with." And at the very end of the Bible, when the book of Revelation describes the final disclosure of God's everlasting destiny, this is what the voice from heaven says: "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3).

We've stumbled upon the most important word in the Bible – the word that describes the heart of God and the nature of God's purpose and destiny for us. And that word is with. That's what God was in the very beginning, that's what God sought to instil in the creation of all things, that's what God was looking for in making the covenant with Israel, that's what God coming among us in Jesus was all about, that's what the sending of the Holy Spirit meant, that's what our destiny in the company of God will look like. It's all in that little word with. God's whole life and action and purpose are shaped to be with us.

In a lot of ways, with is harder than for. You can do for without a conversation, without a real relationship, without a genuine shaping of your life to accommodate and incorporate the other. The reason your Christmas present for your father is doomed is not because for is wrong, not because there's anything bad about generosity; it's because the only solution is for you and your father to be with each other long enough to hear each other's stories and tease out the countless misunderstandings and hurts that have led your relationship beyond the point of being rescued by the right Christmas present. The reason why you collapse in tears when your guests have gone home is because the hard work is finding out how you can share the different responsibilities and genuinely be with one another in the kitchen and elsewhere that make a stay of several nights a joy of with rather than a burden of for. What makes attempts at Christmas charity seem a little hollow is not that they're not genuine and helpful and kind but that what isolated and grieving and impoverished people usually need is not gifts or money but the faithful presence with them of someone who really cares about them as a person. It's the "with" they desperately want, and the "for" on its own (whether it's food, presents, or money) can't make up for the lack of that "with."

But we all fear the with, because the with seems to ask more of us than we can give. We'd all prefer to keep charity on the level of for, where it can't hurt us. We all know that more families struggle over Christmas than any other time. Maybe that's because you can spend the whole year being busy and doing things for your family, but when there's nothing else to do but be with one another you realize that being with is harder than doing for – and sometimes it's just too hard. Sometimes New Year comes as a relief as we can go back to doing for and leave aside being with for another year.

And that's why it's glorious, almost incredible, good news that God didn't settle on for. At Christmas God said unambiguously, "I am with. Behold, my dwelling is among you. I've moved into the neighborhood. I will be with you always. My name is Emmanuel, God with us." Sure, there was an element of for in Jesus' life. He was for us when he healed and taught, he was for us when he died on the cross, he was for us when he rose from the grave and ascended to heaven. These are things that only God can do and we can't do. But the power of these things God did for us lies in that they were based on his being with us. God has not abolished for. But God, this night, in becoming flesh in Jesus, has said there will never again be a for that's not based on a fundamental, unalterable, everlasting, and utterly unswerving with. That's the good news of Christmas.

And how do we celebrate this good news? By being with people in poverty and distress even when there's nothing we can do for them. By being with people in grief and sadness and loss even when there's nothing to say. By being with and listening to and walking with those we find most difficult rather than trying to fob them off with a gift or a face-saving gesture. By being still with God in silent prayer rather than rushing in our anxiety to do yet more things for God. By taking an appraisal of all our relationships and asking ourselves, "Does my doing for arise out of a fundamental commitment to be with, or is my doing for driven by my profound desire to avoid the discomfort, the challenge, the patience, the loss of control involved in being with?"

No one could be more tempted to retreat into doing for than God. God, above all, knows how exasperating, ungrateful, thoughtless and self-destructive company we can be. Most of the time we just want God to fix it, and spare us the relationship. But that's not God's way. God could have done it all alone. But God chose not to. God chose to do it with us. Even though it cost the cross. That's the wonder of Christmas. That's the amazing good news of the word with.

Introduction
God Is With Us

God is with us. These four words express the character of God, the identity of Jesus, the work of the Spirit. They are the Christian testimony about the past, witness in the present, and hope for the future. Each word offers itself as the heart of the gospel.

Thus the gospel is first and last about "God." God's nature and purpose are expressed by the three words that follow ("is with us"). No words can define God, if definition means to limit, to circumscribe, or to prescribe. God is the root, the rhyme, and the reason for all things. God is goodness, truth, and beauty. God is before all things and after all things. Without God, is not anything that is. Yet without the three words that follow, this central statement of Christian heritage, conviction, and destiny has no context, no theatre in which to reverberate, no relationship in which to matter. God does not *need* context; indeed the interrelationship of the persons of the Trinity indicates that the Godhead has an inner context of its own: all other context is secondary and dependent on God. Context is a fruit of grace.

