

Worship in a Violent World

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I have been asked to talk to you about Worship in a violent world. As though there has ever been any other. There hasn't. It is only because of the introduction into our midst of glimpses of a world, not yet our own, where all is peace that we are able to look at our world and refer to it as "violent", rather than simply normal. The discovery that might is might, a frightening aberration for which we can take some responsibility, rather than right, a natural part of the order of things which just tends to run away with us, is a hugely complex insight whose consequences we haven't yet worked out.

What I would like to do with you today is to stand back and ask what it is that allows Christians to use a horrid word taken from the world of violence such as "worship"; what we mean by it when we do use it; and what indeed do we do that counts as "worship".

In 1215, in the course of condemning some of the opinions of Abbot Joachim of Fiore, the fourth Lateran Council made this striking remark:

"Between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying a greater dissimilitude¹"

This remark, sometimes casually referred to as the "maior dissimilitudo" is much more important than it seems. It is one of the great bulwarks against idolatry in the western ecclesiastical tradition. It means for instance that when we take the word "god", a perfectly common pagan word (like "Theos", derived from "Zeus") and part of the world of violence which characterizes the cult of divinities, what we mean when we apply that word to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is much more unlike a "god" than it is like it. Or if you like, the word "god" is a deeply misleading starting place for us with which to begin to talk about God, but the one we have which is least inadequate.

Now I would like to suggest that the weight of this observation is not merely that it is a smart philosophical idea concerning how rational animals use language, but that there is behind it a very, very important theological notion concerning what it looks like for this rational animal to be reached by the God who is not an object in our universe, and thus for talking about whom all our language is bound to be, to a great extent, improper.

This notion of the "greater dissimilarity" presupposes that God likes us so much that he has, over time, made available in our midst a way to disentangle us from the mess we inhabit, before we even knew that it was a mess, and instead has invited us to share with God, at the same level as ourselves, in making something entirely different, together. It is this "liking us even in the midst of the mess" which is what enables us

¹ Denzinger/Schönmetzer 806

to talk about a “maior dissimilitudo”, because it means that God takes us *starting from where we are*, with *our* words to do with god, and worship, and sacrifice, and love and enables us to turn them into something quite else, something which is not full of the fear, ambivalence, violence and frenzy which characterize those words in their ordinary usage. What we are enabled to turn them into is something which is itself much more unlike those words than it is like them, but we find that we are not lying when we say that they are, for instance, true God, true worship, true sacrifice, true love.

Now I suggest that there is a good shorthand term to describe this process whereby someone takes us, starting from where we are, and slowly and gently completely undoes our mindset, starting with the one we find ourselves in, and gives us a completely different mindset such that from the “new place” it looks as though we are in a completely different space from the old, even though there is in fact a genuine organic continuity between the new and the old. The shorthand term is “subversion from within” and I would like to suggest to you that to the theological term “analogy”, which is what the “maior dissimilitudo” is about, there corresponds the anthropological process of “subversion from within”. In other words, it is only if there is a rational way of sitting within the process by which the true meaning of the word can come to be separated from its normal meaning that we can inhabit the “maior dissimilitudo” and thus begin to talk in a way that is other than entirely misleading about the true meaning of “God”, “worship”, “sacrifice” and so on.

All of that is to enable me to come back to the question of “Worship in a violent world”. If what I have been saying is true, we can now begin to reframe this question: worship is a perfectly normal way of being within this violent world, and is part of its violence. The really interesting question is: what does the “subversion from within” look like, and how did it happen, by which we come to be able to talk about the True Worship of the True God. And here is the catch: if the True Worship of the True God looks like the worship of a god, or if they look more like each other than unlike, then we have fooled ourselves. We have short-circuited our process of living with the “maior dissimilitudo” and we have failed to allow the ordinary notion to be subverted from within. In short we have been lazy, and settled for more of the same with a different name.

So I will invite you this evening to share with me in a little attempt to inhabit the “maior dissimilitudo”, the strangeness, the unlike-ness, the surprising-ness of what is meant by Christian worship, in the hopes that this dwelling in strangeness will enable us to understand a little more what we do when we engage in worship.

