

## Lovers of the Dead: An Ode to the Not Yet

We pray direct, immediate prayers in the Vineyard and sometimes get direct, immediate results. Many times, though, we are left with no apparent answer. On these occasions, we are prone to talk about the kingdom not always breaking in, about the already of the kingdom being balanced by the not yet of the kingdom. This explanation puts the kingdom clearly on the side of the already and leaves the not yet as an inferior state, the leading negative getting the emphasis. In his presentation to this conference a year ago, Jon Stovell argued that such descriptions tilt us out of the radical middle and fail to recognize how both the cross and resurrection of Jesus are paradigmatic for kingdom expression on this side of the eschaton. I want to suggest that we can carry this a bit further and describe the work of the kingdom being done in the not yet *qua* the not yet. 2 Cor. 4.10-12 states: "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." Not only is life doing work here, death is doing work too, work that can be done in no other way. I find a helpful description of the nature of this work in Kierkegaard.

In *Either/Or*, A writes three essays to the *symparaneikromenoi* ("fellowship of the dead") which critique how we understand and cope with tragedy. The point for us in these essays is that in praying for those with a need, we are perhaps more often filled with what A calls "sympathetic anxiety," that our concerns may be even in moments of intercession overly self-focused.<sup>1</sup> This, of course, only states the matter negatively (as

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<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 176.

Kierkegaard's pseudonyms often do), but it makes an interesting set up for what Kierkegaard writes (in his own voice) in *Works of Love*, where the most selfless, freest, most faithful form of love is love for the dead, which is most appropriate for people who believe in resurrection. The main argument in *Works of Love* is that self-interest detracts from love. Love develops, love is purified, where reciprocation is not a concern, where fulfillment does not enter into the equation.

I want to extend this argument to the other two theological virtues. Hope only exists where its fulfillment is not yet seen. Faith/trust is specifically a risk into the not yet. Thus it is inaccurate to say the kingdom breaks in when a healing occurs, when we get a glimpse of the already. The kingdom has come and grows and is perfected in faith, hope, and love, which find their highest and truest expression in the not yet.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard wrote.

If you love one dead, then remember him lovingly, and learn from him, precisely as one who is dead; learn the kindness of thought, the definiteness in expression, the strength in unchangeableness, the pride in life which you would not be able to learn as well from any human being, even the most highly gifted...Remember one dead and learn in just this way to love the living disinterestedly, freely, faithfully... Remember one who is dead, and in addition to the blessing which is inseparable from this work of love, you will also have the best guidance to understanding life; that it is one's duty to love the men we do not see, but also those we do see.<sup>2</sup>

This is what it means to be citizens of the kingdom: we are lovers of the dead. We are lovers of the not yet.

#### *About Kierkegaard's Oeuvre*

Let me back up and say a few words about Kierkegaard's body of work. There is a basic division between works he published in his own name, which contain very

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<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 346.

direct prose versus works he published under a variety of pseudonyms (sometimes even collections of pseudonyms with an equally made-up editor), which are anything but straightforward. The works of the direct authorship set for us the ideal, the way things should be, what we should aspire to. We should have a difficult time identifying with what we read, we should not readily see those things manifest in our lives as they are as they are the ultimate, perhaps beyond what is attainable in this life. They are at least expressions of the already, perhaps expressions of the eschaton. “While Kierkegaard wishes it to be difficult for us to see ourselves reflected in the true love he describes in *Works of Love*, we are easily to find our own vices mirrored in the gnarled, misguided, and maddeningly confused characters of his pseudonymous, more narrative texts. Interwoven into *Works of Love* are perceptive sketches of the other side of human involvement wherein love begins or becomes something muddled or menacing.”<sup>3</sup>

The pseudonymous works are the ones that describe the human condition as is. There we do not find Kierkegaard explaining how he wishes things were or would like things to be. Instead he offers painfully accurate critiques of how we actually are. The stand-in authors themselves are often the fullest expression of those critiques. We find less of Kierkegaard’s philosophy in those works, but at the same time we should find a lot that we can identify with; we should recognize ourselves in those descriptive works. But make no mistake, Kierkegaard makes all this hard, and he does so on purpose. Both confusion and humility are important for his overall project and without them we will miss much of what Kierkegaard has for us. To read *Works of Love* without the narrative entanglement in the authorship might lead us to commit one of two errors. We might over-estimate either our capacity to love or our capacity to repent. Reading

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*, 49.

