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## Salvation and Community in the Works of Charles Williams

Donald Clayton Vander Kolk Jr.  
*Grand Valley State University*

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Salvation and Community in the Works of Charles Williams

Donald Clayton Vander Kolk Jr.

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Masters

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With gratitude to my wife Sarah who patiently shared the burden of this long journey and to Allen Sundsmo, the best of all friends who introduced me to Williams and so many great books.

## Abstract

The twentieth century American evangelical Church co-opted many of its values from the surrounding American culture, among them, the tremendous importance it placed on individualism and self-sufficiency. The work of British Christian writer Charles Williams, though, provides a corrective, emphasizing the role of community in the salvation of one's soul. This thesis provides a reading of three of Charles Williams' last works—*The Region of the Summer Stars*, *Descent into Hell*, and *All Hallows' Eve*—and examines the function of community in his work. In the Arthurian poem *Region of the Summer Stars*, Williams imagines a small community, the household of Taliessin, in which mutual acts of service preserve the vision of the Emperor (God) for his people, but which goes unrealized in the larger kingdom of Britain. The community of the household of Taliessin is organized around such communal concepts integral to Williams' theology as the Ways of Affirmation and Negation, largesse, co-inherence, exchange, and substitution. Williams employs a more modern setting in the two novels. In *Descent into Hell*, the salvation of protagonist Pauline Anstruther, her ancestor, and a deceased laborer hinges on the help of others in their small community, in contrast to the demise of Laurence Wentworth and Lily Sammile who insist on finding their fulfillment within themselves rather than among the members of the community of Battle Hill. In *All Hallows' Eve*, the salvation of Lester Furnival and childhood friend Betty Wallingford is achieved only after engaging in communal acts such as repentance, confession, forgiveness, and substitution among those of their small community of friends. The self-absorption of Evelyn Mercer, in contrast, reveals the peril of rejecting the opportunities for mutual care that the interactions of community afford. Williams' depiction of the power of community offers a convincing alternative for those unsatisfied by the American reverence of the self-made man.

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## ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

On the campus of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, not far from the Billy Graham Center and identifiable by the conspicuous Narnia-esque lamp post in front, the Marion E. Wade Center resides on the grounds of that iconic institution of American Evangelicalism. “Founded for the purpose of gathering and publicizing the books, manuscripts, letters, and other writings of seven noted British authors,” the Marion E. Wade Center serves as a repository for the literary collections of eminent British writers Owen Barfield, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald, J. R. R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, and Charles Williams (Wheaton.edu).

Charles Williams, who worked as an editor at Oxford University Press, is probably better known today for his literary associations than for his own work. Although his relationship with C.S. Lewis and the Inklings has been well documented, Williams was relatively prolific in his own right. In addition to his editorial work at Oxford University Press, Williams’ oeuvre includes novels, poetry, theology, drama, biography, literary criticism, and book reviews, all of which are permeated by his deeply held theological beliefs. The inclusion of his works and papers along with those of his fellow Inklings in the Wade Center would seem to suggest a shared theological position with his American evangelical readers, but Williams was an Anglican whose religious and theological expression is framed in terms that grow out of his own religious context and in ways that are uniquely his own. Among Williams’ views expressed in ways foreign to American evangelicalism is that of the foundational concept of salvation.

A close reading of Williams’ narrative, Arthurian poetry, *The Region of the Summer Stars*, and his last two novels, *All Hallows’ Eve* and *Descent into Hell*, reveals that he did not conceive of salvation in a conventional, evangelical sense as salvation from sin, or from an eternity in hell, or even to an eternity in heaven. It involves no specific prayer or public response

in ways that have been formulated by modern American evangelicals—like Billy Graham. Rather, in Williams’ works, the process of salvation depicts a deliverance from isolation or neglected, improper, or dysfunctional relationships into communities that are inclusive and practice forgiveness and mutual service. In a 1941 book review Williams wrote, “Only in the community can ‘the individual’ gain his individuality” (*Image* 141). For Williams, then, salvation of the individual becomes inextricably linked to participation in relationships within an intimate community.

Charles Williams grew up in the Church of England and remained devout throughout his life. According to Williams’ biographer Mary Alice Hadfield, religion was taken simply and seriously in the Williams household and Williams’ religious formation began early (5). Although there is little documentation about his childhood involvement in the church, scholars agree that Williams seems to have been an enthusiastic participant from an early age. Hadfield notes that between the ages of three and eight, Charles and his family attended St. Anne’s Church in London, walking to services regularly, sometimes twice on Sundays (5). And after moving to St. Albans, the Williams family found the services of St. Albans Abbey “a rich center of their lives” (7).

Williams’ own spiritual journey never deviates from his early Christian faith. In her biography Hadfield cites a telling quote from *Flecker of Dean Close*, Williams’ last book, in which the words about Flecker, she contends, apply equally to the faith of Williams:

He had grown up in a tradition against which . . . he had never revolted. Like the great doctors of Alexandria, he grew at once in the graces of this world and the grace of another; he breathed heaven in with the common air. He had to make no

violent retrogression in order to find Christ; he had not to agonise as Augustine and others of the “twice-born” did. It is a fortunate and blessed fate. (11)

The constancy of Williams’ faith and the influence of the Christian Church are integral to both Williams’ personal life as well as the body of his work. Although Jesus, God, and the Church are not always explicitly depicted in Williams’ fiction and poetry, their presence is unmistakable. Even as Williams’ characters attempt to work out their salvation, it is always understood that the “Omnipotence” is operating in the background, working for His own inscrutable ends.

The question of whether Williams need be read in light of his theology has arisen among Williams’ critics. In her essay “Members of God’s Body: Charles Williams’s Theory of Co-inherence,” Melissa Matyjasik argues that it is not necessary to read Williams in the context of his Christian worldview to appreciate his writings. She cites the words of Peter Stanhope in *Descent Into Hell*, who tells Pauline Anstruther, “There’s no need to introduce Christ, unless you wish. [Co-inherence is] a fact of experience” (104). The purpose of her own study, she writes, is to show “that Williams’s theology as well as his fiction concerns the human experience of living and not necessarily the process by which one can achieve rewards in the afterlife” (104). She echoes Thomas Howard, who, in his introduction to *The Novels of Charles Williams*, notes that one need not be a Christian to appreciate his works. In fact, he writes,

Williams assumes quite unabashedly the whole Christian scheme, so that words like “salvation” and “damnation” appear quite naturally when you talk about his works (he himself does not much use them). But a man does not have to believe in heaven and hell in order to admit that these words conjure the most powerful pictures available to human imagination. . . . (9)



While Matyjasik, Howard, and Williams are no doubt correct about the possibility of reading Williams' works *sans* Christian theology, its ubiquity is unmistakable in his works and should not be discounted. For the reader of Williams who understands his theological vocabulary and apparatus, the profundity of Williams' insight into the significance of heaven and hell, salvation and damnation, becomes more apparent.

Williams' clearest articulation of his understanding of salvation is found in his contribution to the collection of theological essays, *What the Cross Means to Me*. In his essay Williams argues that Almighty God created humans to "share His Joy" but also created in them the power of free-will and the power to reject His Joy (168). The resulting "distress" of the Fall occurs, he says, if not because we, being "in" Adam, were actually present at the Fall, then at least, as popular Church doctrine holds, because while "we did not consciously choose that original sin, . . . [we] are at most its successors and inheritors. The vicarious guilt of it is in us" (169). The result is, he says, an eternal dying, a "distress" of our own making and one which "needs" justifying, an operation satisfied by the cross (169). Williams argues that on the cross, Jesus subjected himself to His own sense of justice. "He substituted himself for us" and "submitted in our stead to the full results of the Law which is He" (175). He further argues that not only do sins negate or destroy the good, but even good works result in the "destruction of some equal good" as when the Incarnation resulted in the slaughter of the Innocents (170). The work of the cross, however, allows Christians to speak (without shame) of justice and the credibility of God (171). The Resurrection, which begins even as the words "It is finished" are uttered, says Williams, occurs "at His own decision and by His own will" (174). Belief in His generosity is founded on knowledge that He is just and that in all our failures, "there is left to us only a trust in His work" (175). For Williams "faith" is described as being "a kind of quality of

action” that “is, however, a trust in what is already done” (175). It is a recognition of and submission to His will or holy desire (175). Salvation through His sacrifice, he continues, “is precisely our reconciliation, to nature and to the Church—not that they are so separate” (175-176). In Williams’ works, his characters experience their salvation in their reconciliation with, if not the Church writ large, then with its smaller manifestations in the company—or community—of friends and loved ones who share a common understanding of the substitutionary act of Christ and who practice substitutionary acts of service among themselves.

To understand the nature of the salvation of Williams’ characters it is critical to understand his view of the importance of community, and for Williams, community equates with the Christian Church. According to the Anglican Catechism, the mission of the Church is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (15). In his novels and poetry, Williams focuses on the latter, and for his characters this unity with other like-minded characters is vital to their salvation. The depiction of the practice of exchange, substitution, and coinherence—prevalent terms in Williams’s works and defined below—commonly occurs within his work and derives from his belief that the Church is no less than God’s community. The Church is, says the Catechism, “the community of the New Covenant” (14), and Williams’ works reflect the Anglican belief that, historically, God’s project for saving mankind exists within the framework of His covenant community, which, according to the Catechism, is called in the Bible by a variety of names such as “the People of God, the New Israel, a holy nation, [and] a royal priesthood. . . .” (14). By whatever name it is called, it is the community of God that provides the context in which the salvation of His followers occurs.

In his short book *He Came Down From Heaven*, Williams more fully outlines the history of God’s work among humanity. The importance of this work in understanding the role of

community in the novels and poetry of Williams with which this study is concerned cannot be overstated. In this work, Williams clearly reveals his belief that God has chosen to engage man corporately. The following passage from *He Came Down from Heaven* encapsulates the high regard in which Williams holds the communal as opposed to the individual in his interpretation of the Bible.

The whole of the Bible is a nexus of states of being; a pattern developed in a proper sequence from its bare opening through all its enlarging theme. It even involves states of being more than individual; it concerns itself with corporations and companies. Setting aside supernatural beings, the central figure of the Old Testament is Israel; the central figure of the New is the Church. Those companies dominate their members, except when some peculiarly poignant state of individual being emerges, and by sheer power momentarily dominates the mass. Even then the moment of individuality illuminates and returns to the mass; it is never forgotten that the Israelites are members of the nation as the believers are of the Church, and it is the greater organism which is the full subject, at whatever time. Through those greater organisms, as through the many lesser, there arises a sense of corporate mankind. Individuals and companies, and mankind itself, are all finally set in relation to that non-human cause and centre which is called God.

(8-9)

Echoing the Catechism, Williams' numerous collective terms for the people of God—"corporate," "company," "Israel," "Church," "the mass," "nation," and "organism"—indicate Williams' recognition of the preeminent role of the community in God's plan of salvation. Despite conceding the occasional emphasis on the individual in the Bible, the passage asserts the

primacy of the communal and the corporate in God's project. Much of the rest of the book is an elucidation of the historical development of God's interaction with His covenant community.

Williams begins the book by acknowledging the consequences of the Fall to the relationship between man and God, but his analysis is particularly concerned with the result of the Fall for interrelationships among humanity. In describing those consequences, Williams says that "The original tale (of Adam and, subsequently, the Fall) had dealt almost wholly with the relation of the Adam to the Omnipotence; their relations between themselves had not been much considered. But the next generation sees a schism in mankind itself" (21-22). The Fall results in a division among the human community, a consequence seen dramatically in the second generation in the story of Cain's murder of Abel. In that murder, Williams sees that "Human relationship has become to a man a source of anger and hate, and the hatred in its turn brings more desolation. It is the opening of the second theme of the Bible—the theme of *pietas* and the community" (22). According to Williams, because of the failure of community as God had intended, He establishes a new program in which to redeem that community. What follows this first period after the Fall, says Williams, is the period of covenants (23). In order to redeem mankind, God chooses to engage mankind collectively.

