# The Costs of Victory

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*Books Discussed:*

*Borderlands of Theology: And Other Essays* by Donald MacKinnon. Edited by George W. Roberts and Donovan E. Smucker. Reprint. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011 [1968].

*The Problem of Metaphysics* by Donald MacKinnon. Reprint. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [1974].

*Explorations in Theology* 5 by Donald MacKinnon. Reprint. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011 [1979].

*Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty: A Donald MacKinnon Reader* by Donald MacKinnon. Edited by John McDowell. London: T&T Clark, 2011.

Donald MacKinnon (1913–1994) was a philosopher and theologian whose influence may be inversely proportional to his present-day readership. As a writer of essays, occasional pieces, and reviews, much of his work has long been out of print or otherwise unavailable, in spite of the fact that, as a professor at Oxford, Aberdeen, and Cambridge, he trained some of the most well-known contemporary British theologians, including Rowan Williams, John Milbank, David Ford, and Nicholas Lash. Happily, the lack of access to his work has been mitigated by the recent release of a new volume of collected essays, the reprinting of two other collections, and the increased availability of his Gifford Lectures through the conveniences of digital printing. (*The Stripping of the Altars*, which contains the frequently-cited "Kenosis and Establishment," remains out of print.) In addition, the

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new *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty* also has a brief but engaging and informative introduction by editor John Mc-Dowell for those new to MacKinnon's work.

Visible throughout the *oeuvre* is the fact that MacKinnon's philosophy is rarely separate from his concern with Christian discipleship, the work of the church, and Scripture. While he frequently and fluently discusses philosophical figures like Plato, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and especially Kant, MacKinnon never divorces Athens and Jerusalem. Instead, it is the person of Jesus Christ that guides and constrains the whole of his project. For example, one essay juxtaposes Kantian epistemology and Johannine theology;[1] another defends the arcane vocabulary of substance metaphysics as nothing else but an effort "to see where exactly the *skandalon* of the incarnation is."[2] Rarely have philosophy and theology been so intertwined. His essays aren't just pronouncements from the ivory tower, either; many of them are intensely focused on then-contemporary current events and the specific political context of the time, especially regarding Marxism and the politics of the advent of nuclear weapons. In fact, they are so time-specific that they can feel dated; since some of the essays are as much as seventy years old, several of the characters discussed are now mostly unknown. Others of these same essays, however, make points that are as valuable today as ever: the appeals to state secrecy, extraordinary measures, and the constant threat of war, all of which were justifications for the development of nuclear capability, are hardly foreign to contemporary discussions of the "war on terror." And, whatever its other failings (moral, as well as political and economic), Marxism did provide a sense of concrete hope that can be missing in idealism, romanticism, and the kind of simple appeals to religious mystery which evade the harsher realities of life.

It is the evasion he recognized in philosophical idealism that led MacKinnon to believe it one of the great enemies of authentic biblical Christianity. When the Christian uses nouns like "ethics," "God," or "redemption," she better be speaking of real things, however complicated, elusive, or opaque. Theology is both exploration and invention,[3] not invention only, and, while fully cognizant of the gap between description and object, MacKinnon warns of the "over-indulgent use

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[1]   MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 201–207.
[2]   MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 245.
[3]   MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, 138.

of metaphor" in religious language that speaks of God and creation.[4] "The world is as it is, and not as we might want it," he writes, and to consider it honestly is the job of the theologian as well as the philosopher.[5] The error made by the many different varieties of idealism is to "avoid reckoning with the burden of inescapable fact" in an effort to produce a well-ordered metaphysical system. Of course, the realist also faces an impasse: how can one be a realist about that which "in its inmost essence remains unknown"?[6] These philosophical issues are also practical issues of ethical importance. As Kant recognized, real-world ethics and metaphysics are mutually dependent, such that metaphysics must be constrained by the objective world of experience, while the objective world is itself experienced through metaphysical categories. So how do philosophers and theologians speak of that which resists comprehension by speech, without themselves evading the pressing issues that happen outside the seminar room, and which require a response? MacKinnon found neither idealism, nor Wittgenstein's identification of "forms of life" as giving religious statements meaning, finally sufficient to account for the "intrusive presence" of the transcendent and the jaggedness of the edges of the world.[7]