For the sake of a convenient peg on which to hang things, I’m going to look at what I call the Nuremberg and the un-Nuremberg. I should perhaps stress that I’m using a Nuremberg Rally as an example merely because so many of the different elements of worship flow together in this one example. We could look instead at the same elements in different places, football matches, celebrity cults, raves, initiation hazings, newspaper sales techniques and so on. My point about a Nuremberg Rally is not that it is uniquely awful, but that it is particularly convenient. The liturgical organisers of the Nuremberg rallies knew exactly what they were doing, and did it remarkably well. You bring people together and you unite them in worship. You provide regular, rhythmic music, and marching. You enable them to see lots of people in uniform, people who have already lost a certain individuality and become symbols. You give

them songs to sing. You build them up with the reason for their togetherness, a reason based on a common racial heritage. You inflame them with tales of past woe and reminders of past confusion when they were caused to suffer by some shame being imposed upon them, the tail-end of which woe is still in their midst. You keep them waiting and the pressure building up. All this gradually serves to take people out of themselves; the normally restrained become passionate, unfriendly neighbours find themselves looking at each other anew in the light of the growing “Bruderschaft”. Then, after the build up, the Führer appears, preferably brought in by means of a helicopter or airplane which has been seen from beneath by the gradually effervescing crowd, and before long, the apotheosis takes place, and he is in their midst. They are already riveted, the waiting helped prepare that, they are united in fascination with this extraordinary person, to whom they have handed over the task of being the chief liturgist. And he does not disappoint. With a few deft words and gestures he conjures up the mood of those present, pointing to the huge gathering as a sign of a new unity which is overcoming the pains and humiliations of the past, pains and humiliations caused by enemies from afar, and more important, by readily identifiable enemies who are much closer at hand, he need not say more. But none of these will stand in the way of the heroic victory which this new gathering, this huge unanimity portends. A victory which presages a new world order without the presence of those enemies within, one where only the good and the pure such as those who are gathered here, will remain. The Führer is even able to thank God whose providence has allowed him, unworthy servant of the Volk, to expend his life sacrificially on behalf of his people in his daily work of leading them into this new world. By this stage of course, the crowd is delirious, outside themselves, united in love and adoration of their Führer, and of course ready to do whatever he asks of them. On their way home that evening, though they may not notice it, part of the magic of the day will have rubbed off on them. They will look at the Jew from across the road in a different light. He will have lost personality in their eyes, and become a representative of the sort of thing the Führer had suggested to them. They will be that much closer to turning a blind eye to his disappearance, to agreeing that old Mr Silberstein the cobbler is indeed a threat to society. To the divinisation of the one, there corresponds the demonisation of the other, which is the dehumanisation of them all.

And that is what I take Worship to be. It is a dangerous and dehumanising thing.

Now I would like to look at the un-Nuremberg, piece by piece. In the **first** place who is the “they” who want us to participate in the un-Nuremberg, and why do they want us to do it? In the case of Nuremberg, it was the party officials, for whom the faithful only had interest in as far as their mobilisation served the purpose of keeping the party officials in power and wealth. The faithful had to be made ready to do things, or acquiesce in things, with which calm and unenthusiastic people might disagree. A quite specific set of desires was being put forward, and the faithful were being inducted into acquiring these as their own. In the case of the un-Nuremberg we have something rather different: the “they” whose desire the faithful are being inducted into acquiring as their own is God, who has made his desire manifest. God has no desire for us to worship him for his sake; he needs no worship, no adulation, no praise, no glory. No divine ego is flattered, stability maintained, nor is any threatened petulance staved off, by our worship. No, the only people for whom it matters that we worship God is ourselves. It is entirely for our benefit that we are commanded to worship God, because if we don’t we will have no protection at all against the other sort of worship. We will allow our hearts to be formed by the desires of the

contradictory social other that is around us, and that heart will eventually participate in its own heartbreak and self-destruction. So the insistence on worship, and on prayer is much more like someone outside the gates of a prison giving us, who think we are living in a mansion, gentle hints as to what it's really like and letting us know how to build the tunnel to get out of the prison, than it is a demand for flattery.