Williams identifies God's first covenant with men as that with Noah. Its requirement of a life for a life, Williams says, introduces and establishes the divine expectations for the nature of human relationships. It is a covenant with a community that will practice mutual responsibility for the lives of its members. He writes, "It is a declaration of an exchange of responsibility rather than of joy, but the web of substitution is to that extent created, however distant from the high and utter conclusion of entire interchange. Into the chaotic experience of good as evil the first pattern of order is introduced; every man is to answer for the life of his brother" (24). In the

first covenant is found the rudimentary patterns of substitution and exchange that are to be practiced in the human community.

Williams argues that in the ensuing covenant between God and Abraham (and subsequently Isaac and Jacob), God more clearly formalizes the community with which he will especially engage. The Abrahamic covenant establishes the nation of Israel—and eventually, by extension, the Church—as God’s chosen community. “Out of that covenant a new order issues,” writes Williams, “and the first great formula of salvation. It is the promise and first establishment of Israel, but of Israel in a formula which applies both to it and to the future company of the New Testament, the Church” (26). According to Williams, the “formula of salvation” is nothing less than the establishment of a community called, at first, “Israel,” and later the “Church.” His use of “company” as an appellation for the church is echoed in both the creation of the Company of Co-inherence at Amen House—a loosely organized order of friends and associates at the London office of Oxford University Press, where he worked—as well as the household of Taliessen in *The Region of the Summer Stars*.

The later work of the prophets, suggests Williams, is to remind man to keep his covenant, not only with God but also with each other. The chief cause of man’s failure necessitating the admonitions of the prophets is the tendency of man to regard himself too highly. Williams notes this when he writes that “Sin has many forms, but the work of all is the same . . . It has, in the prophets as everywhere, two chief modes of existence; impiety against man and impiety against God—the refusal of others and the insistence on the self” (42-43). While Williams acknowledges that the prophets challenge man’s transgressions against God, he equally emphasizes man’s transgression against others, both of which are acts of self-centeredness and counter to Christ’s dual commands to love God and neighbor.

The eventual work of God in the substitutionary death of Jesus, for Williams, is not only the means of salvation from self-centeredness, but becomes the paradigm by which that salvation occurs in the most recent manifestation of the divine community—the Church. The Church is appointed, he says, to complete the work and mission of Jesus: “When Messiah removed his visibility, he left behind him a group of united followers. He had created the Church” (117). The redemptive project of God that had begun with Noah is fulfilled in the Church. It is a project that Williams is convinced continues to be fulfilled to the present day. He says that “In the centuries after the passing of Christ there grew up in Europe a great metaphysical civilization. . . . The fundamental idea was salvation. The grand substitution had been, and was being, carried out, and society was to be organized on the basis of a belief in substitution and salvation” (84). God institutes the Church, argues Williams, as the means of salvation for his people, the context within which occurs the practice of substitutionary love modeled after that of Jesus.

In Williams’ work, then, salvation is more about the practice of covenantal community in this world than a concern about the nature of the afterlife. Williams speaks frankly on this point. In the introduction to *The Image of the City* Anne Ridler quotes a Williams letter in which he writes, “it seems so odd somehow to feel as if I believed absolutely everything about death and resurrection and all that and yet somehow not here, and (also) yet somehow not anywhere else. Do I look to another life? No; I think I am obstinately determined to believe that everything is justified here and now, when it obviously isn’t” (xv). He expresses similar sentiments in his essay published in *What the Cross Means to Me* where he asserts the significance and the power of the cross in the plan of God, but acknowledges,

There are those who find it easy to look forward to immortality and those who do not. I admit that, for myself, I do not . . . I cannot say I find the idea of

immortality, even of a joyous immortality, much more attractive (than annihilation). I admit, of course, that this is a failure of intelligence; if joy is joy, an infinite joy cannot be undesirable. The mere fact that our experience on this earth makes it difficult for us to apprehend a good without a catch in it somewhere, is by definition, irrelevant. It may, however, make the folly more excusable. (173)

Whether his focus on salvation as an experience of this world is a result of his lack of intelligence as he self-deprecatingly suggests, or is a folly common to humanity, it is clearly the view that he favors. Williams additionally reveals his convictions in a review of translations of Augustine's *Confessions* and Athanasius's *The Incarnation of the Word of God* where he says, about the writings of both men, "what both these writers were talking about is quite clear: it was 'a new heaven and a new earth', not in the future but all about them. Our Lord had promised them this world back 'a hundred fold', as well as eternal life, and to their own intense and joyous surprise they found they had got it. They were in this new genesis . . . and they wrote about it" (90). Williams, who never outright denies the eternal rewards—and punishments—in which Christians believe, clearly focuses on the temporal. For Williams, those who follow the gospel of Jesus do so in the "here and now." In an article entitled "The Church Looks Forward," Williams begins by stating that "In fact, of course, the Church does not, in her full existence, even on earth, look forward. She looks centrally, she looks at that which is not to be defined in terms of place and time...It is *now* that the Kingdom of Heaven is fulfilled, generally and individually" (*Image* 154). The Christian Church's primary concern, says Williams, is the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God in the present.

It is important to note, however, that Williams does not restrict the “here and now” in any way to commonly understood formulations of time. In *He Came Down From Heaven* Williams writes, “The vicarious life of the kingdom is not necessarily confined to sequence even among the human members of the kingdom. The past and the future are subject to interchange, as the present with both, the living and the dead...The laying down of the life is not confined, in the universal nature of the Sole-Begotten, to any points of space or time” (130). Williams believed that even as the substitutionary work of Jesus was timeless, working both backward and forward throughout human history, the substitutionary love of his adherents might also be thus experienced. It is a concept he fleshes out in *Descent Into Hell*.

In addition to finding within the Christian Church a profound sense of community, Williams’ desire for community found fulfillment in other organizations. His four- to five-year participation in the Rosicrucian society, Order of the Golden Dawn, has been well documented, primarily by scholars analyzing Williams’ works in light of the sympathies he had for the ritual and mystery—and mysticism—of the secret society. While it is known that he participated at the invitation of A. E. Waite, who founded his Order after splitting with a Rosicrucian order formed in Paris (to which W. B. Yeats belonged), Hadfield notes that Williams remained faithful to the vow he swore to keep the rituals and practices of the Order a secret (29).

Williams also found a strong sense of community among those with whom he worked. Another notable community to which Williams belonged was the “Companions of Coinherence” of Amen House. According to Hadfield, as a concession to pressure from friends at Amen House, Williams “agreed to his friends’ pressure to form an Order concerned with his ideas of co-inherence, substitution and exchange” (173). The seven points of the Order as written by Williams follow:



1. The Order has no constitution except in its members. As it was said: *Others he saved, himself he cannot save.*
2. It recommends nevertheless that its members shall make a formal act of union with it and of recognition of their own nature. As it was said: *Am I my brother's keeper?*
3. Its concern is the practice of the apprehension of the Co-inherence both as a natural and a supernatural principle. As it was said: *Let us make man in Our image.*
4. *It is therefore, per necessitatem, Christian.* As it was said: And who ever says there was when this was not, let him be anathema.
5. It recommends therefore the study, on the contemplative side, of the Co-inherence of the Holy and Blessed Trinity, of the Two Natures in the Single Person, of the Mother and Son, of the communicated Eucharist, and of the whole Catholic Church. As it was said: *figlia del tuo figlio.* And on the active side, of methods of exchange, in the State, in all forms of love, and in all natural things, such as childbirth. As it was said: *Bear ye one another's burdens.*
6. It concludes in the Divine Substitution of Messias all forms of exchange and substitution, and it invokes this Act as the root of all. As it was said: *He must become, as it were, a double man.*
7. The Order will associate itself primarily with four feasts: the Feast of the Annunciation, the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, the Feast of the Transfiguration and the Commemoration of All Souls. As it was said: *Another will be in me and I in him.* (qtd. in Hadfield 174)

The collective effect of the seven points is to bind together the members of the Order into a Christian community in which will be practiced the same kind of unity, mutual care, and service

which has been modeled by the Trinity, manifested in the incarnation, and celebrated in Christian holy days and feasts. Although little is written about the Companions of Co-inherence, Hadfield records that Williams urged its members to offer prayer and services of exchange to each other when difficulties arose (217). Membership was offered to others outside Amen House, and participation grew, though Hadfield recalls Williams' frustration with one member who believed that the exclusivity of Christianity in itself contradicted the principles of co-inherence. "She must not be allowed to forget that the Order is," he wrote, "in its universality, Christian . . ." (232). And though Williams believed that the principles of the Order should be universal in their application, he insisted that they have their source in the Christian Church. In the postscript of *Descent of the Dove*, which is dedicated "for the Companions of the Co-inherence," Williams voices his vision that such an order might arise within the Christian Church to communicate and affirm unity despite the international and social schism and distress present in the world of 1939 as well as to practice substitutions and exchanges in love that its members might grow in sanctity (236). Williams conceptualized the Companions of Co-inherence as a smaller order or community existing within the larger community of the Church, a vision evident in the small, intimate communities found in *Region of the Summer Stars*, *Descent into Hell*, and *All Hallows' Eve*.

Another manifestation of Williams' high regard for community is his use of the image of the City. The Williams family lived in London, where Charles was born in 1886, until 1894 when the family moved to St. Albans, approximately twenty miles northwest of London (Hadfield 6). It was a difficult move for the Williamses, who were "confirmed city people" (Spencer 10), and after returning to London to attend University College in 1903, Williams remained in London until being relocated by his employer, Oxford University Press, to Oxford

during World War II. Scholars like Kathleen Spencer have noted the correlation between this prominent image in Williams' works and his affection for the city in which he lived. "Charles Williams was a London man born and bred," she writes, who "drew his inspiration from the city..." and found in London and St. Albans "the reflection of his deepest understanding of the ground of human value—community"(10). For Williams, the City is a recurring image found in literature but having its origin in the Bible. The City, he believed, is a universal union transcending both Race and Nation and called "Man or the Church or the City" (*Image* 102). Though not interchangeable with the Church, neither is the City inseparable from it. For Williams, "This phrase 'the Christian City' must be rightly understood. *In the absolute sense of the words*, the true christian [sic] commonweal or city is the Church, and no temporal body" (*Image* 111). The City, he says, is an inclusive union composed of those who are moved by the Holy Ghost to share in the Image of Christ. He writes, "It is the intercourse of those free Images which is the union of the City. The name of the City is Union" (103). It is a union or community marked by the mutuality of free exchange, which is modeled after the act of substitution of Christ. The resurrection of Jesus, says Williams, became the means by which He countered the outrage of sin and the death upon the unity God had created, restoring the unity of mankind and renewing the City (*Image* 104 -105). And though God created this union, and the Holy Ghost drives individuals to it, Williams says that they must choose the Re-creation presented to them in the image of the City and depicted in the Apocalypse (104). As evidenced in Williams' own explanation of the City, his concept of the image of the City is inextricably linked to his other theological beliefs, several of which are key to understanding his poetry and fiction.

Among these key concepts, which are not ever clearly differentiated by Williams, are exchange, substitution, largess, and co-inherence. In a pamphlet published in 1941 entitled "The

Way of Exchange,” Williams describes the means whereby members of the City interact. They engage, he says, in a process of exchange, of “give and take, “ which is evident even on the most basic economic level of society. He notes that at that level—what he calls “the widest sense of social exchange” (*Image* 149)—the medium of exchange is money. He writes that “Money has been called, by the economists, ‘the means of exchange’. It is, usually, the medium in which particular contracts are formed. And contract, or agreement, is the social fact of ‘living by each other’” (*Image* 149). In the same way that money currently serves as a means of exchange, Williams says that at one time “Human life, in the Roman Empire, had been specialized; not perhaps so much as ours, but it had been specialized. It depended on an exchange of labour” (149). This exchange of labor more closely approximates the kind of communal exchange evident in such works as *The Region of the Summer Stars*. But exchange, he will demonstrate, takes place on multiple levels.