His insistence on philosophical realism, on confronting the world honestly, is of a piece with his emphasis on the recognition of a tragic element in Christian theology, and this emphasis is one of the aspects of his work that has attracted the most contemporary interest, by both proponents and detractors. For MacKinnon, tragedy is a recognition of the surd element in the world, an acknowledgment of the effects of contingency, the disconnection between intentions and consequences, between the structure of the world and the flourishing of individuals and communities. There is ambiguity even in grace; a vice and a virtue can be two sides of the same coin. This ambiguity has the result of complicating any simple teleology that would depict the world as following a straightforward path of improvement, or see the course of history as one of untrammeled progress and victimless development, a view he found explicitly in Hegel, but also implicitly in most Christian

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4   MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 209, 221.
5   MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, 139.
6   MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, 164.
7   MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, 157.

theology. MacKinnon mocks any "facile teleology"[8] that ignores tragic conflict in the name of concentrating on the general movement toward freedom, or salvation; why mourn for victims when their sacrifice was integral to the attainment of something better? He saw the attempts to elide these individual cases of loss without reparation as an aversion to addressing directly the pain of another, to absorb and accept it as pain, and not as a means to a further end, as part of a grand design that points to something ultimately good.

MacKinnon identified aspects of tragedy even in the hopefulness of the New Testament. For him, a triumphalist view of Christ's victory is a betrayal of history, of the gospel story of Jesus of Nazareth, the executed political prisoner whose ministry was a failure, just as much as his resurrection was a victory. One must not ignore the despondency of both Christ and the disciples in the time prior to and during the crucifixion. MacKinnon writes, regarding the gospels, "To suggest that we are presented with a developing ministry successfully achieved in consequence of superficial failure, the latter swallowed up by its obliteration in the progress that it makes possible, is a travesty of the book's disturbing and complex reality."[9] The suffering and even failure embedded in the life and death of Jesus is a narrative of "a murder and a defeat," not only a victory. If there is any victory in it all, it is one "achieved at an appalling cost, indeed at the cost of irretrievable defeat."[10] In multiple essays, he refers with approval to a comment made by the Duke of Wellington, victor of the Battle of Waterloo, responding to a woman who was gushing about his glorious accomplishments in battle, and how wonderful military victory must be. The Duke replied coldly, "Madam, a victory is the most tragic thing in the world, only excepting a defeat."[11] What MacKinnon finds in the victory of Christ, which comes after his betrayal by a friend, the pain of the cross, and abandonment by the Father, is the most tragic thing in the world, only excepting a defeat. MacKinnon admires writers like P. T. Forsyth, who insist that no "speculative dialectic" can wash away the blood that stains the cross. The fact that the resurrected Christ continues to bear nail marks on his hands and spear marks on his side complicates religious efforts that attempt to "trivializ[e] the

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[8]   MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 169.
[9]   MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 128.
[10]   MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 133.
[11]   MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 126.

tragic depth of human existence, making even of Gethsemane itself a charade."[12] Gethsemane was not Christ play-acting; his failure was not illusory, but real.