In other words, True worship is for our own good, no one else's. It is the gradual process by which someone who likes us reaches us while we are in the middle of a Nuremberg rally, and gradually, and slowly gives us our senses, allowing us to stumble out of the rally, and walk away, being amazed at what it is we have been bound up in, and shocked at what we have done, or might have done, as a result of where we were going. Our learning to give glory to God, to render God praise, is our being given to have our imaginations set free from fate, from myth, from ineluctable forces, from historical grudges. It is a stripping away of our imaginations from being bound down by, tied in to, inevitability, submission to power, going along with things. It is the detox of our Nuremberg-ed imagination. Our learning to pray means our being taught how to receive long-lasting, up-building desires, over time, in imitation of the desire of someone who likes us, not the short term, malleable desires of someone for whom we are a means to an end. It is because we don't know what we desire, and don't have strong enough desire, that we are ordered to pray without ceasing, so that we can have our desire strengthened and made simple rather than contradictory and belittling. In other words, we are being given the sort of desire that will enable us not to be moved by the social other but instead empower us as creators of a quite different social other.

Secondly, and linked to this of course, is a perception of worship which, unlike the Nuremberg rally, is not linked to a time and a place. The true worship of the true God is in the first instance the pattern of lives lived over time, lives which are inhabited stories of leaving the world of principalities and powers, and gradually, over time, giving witness to the true God in the midst of the world by living as if death were not, and thus in a way which is unmoved by death and all the cultural forces which lead to death and depend on death. In other words, the true God brings about true worship not in the first place by organising rallies in order to enthuse us for some new feat. Rather the true God brings about true worship by inducting us over time into the process of having our desire, and thus our heart, and our way of being with each other, completely reformed. Within this induction over time into the process of the reformation of desire, the true God gives us to become habituated to the process by participating in signs of what it is that we are called to become, which participation is a certain beginning and developing of that becoming.

In other words, in order to help us towards the pattern of lives which are a true worship of the true God, God gives us to become trained in, disciplined in, the habits of worship which point us to where we are going. Now please notice what this means. It means that any given liturgical action, act of worship, is something to help us on the way, it is not an end in itself. If you like, it is designed to be learned as a discipline to help us inhabit more fully the creative life story, which we are gradually and peacefully receiving, of leaving the world of "worship", the world of principalities and powers. Unlike the Nuremberg rally, it is not designed to take us outside our ordinary life, but to enable us to dwell more freely and creatively within it, a lifelong therapy for distorted desire.

I would ask you to remember how much a part of the early Christian testimony this is. All the Gospels bear witness to Jesus subverting the Temple from within in one way or another, and making of the gift of his own body and blood, in a ritual which can be celebrated wherever two or three are gathered together, the worship of the New Covenant. All the functions of the Temple, principally faith, prayer and forgiveness, are to be carried out in interindividual relationships between people wherever they are (Mark 11, 23-25). If we collapse the “maior dissimilitudo” we make Christian worship a backsliding into Temple worship, but worse. It is only if we remember the “maior dissimilitudo” that our liturgies can be part of our fulfilment of our Lord’s prophecy to the Samaritan woman:

“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4, 21-24)

It is not for nothing, I think, that in John’s Gospel the cleansing of the Temple and the prophecy of its destruction comes right at the beginning of the Gospel. Jesus’ discussion of the Eucharistic Bread from heaven, which is how we are inserted into the new temple which is his body, is presented as a meditation on the manna in the desert, the food given for the journey. Any liturgical act is a staging post in a journey, and should point towards the dwelling within that journey. It is an induction into a more fully inhabited, more conscious, and freer creation of that journey, which is itself the bringing about of the Kingdom of God on earth, not a temporary excision from the journey in order to engage in something ecstatic.