Williams identifies the family as providing a fundamental model of exchange, substitution, and co-inherence. The process of childbirth, he says, includes the exchange of the man’s seed with the woman who receives it. The transference of the seed represents a literal exchange of the means of procreation. Similarly, because the man is incapable of carrying the unborn child, the woman, in an act of substitution, carries it within herself. This substitution also exemplifies the act of bearing the burden of another, of the willing acceptance of the hardship on behalf of someone else. “That substitution,” writes Williams, “produces the new life. That new life exists literally within its mother; it inheres in its mother” (150). As a result, he says, “The value of the sexual act itself is a kind of co-inherence” (150). Both the gestation of the baby and the act of intercourse display a kind of interconnectedness or union that serve as a metaphor for the mutuality of community. The principle of exchange, substitution, and co-inherence that

humans experience even in the process of birth, establishes a pattern that is also borne out in Christian doctrine.

For Williams, the doctrine of the Christian Church also provides the critical foundation of co-inherence and substitution. In fact, he says, “The doctrine of the Christian Church has declared that the mystery of the Christian religion is a doctrine of co-inherence and substitution” (*Image* 152). According to Williams, the meaning of co-inherence is first seen in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. In “The Way of Exchange” Williams cites ecclesiastical doctrine that “declared not merely that the Father and the Son existed co-equally, but that they existed co-inherently—that is, that the Son existed *in* the Father and that the Father existed *in* the Son” (*Image* 149). He adds that “The Divine Word (Jesus) co-inheres in God the Father (as the Father in Him and the Spirit in Both)” (152). The doctrines of the Incarnation and Atonement, both acts of substitution (152), provide the means for the co-inherence between man and God. Charles Moorman says, “This doctrine—called indiscriminately Largesse, Exchange, Substitution—represents the working out in daily life of the central doctrines of Christianity, the Incarnation and Atonement, which themselves are manifestations of what Williams called the “co-inherence” of all things” (*Triptych* 69). The doctrine of the co-inherence of the Triune community when coupled with the substitution of Jesus in the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement provides the basis for mankind to co-inhere with God as well. The nature of the relationship between Father and Son, Williams says, is the same as the one into which God promises to enter with His Church. “The same preposition,” he writes, “was used to define our Lord’s relation with His Church: ‘we in him and he in us’. It was in that sense that the Church itself in-lived its children: ‘we are members one of another’” (*Image* 149). In the same pamphlet, he says, “The principle of the Passion is that He gave His life ‘for’ –that is, instead of and on

behalf of—ours. In that sense He lives in us and we in Him, He and we co-inhere” (152). In the same way that Father and Son co-inhere; and He and we co-inhere; we, the members of His Church, also co-inhere with one another.

Having made possible the way for man to co-inhere with himself, Jesus established the model and the means for mankind to co-inhere and practice substitution with each other. Salvation and life in God’s kingdom, for Williams, are concerned with both the substitutionary love of Jesus and its subsequent manifestation among his followers. He elucidates this point, quoting I John 3:16 as the basis for the kind of relationships in which his covenant people should engage:

Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren . . . if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” We are to love each other *as* he loved us, laying down our lives *as* he did, that this love may be perfected. We are to love each other, that is, by acts of substitution. We are to be substituted and to bear substitution. (*He came Down* 121)

God’s community, the Church, engages in the practice of substitutionary love as an expression of its love for God and in obedience to biblical injunction. Judith Kollmann writes that “The Crucifixion . . . becomes the prototype for man’s practice of exchange and substitution; and consequently it also becomes the basis for peaceful human society, the foundation of the human community” (183). Williams’ most prominent example of substitution is found in his understanding of the command to bear one another’s burdens. He writes that “So great a business of exchange and substitution fills the phrase ‘bear ye one another’s burdens’ with a much fuller meaning than is generally ascribed to it. But that fuller meaning is no less practical than the usual

meanings of being sympathetic and doing exterior acts ‘of kindness and love’” (*Image* 150). Instead, substitution occurs when an explicit and overt pact is made. Such “compacts can be made,” he says, “for the taking over of the suffering of troubles, and worries, and distresses, as simply and as effectually as an assent is given to the carrying of a parcel” (*Image* 151-52). What Williams means here is no less than the literal bearing of another’s burdens, an agreement between two people that one will willingly experience a portion of the suffering and emotional distress of the other with the purpose of producing real and substantial relief.

That act of sharing, Williams also calls “Largesse,” by which he means, in essence, a sharing of self—of giving and receiving—that results in unity, a unity in which participants retain their individuality. Largesse is both founded on and modeled after the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ. It is in this context of largesse that Williams also writes that “Only in the community can ‘the individual’ gain his individuality.’ ‘Sanctification,’” he adds, “is that state in which ‘reconciliation and fellowship find their goal and consummation’; it is this which is, to raise to its full meaning a term otherwise applied, ‘the doctrine of largesse’” (*Image* 141). This unity within community is the doctrine of largesse. Williams reasons that “The doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine of largesse; the doctrine of the Atonement is a doctrine of largesse; the doctrine of the Church is a doctrine of largesse; therefore the doctrine of the individual is a doctrine of largesse” (*Image* 141). The community founded on largesse is also one that practices mutual forgiveness. Williams says that “To forgive and to be forgiven are the two points of holy magnificence and holy modesty; round these two centres the whole doctrine of largesse revolves. This is the pattern of our ‘actual situation’ in the Church, and ‘outside the Church is no salvation’ (*Image* 141). Salvation, for Williams, is a function of largess and is

found exclusively within God's community, the Church, as it exercises the mutual practice of forgiveness.

For those belonging to the Church, Williams identifies two approaches to the practice of one's faith, The Ways of Affirmation and Rejection, which represent two means of engaging in the pursuit of God. The Way of Affirmation is the affirmation or embracing of all it means to be human in the context of the divine. The Incarnation of Christ, writes Williams, provides the paradigm for The Way of Affirmation. He notes that the "maxim of the Affirmative Way [is] 'Not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God'" (*Descent* 59). Eloise Schreiner describes Williams' concept of The Way of Affirmation as a path that one chooses to regard "those creations of God which exist in the natural world...with proper awe and wonder as they reveal characteristics of God" (4). The negative way, or what Williams calls The Way of Rejection, Schreiner says, rejects the worship or idolization of them (4). Rejection is not simply the negation of the Way of Affirmation, rather it is the choice to reject any worldly distractions that might divert one's focus from God. Williams most clearly articulates the two Ways thus:

The one Way was to affirm all things orderly until the universe throbbed with vitality; the other to reject all things until there was nothing anywhere but He. The Way of Affirmation was to develop great art and romantic love and marriage and philosophy and social justice; the Way of Rejection was to break out continually in the profound mystical documents of the soul. (*Descent* 58)

Both Ways provide a common basis upon which Christians can unite in community: the Way of Affirmation forms the prevalent context for the Church, and the Way of Rejection for the ascetic life.



The recurring theme in Williams' life and theology is the centrality of community. It grows out of his love of the city and is manifested in the various associations with which he surrounded himself. It is pervasive in his understanding of theology, Church history, and in such Christian doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation. It is similarly prevalent in his most prominent theological terms: exchange, substitution, co-inherence, largess, and The Ways of Affirmation and Rejection. In the following chapters, this study will examine the ways in which Williams explores his theological principles in the laboratory of his poetry and novels, demonstrating how they might unfold in one's journey to salvation, beginning with his last book of poetry, *The Region of the Summer Stars*.

## ***Chapter 2: The Region of the Summer Stars***

Charles Williams published what is probably his best-known collection of Arthurian poetry, *Taliessin through Logres*, in 1938. While the twenty-four poems that comprise the collection contain elements of the Arthurian legend, the poems are generally independent and only loosely reflect the *Morte D'Arthur* upon which the collection is generally based. His second volume, *The Region of the Summer Stars*, published in 1944 is a slimmer volume of only eight similarly independent poems. Judith Kollman writes that “It is certain that [Williams’] *Arthurian* is one of the most creative versions of the Arthurian legend written in the twentieth century” (203), yet the reader hoping to find a continuous narrative of Arthurian legend in Williams’ *Taliessin Through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars* is likely to be disappointed. In fact, in the *Arthurian Torso*, Williams’ friend C. S. Lewis begins by reorganizing the poems into a more coherent chronological order (279-280). Williams’ poetry is also idiosyncratic, and unfamiliarity with the theological concepts that contextualize its pervasive images can greatly hinder one’s comprehension. Roma King observes that while “Many readers have indeed complained about a perceived eccentricity in Williams’s diction, . . . there is little pedantry or pretentiousness here” (155). That is part of the appeal of his poetry, and its theological—and spiritual—significance justifies the effort of decoding his use of language.

In his preface to *The Region of the Summer Stars* Williams writes, “These poems are part of a series of poems which began with *Taliessin through Logres*, but these, generally, are incidental to the main theme” (117). Although they might be “incidental,” critics have agreed that they certainly are not unimportant. In fact, the importance of these poems in Williams’ *Arthurian* should not be underestimated. Kollmann correctly argues that *The Region of the Summer Stars* “fleshes out the story, the theology, and the philosophy (of *Taliessin*) . . .

opulently” (203), and Glen Cavaliero calls them “commentary” that “develop the eschatological aspect of the myth” (116). Of the eight poems that comprise *The Region of the Summer Stars*, “The Founding of the Company” is the focal point. Structurally and thematically it is the center of *The Region of the Summer Stars*, and a close reading reveals that Williams’ description of the Company contains many of Williams’ major theological ideals: The Way of Affirmation, largesse, exchange, substitution, and co-inherence. It is a sincere and honest vision of the principles that Williams hoped to see realized in the community of the people of God—the Church.

In both *Taliessin through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars*, Williams employs the Arthurian legend to tell his own theological story. Kollmann points out that Williams’ *Arthuriad* is “one of the very few that has approached the topic from a symbolic and theological perspective rather than a historical one” (203). While the characters and geography of Malory largely provide the foundation for the systematic development of Williams’ own images and concepts, the origins of the central character Taliessin derive from *The Mabinogion*. In order to understand Williams’ depiction of the Arthurian legend, the reader must first understand the rather complex system of images or symbols that underlies it. Williams himself explains some of these images in a 1941 essay, “The Making of Taliessin,” and additional explanatory notes of Williams’ were published posthumously in Anne Ridler’s collection of Williams’ works in *The Image of the City and other Essays* in 1958. C. S. Lewis, a friend of Williams who had spoken at some length with Williams about his poetry, also provides significant commentary on these poems and their meanings in *Arthurian Torso*, which was published in 1948. Although these works provide invaluable clarification to the reader of Williams’ work, not everyone agrees that that Williams’ system of symbols is useful.

Critics differ as to whether Williams' use of Arthurian symbols, or images, succeeds. M. M. Mahood notes that "To Charles Williams as a creative artist, the evolution of Arthurian romances is purposive because its goal is the body of symbols it supplies to the twentieth century poet" (238). On the other hand, Roger Sale argues that Williams' use of symbols is overly rigid and mechanical. He writes that "The difference between Williams [and other modern poets] lies primarily in the rigidity of his intellectual symbolic system...the only way to read Williams at all is unresponsively and unimaginatively...Williams' system is not simply hierarchical; it must be understood mechanically" (215). In the same essay, Sale reveals what may be the basis for his criticism: a lack of sympathy for Williams' Christian vision. He writes that "If the reader of Williams does not believe in his version of Christianity, then almost everything in the cycle tends to seem cheap..." (213). He is probably right. Williams' system of images requires a considerable understanding of Christian theology, Anglican theology in particular. Even if one understands the underlying theological basis for the poetry, it can still be obscure. In fact, in *Arthurian Torso*, Lewis notes four different kinds of obscurity found in Williams' Arthurian poetry (371-2). Despite the difficulty of Williams' Arthurian poetry, Stephan Dunn still "consider[s] Williams one of the great minds and imaginations of the century," and writes, "I am willing to spend time puzzling out Williams' fantastically complex metaphors and bizarre turns of phrase, and that is why I ask the reader to do the same" (367). Certainly, Williams' work offers rewards for those willing to engage its complexities.