*Works of Love* with the authorship helps to amplify Kierkegaard's call to discomfiture."<sup>4</sup>

In the fellowship of the dead from *Either/Or* and the lovers of the dead from *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard gives us two related typologies that I think can help us better think through our already/not yet construct.

*The already and the not yet*

Last year in Anaheim, Jon Stovell argued that our understanding of the already/not yet has primarily been formed in terms of inaugurated eschatology. He said, "At its core, inaugurated eschatology is a form of eschatological dualism. Despite the complexity of their arrangement and relationship, the present and future ages remain fundamentally contrasted and opposed in inaugurated eschatology."<sup>5</sup> Stovell found that, "inaugurated eschatology fits very well with the dualistic strain that runs through New Testament theology. Indeed, its complex, "already, but not yet" dualistic structure provides a nuanced and profound account of the New Testament's depiction of the struggle of good versus evil across the history of salvation, and this is much to be valued."<sup>6</sup> Stovell rightly locates the source of this thinking by quoting Ladd:

We have seen that at the heart of Jesus' mission was a spiritual struggle with the powers of evil. In Jesus' person and mission the Kingdom of God was conquering the kingdom of Satan. John indicates that this struggle extends to the cross. The hour of death meant that "the ruler of this world" tries to engulf Jesus. His betrayal by Judas is described as an act motivated by the devil (6:70; 13:2, 27) Yet the death of Jesus means that the ruler of this world is "cast out" (Jn. 12:31; see also 16:11) Somehow, in a way the Evangelist does not try to describe, the death of Jesus is both an act of Satan and an act in which Jesus wins the victory over Satan.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>5</sup> Stovell, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Stovell, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Stovell, 6.

I find Stovell's assessment accurate and also his lament that Ladd does not press beyond the dualism. But I want to suggest that the path beyond the dualism is right there in the Johannine account of Jesus' struggle with the ruler of this world. The problem with the dualism is its lack of a middle term. Is the past on one side, with the present and future on the other? Are the present and future conflated? Or does the present oscillate past-to-future-and-back-again? I want to argue that in terms of chronology, what the Fourth Gospel gives us is not dualistic, it is comprehensive. What appears to be missing from Ladd's examination of these passages is the shift in tense from future to present to perfect. This is a key move in the development of the Johannine narrative. In John 12.31, the ruler will be cast out; the battle is future tense. In 14.30, the ruler is coming, the battle moves to the present tense. And in 16.11, the ruler has been condemned, the *aktionsart* has moved to the perfect tense, before Jesus has even been arrested. The kingdom has come, the kingdom is coming, the kingdom will come. The already names the past tense, the kingdom has come. The not yet names the future, the kingdom will come. These poles held in dialectical tension leave us with the existent present - the kingdom is coming. And despite Ladd's claim, the action does not hinge on any action of the ruler, but only on the obedience of Jesus, as is made clear in 14.31 where the action is in the present. The kingdom has come (perfect tense) and the kingdom will come (future tense) but both of these lie beyond our control or influence. But the kingdom is here now, and as with Jesus so with us, the kingdom comes into the present by obedience. We can learn about a key impediment to obedience (and a wrong approach to the already) from the fellowship of the dead. We can learn an important feature of obedience (i.e., a necessary approach to the not yet) from the lovers of the dead.

*The fellowship of the dead*

In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin Compson's father tells him that all tragedy is second-hand, that humans can only experience tragedy through someone else. This is a fair description of the *symparanekromenoi* - the fellowship of the dead - in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. The fellowship of the dead seek to "sympathetically enter into and perhaps identify with" the reflective sorrow of the victims of tragedies.<sup>8</sup> They take delight in this, since "no passion is as wild as the passion of sympathy," they "arise in the middle of the night like robbers [and] risk everything" to attain "sympathetic anxiety."<sup>9</sup> Anxiety names something specific, something key for what I am up to today. "Anxiety is essentially different from sorrow, [A claims], in that it is determined by reflection, through which it separates itself from its object. [It reflects] on the past and the future, whereas sorrow lies in the present."<sup>10</sup> Their intentional unhappiness is achieved precisely by avoiding the present. A claims:

The unhappy one is the person who in one way or another has his ideal, the substance of his life, the plenitude of his consciousness, his essential nature, outside himself. The unhappy one is the person who is always absent from himself, never present to himself. But in being absent, one obviously can be in either past or future time. The whole territory of the unhappy consciousness is thereby adequately circumscribed.<sup>11</sup>

Absence is also a misplacement in time or an inability to be present, as A explains: "So, then, the unhappy one is absent. But one is absent when one is in either past or future time. If, generally, only the person who is present to himself is happy,

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<sup>8</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 294.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 176.