In the **third** place I would like to ask you to consider the difference between the achievement of Nuremberg worship and the lack of achievement in True worship. In a Nuremberg rally the purpose is to create a sense of togetherness, of new belonging, so as to inspire something to happen in the future. Now, bizarrely, True worship has none of this at all. It achieves nothing at all, in that sense. And this for a striking reason, which ought in itself to give us pause for thought about how odd a form of worship it is. Christian worship is predicated on the understanding that there is nothing left to achieve. It has already been achieved, once and for all. The struggle is over; the kingdom has been inaugurated and obtained. I can’t get over how difficult it is for us to pause and sit in this for long enough. We are not building ourselves up for something which is going to happen; we are beginning to be swept up into the rejoicing that is emanating out from something which has already happened.

In order to imagine this more clearly, please go back in your memory to 1989. Now please imagine that you are in Albania. November comes along, and through the ether comes news that many miles to the north, in Berlin, the wall has come down. You know exactly what this means: it means that it’s all over, the beast which ran your lives is mortally wounded, has lost its transcendence, is dead. It’s all over bar the shouting. It may take some time for the thrashing about of the beast in its death throes to calm down. It may take some time for the effects of that to trickle down through Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, but fundamentally, it’s over. You and some friends begin quietly to dance and celebrate in Albania. The very fact that you are dancing and celebrating is itself not only a sign that the beast has lost its

transcendence, but is something which is, itself, helping the loss of transcendence, because you can have a party in its face. Something has been undone, somewhere else, and this means that you don't need to undo it yourself, the rejoicing in its being already done is part of what universalises the undoing so that you do find yourself participating in the undoing, but as a recipient who is spreading the effect.

Some people of course, do not accept that the coming down of the wall means that the beast is dead. They want to say: no, that's a temporary blip, and we're in charge here. So they turn up grunting and shouting and bullying to try and make it look as though nothing has changed. But it has, and even they are losing faith in the old order. Part of the celebration may be learning to help the apparatchiks of the old order discover themselves a place in the new one. Giving them a soft landing: something the old order, built on revenge and triumph over enemies, couldn't possibly understand. While they're around, of course, your celebration will look like, and be made to look like, dancing in the face of the evidence. And that is what True worship implies: the beginning of the celebration of a new regime even while the old regime hasn't yet grasped the news of its own fall. One of the things which really tickles me, in my own Church, is beginning to celebrate the good news of gay people, just as we are, finding that we really are at the party, and having to be quite gentle with the border guards of the old regime who haven't yet been able to admit that the wall coming down wasn't simply something which happened between Jews and Gentiles long ago, but it just keeps on coming down wherever the apparatchiks try to patch it up and make some people pure and some impure.

I would like to pause here to consider the fundamental place of this "already having been achieved" in Christian doctrine. The place where this is celebrated is in the, in our day vastly underrated, feast of the Ascension. This is the way in which we describe the fact that it's all over, the Crucified and Risen Lamb is already in heaven. His marriage supper has already started. Heaven is now irreversibly and eternally intertwined with human life stories, in a movement ever expanding outwards from the altar of the lamb. There's nothing we can do about it! It's already happened. We can be like the apparatchiks of the old regime if we want, trying to pretend that nothing has happened, but if so, we will find ourselves less and less convinced of our own battenning down of the hatches, and we will be bemused at finding other people tolerating our sacred duty without minding too much, because they are already on the way somewhere else, and know that somewhere else is ineluctably coming here.

My **fourth** point, develops straight from this. In the Nuremberg model, the central apotheosis has to be produced by careful orchestration, a deliberate build up of fascination and mimetic intensity in the worshipping crowd, so that in their eyes the Führer really does acquire an aura and a divinity. In the case of True worship, however, following on from what I said about the achievement having been already achieved, there is no apotheosis to be produced, no whipping up of emotions in order that we glimpse the crucified and risen lamb. Exactly the reverse. Part of the effect of the achievement having already been achieved, is that the crucified and risen Lamb *is just there*. This seems to me to be a central part of True Worship. True Worship presupposes that the crucified and risen Lord is *just there*. In the address he gave during his recent enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams described a moment when he was on a retreat in an orthodox monastery, and was taken to a small chapel and shown a not particularly distinguished icon, and as he looked at it, it was suddenly alive to him as the crucified and risen Jesus who was *just*

there. So we can relax, because we know he's just there. And relaxing is exactly the reverse of a mimetic build up of fascination.