To grasp the meaning of Williams' Arthurian poetry, though, it is necessary to start with a very simple introduction to the geographic images of *Taliessin through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars*. For Williams Logres (or Britain) is one province of the Byzantine Empire, which represents all of creation (or the pattern of creation) and whose Emperor is God (or "God-

as-known-by-man”) (*Image* 178). Dunn notes “Logres also represents what Britain could have become had the Arthurian enterprise succeeded and had the Grail actually been recovered” (368). Other prominent provinces include Caucasia (“the physical fundamental”), Gaul (“fruitfulness” or the home of scholastic activity and theology) (*Essays* 178), and Rome (the hands, or “the ‘tools of the intellect’”) (Schreiner 53). In Logres, the forest of Broceliande in which Nimue, the “mother of making,” resides is found in the southwest, in the region of Cornwall and Devon extending into the sea—a sort of sea-woods (*Essays* 179). Broceliande’s role in Williams’ Arthurian poetry is significant. Dunn observes that “the ‘Arthurian enterprise’ is, for Williams, something quite specific: the unification of Broceliande with Byzantium—which means, of the imagination with reason, order, the hierarchical principle. This union, if it could be brought about, would produce the perfect individual or the perfect state, or both” (268). West of Broceliande lay Carbonek, the home of hallowed things and the home of Pelles, who guards the Grail. Farther west beyond Carbonek lay Sarras, “the land of the Trinity.” In the other direction, far to the East in the antipodean ocean, lay P’o-lu, a type of hell and the home of evil (*Torso* 238). Kathleen Spencer points out that in *Taliessin through Logres*, Williams’ image of the Emperor of P’o-lu is “is masturbatory and self-involved, always the hallmarks of Williams’ visions of Hell” (81). To aid the reader, these geographical images of Williams’ Byzantine Empire appeared on the endpapers of early editions of *Taliessin*.

Williams’ geographic images become the vehicle by which he expresses his theological and philosophical ideals, and in *Summer Stars*, Williams’ views, particularly his view of exchange, community, and salvation, are concentrated in “The Founding of the Company.” Not everyone is convinced of the importance of “The Founding of the Company,” though. Agnes Sibley argues that

As a poem, “the Founding of the Company” is less compelling than some of the others, simply because of the rather difficult exposition that makes up the first part of it. There is no doubt of Williams’s sincerity or of his high vision of the perfected society. Like Taliessin, he is thrilled with the idea of people everywhere living in the exchange made possible by Christ’s love and self-giving [. . .] In a sense, ‘The Founding of the Company’ can be thought of simply as a necessary preparation for the last poem in the book, ‘The Prayers of the Pope.’ (133)

I would argue first, that the exposition of “The Founding of the Company” is no more difficult than most of the other poems, and even if it were, certainly no poetry’s importance can be determined by the difficulty with which the reader encounters it. Secondly, it is precisely because this poem does articulate Williams’ “high vision of the perfected society”—and because he does seem to be “thrilled” by the possibility of a community living in the free exchange of love that it must be recognized for its importance.

Not only does the structure of *The Region of the Summer Stars* affirm the centrality of “The Founding of the Company” in Williams’ cycle of poetry, but it also reflects its theological importance to Williams as well. If one omits the Prelude of *Summer Stars*, as C. S. Lewis suggests when he organizes Williams’ poetry chronologically (*Torso* 280), what remains are seven poems that are clearly organized in such a way that “The Founding of the Company” is the focal point. It should be noted that the alternative structure of Williams’ Arthurian poetry in *Taliessin Through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars* suggested by Lewis in *The Arthurian Torso* reflects his concern for the chronology of the two cycles rather than for their theological import. *The Region of the Summer Stars*, then, can be organized in the following way: the second poem (the first poem after the Prelude), “The Calling of Taliessin,” corresponds

to the last poem, “The Prayers of the Pope” (2 and 8); the third poem, “Taliessin in the Rose-Garden,” corresponds to the seventh poem, “The Meditation of Mordred” (3 and 7); the fourth poem, “The Departure of Dindrane,” corresponds with the sixth poem, “The Queen’s Servant” (4 and 6); and the middle, or fifth poem, “The Founding of the Company” is the structural center of *The Region of the Summer Stars*, forming the heart of Williams’ theological meaning.

This structural analysis is corroborated by Charles Moorman in his essay, “The Structures of Charles Williams’ Arthurian Poetry.” His suggestion that the first (the Prelude) and last poems (1 and 8) make up the beginning and ending of the *Summer Stars* cycle and the second and seventh poems (2 and 7) poems provide the border for the middle poems, does not substantially differ from the analysis of this essay. He does, in fact, come to the conclusion that the remaining interior poems comprise the “thematic center of the cycle” (100). A close reading of “The Founding of the Company,” the centerpiece of *Summer Stars*, reveals the importance Williams places on the value of a small community for those searching for a means to effect the doctrines of largesse, exchange, and co-inherence.

Following the prelude, the first poem, “The Calling of Taliessin,” foreshadows the coming of the Company. Although the poem depicts the failure of the broader program of the Emperor to extend his kingdom, Byzantium, by creating Logres out of Britain through the leadership of Arthur, its king, and the priesthood of Galahad and his achievement of the grail, it contains the first mention of the Company. It is a relatively lengthy tale about Taliessin, the court poet who represents the poetic imagination (*Essays* 179), his arrival in Britain as an infant, his journey to Byzantium and his encounter with Merlin and Brisen, his sister, who represent time and space (*Essays* 19). Merlin reveals to Taliessin in a dream their mission to prepare the way for the Grail, he with Arthur in Logres, and Brisen with Galahad in Carbonek. The Emperor’s

enterprise is only partially revealed to Taliessin, who is not yet able to receive the full vision because he has not yet been to Byzantium and encountered the Emperor. The poem concludes when Merlin tells Taliessin that if Brisen and he fail to accomplish the purpose of the Emperor to unite the Grail with Broceliande, then the purposes of the Emperor might at least be realized by the household of the king's poet. Merlin states that

they who shall be called and thralled  
by Taliessin's purchase and their own will  
from many a suburb, many a waste; say  
that they are a wonder whose origin is not known,  
they are strown with a high habit, with the doctrine of largesse,  
who in his house shall be more than the king's poet  
because of the vows they take. (137-138)

Despite foreshadowing the eventual failure of Logres to achieve the Grail, Merlin's words introduce the nature of the Company, which will arise in its place. Taliessin's household will be, as Merlin describes, one where those who reside will practice the higher doctrine of largesse.

"The Prayers of the Pope," which corresponds to "The Calling of Taliessin," is a similarly lengthy poem that also contains the last, and ominous, reference to the Company. In "The Prayers of the Pope," the prayers of Pope Deodatus reveal the conflict of Arthur and Lancelot, the triumph of Mordred, the invasion of heathen tribes, the fall of the Empire, and the failure of its project. In "The Prayers of the Pope" amid the disintegration of the Empire, Taliessin addresses his household and announces, "We declare the Company still/ fixed in the will of all who serve the Company, / but the ends are on Us, peers and friends" (174). The members of the household swear an oath to remain faithful to the Company as long as it endures



(175). Mariann Russell observes that the Pope's prayers for this remnant are "reminiscent of Christ's prayer for his disciples at the Last Supper" (14). The introduction of the Company in "The Calling of Taliessin" and the intimation of its demise in "The Prayers of the Pope" form a type of bracket that frames the remaining poems. While Williams offers no description of the downfall of the Company in "The Prayers of the Pope," he does offer a glimpse of hope for the Empire. The piece ends with the Pope's celebration of the Eucharist and the stemming of the worst of the evils at work in the Empire.

The third poem in the cycle, "Taliessin in the Rose-Garden," contains no direct references to the Company, but lays the groundwork for its coming. It is a shorter poem that tells of Taliessin's walk in the queen's rose garden where he encounters Guinevere, Dindrane, and a slave girl. Guinevere, "the feminine headship of Logres," (139) is majestic, but her infidelity to and betrayal of the King is suggested as she looks for Arthur's friend, Lancelot. She wears a ruby ring that induces in Taliessin a vision of "Logres in the Empire" (140), a Britain that has achieved its divine intention. In his vision, Taliessen sees the unity of Logres symbolized by "multifold levels of unity" (143): the unified and harmonious houses of the zodiac and the peace, joy, balance, and justice evident in the unity between man and man, and man and woman (143). That unity is corrupted by the fall of Adam and Eve and the fratricide of Abel. The co-inherent unity of the original state is inverted, becoming "incoherent" (144). But, in his vision, Taliessin foresees that it is the joy of womanhood to bear the one who will redeem the cosmic order with the coming of Galahad. The "sideways" talking of Guinevere and her condescending scorn of Taliessin's visionary gift, however, hints at the complicity of Guinevere in the calamitous end of the Emperor's project of Logres (146), thus paving the way for the creation of the Company that will establish a community of "multifold levels of unity" foretold in the previous poem and

achieved in “The Founding of the Company.” Moorman identifies the purpose of the first two poems (1 and 2) as “serving only to define the creation . . . of the Company” (100), though clearly “Taliessin in the Rose-Garden” similarly anticipates its coming.

The corresponding poem, “The Meditation of Mordred,” similarly makes no direct reference to the Company, but its depiction of the onset of the collapse of Arthur’s kingdom reflects the disintegration of the spirit of community in Britain that culminates in the disbanding of the Company in “The Prayers of the Pope.” In this short poem Arthur disregards the instruction of the Pope and crosses the Channel to Berwick, where he lays siege to Lancelot. Guinevere enters the nunnery at Almesbury, and Mordred rules in Britain. Mordred rejects the need for “such a fairy mechanism” (166) as the Grail and envisions the means by which he will supplant the role of Arthur and establish himself as king of Britain. Unlike his father, who forged the community of Camelot, Mordred is content to “sit . . . alone in a kingdom of Paradise” (167). His desire for supreme power juxtaposes the refusal of Taliessen to exert his authority over the Company when they request that he rule over them. Moorman also correctly links the last two poems (7 and 8) in their role of describing the destruction of the Company (100).

The third poem, “The Departure of Dindrane,” contains two stories that directly lead into the creation of the Company and illustrate the Ways of Rejection and Affirmation. One story tells of the departure of Dindrane, Percivale’s sister—who loves and is loved by Taliessin—from Camelot to the convent of Almesbury. Williams describes the convent both as “the court of separation” and “the household in waiting” (148). As the court of separation, it represents her decision to separate herself from her community outside the convent; hers is the Way of Rejection. As the household in waiting, the convent represents the new, cloistered community that anticipates her arrival. More significantly, it also contrasts the household of Taliessen into

which the slave will enter as, with Taliessin, she chooses the Way of Affirmation. As the procession rides to Almesbury, the slave girl observes the two lords, “the Ways upon the Way,” and recognizes in Dindrane’s choice the vocation of “the Rejection of all images” and in Taliessin’s “the Affirmation of all images,” though in both, the doctrine of largesse (150).

The second of the two narratives within the poem tells the story of Dindrane’s Athenian slave girl, who by law is being freed. After seven years of service, the law of Logres provides her the options of being returned to Athens, being given a dowry and remaining free in Britain, or of continuing in service to the master of her choice. On the road to Almesbury as part of Dindrane’s retinue, the slave girl experiences an epiphany. As she observes Dindrane choosing freely for herself a life of bondage or servitude in the convent, she recognizes a parallel between Dindrane and herself. Williams writes that “Love and a live heart lay in Dindrane; / love and a live heart sprang in the slave,” and she apprehends that “servitude and freedom were one and interchangeable,” that “Servitude is a will that obeys an imaged law; / freedom an unimaged—or makes choice of images” (149). Her new insight of community and the relationship between freedom and service provide the basis that informs her decision to serve in the household of Taliessin. At the end of the poem she says, “I will swear to what I serve, / the household and its future” (153). The following poem, “The Founding of the Company,” depicts the way of life in that household.

The poem “The Queen’s Servant” corresponds to “The Departure of Dindrane” and tells the story of another servant girl who, like the Athenian slave in “The Departure of Dindrane,” is similarly confronted with an opportunity to gain her freedom. In “The Queen’s Servant” Kay sends Taliessin a note requesting provision from his household of a literate servant for Guinevere. Taliessin complies, selecting a girl that meets Kay’s requirements. He clothes her and

releases her from the obligation of servitude so that she can serve freely in the court of the Queen. Principles of freedom, loyalty, and service found in “The Queen’s Servant” also echo those found in “The Founding of the Company.” Though she leaves willingly and for a good cause, the departure of the young woman from the community of the Company marks the beginning of its dissolution.