MacKinnon identified the whitewashing of history as one of the original sins of the church. In *The Problem of Metaphysics*, he undertakes a fascinating reading of the story of Ananias and Sapphira, an event that is narrated in the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. On the one hand, Acts presents a picture of the emerging group of Jesus followers, forming in the wake of the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, as this Spirit-led community establishes itself as one that takes care of all of its members equally: "No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common" (4:32). (MacKinnon refers to Acts as "the early church's essay on communism."[13]) Acts also, however, reveals the other side of that community organization, one which almost immediately seeks to aggregate power. (Perhaps Acts is an essay on communism in more than one way.) This is illustrated in the episode with Ananias and Sapphira. As recounted by Luke, the couple sold a piece of property, but, contrary to their agreement with the community, they did not turn all the money over to the group, but surreptitiously reserved a portion of it for themselves. Upon learning of this transgression, the apostle Peter confronted Ananias. Faced with the public revelation of his failing, Ananias promptly died. Ananias' body was hustled away before the unsuspecting Sapphira arrived, three hours later. Upon her arrival, Peter confronted her about the missing money. She promptly died as well, with a predictable outcome: "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things" (5:11). The text then proceeds without comment, the context indicating that these fatal consequences were, indeed, the couple's just deserts. MacKinnon notes the gross irony that it is Peter, of all people, who facilitates this divine punishment; after all, Peter's denial of Jesus was at least as serious an infraction as that of Ananias and Sapphira. Peter, however, was forgiven by the risen Christ; the couple was not forgiven by Peter. This Petrine act sets the pattern for future church-sanctioned, and therefore divinely-sanctioned, injustice. MacKinnon writes that, in the story of Ananias and Sapphira,

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12   MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 70.
13   MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 134.

we are presented with a picture of a struggling emergent institution already behaving to those who seem by dishonesty to threaten its policies with that ruthlessness which has across the ages characterized virtually every style of ecclesiastical institution. The survival of the institution . . . justifi[es] action that is none the less morally monstrous because it is presented as achieved by supernatural means.[14]

The author of Acts seems to believe that Ananias and Sapphira had to die in order to establish beyond question that betrayal of the *ecclesia* is the unforgivable sin, since the *ecclesia* is the glorious outworking of God's plan on earth; Peter says, "You did not lie to us but to God!" (5:4). The slippage from one to the other has become easy. And indeed, Luke's implication is that the episode was justified by being so greatly beneficial for the community: "Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women" (5:14). The fact that the couple's judge was guilty of a worse crime, yet not punished, but forgiven, is chalked up to providence. This conception of a Christian teleology can justify the injustice done to Ananias and Sapphira as being part of God's plan, and it is an idea that MacKinnon sees repeated in the church's history time and again: "The language of Caiaphas ["it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people"] . . . is that of 'ecclesiastical statesmen' all down the ages."[15] The death of Ananias and Sapphira was, indeed, an "act of the apostles" that is part of the church's inheritance, just as much as the undeniable religious benefits passed down by that early church. While Ananias and Sapphira's unjust deaths are part and parcel of the emergence of the church, the tragic element had to be ignored in order to tell the story of a triumphant community.

This theological antipathy to the acknowledgment of suffering as suffering, not merely as laying the groundwork for something better, is not innocent, and has consequences even in the present day. MacKinnon explicitly ties this aversion, this looking away from the site of immense suffering, to the Christian response, or non-response, to the Holocaust:

The events of the present century and in particular what happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945 rob any serious theologian of

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14   MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 134.
15   MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 67.

> the remotest excuse for ignoring the tragic element in Christian-
> ity. It was in the long Christian centuries and by the styles of per-
> sistent Christian behavior that the ground was prepared for the
> acceptance of the holocaust of the Jewish people.[16]