The second word declares that the gospel is about now. God "is." In that brief statement lies faith that God is always present. For sure, God has acted and will fulfill: but most of all, God *is* – is here, is present, is now. "Is" means the incarnation, the passion, and the coming of the Spirit have abiding, not just fleeting, significance: they are past events but have permanent dynamics. Meanwhile Jesus' resurrection constitutes the "is" event par excellence: it guarantees that not even death can dismantle God's "is." Without the resurrection, the incarnation might be simply a past event – a "was" ("God was in Christ"). Without Pentecost, the Ascension might mark the conclusion of the human encounter with the living Lord. But resurrection and Pentecost ensure the definitive action of God in Christ remains a present event – an "is." God exists, and perhaps alone truly exists: all other existence is by analogy with, and by the gift of, the true being, which is God.

This is the simplicity of truth: there is no frenzy of activity – there is simply abiding existence. God is. This is the faith of Israel, the name of the God of Moses, the unflinching underpinning of reality.

These are claims long held, from the beginning, to be central to Christianity. But the third word has not always been held in such high regard as the first two – or dwelt upon quite so acutely. This book seeks imagine what theology and ethics would be like if it were. My argument abides in the "with" of God. God is with. God's whole being is shaped to be with. Being with is about presence, about participation, about partnership. It is not about eliding difference, or denying separation, or neglecting otherness. On the contrary, it is about being present in such a way that such contrasts and tensions are made visible, recognized, named, and embraced, rather than ignored, suppressed, or exploited. Being present is above all a Trinitarian condition. God is three persons in one substance. In other words, God isn't a thing, an achievement, an edifice, a piece of technology, an impressive vision, even a dazzling light, or a blazing fire. God is a relationship. God is a relationship of three persons, so wonderfully shaped toward one another, so wondrously *with* one another, that they are one, but so exquisitely diverse and distinct within that unity that they are three. With is the key to the identity of the God who is.

These three words together become focused on the fourth word: "us." This is the wonder of grace. Us – humanity, set amidst the good creation – is the object of God's attention, made subject in the miraculous word "with." This is not an exclusive choice, with losers and outsiders; it is an inclusive covenant, held with fierce intensity, as if each one were the only one. And this relationship, at the same time personal and corporate, is made permanent in the abiding affirmation of "is." This, then, is the axis of Christian faith: that God, whose being is "with" – the inner interrelationship of the three persons of the Trinity – is not just "with" within, but determines to be with externally: to be with *us*. God's whole life is shaped by the permanent resolve never to be except to *be with us*. Here is the direction, the fixed purpose, the orienting goal of the ordering of God's life: *being with us*. This, indeed, is henceforth the name of God: if we are asked who God is, what God is called, what is God's nature, what we most fundamentally answer is that God is "with us."

Each moment of salvation history bears the character of God being with us. *Creation* is God making a context in which to be with us, and a theater in which we may discover how to be with one another and with God. Humanity's *fall* distorts that creation. It interrupts God's being with us, and

ours with God and with one another, such that our lives become grievous to God, to one another and to ourselves, and God's life becomes grievous to us. The *covenant* – liberation, law, and land – crystallizes God's resolve to be with Israel, and thus to be with all peoples and the whole creation, through sustained and personal encounter. The *exile* is the season par excellence when Israel discovers that even sin, even estrangement, even loss of tangible signs of land, king, and temple, cannot break, but only refine God's resolve to be with. The *incarnation* is the disclosure of God's utter commitment to be with us, and of the grace that such an orientation is at the heart of God's identity. *Salvation* is God isolating the process by which being with became a constraint, a curse, and a threat, God finding ways to dismantle such distortions, and God restoring our being with ourselves, with one another, and with God so that it becomes an abiding blessing and an abundant joy. *Church* is being with God, one another, and ourselves, and celebrating and embodying the ways such restoration takes place. *Kingdom* names the ways God brings about this restoration sometimes regardless of, sometimes in spite of, sometimes alongside, and sometimes through the church. And *eschaton* names the final existence of God and the whole creation being with one another with all curses and threats having passed away. Thus every dimension of theology finds its telos in God being with us.

These, then, are the two dynamics that lie at the center of all things: God's perfect inner relationship, which we have just considered; and God's very life shaped to be in relationship with us through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Both are characterized by the preposition "with." The task of theology, I suggest, is to describe that "with." The task of theological ethics is to inhabit and imitate it. Such is the purpose of this book.