While the structure of *Summer Stars* clearly establishes the centrality of Williams’ vision of “The Founding of the Company,” this conclusion is also borne out in the way in which Williams unfolds his most significant theological and philosophical ideas in the poem. The organization of the Company reflects a progression of these concepts at work in Taliessin’s household. After introducing his views of the Ways of Rejection and Affirmation in “The Departure of Dindrane,” in the first verse paragraph of “The Founding of the Company” Williams illustrates what a community of the Way of Affirmation looks like. Structurally, the placement of “The Founding of the Company” after “The Departure of Dindrane” is significant because it forms a response to Dindrane’s pursuit of The Way of Rejection. By entering the cloister at Almesbury Dindrane chooses the Way of Rejection. Taliessin, on the other hand, chooses the Way of Affirmation, and the Company is a natural manifestation of that Way. Russell notes that while Dindrane and Taliessin choose different Ways, neither Way is better than the other (13). Though expressed differently, the intent of either Way is the quest of a life devoted to God. Yet, the fact that Williams devotes the whole central poem to the Company and the affirmation of the community in which the slave girl finds her freedom—and salvation—indicates Williams’ preference for the Way of Affirmation as a means of experiencing the kingdom of God. This is also borne out in *Descent into Hell* and *All Hallows’ Eve* where small communities practice the same ideals developed in “The Founding of the Company,” where their

members find salvation, and where those who reject the practice of community do so at the peril of their souls.

While the achievement of the Grail ultimately fails, “The Founding of the Company,” which Glen Cavaliero writes “constitutes the charter for the Way of Exchange” (117), presents Williams’ portrayal of how a society founded on the Way of Affirmation might function. Hadfield links the “Founding of the Company” with the Companions of the Co-inherence formed by Williams at Amen House and to which she belonged. “The Founding of the Company,” she writes, “is a very lovely and warming presentation, among many other things, of the Companions of the Co-inherence” (223). The principles Williams instituted for the Companions are those practiced by the Company, which is said to have arisen earlier than the orders at Tabennisi and later than those of Monte Cassino, and Cappadocia. But unlike these formal monastic orders—and that of Almesbury—Taliessin’s is a community that shares a commonality that draws its members together but binds them more loosely, in what C. S. Lewis calls “something less than a religious order” (*Torso* 325). The origin of this Company is the household of Taliessin and yet bears no name, least of all Taliessin’s, says Williams (154). And while Taliessin is uncertain of its origin, whether it grows out of “doctrine or toil” (154), out of some written dogma or the good works it engenders, it is the manifestation of love, “a token of love between themselves, and between themselves and their lord” (154). The principles upon which the Company is founded are the “Acts of the Throne and the pacts of the themes” (154). Because the Throne represents the Emperor, or God as he is known, these Acts should be understood as the law of God, and in this context, specifically the dual commands of Jesus to love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22: 37-39). The two commands, which Jesus said summarize all the law of the Hebrew Scriptures, reflect both the love among Taliessin’s household and the love

they share with him as their lord. They similarly provide the basis for the unity among the “themes” or provinces. This then becomes the basis for the practice of the Company. Unlike a formal religious order, the Company, Williams says, unites in mutual concession. No overt organizational system is necessary to make decisions, nor is a process for admission instituted (154). Instead, the only requirement for participation is “that any soul [take] of its own election of the Way” (154). The participant in this Company need only freely choose the Way of Affirmation.

Another of Williams’ theological concepts found in the closing lines of the first verse paragraph of “The Founding of the Company” is largesse. There, Williams describes the two-pronged source of the largesse of the Company. The first source of largesse, the Incarnation, is found in an allusion to Dante. In “The Founding of the Company” Williams writes that “the whole manner of love” of the Company is “fate to minds adult in love” (154). Here, Williams references an expression also found in *The Figure of Beatrice*, his study of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. What Williams calls “fate to minds adult in love” is an expression that communicates the profound act of self-sacrifice that is evidenced in the incarnation—or what Williams calls in “The Founding of the Company” “the Flesh-taking” (154). In his analysis of *Paradiso* Williams writes that the Incarnation and substitutionary self-sacrifice of Christ provide the basis for the community of love and can only be understood by those who have acquired a certain level of maturity and consciousness of that love. He writes, “It is this . . . handing over of the self to become another self which is the greater largesse of spirit, and this which is understood only by those adult in love” (202). Only those who fully comprehend the magnitude of the love that prompts the Incarnation can be said to be “adult in love.”

The second source of largesse in the Company is the Trinity. Like the Incarnation, the Trinity, for Williams, represents the ideal unity within community. The “three-in-one” becomes the paradigm for the company of Logres and the source of its doctrine of largesse. In “The Founding of the Company” Williams asks, “What says the creed of the Trinity?” (154). The “creed of the Trinity” to which Williams alludes is The Creed of St. Athanasius. Williams’ reply, “*quicunque vult*” is the first two words of the Latin text of the Creed and means “whosoever will.” The Creed of St. Athanasius states that “Whosoever will” can find salvation in the Catholic Faith and begins its description of that faith with a statement of the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of the divine unity. It begins by stating, “we worship God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance” (*Medieval Sourcebook*). “Therefore,” says Williams, the cult of the company is “the Trinity and the Flesh-taking” (154). He adds that the “rule” of the company is “the doctrine of largesse” and its vow the mutual interdependence of “each in each” (155). The unifying practice of the Company is the mutual sharing of resources and self. This practice becomes progressively more and more involved as the members advance in the stages of this informal order.

The second verse paragraph of “The Founding of the Company” describes in more detail the nature of Taliessin’s Company and contains Williams’ concept of exchange. In this poem the reader learns that the Company has spread throughout Logres and that it is composed of members of all levels of society, from “maids, porters, mechanics, to the glowing face / of Dindrane . . . and the cells of the brain / of the king’s college and council” (155). Though it is “a common union” (155), the Company is described as consisting of three stations; each level exhibiting a greater degree of exchange, but it is by the characteristic of exchange, the process of “give and take,” by which the first station is known. C. S. Lewis says about the members of the

Company at this level, “There is nothing to distinguish them from people outside the company except the fact that they do consciously and joyously, and therefore excellently, what everyone save parasites has to do in some fashion. From one point of view they are merely good slaves, good soldiers, good clergy, good counselors and the like” (326). But they are not merely good citizens of their community; Lewis describes them as having “taken into their hearts the doctrine of Exchange” (326). They are devoted to live in the mutual exchange of labor and service to others in the Company. Williams writes that those of the first station, despite their station in society, “were those who lived by a frankness of honourable exchange, / labour in the kingdom, devotion in the Church, the need / each had of the other; this was the measurement and motion of process” (155). Williams describes them as belonging to, and taking their measurement in, the communities to which they belong: they are citizens of Logres, they are members of the Church, and they are members of the Company. And as members of the Company, they exchange labor freely. “Servitude itself,” writes Williams,

Was sweetly fee’d or freed by the willing proffer  
of itself to another, the taking of another to itself  
in degree, the making of a mutual beauty in exchange,  
be the exchange dutiful or freely debonair freedom mingled,  
taking and giving being the living of largesse,  
and in less than this the kingdom having no saving. (155-6)

The servitude of Taliessin’s community is happily rendered, regardless of whether the exchange is a matter of duty or of “debonair freedom,” and generates a mutual beauty that sustains the kingdom.



The second station—or “mode”—as it is called in the third stanza involves a greater degree of exchange. This level of exchange entails a fuller exchange of the self, and in Williams’ vocabulary, attains a level of what he calls “substitution.” King notes that the distinction between the first and second levels of the Company is the degree of consciousness with which the members participate. While the members of the first station practice exchange unconsciously, those of the second station are “those who consciously offer themselves in exchange with each other. This goes beyond necessity or even ordinary human goodwill to embrace a willed substitution” (153). The substitution practiced by the second station of the Company of Taliessin reflects more directly the substitution of the “Flesh-taker,” Jesus, its prototype:

The Company’s second mode bore farther  
The labour and fruition; it exchanged the proper self  
and wherever need was drew breath daily  
in another’s place, according to the grace of the Spirit  
‘dying each other’s life, living each other’s death’.  
Terrible and lovely is the general substitution of souls  
The Flesh-taking ordained for its mortal image. . . . (156)

And, says Williams, no members of the Company “forgot in their own degree the decree of substitution.” Whether in Camelot or Caerleon, “when they kissed / or pressed hands, they claimed and were claimed at once, / neither ashamed of taking nor chary of giving, / love becoming fate to dedicate souls” (156). Through the intentional practice of substitution the Company realizes an intimacy of community that is substantially deeper and more profound than that experienced by those of the first station.

In the fourth stanza, the members of the third and last station attain the deepest degree of substitution, and at this station Williams introduces the last theological ideal, co-inherence. While Williams may use terms like “largesse,” “exchange,” “substitution,” and “coinherence” rather indiscriminately in the rest of his works—and even periodically in his *Arthuriad*—it is important to note that in this significant poem he chooses them very intentionally. They are introduced progressively as Williams develops the nature of the three stations of the order of the Company. While all are said to practice exchange, very few of the Company attain the level of co-inherence. Williams says that “Few—and that hardly—entered on the third / station; where the full salvation of all souls / is seen” (157). Despite being comprised of a very limited membership, this station is still democratic, containing common laborers as well as nobles. Williams says that “Of the lords—Perceval, Dindrane, Dinadan, the Archbishop; / of the people—a mechanic here, a maid there, / knew the whole charge, as vocation devised” (157). That they are also characterized as experiencing a “full salvation of their souls” attests to the significant spiritual benefit of the co-inherent community and the role it plays in the process of their salvation. Their salvation, though, is not merely the result of a purely human endeavor; it is, as Williams notes, the image and product of God as community—the Trinity. He describes them as “cohering, as when the Trinity / first made man in Their image, and now restored / by the one adored substitution” (157). The third stage represents the redeemed human community, which exists and functions as God intended.

Williams’ vision of a co-inherent community in Logres reveals his belief that such a community can and should really exist. Agnes Sibley points out that in the postscript of *The Descent of the Dove* Williams describes what such a Christian community might—or ought to—look like. Although quoted in part earlier, the full passage is worth noting for its close

correspondence to the description of “The Founding of the Company” in *The Region of the Summer Stars*:

The apprehension of this order, in nature and in grace, without and within Christendom, should be, now, one of our chief concerns; it might indeed be worth the foundation of an Order within the Christian Church [ . . . ] About this there need be little organization; it could do no more than communicate an increased awareness of that duty which is part of the very nature of the Church itself. But in our present distresses, of international and social schism, among the praises of separation here or there, the pattern might be stressed, the image affirmed. The Order of the Co-inherence would exist only for that, to meditate and practice it [ . . . ] Substitutions in love, exchanges in love, are a part of it; ‘oneself’ and ‘others’ are only the specialized terms of its technique. (236)

The Order of Co-inherence that Williams proposes in *The Descent of the Dove* is analogous to the Company of Taliessin’s household as described in *The Region of the Summer Stars*. The Company represents Williams’ ideal of the Christian Church, an intimate community that embodies the principles and practices established by God himself for his people. It is a democratic community where every member belongs to one another; where mutual exchange, substitution, and co-inherence are practiced, albeit at different levels of mastery; and where each finds the salvation of his or her soul. Williams’ belief in the value of the small community in the experience of the soul’s salvation is similarly evidenced in his novels *Descent into Hell* and *All Hallows’ Eve*.

### ***Chapter 3: Descent into Hell***

In his sixth novel, *Descent into Hell*, Charles Williams places a similar importance on the role of community. Of Williams' novels, *Descent into Hell* is especially significant for its portrayal of Williams' principle of substitution as an expression of love within a small community. The plot of *Descent into Hell* revolves around the existential crisis of its protagonist, Pauline Anstruther, who sees her doppelgänger with increasing frequency as she moves about the community of Battle Hill where she lives with her elderly aunt. The novel opens during the initial reading of a play being performed by a community group that includes Pauline, whose story is interwoven with those of other residents of Battle Hill, including local playwright Peter Stanhope. In this novel Williams juxtaposes the salvation of Pauline and an unnamed deceased construction worker with the failure of characters Lawrence Wentworth and Lily Sammile to experience the salvation of their souls.