To be sure, acceptance is not participation; MacKinnon is not laying
the responsibility for the guarding of the prisons or the running of the
trains on the shoulders of speculative idealists. Nonetheless, he sees
the willingness to abide the suffering of others by fitting that suffering
into a preestablished schema called providence as preparation for the
lack of dramatic response to the extermination of the Jews as it was
underway. As a person who was twenty years old at the beginning of
the Hitler regime in Germany in 1933, MacKinnon seems almost
dumbfounded by the lack of theological response to the Holocaust; to
ignore the Holocaust when making claims about God, theological an-
thropology, and creation and redemption is the ultimate evasion of
what the world is actually like. In a discussion of theologian Hans Urs
von Balthasar, MacKinnon identifies a fundamental distinction among
contemporary theologians: "their awareness or disregard of the fact
that in the terrible twelve years, 1933–1945, six million Jews were
deliberately murdered."[17] That event should determine the context
for all twentieth-century theology. He continues, "The refusal to
reckon with this appalling fact gives to any treatment of fundamental
theological issues a sort of shallowness that no modernist expertise can
conceal."[18] MacKinnon admires that Balthasar, more than most theo-
logians, "refuses to turn aside from the overwhelming, pervasive real-
ity of evil," and composes his theology in full recognition of that fact.[19]
This reality exists in the concrete world of individuals and communi-
ties, not in an idealist realm of moral lessons and spiritual mythology.
In everything it does, theology must not look away from Belzec, Sobi-
bor, Treblinka, Auschwitz. The brute fact of the atrocities of Nazi Ger-
many should dispel Christian theological illusions that refuse to
acknowledge the presence of tragedy. In fact, the Holocaust must af-
fect not only the Christian approach to suffering, but also the Christian
understanding of itself as a whole; he saw this response in Balthasar's

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16   MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 130.
17   MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 282.
18   MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 282.
19   MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 282.

"remorseless emphasis on the concrete,"[20] reflected in Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday and the descent of Christ into hell.[21] A Christian understanding of God's engagement with, and redemption of, the world must include those facts of history. This touches every aspect of the faith: this philosopher of religion, writing about miracles, remarks that special divine action must be considered in light of "the death camps of Nazi Europe . . . when the prayer of millions went unanswered, and the death-trains continued to roll."[22] That, after all, is the true story of history, and it is to these hard cases, these limit conditions, that theology should look when it speaks of God's work in the world. The alternative is "shallowness," willful blindness.

This relentless focus on the tragic element of Christianity may seem overly despairing. MacKinnon, however, resists falling into a "facile cult of pessimism."[23] Pessimism and despair fall prey to the same temptation as idealism, which is the predisposition not to deal with people and events in their particularity, but instead to fit them into a preexisting pattern or generalization. In other words, despair is too easy; it makes the same totalizing mistake in reverse. And, in fact, philosophy may not be the best genre in which to thread this very thin needle; the tragic elements are sometimes better described in the languages of myth, parable, and drama, wherein "the deepest recesses of the human spirit" can be laid bare.[24] Ironically, these genres are sometimes more capable than straightforward philosophical exposition of engaging with reality. The Greek tragedians in particular recognized the messiness and ambiguity of human life, and the tension between hope and despair in extreme conditions is reflected in their dramas with particular genius. For example, at the end of Euripides's *Trojan Women*, the audience sees Hecuba bound for a life of slavery to the men who destroyed her city and her family, even having stymied her attempt at self-immolation. The woman who had been queen of Troy was queen no more; once the mother of heroes, the bodies of her sons now littered the Scamander plain, and her daughter Cassandra, though consecrated to be a virgin votary of Apollo, was being taken to serve in Agamemnon's bed. The gods took their leave of Troy in the

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[20]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 283.
[21]  Found particularly in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 148–188.
[22]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 205.
[23]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 282.
[24]  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 50.

prologue; nothing is sacred there anymore. In the final image of the play, however, this defeated woman (who began the play collapsed on the ground) stands upright, of her own accord and without assistance, and moves herself toward the hated Achaean ships, headed toward Greece and servitude. In this depiction of Hecuba's momentary independence, are we to see the triumph of the individual human spirit, still fundamentally free, even in slavery? Is her agency an example of personal resiliency in the face of overwhelming opposition? Or, alternatively, are we watching a woman stagger into hell itself, now utterly stripped of any of the comforts she may have hoped for at the beginning of the play? Is the picture all the more painful for the fact that the only agency she has left is in participating in her own existential demise? Is moving forwards, or backwards? Is Euripides showing us resiliency, or "total disaster"?[25] The curtain falls without resolution. This same poetic sensibility of ambiguity and contingency informed MacKinnon's readings of Scripture, and therefore his theology as a whole. When the Son of God dies on the cross, should we read it as the final triumph of the Christ, the sacrifice that brings the possibility of eternal life to all people? Or is it the event that inaugurates a virulent and pervasive hatred of Judaism that, while its intensity waxed and waned for nineteen hundred years, achieves its grotesque apotheosis with the destruction of Europe's Jews? (For MacKinnon, "part of the price paid for [the Easter event] was the unmentionable horror of an anti-semitism whose beginnings can perhaps be traced in the New Testament itself, and whose last manifestation in our time was Christian acquiescence in the 'final solution.'"[26]) Both of these, of course, and so much more. This same tension and uncertainty is reflected in the conclusion to the Gospel of Mark, which ends with silence and fear, with "terror" as well as "amazement." There, too, the curtain falls without resolution.[27] For MacKinnon, both the Gospel writers and the classical tragedians recognized what too many modern theologians do not: "the deepest contradictions of human life," which the tragedians handled