1

Being With

Argument

My argument is as follows. I maintain that the word with is the most important word in theology. Hence the Prologue, which articulates that conviction as best and as succinctly as I am able. This is not an Anglican theology that sacralizes the created order by claiming divine participation in it through Christ. It is an enquiry into whether with is the pervading theme that runs through Trinity, creation, incarnation, atonement, the sending of the Spirit, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

In Part I, I come from two angles to the same arrival point. In Chapter 3 I argue that the human project in the West has been to secure life against limitation in general and mortality in particular, but that such efforts have only deepened the true predicament, which is isolation. In Chapter 4 I suggest that efforts at reconciliation fail because Christians invariably approach the situation with exasperation and impatience, whereas it turns out that there is no gospel that is not reconciliation – and restored relationship is the epicenter of God's mission.

In Part II, I continue this introductory survey of the significance of with by first exploring, in Chapter 5, how with is the central theme, not just of Jesus' ministry, but of the whole scriptural narrative. I then in Chapter 6 narrow down on what I judge to be the single most important story in the Bible for grasping my argument – the parable of the Good Samaritan – and show how the way the story is read reveals people's commitments and assumptions about social engagement and their status before God. Then in Chapter 7 I offer a critique of the other three modes of engagement – working for, working with, and being for – to explain why I make the bold claims for being with that are to be found in Chapter 2.

Part III is the center of the book. Those who have perhaps read *Living Without Enemies*, and are convinced of the centrality of being with, and wish to know more what it involves and implies, might want simply to start here. Chapter 8 is the numerical and thematic heart of the argument. Here I outline eight dimensions of being with in philosophical and pastoral perspective. In the following chapter I suggest what it means to see Jesus as the embodiment of the phrase "God with us." Then in Chapter 10, Chapter 11, and Chapter 12 I explore and illustrate the ways being with has been played out in a carefully chosen range of contexts.

In Part IV, I make a start on what could well be a much larger project – to imagine the implications of being with for theology and ethics. Chapter 13 offers some pointers within some of the conventional theological loci, and Chapter 14 looks in detail at one particular approach to social engagement that I judge to have promising resonances with my argument.

In Part V, by way of summary and review, I anticipate what I expect to be the two most consistent criticisms of my argument. In Chapter 15 I set out what being with means in relation to more conventional working-for and working-with notions of justice and in the process offer a model by which one may set these different approaches side-by-side as complementary forms of engagement. Then in Chapter 16 I look at suffering and consider ways in which being with clarifies what is at stake in Christian witness in the face of suffering. In the end, being with rests on a renewed notion and practice of prayer.

The book concludes in the Epilogue as it began in the Prologue, with a sermon: this time with a simple, tangible encounter that seeks to epitomize the hopefulness and humble spirit of the book, and affirms that being with one another and with God are not, ultimately, two different things.

I should add a note on style, assumptions, and forebears.

Style

I have published conventional academic monographs and works in a more homiletic vein, introductory works to ethics and other subjects, and more provocative and exploratory works in new areas. This book includes elements of all of these. I am a scholar and a practitioner, a writer and a speaker, a pastor and a broadcaster, a theologian and a priest, a preacher and an academic. It became clear in the writing that this book was going to find it difficult to settle in one genre alone. I trust this comes across as an asset rather than a defect.

The reason the style varies is that I am trying to do several things in the same book. The early chapters are seeking to persuade the reader that there really is a practical and theological problem with the way social engagement is conventionally carried out. They make this argument in a direct and somewhat popular style. I am not seeking to amass data to compel agreement; I am setting out to capture the reader's imagination to see the world a whole different way. The theological and practical arguments cannot, in the end, be disentangled from one another, so for example in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 they are intermingled. Likewise I see the move to being with fundamentally as a conversion, and so I begin and end the book with a prologue and epilogue that suggest a whole outlook on life that I do not finally know how to communicate other than in a homiletic genre.

The surveys of biblical and theological themes are similarly not intended to offer comprehensive analysis of a century of scholarly writing on the subjects they cover. Instead they seek to paint broad brushstrokes that locate anomalies, highlight key questions, and point to fertile areas of development. Almost any chapter in the book could have developed into a book in its own right, so the challenge has been to avoid digging down into exhaustive detail but instead to keep the perspective broad and general. When it comes to the central chapters in the book in Part III, the method changes somewhat. The most significant chapter is Chapter 8, because there I do my best to articulate precisely what being with involves – and here I draw on a significant tradition including such figures as Gabriel Marcel, Iris Murdoch, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Lévinas, Giorgio Agamben, and Martin Buber. This is perhaps the only chapter in the book where I am seeking to be definitive rather than polemical or suggestive, and in order to be definitive I need to establish roots among those who have sought to be definitive before me. The other chapters in Part III are largely illustrative: the broad principles of being with are fairly easily grasped, and my sense in the main task is then to show how deeply being with is grounded in scripture and to illustrate what its commitments imply in particular contexts.