Pauline's growing inability to cope with her crisis sets the stage for her need to depend on others in the community around her. Returning home from the reading, Pauline sees her doppelgänger once again, which results in considerable fear and anxiety. In her essay "Charles Williams and the Companions of the Co-inherence," Barbara Newman speculates that Pauline's double represents her "Platonic or ideal self, such as she has existed eternally in the mind of God," an idea, she says, with which Williams would have been familiar from having read medieval mystics (12). But for Dennis Weeks, the doppelgänger is a literal representation of the sixth of the seven points of the order of the Companions of Co-inherence. Weeks argues that each of the points corresponds progressively to each of the seven Williams novels and that Pauline's double exemplifies Williams' statement. "He must become, as it were, a double man" (64). He argues first that the presence of a doppelgänger provides evidence of a double man in the novel. But he also contends that the practice of substitution in the novel represents a means to

becoming a double man. He writes that “All that is required to become a double man is to simply act upon the desire to be a part of humanity and shoulder another person’s burden” (68). The process of sharing one’s burden with another human being, Weeks suggest, results in a kind of doubling, of one load bearer becoming two. Though his point is weakly argued and not entirely convincing here, the fact that Pauline literally becomes a double in order to carry another’s burden lends credence to his thesis. Whatever one may think of Weeks’ attempt to link the seven points of co-inherence with Williams’ novels, one can appreciate the attempt to explain Williams’ concepts more comprehensively within the context of his fiction.

When Pauline arrives at the house of her aged grandmother, Margaret Anstruther, Margaret reveals that she is aware that Pauline is experiencing trouble and questions Pauline’s refusal to “lean” into the support of community. At first Pauline denies it; her initial response to her grandmother is that there is “no help to lean” and then, “no need to lean” (57). Pauline’s response reflects both her helplessness and her refusal to seek the assistance of others as she faces her crisis alone. In the chapter entitled “The Doctrine of Substituted Love” Peter Stanhope echoes Margaret Anstruther’s question. At play rehearsal he, too, notices Pauline’s anxiety and inquires about its source. It is worth noting that it is the concern of others, those who genuinely care about the wellbeing of those around them, which will open the door for Pauline to enter into a relationship upon which she can depend for help. When Pauline describes the source of her fear, Stanhope says, “I don’t quite understand. You have friends; haven’t you asked one of them to carry your fear?” (96). When Pauline expresses her surprise that anyone might be able to carry her fear for her, Stanhope articulates what is one of Williams’ clearest explanations of the doctrines of substitution and exchange. In the passage, Williams explains what the Bible means when it says that we ought to bear one another’s burden:

It means listening sympathetically, and thinking unselfishly, and being anxious about, and so on. . . . I think when Christ or St. Paul, or whoever said bear, or whatever he Aramaically said instead of bear, he meant something much more like carrying a parcel instead of someone else. To bear a burden is precisely to carry it instead of. (98)

When Pauline expresses her reluctance and asks, “Would I push my burden on to anybody else?” (99), Stanhope replies,

Not if you insist on making a universe for yourself. . . . If you want to disobey and refuse the laws that are common to us all, if you want to live in pride and division and anger, you can. But if you will be part of the best of us, and live and laugh and be ashamed with us, then you must be content to be helped. You must give your burden up to someone else, and you must carry someone else’s burden. . . . this is a law of the universe, and not to give up your parcel is as much to rebel as not carry another’s. (99)

Stanhope reveals Williams’ belief that by exchanging one another’s burdens in an act of substitution, one resists the desire to live unto and for oneself and chooses to experience the joy of community that is a part of the moral and spiritual fabric of the universe as it is designed by God. When Pauline then expresses her concern about losing her self-respect, Stanhope counters, saying, “if you must refuse the Omnipotence in order to respect yourself, though why you should want so extremely to respect yourself is more than I can guess, why go on and respect” (99). So, although he had conceded that the practice of substitution need not require any reference to Christ (98), he does reveal Williams’ Christian belief that, ultimately, the practice of substitution as an element of community is part of the design of the “Omnipotence.” An individual’s desire to

bear his own burden, then, and to maintain his self-respect, prevents him from engaging in the universal community as God intends. And even as Pauline is just beginning her journey to her salvation, Williams indicates that behind her efforts (and those of the community on her behalf) exist the purposes and the grace of God.

Pauline's consent, albeit irresolute, is sufficient to initiate her into the community of Christendom as Stanhope accepts her burden of fear. In an act of imagination, he visualizes seeing her doppelgänger, summons the sense of her fear, opens himself up to that fear, absorbs her terror, and "receives her spirit's conflict" (100-101). And because the burden is not his and he experiences it imaginatively from within rather than from without (101), he is able to experience her dread with less immediacy in an act that has its source in the mystery of the substitution of Christ, which Williams acknowledges is ultimately incomprehensible even to its initiates. Williams writes,

The body of [Stanhope's] flesh received her alien terror, his mind carried the burden of her world. The burden was inevitably lighter for him than for her, for the rage of a personal resentment was lacking. He endured her sensitiveness, but not her sin; the substitution there, if indeed there is a substitution is hidden in the central mystery of Christendom which Christendom itself has never understood, nor can. (101)

But, he adds, "wherever there is intelligence enough for exchange and substitution to exist, there is place enough for action" (102). Stanhope's act on behalf of Pauline is one of both the imagination and the intellect and also reflects another doctrine of Williams, that such acts are not bound to the limitations of time. He writes, "The act of substitution was fully made; and if it had been necessarily delayed for years . . . still its result would have preceded it. In the place of the

Omnipotence there is neither before nor after; there is only act (102). For Williams, the timelessness of the act of substitution derives from the timelessness of God.

Pauline's participation in this exchange makes possible the act of substitution and is itself a commitment to relationship and community. The effect is immediate and profound, though she still does not understand it. "God knew how [Stanhope] had done it," she thinks, "but he had" (104). Her experience results in a conversion of sorts, a transformation of her existence. Williams describes it as a "violent convulsion of the laws of the universe. . . . it was certainly quite different from anything she had ever supposed it to be. It was a place whose very fundamentals she had suddenly discovered to be changed" (104). The salvation that Pauline begins to experience, then, is not merely the pleasure of having received a kind act or the relief of exorcising her fears. It is a fundamental reordering of the reality of her life in this world through the practice of community modeled and ordained by God.

Community is reciprocal, however, and for Pauline's salvation to be complete she must do more than receive Stanhope's gift of substitution. As with the mutual acts of exchange in the household of Taliessin, she must give as well as receive. Her first act of reciprocity is to offer to take on the burden of her aunt, Margaret Anstruther, who appears to be near death. It is an offer that expressly results from Stanhope's act. Williams writes, "For the first time in her young distracted life her energy leapt to a natural freedom of love. She ran swiftly down the way her master had laid open; she said, in words almost identical with his, 'Let me do something, let me carry it. Darling, do let me help'" (124). And though the resultant errand on which she is sent by her aunt does not occur until later in the novel, her offer reflects a new-found sense of love and mutual exchange.



In the following chapter, “Dress Rehearsal,” Williams illustrates a momentary glimpse of the eternal community in much the same way Taliessin’s household represents heaven on earth, even if only realized temporarily. On a literal level, the chapter describes the dress rehearsal of the play, and yet, Williams also suggests that this moment is a dress rehearsal of the eventual, greater drama yet to come. Williams writes,

She was not aware, as the rehearsal proceeded, of any other sensation than delight. But so clear and simple was that delight, and so exquisitely shared by all the performers in their separate ways, that as between the acts they talked and laughed together, and every one in the field, with the exception of Lawrence Wentworth, joined in that universal joy—so single and fundamental did it become that once, while again she waited, it seemed to her as if the very words ‘dress rehearsal’ took on another meaning. . . . All things at all times and everywhere, rehearsed; some great art was in practice and the only business anyone had was to see that his part was perfect. And this particular rehearsal mirrored the rest—only that this was already perfected from within, and that other was not yet. (147)

The near ecstatic joy that is experienced by the play’s participants, and especially by Pauline, as each member functions according to his or her role is indicative of having attained a meaningful level of exchange and reflects the timeless “art” of God’s community.

But there is more for Pauline to learn. Her joy is noticeably tempered by her knowledge that one of her ancestors, John Struther, died a martyr’s death on that very location, and her joy seems inappropriate in light of his agony. When she explains her dilemma to Stanhope, he suggests, “Mightn’t his burden be carried too?” (149). And over her protestations and her questions whether it is even possible to carry a dead man’s burden, Stanhope tells her, “you can’t

make contract; so far, it's true, death or red hair or what not interferes. But you might, in the Omnipotence, offer him your—anything you've got" (149). Stanhope suggests that while Pauline might not be able to enter into a verbal agreement with her dead ancestor to alleviate his burden, hurdles of time and death are mere trivialities—like the color of one's hair—to an omnipotent God. Pauline discovers that her understanding of substitution is too limited, this time by an inadequate concept of the power of substitution to transcend time. Stanhope explains that in the Omnipotence, there are no barriers to the practice of substitution, and the effects of that revelation on Pauline are, once again, very powerful:

She felt again, as in a low but immense arc rising above the horizon of her world, or perhaps of the earth itself, the hint of a new organization of all things: a shape, of incredible difficulty in the finding, of incredible simplicity found, an infinitely alien arrangement of infinitely familiar things. The bottom had dropped out of her universe, yet her astonished spirit floated and did not fall. . . . The salvation throbbed in the air about her; it thrilled in the mortal light. . . . and all the past of the Hill was one with its present. It lived; it intermingled; not among these living alone did the doctrine of substituted love bear rule. (150-151)

Kathleen Spencer calls the substitution that occurs over this four-hundred-year gap one of the most difficult yet characteristic passages in the book. She argues that to understand it, the reader must understand the presence and relationship between the three realms that Williams posits: the realm of the living, the realm of the dead, and the realm of the Omnipotence. She notes that because of the tremendous amount of death occurring on Battle Hill, the realm of the dead interpenetrates the world of the living more often than in other locations, and that the realm of the Omnipotence contains within it the other two worlds (69). Despite the tumultuous reordering

of her understanding of this reality and substitution, Pauline is not entirely convinced that she possesses the ability to carry the burden of her ancestor who died four hundred years earlier. She discusses Stanhope's proposal to her aunt, and when Pauline makes the same protestations to Margaret Anstruther that she had to Stanhope, her aunt says, "Why do you talk of *before*? If you give, you give to It, and what does It care about *before*?" (158). Margaret Anstruther, too, expresses Williams' belief that all moments can be found in the eternal nature of God; that past, present, and future all coexist in the eternal "It," what Spencer calls the "realm of the Omnipotence." When her aunt sends Pauline to find and help the deceased construction worker of whose presence only she is aware, Pauline experiences the culminating moment to which her journey has led, her encounter with both her doppelgänger and her martyred ancestor.

In the chapter "Tryst of the Worlds" Pauline's growth is evidenced in her desire to help both deceased men. After having met and offered the dead laborer hospitality, she watches him depart as he makes his way down the road toward London. When he stops some distance away and cries out, Pauline runs to help him, but instead finds that he has been transformed into her ancestor. When she approaches him, she hears his cries to God for help to bear his fear of the fire (169) in the face of his impending martyrdom, and because Peter Stanhope has instructed her in the way of substitution, she is prepared for this moment. Kathleen Spencer points out that John Struther cries out to be saved from his fear of the fire in which he is to be burned rather than the fire itself (69), and that is something that Pauline is capable of doing.

She had been taught what to do. She had her offer to make now and it would not be refused. She herself was offered, in a most certain fact, through four centuries, her place at the table of exchange. The moment of good-will in which she had

directed to the City the man who had but lately died had opened to her the City itself, the place of the present and all the past. (169)

Pauline's desire to take on the burden of her ancestor makes possible an act of substitution in the eternal community of the Omnipotence. Her participation at the "table of exchange" of the City recalls the "honorable exchange" and "devotion in the Church" of the members of the Company of Taliessin's household in *The Region of the Summer Stars* (155).