Now unless we sit in this bit of the “maior dissimilitudo” we will be inclined to think that we must do a liturgy right so as to make something happen, and then He will be there. But the reverse is true. Because He is just there, our liturgy is an ordered and relaxed way of habitually making ourselves present, as worshipping group, to the one who is just there, already surrounded by festal angels and our predecessors in the faith. If you like, it is an orchestrated detox of our mimetic fascination with each other which is the only way we are going to be able to glimpse the other Other who is just there, and who has been inviting us, all along, to his party.

My **fifth** point concerns the build up to unanimity and the victim. In the Nuremberg rally, the build up involves a mythical story in which the people gathered together are themselves presented as the victims. It is they who have suffered terribly. They are told a story about themselves in which they have been having a hard time, but the saviour figure will himself take them forward into the new Reich. The miserable enemies within, who have luckily, thanks to the Führer, been detected, will be eliminated, and so the long-suffering Volk will enter the promised land. Now it is unfair of me to go on using the German language, when I could be using Serbian, or English, or any other, because the story is invariably the same. “We the victim”, being led by our glorious hegemon to triumph over our enemies and acquire what is rightly ours. But in the true Worship, there is something very different, because in the True Worship there is no attempt to build up the unanimity of those who feel themselves victimized, no propagation of a comforting myth. On the contrary, those who are gathering are only doing so in the degree to which they come out of comforting unanimities, and learn to recognize and reject the myths that have sustained those unanimities for the lies which they are. And it is the hegemon who is gathering them together who is the victim, not the group that is gathering. The group of those gathering is having all their fake unanimities, their fake belongings, their myths, uncovered, peeled away, by their drawing close to the one at whose expense their unanimity existed. The interpreter who is telling their story to them is the one who is exposing them to their own collusion in a myth, and is doing so not out of confrontation, or hate, or revenge, but out of forgiveness.

The one true victim in the Christian story is there, the one who occupied the place of shame and disgrace because he liked those who needed to create such a space, so great was their fear of death. He liked them so much that he left a memorial supper for them so that after he had been killed, and after the resurrection had revealed to his fore-chosen witnesses that the victim was given back to them as their forgiveness, they could remember that even before he had died, he had deliberately set up his own interpretation of what he was doing beforehand, and they could remember that he had been pleased to occupy that space for them. That means that for those who allow themselves to be forgiven there is neither fear of death nor place of shame any longer, and they can walk in the same path as he, without fear.

I want to stress this point, the point concerning the remembrance of the victim, because it is exactly the reverse of the memory of “how we were victimized”. The memory of the victim, which is only possible for us because the victim is forgiving, is the condition of the possibility for true worship. The repetition, the rehearsal of the memory of being victimized is always mythical, always a lie, and always part of a

worship which is a manipulation into more self-destructive desire². Constantly to be brought up face to face with the forgiving victim is constantly to be encouraged into not being frightened of telling the truth, of having the myths stripped away. Because it is a reminder of how we are victimizers, when we thought we were being good and holy and just, and how we need no longer be. In other words, the presence of the forgiving victim is forever producing that deflation of us out of myth and into truth. There is no true worship except in the presence of the true victim, because it is only from the victim that the voice which can undo the lies will come.

But this again means, as my **sixth** point, something very odd about the sort of group unanimity which is being produced in group worship. In the Nuremberg model, unity is absolutely of the essence of the worship, and it is a unity whipped up by the loss of individual life stories so as to acquire a collective persona, fuelled by a myth of victimage, being pointed towards a new future, and having shown to it the piffling obstacle it must kill in order to keep its unity. But in the true worship, there is no such unity, no such unanimity. On the contrary, since everyone in the new gathering is undergoing a personal story of how they left such rallies, each one is entirely different. And yet, each story comes, over time, to bear a remarkable resemblance to the story of one who “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12,2).