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[25] Adrian Poole, "Total Disaster: Euripides' *The Trojan Women*," *Arion* 3, no. 3 (1976): 257–287.

[26] MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 103.

[27] For a recent reading of Mark as continuous with Greek tragedy, see Louis A. Ruprecht, *Tragic Posture and Tragic Vision: Against the Modern Failure of Nerve* (New York: Continuum, 1994). Ruprecht also defends Hegel against charges of advocating a "crass teleology" (116).

"without the distorting consolation of belief in a happy ending."[28] In the story of Jesus too, there is an ending, but it is not a happy one, or at least it is not happy in an uncomplicated way. The torture, death, and descent of Christ into hell, his own cry of dereliction, are inseparable from the great benefits of the resurrection. No single aspect of the Christ event exists without the others, and it is in the middle of the tension between them that MacKinnon believes the faithful Christian theologian must make her home. He bars any easy ways out of that tension; he refuses to be reconciled to the costs of victory.

It is only a frank acknowledgment of the concrete reality of suffering that enables an understanding of what redemption must entail and, consequently, deepens the mystery of that redemption. The glory that is revealed on the cross is, MacKinnon writes, a "strange glory,"[29] and the ambiguity not only remains after the resurrection, it is amplified. Nonetheless, it is that complex ambiguity, that "strange glory," that the Christian claims brings salvation. The faith in the efficacy of that atoning act of Christ for the world's redemption is what MacKinnon finds expressed so well by *Lux Mundi* theologian H. Scott Holland. Holland, MacKinnon believes, acknowledges the historicity and savageness of the crucifixion, while also placing his faith in the hope of salvation that it enables. Even in a world riven by conflict, "we need to be reminded," MacKinnon writes (uncharacteristically), "of the ultimate sweetness of things."[30] The ultimate sweetness, however, is something that can be realized only after "the abysses of existence are sounded and the ultimate contradictions of life plumbed and explored."[31] But it is realized in the good news of God in Christ, and that is a note that must not be silenced. The believer lives in the tension where she "will not be fobbed off by a trivial optimism," nor will she "be betrayed into a nihilistic despair."[32] It is true that, in attending so closely to the tragic dimension, one risks "glory[ing] less in the Cross than in the disintegration of human societies and in the coming of despair."[33] At the moment of Christ's dereliction on the cross, however,

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28  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 291.
29  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 81.
30  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 118.
31  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 104.
32  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 118.
33  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 119.

it was made plain that in the Son of God's acceptance of the ultimate triviality and failure of human existence, whose deeps at that
moment he finally plumbed, the whole language of perplexity,
uncertainty, bewilderment, hopelessness and pain, even of Godforsakenness, was laid hold of and given a new sense by the very
God himself and converted into the way of his reconciling the
world unto himself.[34]