Readers will already have noticed that the language of with and for, and the categories of working for, being for, working with and being with, pervade the book. I do not put such terms within speech marks, nor do I italicize them. This may take a bit of getting used to, but it is in keeping with my aspiration to make such terms part of regular theological and ethical vocabulary. When I use a term such as working for adjectivally I hyphenate it to avoid misunderstanding – hence "a working-for solution." They are not watertight categories, and the book is not designed to chase everything but

being with out of town; but I hope the reader will quickly find they offer a helpful lens to assess ethical and theological questions.

Is therefore the whole argument of the book an exaggeration? Does healthy social engagement involve a sober balance of all the four approaches rather than a heavy steer toward one of them? I have three ways of answering this question. First, no: a request to bear in mind that this is a book primarily concerned with the plight of those who by any conventional social assessment are in a lot of trouble. Thus the three illustrative chapters are concerned not with suburban docility but with chaotic homelessness, chronic and often acute ill-health, and subjection to political tyranny, respectively. These are invariably contexts in which working-for approaches have failed or at least proved inadequate. To say it is time to consider an alternative approach is not so very radical or reckless.

Second, yes: sometimes one does need to exaggerate to get a point across, and if I offer vivid examples I am doing so to draw the reader in to what is in the end a subtler argument. In particular I stress the differences between being with and working with, even though I am well aware that there are often significant and appropriate crossovers between the two, and that working with is often the only way to gain trust in order to attempt to be with. I stress the differences in order not to confuse the necessary and the tactical with the eschatological and the teleological. Being with is, fundamentally, a teleological claim about the ultimate purpose and character of God.

Third, yes – but in a different vein: I would suggest the whole of the gospel is an exaggeration – the whole call to discipleship and nature of the church is an exaggeration; attempts by scholars and pastors to bring the message under control and make it digestible are often distortions of the character of God. God's original decision never to be except to be with us in Christ is an absurd exaggeration of what many would prefer to deal with: a more benevolent and understated divine orientation toward our well-being. If this argument is an attempt to imitate and ponder the exaggerated character of God, then so be it. That is what theological ethics is for.

Some Assumptions

This book makes a number of working assumptions, and is most easily read alongside other works that make similar assumptions.

One is that there is no impermeable divide between doctrine and ethics. I understand doctrine as an understanding of the action of God, and ethics,

particularly theological ethics, as an understanding of the most appropriate response of humankind to the action of God. It will already be clear that this book is designed to be a prime example of theological ethics – that is, a study in how human beings may best respond to the nature of God's action in creation, the purpose of God's action in making the covenant with Israel, the manner of God's action in Christ, the pattern of God's action in calling the church, and the destiny of God's action in the final consummation of the eschaton. Being with is, I believe, a succinct term that summarizes the nature and destiny of humankind and the creation before God. Being with is the dynamic of the inner relations of the Trinity – God being with God; it is the essence of God being with us in Christ; and it is the fulfilment of the Spirit's work in our being with one another. The last of these is the sphere generally known as ethics; but it is a sphere whose content is shaped by the previous two.

A corresponding assumption is that there is no impermeable divide between Jesus and ethics. In the terms of this study, one can regard the longstanding divide – between those who see Jesus as a model for Christian ethics and those who do not – as a tussle between working with and working for. We may perceive the Jesus-as-a-model view as a working-with approach, in that it tends to see a significant part of Jesus' ministry and mission as establishing a template for human flourishing. The reaction against this approach, often based on a judgment about its naïvety in the face of human sin, tends toward a working-for model, since it sees Jesus' cross (and sometimes his resurrection) as delivering humankind from the slavery of sin and death, thus achieving something to which humankind could not have aspired on its own. Being with introduces a new element into this longstanding debate. In some ways being with is an extreme version of working with, and subject to many of the same criticisms; but it also has its own criticisms of working with – and of course vice versa.