Yet it is different in every historical detail. It is in fact a different creative act in every single particular, it is that person’s own story, and yet can be seen to be a respectful and flexible multiplication of the same story. And this of course means that our liturgical celebrations are all automatically skewed from the start as regards any attempt to produce unanimity, a feeling of togetherness, a shared group narrative.

In any given celebration of Holy Mass neither the celebrant nor the participants have any idea of where in their journey, where in their story of having their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, are any other given members of the assembly, all of whom differ in age, generation, sex, marital status, employment status, health, background, class and so on *ad infinitum*. And there is, and should be, no attempt at all to affect the subjectivity of those involved, to whip them into any sort of uniformity of feeling. The one who *is there*, the forgiving victim himself, is drawing towards himself all those who are there, starting exactly where they are, through the forgiveness, the prayers, the scriptures, the opening of the scriptures so that they are given a sudden sense of some shift in their perception. And then the forgiving victim entrusts himself to them, handing himself over so that they can become him, and he them, over time. In doing this the forgiving victim is engaging in a huge creation of a quite new sort of respectful unity entirely bereft of any need to produce uniformity, shared feeling or any of the excitement that goes along with such things.

When people tell me that they find Mass boring, I want to say to them: it’s supposed to be boring, or at least seriously underwhelming. It’s a long term education in becoming un-excited, since only that will enable us to dwell in a quiet bliss which doesn’t abstract from our present or our surroundings or our neighbour, but which increases our attention, our presence and our appreciation for what is around us. The

² And of course this is something which is especially delicate for people who really have been victimized: if they repeat and rehearse their memory of themselves as victims they condemn themselves to remaining prisoner of those who victimized them.

build up to a sacrifice is exciting, the dwelling in gratitude that the sacrifice has already happened, and that we've been forgiven for and through it is, in terms of excitement, a long drawn-out let-down.

My **seventh** and penultimate point, though I suppose we could go on and on, is a different point about the group building exercise in the Nuremberg rally. One of the things in Nuremberg-style worship is what I referred to in my initial description as "Bruderschaft". This is the sense in which, as they gradually become worked up in their enthusiasm, so those involved in the crowd begin to discover a special sort of love for those who are there along with them, a deep camaraderie, a sense of being one with, and delighted to be with, these others who, but a few hours previously were entirely unknown to them, and, in few hours time, will be just as unknown once again. Part of worship is a sense that love enables you leave behind the tedious banalities of the particular, the petty irritations, the timidities, the quirks, and instead find yourself together, and in communion, with these people who an outside viewer would describe as strangers, but you, at the time, would swear that you were united by a special and mystical bond. And that ecstasy, that *ek-stasis*, can be quite overpowering, and indeed quite addictive.

Now I want to say that, from the perspective of True Worship, this is all completely ersatz. True Worship leads to a slow, patient discovery of being able to like people in their bizarre particularities, and see the beauty in those things, not abstract from them. Just as true friendship requires time and stretching and self-examination, and trust building, and vulnerability and time wasted doing nothing in particular. This is part of the sense that we don't need to hide from each other if we are all being forgiven together by the forgiving victim, and that un-hiding, that discovery, happens very slowly. Worship requires the suppression of the particular because it requires all those involved to share in a lie which will lead to a new form of unity creating a new sacrifice by casting someone out. All those involved in the unity are automatically, by the mere fact of being involved, abstracting from their particular stories and sharing in a lie, a cause that is beyond them. The love, the friendship, the real brother-hood which comes with and through True Worship is a certain sort of being able gradually to bask in particular beauties discovered without any cause beyond themselves.

My **final** point in my attempt to sit in the "maior dissimilitudo" before I finish with a story which will, I hope, illustrate what I think worship in a world of violence looks like, is as follows. Typically within Worship as the world knows it, Nuremberg-style worship, we have a sense of being caught up in something bigger than us, which envelops us, is comfortingly ritualistic, whose outcome we know. It is part of a creation, or recreation of an order which we know. It is part of a sense of everything being OK. There should be nothing too unfamiliar about it, nothing particularly new, no great discoveries about the world. It should not threaten us with hazard, except the comfortingly controlled hazard of the choosing of the victim. There should be nothing too risky or open-ended about it. No good liturgist, Führer, or Hierophant would let the liturgy follow uncharted paths.

