

ness and is preoccupied with the cybernetic production of knowledge, this community seeks wisdom. In a culture that turns knowledge into power—and often the power to do violence to the other—the church is a community that roots wisdom in the indwelling presence of the One who was powerless on the cross.

All of this is impossible apart from *worship*. The community cannot be formed with these kind of virtues, cannot take on the character of the renewed image of God, without singing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (Col 3:16). Worship is a world-making endeavor. By singing songs of praise to God, we proclaim the source of ultimate sovereignty in the world. By singing the poem of Colossians 1:15-20, the early church subversively announced that Christ, not Caesar, is Lord. By singing that song today, we proclaim that Christ—not the global market, not the president of the United States, not Microsoft, not military might—is Lord of our lives. In the face of empire, “what is needed is imaginative, liturgic world-making that enacts a world more credible than the world of the empire.”<sup>15</sup> By reciting these stories to each other in worship, we shape our imaginations in a way that engenders an alternative praxis, a character shaped in the image of God.

For this community, it all begins and it all ends with Christ. “Christ is all and in all.” When the community so indwells his story that its very imagination is transformed by this narrative and its daily life in the empire embodies these counter-imperial character traits, “whatever” this community does, “in word or deed,” will be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17). Again, the comprehensive nature of Paul’s vision must not be missed. *Whatever* we do—voting or shopping, writing a poem or a check, shaping educational curricula or a sculpture, establishing a household or a business enterprise, having babies or caring for the elderly, paying taxes or lobbying the government, singing praise or singing the blues, making a film or making a pie, building housing for the homeless or protecting an endangered species—will be done in the name of the Lord Jesus and will thereby be giving thanks to the Creator in whose image we have been renewed.

### The Poetics of Community

There is something wildly audacious about all of this. This is a vision of life and an ethic that are hardly imaginable to most of us. And so again we must turn to poetry to help us find the images that might make this radical ethic real in our lives. Wendell Berry and Bud Osborn again prove to be wise guides through the terrain of an alternative ethic in the face of our captivity.

In “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,” Berry offers us resources of a transformed imagination by contrasting the anonymous world of “the quick profit,

<sup>15</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), p. 46.

the annual raise," in which we receive "everything ready-made" and in which "when they want you to buy something they will call you," with a subversive alternative rooted in love.<sup>16</sup>

So, friends, every day do something  
that won't compute. Love the Lord.  
Love the world. Work for nothing.  
Take all that you have and be poor.  
Love someone who does not deserve it.

Because this is a vision of life that embraces humility and patience,

Give your approval to all that you cannot  
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man  
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.  
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.

Say that your main crop is the forest  
that you did not plant,  
that you will not live to harvest.

Say that the leaves are to be harvested  
when they have rotted into the mold.

Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

As we have seen, in the face of the empire Paul proclaims a gospel that calls forth a community of fruitfulness. If this is true, then Berry's advice about how to discern ethically life-giving paths of wisdom in the day-to-day rhythms and decisions of life is worth heeding.

Ask yourself: Will this satisfy  
a woman satisfied to bear a child?  
Will this disturb the sleep  
of a woman near to giving birth?

Is this cultural action, this communal decision, this political policy or ecological practice, this artistic product or technological development life-giving or not? Is it the kind of thing that bears good fruit in our lives? Would it make sense to a woman about to bring vulnerable new life into the world? Is it something that would be worth disturbing the sleep of a woman between the contractions of birthing? If not, then abandon it for the path of death it is. This "Manifesto," this community, is committed to life, and life more abundant. "Practice resurrection."<sup>17</sup>

Resurrection can be practiced only in the face of death. And death is often

<sup>16</sup>Wendell Berry, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," in *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), pp. 87-88.

<sup>17</sup>This is the last line of the poem.

...of Community  
...the Christian comm  
...community" tells the stor  
...of another man in t  
...formed his fellow pris  
...s testimony:  
kolbe  
who created community  
kolbe  
who lived community  
kolbe  
who sang community  
kolbe  
who demonstrated t  
though buildings ar  
though people are  
kolbe  
who taught that co  
as long as a single  
steps forward  
out of line  
and speaks out  
for the sake of  
kolbe  
We might ac  
his life for the  
Kolbe and cou  
Like the l  
"longs for inc  
in the emboc  
ticular time  
tians, in sh  
that woul  
to be a cu  
children.  
What

<sup>18</sup>Bud O  
pp. 45  
<sup>19</sup>Wend  
<sup>20</sup>Rod

An Ethic of Community

where the Christian community finds itself. Bud Osborn's poem "The Truth of Community" tells the story of the Franciscan Maximillian Kolbe, who took the place of another man in the starvation cell at Auschwitz and while in a death cell comforted his fellow prisoners and sang canticles of love.<sup>18</sup> The poem ends with this testimony:

kolbe  
 who created community even in auschwitz  
 kolbe  
 who lived community while naked and starving to death  
 kolbe  
 who sang community into a situation without hope  
 kolbe  
 who demonstrated that community cannot be destroyed  
 though buildings are demolished  
 though people are scattered and lives are shattered  
 kolbe  
 who taught that community cannot be extinguished  
 as long as a single human being  
 steps forward  
 out of line  
 and speaks out  
 for the sake of another's life  
 kolbe

We might add: Kolbe, who follows a Savior who stepped out of line and gave up his life for the sake of us all. Christian community, as demonstrated by Maximillian Kolbe and countless others, is founded in the love of God and reflects that love.

Like the love of God for his creation, the love of the Christian community "longs for incarnation."<sup>19</sup> Love cannot remain an abstract idea; it must take on flesh in the embodied life of the Christian community in particular places and at particular times. Rodney Clapp offers this historical observation: "The original Christians, in short, were about creating and sustaining a unique culture—a way of life that would shape character in the image of their God. And they were determined to be a culture, a quite public and political culture, even if it killed them and their children."<sup>20</sup>

What shape might this alternative public and political culture take in our time?

<sup>18</sup>Bud Osborn, "The Truth of Community," in *Hundred Block Rock* (Vancouver, B.C.: Arsenal Pulp, 1999), pp. 45-48.

<sup>19</sup>Wendell Berry, "Word and Flesh," in *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point, 1980), p. 200.

<sup>20</sup>Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 82.