Another similar assumption that may be noted more briefly is that the inner life of the Trinity may be drawn upon as a source for ethics. Some theologians regard this move as speculative or implausible. However, in view of my contention that being with represents the nature of God as well as the origin and destiny of God's purposes, it is a necessary and essential move.

We could call these three claims assumptions about God, about Jesus, and about the Trinity, respectively. My final assumption is about the church. This is a study in ecclesial ethics, a term I have identified and described in detail elsewhere.[1] By ecclesial ethics, I mean not ethics for everyone, as the field of ethics is widely understood; I believe such ethics is flawed because it

is often insufficiently mindful of its social location, because it concentrates overmuch on moments of decision rather than the development of character, and because it makes assumptions about what "everyone" thinks that are empirically and philosophically unsustainable. Neither do I mean ethics for the excluded, as I characterize an approach that foregrounds social location and seeks to prioritize the reassertion of hidden and suppressed voices. While I have much common ground with this approach, and for all its language of solidarity, I fear it can be as inclined to a working-for mentality as what it sets out to supplant. Instead I seek to do ethics with the church – with the body of people that sees itself as occupying a time between the full revelation of God's purpose in Christ and the fulfillment of that purpose in the eschaton, aspiring to imitate the former and anticipate the latter.

My work on being with attracts two principal lines of (consequential) ethical criticism. One is that it is too soft – that it does not stand up to evil, expose power relations, or make the world a better place. The other is that it is too hard – it asks too much of people, it is too difficult, it requires sacrifice, it is too uncompromising. It strikes me that these are the two principal (consequential) criticisms of Jesus. And, on a good day, the two principal criticisms of the church.

Forebears

An attempt to survey the historical field would be a major project, so here in a spirit of humility I simply seek to register my awareness and/or indebtedness to many from different traditions who have taken up these questions in their own discipleship. I believe the place to start is the New Testament and specifically the gospels; and in Chapter 5 suggest that the main contours are already set in shape by the Old Testament and especially the themes of Sabbath, covenant, and exile. But during the period before the division of the churches perhaps the key figures are the Cappadocian theologians of the fourth century who articulated what I would call God being with God as Trinity – what has sometimes been called the social doctrine of the Trinity. It is hard to imagine what I describe as the dimensions of a Trinitarian being with outside the work done by Basil, Macrina, and the two Gregorys in Cappadocia.

The next place to turn is the lively medieval debates on voluntary poverty and mendicancy.[2] Here, for example, we see Thomas Aquinas basing his economic teachings on the virtues of humility, patient receptivity, and

hopeful trust.[3] We see also the way Francis of Assisi renounced property and thus became immune from disputes over property rights, offering a living alternative to the growth of the market economy, and an embodiment of reciprocal charity in a world becoming dominated by the contract.[4]

Since the Reformation different strands of the church have developed their own characteristic forms of encounter. My own tradition, the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, has sought to make the language of incarnation its own. The document that epitomizes this more than any other is *Lux Mundi*.[5] In this volume eleven Oxford theologians sought to affirm the incarnation as the central doctrine of Anglican theology. While this became associated with the negative aspects of incarnational theology (reducing the significance of the cross and investing the status quo, particularly the establishment of the Church of England, with almost revelatory authority) it gave the efforts of Anglo-Catholic priests in slum parishes an articulation of the theological aspirations of their social commitments. Thus Anglicanism, particularly in England, where the parish system is so significant, has continued to be closely identified with incarnational understandings of mission. While other traditions stemming from the magisterial Reformation have issued in forms of incarnational mission, it is most associated with Anglicanism because Anglicanism, particularly since *Lux Mundi*, has stressed the theological, as well as missional, significance of the incarnation.

Two twentieth-century figures may be taken to represent Roman Catholic practice in this tradition. Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, founded in 1933, are most associated with radical hospitality and the daily practice of the works of mercy. This movement is a wide-ranging attempt to renarrate theology and social engagement. It believes, for example, that "True prayer does not consist in asking favors from a king-God, but in giving alms to a beggar-God." God is, in short, a beggar. "The game of freedom then is not how to maximize use of the resources God has entrusted to us to prove ourselves good stewards, but how to give ourselves in love to the One who grasps at nothing."[6] Mother Teresa of Calcutta is an iconic figure who may still be regarded as part of the same Catholic encounter with Christ in the face of the poor. Her Missionaries of Charity have, since 1950, sought to encounter the hungry, naked, homeless, crippled, blind, lepers, all who feel unwanted, unloved, or uncared for throughout society, those who have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone; in particular it has sought from the beginning to help those "who have lived like animals die like angels – loved and wanted."[7]