And often enough, by failing to sit in the maior dissimilitudo, we manage to reduce the events of Holy Week to a comforting expression of some eternal return. I would like to suggest that True Worship was inaugurated in the events of Holy Week as a wholly uncomfortable, wholly contingent, wholly creative, wholly open-ended, wholly vulnerable and risky act of human imagination, taking symbols and forms and

recasting them in a quite new and unique way, offering through them a way out of a sacrificial world of death and violence, and opening something up in a way which I can only describe as “with jagged edges”. It is the strange combination of the contingent, the creative, the brave, the unimagined, the revealing, the not yet clear or tied up which is quite outside all the normal forms of comforting and regular worship, and it is this “jagged edge” quality which is one of the things which it is most difficult to imagine and to continue to make alive. But I associate this with the bringing about of the New Creation, something which we don’t yet know what it will look like, and something we are invited to have a go at making up along with the one who inaugurated it. It is this jagged edge of creative imagination in the midst of contingency which seems to me to be one of the indispensable qualities of True Worship, and one of the most difficult to learn and to perform.

So I’d like to close with a story which I think illustrates the elements of what I think True Worship in a violent world looks like, and is about. It is a story which I have gleaned from Chris Hedges book *War is a force that gives us meaning*³, a book, which I should say, has been particularly instructive to me in my preparation for this talk. Hedges, a war correspondent who covered the Bosnian war extensively, tells of meeting the Soraks, a Bosnian Serb couple in a largely Muslim enclave. The couple had been largely indifferent to the nationalist propaganda of the Bosnian Serb leadership. But when the Serbs started to bomb their town, Goražde, the Muslim leadership in the town became hostile to them, and eventually the Soraks lost their two sons to Muslim forces. One of their sons was a few months shy of becoming a father. In the city under siege, conditions got worse and worse, and in the midst of this Rosa Sorak’s widowed daughter-in-law gave birth to a baby girl. With the food shortages, the elderly and infants were dying in droves, and after a short time, the baby, given only tea to drink, began to fade. Meanwhile, on the eastern edge of Goražde, Fadil Fejzić, an illiterate Muslim farmer, kept his cow, milking her by night so as to avoid Serbian snipers. On the fifth day of the baby having only tea, just before dawn, Fejzić appeared at the door with half a litre of milk for the baby. He refused money. He came back with milk every day for 442 days, until the daughter in law and granddaughter left for Serbia. During this time he never said anything. Other families in the street started to insult him, telling him to give his milk to Muslims and let the Chetnik (the pejorative term for Serbs) die. But he did not relent.

Later the Soraks moved, and lost touch with Fejzić. But Hedges went and sought him out. The cow had been slaughtered for meat before the end of the siege, and Fejzić had fallen on hard times. But, as Hedges says⁴:

When I told him I had seen the Soraks, his eyes brightened.
“And the baby?” he asked “How is she?”

This for me is the sign of True Worship: not only the complete lack of concern about his reputation with his own group; not only the refusal to believe the lies about the despised other whose fault it all was; not only the daily trudging, for fourteen and a half months, through the dawn with milk before the snipers could see well enough to shoot. But the brightening of the eyes at the contemplation of the baby in whose jagged-edged creation he had found himself playing a part.

³ Hedges, Chris. *War is a force that gives us meaning*. New York: Public Affairs, 2002, pp. 50-53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

This attempt of mine to dwell with you in the “maior dissimilitudo” leaves me with a certain fear. It is the fear that True Worship in a violent world is going on all around us, particularly unnoticed by those of us who have a strong interest in Worship and liturgy, and are thus particularly likely to succumb to the attractiveness of the “similitudo” and to be blinded to that of which it is supposed to be a sign. I ask you to pray with me that our deliberations and our liturgies be part of our being inducted, even if it be kicking and screaming, into finding our role in the jagged edge of creation and the brightening of the eyes.

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