The suffering was not obliterated, nor revealed to be illusory, but
somehow redeemed. There is a teleology in this view, to be sure, but
it is neither facile nor simplistic. Rather, it is one that surveys the brokenness of the world and yet still holds to the fact that it is, somehow,
the site of Christ's redeeming work, even as it is also the site of tragedy. If Christianity is to be relevant, he writes, it will be because it
recognizes, and does not look away from, the "pervasive reality of
evil,"[35] but rather somehow includes it, without reduction or mitigation, into what it means to be redeemed. A comment he makes about
the dialectic between moral intuitionists and utilitarians—"Nothing is
resolved in a higher synthesis!"—is apropos here.[36] The intractable,
the inscrutable, the painful discontinuity that exists between creation
and Creator even after the incarnation: these also must be included in
redemption, not elided. MacKinnon, more than most theologians,
identifies and acknowledges those wild and untamable surd elements,
even at the risk of being overwhelmed by them. Concluding the first
section of the essay "Finality in Metaphysics, Ethics and Theology,"
MacKinnon writes:

> The threat is of something much more profound than that of Car
> tesian *malin génie*, it is the menace of a backlash somehow built
> into the heart of things that will lay our sanity itself in ruins. We
> are face to face not with a grisly theodicy that allows historical
> greatness to provide its own moral order (there are more than
> hints of this in Hegel), but with a cussedness which seems totally
> recalcitrant to the logos of any justification of the ways of God to
> man. And here the last word is with the cry for redemption.[37]

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[34]  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 81.
[35]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 282.
[36]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 114.
[37]  MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, 106.

That cry for redemption is one that is made by Jesus on the cross, and by every inhabitant of a crumbling world, from Troy to New Orleans. The drumbeat of these essays is its own plea not to turn a deaf ear to those cries, for religious reasons or any others.

What the reader may find lacking in these volumes is the acknowledgment that the cry for redemption is sometimes also voiced alongside a song of praise. In MacKinnon's unremitting refusal to come to rest, he makes it nearly impossible to pause long enough to celebrate Easter at all. Is it true that "the supremely revealing and supremely authoritative moment in human history . . . was that in which [Jesus] cried upon the Cross: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me'"?[38] What about the silent moment in the garden, with the stone rolled away? Even a sympathetic reader, who agrees that while "we crave security,"[39] Christ's answer in response is interrogation, and that the repetition of this interrogation is the job of the liturgy (during which "we must seek to increase rather than eliminate tension"[40]), finds himself seeking a break long enough to catch his breath. When the Greeks gathered for the Dionysian festivals they watched both tragedies and comedies; while still mourning for Patroclus, Achilles organized funeral games. Not every camp is Auschwitz; not every ecclesiastic is Caiaphas. Yes, resting can be a moral laziness. But it can also be salubrious, a time of Sabbath. Christian realism is recognizing both the prevalence of tragedy and the surfeit of grace.

Of course, all thinkers are products of their time, and MacKinnon did much of his work as the invention and adoption of nuclear weapons (with the acquiescence of much of the church) was coming on the heels of the first reports of the true extent of the atrocities in Nazi Germany (also with the acquiescence of much of the church). And, to be sure, in the North American churches of the twenty-first century it is not always clear that the lessons of the tragedians have been fully digested: that there remains something intractable embedded in reality as we experience it, something resistant to all attempts to root it out—even if we have no choice but to try. MacKinnon excoriates those who "substitute a febrile activism for [a] sense of human tragedy, who behave spiritually as if Auschwitz had never happened."[41]

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[38]  MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, 81.
[39]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 275.
[40]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 156.
[41]  MacKinnon, *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, 273.

Fully, perhaps overly, attuned to the recalcitrant, like Kant himself MacKinnon presents "a metaphysics of permanent rupture," a "mixture of longing and outrage."[42] The complexity and ambiguity of the tragedians, so admired by MacKinnon, is sometimes missing in theologies that are overly optimistic about human capabilities. Perhaps the renewal of interest in MacKinnon's work is a recognition that utopianism, whether apocalyptic or progressive, is not enough. MacKinnon's essays—even if sometimes more fragmentary and evocative than thorough and disciplined—entreat their readers to look, and look again, at the world as it is.

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[42] Susan Neiman's description of Kant in *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 80.

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