When Pauline finally encounters John Struther the voice that offers to take his fear is that of Pauline's doppelgänger who appears at that moment—and her own; it is the moment of reconciliation, not only with her ancestor, but with her own fears. It is the moment of salvation both for John Struther and for herself.

Pauline sighed deeply with her joy, this then, after so long was their meeting and their reconciliation; their perfect reconciliation, for this other (her double) had done what she had desired, and yet not the other, but she, for it was she who had all her life carried a fear which was not her fear but another's, until in the end it had become for her in turn not hers but another's. (170)

The burden of fear that Pauline has carried, unwittingly, proves to be the very one she had offered to take from John Struther four hundred years prior. The presence of two Paulines resulting from her act of substitution would seem to provide evidence for Weeks' contention that substitution, of necessity, requires becoming a "double man." Anne Ridler notes that "we are to imagine that [John Struther] was able to [see his salvation] just because Pauline, centuries later, was afraid on his behalf" (xlvii-xlviii). For Williams, all times are present in the eternal Omnipotence, and both the dislocations of time and personhood that Pauline experiences are reconciled in this moment. It is the exchange of burdens, Stanhope's for Pauline's and Pauline's

for Struther's, which assists them in the journey toward their salvation. And, once again, Pauline experiences a profound sense of joy, the preeminent characteristic of living in mutual service to others. "Joy," says Williams,

had filled [Pauline] that afternoon, and it was in the power of such joy that she had been brought to this closest propinquity to herself. It had been her incapacity of joy, nothing else, that had till now turned the vision of herself aside; her incapacity for joy had admitted fear, and fear had imposed separation. She knew now that all acts of love are the measure of capacity for joy; its measure and its preparation, whether the joy comes or delays (171).

Joy is not only the product of Pauline's substitution for John Struther, but her gift to him as well. During the dress rehearsal Stanhope had suggested that she have joy to offer her ancestor (149), and in the chapter "The Tryst of the Worlds" when she comes to the aid of Struther and reconciles with her double, Pauline recollects that she had, in fact, assented "to the choice her beatitude had made . . . then or that afternoon or before this life began. She had offered her joy to her betrayed ancestor" (171). In Williams' theology, joy is the product of a communal practice of exchange and substitution, the manifestation of love, which is a bond that, echoing the words of John 4:18, "drives out fear" (NIV) and unites the members of God's community regardless of the apparent boundaries of time. It is a mystery accomplished in and by the grace of the Omnipotence. Williams writes that for Pauline, "The roads had been doubled and twisted so that she could meet him there; as wherever exchange was needed. She knew it now from the abundant grace of the Hill or the hour; but exchange might be made between many mortal hearts and none know what work was done in the moment's divine kingdom" (172). That the salvation of Pauline and John Struther is complete is evidenced in parallel declarations. The voices of both

cry out, “I have seen the salvation of my God,” first by John Struther (172) and then four centuries later by Pauline (170). Williams further reiterates the fulfillment of Pauline’s salvation when she reports her experiences to Stanhope. In words that allude to Jesus’ final words on the cross, Stanhope asks, “It’s done, then?” and she replies, “It’s done” (173)—to which Peter Stanhope says, “Arise, shine; your light is come; the glory of the Lord is risen upon you” (173). And so Williams not only provides the resolution to the crisis of his protagonist, but depicts the salvation of her soul as she achieves her personal redemption and joins the community that includes Stanhope, Margaret Anstruther, the dead laborer, and John Struther.

Another character in the novel who finds his salvation in the small community practicing exchange on Battle Hill is the unnamed construction worker who had committed suicide in the very building in which Lawrence Wentworth lives. In the second chapter of the novel, *Via Mortis* or the path of death, the deceased laborer returns from his wanderings to the worksite from which he had been fired and where he had hanged himself. Williams writes that the society of Battle Hill, a location dominated by massacres, revolts, feuds, and war, had betrayed and withheld from him the society of friendship—or community—that is necessary for life. He writes that “all the nourishment that comes from friendship and common pain was as much forbidden to him as the poor nourishment of his body. The Republic had decided that it was better one man, or many men, should perish, than the people in the dangerous chance of helping those many. It had, as always, denied supernatural justice” (28). And so he dies alone and wanders alone in a dimension of the dead. When the dying Margaret Anstruther, whose vision begins to blur between the worlds of the living and of the dead, sees the worker, she has compassion on him, and he receives a second chance to find his salvation. Williams’ character receives this second opportunity to engage in a community in which love is present because he

had not had such an opportunity in his lifetime. His death had been merely physical rather than spiritual (a rejection of love), and he had succumbed to the understandable, oppressive conditions of his life. So though his damnation is imminent, he is permitted time to recover and then extended a “gospel” of love by Pauline’s aunt:

Because he had had it all but forced on him, he had had opportunity to recover. His recovery had brought to him a chance of love. Because he had never chosen love, he did not choose it then. Because he had never had an opportunity to choose love, nor effectively heard the intolerable gospel proclaimed, he was to be offered it again, and now as salvation. (118)

The experience of the dead laborer intimates that Williams’ sympathies lie with those in this world who never have the opportunity to experience the love of community, suggesting—or at least speculating—that such opportunities may exist for such people before the ultimate judgment of their souls occurs. But his use of the word “intolerable” for the gospel of love and community further suggests that ideal or perfect love may not be as comforting or reassuring as one might think, but might, in fact, be unbearable in its requirements for humility, vulnerability, and mutuality. When he is drawn to the window of Margaret Anstruther, she sees him and speaks to him “with a fresh spring of pure love.” Williams writes, “He tried to answer, to thank her, to tell her more, to learn salvation from her” and that her face “had lived towards him in love” (121). For Williams, even the most basic communication, spoken or unspoken, possesses the ability to convey the love that unites its members in community, and although Margaret Anstruther is bed ridden, her face evidences a life that is lived towards others in love—even the unfortunate dead laborer. The power that she possesses is the energy of love, says Williams. “At least to the dead man it was felt as love, as love that loved him, as he longingly and unknowingly

desired. This holy and happy thing was all that could be meant by God; it was love and power” (123). Love extended and received, love in community, is how the dead laborer experiences God. And while he awaits “some renewal of his earlier death,” Margaret Anstruther tells him, “It’s done already; you’ve only got to look for it”(123). In this new climate of transformation, the dead workman is receptive to her love; he receives it and even attempts to reciprocate. He “tried to speak,” writes Williams, “to be grateful, to adore . . . He only moaned a little, a moan . . . of intention and the first faint wellings of recognized obedience and love. All his past efforts of good temper and kindness were in it; they had seemed to be lost; and they lived” (124). But it is enough; and because even in death, salvation is still achieved and experienced in community, the dead workman must make his way back to London. Encountering Pauline on the road at night, he approaches with “a quiet freedom” and a smile, asking for directions to London (165). And refusing her offer of lodging and fare, he “[lifts] his hand to his cap again in an archangelic salute to the Mother of God. ‘It doesn’t matter perhaps,’” he says, “‘but I think I ought to get on. They may be waiting for me’” (166). And that is the last the reader hears of the worker who presumably finds his salvation and his community waiting in the London—the City—of that other world.

Not all of Williams’ characters are receptive to the love found in relationship with others, however. Laurence Wentworth, a local historian, serves as a foil of those who choose to involve themselves in community and practice substitution and exchange. Choosing rather to withdraw from the intercourse of society, his self-absorption occurs in both his professional and personal lives. Spencer points out that “It is the only time Williams shows us at such length the process of refusing salvation” (71). When Wentworth receives notice that fellow historian Sir Aston Moffat, and not he, will receive a knighthood for his work in history, he consciously chooses not to



respond with good will. He refuses to share in the pleasure of another's success and experience joy. Instead, he chooses resentment, envy, and bitterness, even at the risk of the damnation of his soul. Williams writes that he could have rejected damnation, but "With a perfectly clear, if instantaneous, knowledge of what he did, he rejected joy instead. He instantaneously preferred anger, and at once it came; he invoked envy, and it obliged him" (80). In fact, his envy grows to hate, and he envisions—and even wills—the death of Sir Moffat. For Williams, hate and murder, like that of the Cain and Abel story, epitomize the fracturing of community. And as he contemplates the death of Sir Moffat, Williams says that Wentworth prefers and is offered another kind of death instead. His utter rejection of Sir Moffat and the academic community is immediately followed by the coming of an imaginary lover, portending a further withdrawal from human society.

Because of his historical expertise, Wentworth is consulted in costuming matters of the play where he meets Adela Hunt, with whom he becomes enamored and eventually obsessed. Because Adela is seeing fellow cast member Hugh Prescott and Wentworth cannot have her, in the chapter "Return to Eden" Wentworth creates from his imagination a double of Adela. This false Adela sharply contrasts both Pauline, whose double represents an act of real love—of exchange and substitution with her ancestor—and the malformed dwarfish woman Simon the Clerk creates out of dust and spittle in *All Hallows' Eve*, which represents a corruption of creation and recalls Williams' example of genuine exchange, substitution, and co-inherence found in the process of procreation. Instead of participating in the real communities in which he lives—whether those of his professional community, Battle Hill, or of the play—Wentworth turns inward and constructs a pseudo reality with which to engage. The Adela he creates is the Adela he craves. Though she is like Adela, she is different from the real Adela because she has

not been in a relationship with Hugh. This Adela is his alone, his Eve; and as a product of his own creation, she speaks what he desires to hear. She is “the Adela that was his, since what he wanted was always and everywhere his” (83). As a manifestation of his own desires and fantasies, she is, in reality, him—his self. When they meet, his Adela tells him, “You don’t think about yourself enough . . . and he knew [her words] were true. He had never thought enough about himself” (82-83). Her—or his—words validate his self-absorption. As the chapter title suggests, she becomes his Eve in his own Garden of Eden, though unlike the Biblical Eve, she is not a companion with whom he might engage in community. Instead, “[Wentworth] knew the truth, and the truth was that she was quite subordinate to him” (86). In words that contrast God’s declaration in Genesis that it is not good for man to be alone, Wentworth’s Adela tells him, “Yes, yes, yes: better than Eve, dearer than Eve, closer than Eve. It’s good for man to be alone” (86). And so he shuts himself inside his own Eden, alone. When his Adela asks where they are, Wentworth feels it is “almost as if he were inside his own body” (84). Williams writes of Wentworth, “He might be back again in Eden, and she be Eve, the only man with all that belonged to the only man” (85). Content with the world of his own making and displeased with the world outside, Wentworth begins to close the door between the two. Others, writes Williams, were “outside the sealed garden, no less sealed for being so huge, through a secret gate of which he had entered, getting back to himself. He was inside and at peace. He said aloud: ‘I won’t go back’” (85). Confident in his ability to create his own reality, he becomes his own god. “[Sinking] into oblivion, he died to things other than himself; he woke to himself” (87). Unlike the biblical Eden, which was intended to be the idyllic home of the human community, Wentworth’s garden becomes a means to isolate himself, a perversion of God’s original design for community.

In the chapter "Dress Rehearsal," Williams juxtaposes Wentworth's self-preoccupation with the communal revelry and joy of the play members. Wentworth is offered an opportunity to find his salvation, even if only in loving the real Adela, but his self-absorption becomes more and more absolute as he dotes on the object of his own imagination and creation. Williams writes that "He could exercise upon it all arts but one; he could not ever discover by it or practice towards it the freedom of love. A man cannot love himself; he can only idolize it" (127). For Williams, it is not possible to experience real love where there is no real community. Salvation does not exist in self-love. When Wentworth eventually appears in public with his own Adela, the possibility of loving someone other than himself occurs, but the cost of experiencing real love is not without its challenges, and he is unwilling to meet those challenges. As he approaches the gate of his house, a part of him wishes that Hugh Prescott (Adela's suitor) would come and escort the pseudo Adela away from him. But, Williams notes, salvation is not imposed upon people; it requires an act, a desire for others. "Hugh could not save him," writes Williams, "unless he wanted the thing that was Hugh's, and not this other thing. The thought of Hugh . . . reminded him of the difference between the real and the unreal Adela. He must face jealousy, deprivation, loss, if he would be saved. He fled from that offer, and with a sudden snarl clutched his companion (the pseudo Adela) by the arm" (129). Despite the fact that as he carries his Adela over the threshold into his house, his own mind yet tells him, "You fool, that's not Adela; you couldn't carry Adela. What do you think you'll get out of anything that isn't Adela? . . . He recognized well enough . . . his whole damnation was that he would not choose the trouble to lift the real Adela" (129-130). Wentworth is cognizant of the symbolic meaning of his refusal to carry a real burden, a real Adela, into his home, and the concomitant risk of his own damnation.