<sup>10</sup> Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 290.

<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 222.

then these people, insofar as they are only hoping or only recollecting, are in a certain sense certainly unhappy individualities."<sup>12</sup> A further explains:

This is due, on the one hand, to his continually hoping for that which should be recollected; his hope is continually being disappointed, but he discovers that this disappointment occurs not because his objective is pushed further ahead but because he is past his goal, because it has already been experienced or should have been experienced and thus has passed over into recollection. On the other hand, he is continually recollecting that for which he should hope, because he has already encompassed the future in thought, has already experienced it in thought, and he recollects what he has experienced instead of hoping for it. Thus, what he is hoping for lies behind him; what he recollects lies ahead of him. His life is not backwards but is turned the wrong way in two directions. His life knows no repose and has no content. He is not present to himself in the moment, nor is he present to himself in the future, for the future has been experienced, nor in past time, for the past has not yet come. He cannot grow old, for he has never been young; he cannot become young, for he has already grown old; in a sense he cannot die, for indeed he has not lived; in a sense he cannot live, for indeed he is already dead. He cannot love, for love is always present tense, and he has no present time, no future, no past, and yet he has a sympathetic nature.<sup>13</sup>

The fellowship of the dead seeks out tragedy because they want to experience the attendant anxiety. They want to sample the passion, the emotion, enjoying it as only one standing outside tragedy could. Theirs is an entirely selfish sympathy. This is, of course, an extreme caricature, just as Kierkegaard intends. Still, I think we can see something of ourselves in this. It may be the case that sometimes as we pray for others we are attending more to our own anxiety, our own second-hand experience of their tragedy. I am not suggesting that we take pleasure in that as the *symparanekromenoi* do, but I am suggesting that perhaps sometimes our motivation is a need to see something happen. A Vineyard pastor recently described the already as the 'thrill of victory' and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 225-6.

the not yet as the 'agony of defeat.' If we approach praying for others with this mindset, then I would suggest we are preoccupied with our own anxiety.

*Lovers of the dead*

The antithesis of the fellowship of the dead are the lovers of the dead. The one who loves another who has died cannot feel anxiety, the beloved is beyond anxious reach. Any love that can enjoy reciprocation runs the risk of being infected by the selfishness of the *symparanekromenoi*. Christian love must be the opposite, as paradoxically it is love via command: "Thou shalt love." The paradox of commanding love, commanding that which cannot be commanded, but only given freely. This is the depth and height of Kierkegaard's paradox, where his dialectic finds its clearest, most indissoluble expression. This is the radical middle at its most radical, most centered. It is commanded because it is not yet here. It is love, the essential nature of God, of existence itself, because it is already here. "It is one of the basic aims of all his writings to rejuvenate Christianity into what it was supposed to have been during St. Paul's times: a scandal to the Jews and a folly to the Greeks. The scandal is Kierkegaard's Christian paradox," the paradox of commanded love.<sup>14</sup>

Love of the dead is the most pure love precisely because reciprocation is removed. The lover has nothing to gain, not even the thrill of anxiety, no self-concern. As Adorno explains, "one may most accurately summarize Kierkegaard's doctrine of love by saying that he demands that love behave towards all men as if they were dead. [*Works of Love*] culminates in the speech, 'how to think with love of those who have passed away.' There is good reason to regard this speech as the one of the most important pieces he ever wrote. The death-like aspect of Kierkegaard's love comprises

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<sup>14</sup> Adorno, 419.



the best and the worst of his philosophy.”<sup>15</sup> The enemy of Christian love is preference, any attempt to choose the object of love based on reciprocal qualities in the other. The only proper object of Christian love is the neighbor, the one met by accident, which for Kierkegaard opens the way for providence or ‘governance.’ Kierkegaard explains: “When you open the door behind which you have prayed to God and walk out, the first man whom you see is the neighbor whom thou shalt love.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, Christians should actively pursue this accidental providence. Kierkegaard encourages us to, “put oneself in the place where one may be used by governance.”<sup>17</sup>

And we must be clear, this sort of love does not make sense in the modern world. Adorno seems frustrated with how incommensurate Kierkegaard’s prescription is for modernity: “The neighbor no longer exists. In modern society, the relations of men have been ‘reified’ to such an extent that the neighbor cannot behave spontaneously to the neighbor for longer than an instant. Nor does the mere disposition of love suffice to help the neighbor.”<sup>18</sup> This is where we often are, this is why we often pray, because we want to help, we need to help, we need to know that the same ill-fate will not befall us. The world Adorno describes is a world of anxiety. The fellowship of the dead feast on anxiety. The lover of the dead fasts from anxiety.