Among the resurgence of evangelical interest in what is often now called incarnational ministry, a particular contemporary movement, particularly involving young adults, is known as New Monasticism. Like Catholic Worker houses there is much emphasis on face-to-face engagement with disadvantaged people, hospitality, and communal life. There is also in many cases a commitment to shared prayer and contemplation. Other features include relocation to society's margins, lament for racial divisions and active pursuit of a just reconciliation, and support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples.[8]

These are among the ecclesial strands that inform this study. But just as significant in understanding the context of the argument are the professional culture that I describe in Chapter 3 and Chapter 14 and the growth and development of international humanitarian aid that I discuss in Chapter 7.[9] I regard the theological assumptions listed earlier as prior to the ecclesial and humanitarian forebears cited here in comprehending my project; but I do not for a moment pretend I am the first to discuss these subjects, still less live courageously in the light of them, and so this section has named some of those with whom I anticipate many of the readers of this book will already be in conversation.

Notes

1. Samuel Wells and Ben Quash, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): especially 180–206. A caricature of this aspect of contemporary theology sees it as absorbed in the inner workings of the church, and unaware or uninterested in justice, poverty, or social exclusion. I have never seen why that is assumed to be so. It may be that some who have read deeply in Aristotle, Karl Barth, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Howard Yoder, and Stanley Hauerwas, let alone Thomas Aquinas, Ludwig Wittgenstein, or John Milbank have remained in a somewhat select academic culture. I started reading such people because they seemed to address better than anyone else the questions that were arising for me in seeking to address poverty and disadvantage in a largely post-Christian context; I find, all these years later, that they still do. I see this book as a humble contribution to the field of ecclesial ethics which may in some small way correct the wrongful assumption that the field has nothing to say about poverty or justice.
2. In these debates I have been guided by Christopher A. Franks, *He Became Poor: The Poverty of Christ and Aquinas' Economic Teachings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009); Kelly Johnson, *The Fear of Beggars: Stewardship and Poverty in*

Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); and Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

3. Christopher A. Franks, *He Became Poor*: 2.
4. Kelly Johnson, *The Fear of Beggars*: 13–69. Johnson also points out the problem that arose when Francis' approach became too popular. The question "What if everybody did it?" is one I have been posed many times when I have spoken around the USA, Canada, and Britain about being with; my answer has always been, "If I thought there was the remotest chance of my proposals being widely adopted I might speak slightly differently."
5. *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, edited by Charles Gore (London: John Murray, 1902).
6. Kelly Johnson, *The Fear of Beggars*: 198. The first quotation comes from the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Peter Maurin.
7. Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: A Complete Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997): 55.
8. Rutba House, *Schools for Conversion: Twelve Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005): xii–xiii.
9. This last is explored in a large number of studies, of which I have found the following the most helpful: William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006); David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003); Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); Dean Karlan and Jacob Appel, *More Than Good Intentions: How a New Economics is Helping to Solve Global Poverty* (New York: Dutton Penguin, 2011); Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2

A Nazareth Manifesto

Being With and its Alternatives

The following treatment takes for granted that the reader is willing to *see* poverty, in this case in the form of people who sleep outside, and believes such poverty requires of them a personal response.[1] (It assumes that homelessness epitomizes poverty because it is a particular kind of distress that brings together hardship in the past, powerlessness in the present, and poor prospects for the future.) A quick survey of perceptions might illustrate why such is not always the case.[2]

Many people see a person who is homeless, and see before them (1) a personal tragedy. Here is someone who is more than likely struggling with addiction, who may be dealing with various kinds of mental illness, who may have relied on having a structure for their life through being in the armed forces or perhaps having had a period in prison; somehow, at this moment in their lives, the trapdoor between them and the abyss has given way and they find themselves on the streets. (2) A related but slightly different point of view sees a person who is homeless, and thinks, "It appears I've come late onto the scene of a crime." Here, it seems, is someone who's most likely been the victim of abuse. They may as a child have been a tool in a grown-up's game, or at the very least have been subject to neglect. As an adult they may have been assaulted, been thrown out of the house, and been made to live in such fear that sleeping outside was significantly preferable to the threat that lurked at home.

But there are contrary views. The opposite of personal tragedy is (3) public policy failure. For many people, to focus on individuals and their poignant stories is to overlook the larger structural and systemic issues, which include unemployment, the quantity of available low-cost housing, the closure of mental institutions, and the eradication of the safety net around