The source of the anxiety the *symparanekromenoi* crave is the potentiality of time, what we can express as an eagerness for the already to break in against the not yet. It is the self-concern that attends us when we pray for another. This is the reason we have an excuse ready when our anxiety rises, when the already remains unrevealed.

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<sup>15</sup> Adorno, 420.

<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>18</sup> Adorno, 423.

But the lover of the dead has fully embraced the not yet. She prays not because she needs the already to break in, not because of the anxiety, but because she loves the not yet. "Love for the dead is the one which most rigidly excludes the reciprocity of love, it is love absolutely void of any barter, of any 'requital,' and therefore, the only unmutilated love permitted by our society. The paradox that the only true love is love for the dead is the perfect expression of our situation."<sup>19</sup>

The not yet is the perfecter of love. The not yet is the purifier of faith. The not yet is the protector of hope. The not yet grows the kingdom. The already enjoys the fruit of the not yet's labor. The already and the not yet are the poles of the dialectic. The kingdom is the paradox that only exists in their tension. The not yet is not the agony of defeat. It is not the absence of the kingdom. It is the *sine qua non* of the kingdom. To love purely is to love the dead is to love the not yet. Only in love of the dead, love of the not yet, is love purified of self and the already made possible, not as negation of the not yet, but as affirmation that the kingdom is there too. Kierkegaard affirms: "Truly, if you wish to ascertain, how much love is in you or in another person: watch only the behavior to a dead one... that we think lovingly of those who passed away is a deed of truly unselfish love."<sup>20</sup>

We tend to think about the power showing up and performing some miraculous thing, some evidence that the already is breaking in. That is how we commonly describe what is going on. This gives the indication that power is on the side of the already and that the not yet is powerless. But there is power in the not yet. As evidence, I submit to you the power of death. We all know that death is very powerful.

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<sup>19</sup> Adorno, 429.

<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 355.

Try as we might we cannot ultimately break free from its grip. It has a power over us more than any other force in life, even taxes. But it is not a wholly negative power. It is a power in its very powerlessness. There is power in what looks to us as powerless. As evidence, I submit to you the cross. In the embrace of death, in the foregoing of all forms of power as we think we know them, Jesus becomes completely powerless, and in that powerlessness he conquers sin, death, and the world. The not yet operates in this mode of power, in the power of the cross. As people called to live cruciform lives, this is the standard mode of power in which we operate. We give up power, we embrace the cross, when we risk to trust, when we dare to hope, when we submit to love.

When I look at someone like Robby Dawkins I see a person who is in love with the not yet, who acts in faith embracing anxiety and then acts in love, letting anxiety go. When we get to a place where we can love those who cannot or will not love us back, whether they are dead, disconsolate, or reprobate, then the kingdom has come. Our sympathetic anxiety can leave us unable to sit with those who suffer, we feel like we have to do something, we have to pray, we have to fix it, because their tragedy could become our tragedy. We know the kingdom is come when we can sit with those who suffer, when we can be present to tragedy, when we can love the dead. Sometimes those who suffer need healing, need something to be fixed; other times we are called to suffer with those who suffer. Only lovers of the dead, only lovers of the not yet, can fulfill this kingdom call.

#### *Ode to the not yet*

Just as revelation is dependent on hiddenness, the already is dependent on the not yet. Faith does not grow in the already. Hope does not exist in the already. Love is

not perfected in the already. Only in the not yet are the theological virtues - the pillars of the kingdom - formed. Those most in love with the not yet, those most free of self-conscious anxiety, are precisely those who usher in the already. Those who have are given more. Those who are anxious about what little they have lose even that. The already is the kingdom. The not yet is the kingdom, not the failure of the kingdom. As I noted from the Fourth Gospel and the command to love, the kingdom comes by obedience. Only disobedience marks a failure of the kingdom, because the rule of the kingdom extends no further than the end of obedience to the command of God that comes to each of us in our particularity. More than universal, more than individual, the command of God is absolute. Universal duty easily explains away all hard demands. Individual conscience leads to imitation after our own fashion. But the absolute command of God coming to us in our particularity only allows for two responses: obedience or not. And what is the abiding nature of this command in all its absolute particularities? To love purely. To love selflessly. To love cruciform. To love as one loves the dead. To love the not yet.

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