His spiritual demise is later described by Peter Stanhope as a contrast to Pauline's salvation, a contrast between her "Zion" and his "Gomorrah." Williams' use of "Zion" alludes to an alternative name for Jerusalem, the City of God's people, God's community. Gomorrah, in contrast, alludes to the wicked sister city of Sodom, the character and destruction of which are recounted in the narrative of Genesis where God's judgment is meted upon the two cities infamous for their inhospitality and sexually aberrant behavior. Though not speaking specifically of Lawrence Wentworth, here, Wentworth's state is clearly implicit in Stanhope's reference. In Gomorrah, says Stanhope, "There's no distinction between lover and beloved; they beget themselves on their adoration of themselves and they live and feed and starve on themselves, and by themselves too" (174). Stanhope describes Gomorrah as an "anti-community" where the self-love of its citizens contrasts the community of exchange, substitution, and co-inherence of Zion. Williams identifies the kind of isolation in which Wentworth indulges as resulting in the kind of sin—and destruction—of Gomorrah. Spencer describes it this way:

What he does and does of his own free and deliberate choice, is . . . [refuse] to acknowledge his connectedness with the human community. He denies exchange and relation. What he will not give, he cannot find. His fate, in those chilling final pages of the novel, seems not so much a punishment imposed as the inevitable result of his own choices. (71)

If substitution and exchange are the means by which the human community resembles the tri-part community of God, as Williams believed, then Wentworth's refusal to participate in that community subjects him to the kind of damnation reserved for those who reject God himself.

In *Descent into Hell*, Lily Sammile similarly represents the rejection of the way of love and substitution and, like the contrast between Lawrence Wentworth and Pauline Anstruther,

serves as a foil for Peter Stanhope. She denies that reality need contain any difficulty, hardship, or dependence on others; and asserts, rather, that instead of carrying a burden one simply reshapes reality in such a way as to experience pleasure and satisfaction in isolation. Williams juxtaposes the two characters and their two approaches to life in the chapter “The Doctrine of Substituted Love.” While the first half of the chapter is devoted to Peter Stanhope’s explanation of substitution to Pauline and to their exchange of her fear of her doppelgänger, the second half presents Lily’s offer to Pauline of the joy of thinking only of herself and rejecting the nuisance of others.

Even as Pauline experiences the joy of having the burden of her fear carried by Stanhope and considers the possibility that “perhaps, later on, she could give the Omnipotence a hand with some other burden; everyone carrying everyone else’s” (108), she is jolted out of her reveries by the voice of Lily Sammile. Instead of thinking of others, Lily tells her, “Think of yourself; be careful of yourself. I could make you perfectly safe and perfectly happy at the same time” (108). And unlike Peter Stanhope, whose very vocation is to bring people together through his art in an affirmation of community, Lily Sammile proffers narratives that isolate and from which others are excluded. She tells Pauline,

I could tell you tales that would shut everything but yourself out. Wouldn’t you like to be happy? If there is anything that worries you, I can shut it away from you. . . . I can fill you, fill your body with any sense you choose. I can make you feel whatever you’d choose to be. I can give you certainty of joy for every moment of life. Secretly, secretly; no other soul—no other living soul. (109)

Lily offers Pauline the opportunity to find fulfillment, contentment, and even perpetual joy by avoiding her problems rather than by confronting them, by satisfying all her physical and

emotional needs in isolation from those around her. Williams explicitly identifies Lily Sammile with Lilith, the legendary first wife of Adam, a temptress whose seductions represent an attempt to lure Pauline away from discovering her salvation in Stanhope's gospel of substitution. As Pauline ponders the appeal of Lily's offer, Lily continues to impart her own "anti-gospel." She tells Pauline, "come and dream, till you discover, so soon, the ripeness of your dreams. . . . You'll never have to do anything for others any more" (110), and the words "Everything, anything; anything, everything; kindness to me . . . help to me . . . nothing to do for others, nothing to do with others . . ." echo in her mind (112). Lily's offer appeals to that which Lawrence Wentworth succumbs: the desire to love only oneself, to isolate oneself—the rejection of community.

In the chapter "The Opening of the Graves," Williams makes clear that Lily Sammile's rejection of the practice of community and substitution leads to damnation. After passing out at the end of the play, she reappears at the gate of the cemetery into which she attempts to lure Adela and Hugh even as the dead begin to rise. She is remembered by Pauline as "something more than an old woman by a gate, or if, then a very old woman indeed, by a very great gate, where many go in who choose themselves, the gate of Gomorrah, in the plain, illusion and the end of illusion; the opposite of holy fact, and the contradiction of sacred love" (203). Now, plainly called Lilith by Williams, she stands at the gate of the wide path to hell, recalling Matthew 7:13, which says, "For wide is the gate and easy the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it" (*NIV*). Like Wentworth, Lily is similarly associated with Gomorrah and its notorious perverse self-indulgence and supernatural destruction. Sitting in the cemetery shed that opens into an underground cave in which the dead arise, Lily (now Lilith) gabbles incoherently "such gabble as Dante, inspired, attributes to the guardian of all the circles

of hell” (217). And when Pauline, radiant in the joy and splendor of her salvation, appears, she continues to try to entice her. Williams writes, “At the moment of destruction she still pressed nostrums upon the angelic visitor who confronted her. She broke again into gabble, in which Pauline could dimly make out promises, of health, of money, of life, or their appearances, of good looks, and good luck, or a belief in them, of peace and content, or a substitute for them” (208). When Lily Sammile is confronted by the joy Pauline now radiates, her gospel of self-fulfillment begins to crumble, which is evidenced in the failure of her intellect and language. Lily meets her final doom when the cemetery shed collapses on her, burying her with the dead, ironically, entombing her with a community of the damned.

#### *Chapter 4: All Hallows' Eve*

Alice Mary Hadfield points out that Williams had told T.S. Eliot that *All Hallows' Eve* begins where *Descent into Hell* leaves off and notes that for Williams there was always more to discover, “to move forward from each point of awareness—exchange, patience, [and] delight” (228). Similarly, in *Steps Toward Salvation*, Weeks suggests that “the close identification of steps six and seven (of the order of the Companions of Co-inherence) with their respective novels may account for the fact that Williams felt *All Hallows' Eve* was an outgrowth of *Descent into Hell*” (71). Yet, one constant in these three late works of Williams is the centrality of his vision of community as the means whereby one finds salvation. In his final novel, *All Hallows' Eve*, published just three months before he died (Hadfield 227), Williams continues to explore—and affirm—his conviction of the importance of love, confession, forgiveness, and substitution within the context of community. Kathleen Spencer puts it this way: “Williams’ final novel, *All Hallows' Eve*, represents the culmination of several of his most important themes: the essential character of love (and its opposite, self-love); the necessity of exchange, pardon, and substitution” (73). Charles Moorman writes that the characters of *All Hallows' Eve* “are led either to salvation or damnation in terms of their willingness to accept or reject their place in the web of *Co-inherence*” (47). These functions of community, then, become the basis of the plot of *All Hallows' Eve*.

Ostensibly about the plot of Simon the Clerk to achieve some kind of world domination, the central crisis of *All Hallows' Eve* is really the personal salvation of its individual characters, primarily Lester Furnival, as well as the characters with whom her life and fate intertwine. Although the salvation of the world may be at stake, Williams’ primary interest here is not the salvation of the world, or even the expectation of a heavenly reward for the faithful; as in



*Descent into Hell*, Williams is more interested in the ability of individuals to experience their spiritual salvation in the present by means of the community in which they participate. Williams' protagonist, Lester Furnival, despite having died, at which point the novel begins, can only achieve community, and thus her salvation, by effecting reconciliation with those whom she had wronged in life: her husband, Richard, and her two childhood friends, Betty Wallingford and Evelyn Mercer. In *All Hallows' Eve*, the practice of community requires the recognition of one's offenses as well as the confession and forgiveness for those offenses. However, in this novel, confession and forgiveness are not made to and received from God, but rather to and from those in one's community. The salvation of Lester, Richard, and Betty contrasts sharply with the failure of Evelyn, who, like Lawrence Wentworth and Lily Sammile, serves as an exemplum of the individual who will not be drawn into a proper experience of community.

Because she is married, the first and foremost member of Lester's small community with whom she must reconcile is her husband, Richard. In his essay "The Redeemed City," Williams identifies marriage as one prototypical community in which occur the methods of its most fundamental characteristic, exchange. He says, "Most clearly perhaps in marriage, but no less definitely in all relationships, the law of bearing one another's burdens exists" (108). For Williams, exchange is the defining feature of community; and marriage, by its nature, is a community that provides the context and opportunity for its members to practice mutual exchange. He notes that "The fidelity which the Church has declared to exist in marriage between Christians, and the finality in it which may be denied but cannot, this side of death, be destroyed, is of this nature, because there the nature of exchange has been accepted but in nature and in grace" (*Image* 108). Once entered upon, the rigorous canonical conditions of marriage provide the example of "the truth that the vicarious and exchanged life which the Divine Spirit

commands and communicates. . . .” (108). He adds that the marriage union multiplies the opportunities of exchange and doubles the power upon which the two-become-one may draw so that “each may say, when the great experiment is done: ‘Myself I could not save; another I saved and another saved me’” (108). Here, Williams explicitly articulates his belief in the advantages in the marital union—or community—to provide the context in which one can experience his or her salvation.

Even after her death, Lester’s marriage to Richard continues to provide the context for Lester to practice the exchange that will evidence her salvation. As Clinton Trowbridge notes, “through her own thoughts and through what Williams says about them, we see that her love for her husband, feeble and inadequate as it is, is the ‘hint of heaven’ on which her salvation is founded” (340). Requisite for Lester’s salvation and reconciliation with Richard, though, is an acknowledgement of her inability to love him selflessly. Although Richard, who is the first person Lester encounters after she is killed when a plane crashes on the London street on which she has been walking, had been the one person whom Lester had come the closest to loving, she had not treated him selflessly. When Richard initially appears to Lester, the moment is definitive and reveals the nature of her treatment of Richard prior to her death. When Richard sees Lester he eagerly “sprang towards her.” Yet, Williams writes, “She threw up her hand as if to keep him off. She said, with a coldness against her deeper will, but she could not help it, ‘Where have you been? What have you been doing? I’ve been waiting’” (4-5). She is primarily—and selfishly—concerned with how Richard has inconvenienced her, and as Richard begins to fade from Lester’s sight, Williams notes, “her hand [is] still raised, in that repelling gesture” (5). It is not an affectionate gesture, an attempt to take Richard’s hand as Weeks suggests (71), but a gesture that Lester recognizes as a pattern of such gestures and behavior that might now result in eternal

consequences. Williams writes that she realizes that “she had thrown him away. It was all quite proper; quite inevitable. She had pushed him away, and there was an end to Richard” (7). She continues to recall the many and various ways she had effectively pushed him away. “They had been,” she recalls, “fools and quick-tempered, high egotists and bitter of tongue” (6); she had had pride, “a good deal of pride, especially sexual.” She “had wished Richard . . . to love her more than she loved him” (9-10), and she comes to the realization that “her irritation with her husband had been much more the result of power seeking material than mere fretfulness” (12). She had also been, writes Williams, “rash, violent, angry as she might have been, egotistic in her nature” (214). Her relationship with Richard, she realizes, had been self-serving and faulty; and if her sins had not been of the worst sort, she grows conscious of having behaved less selflessly and lovingly than she ought.

After having begun to apprehend the defects in her relationship with Richard, Lester vows that, given the opportunity, she will not push Richard away again. When she does meet Richard again in a second brief, but symbolically important, encounter, Richard sees her with one hand “raised and still” and with the other hand on ‘her breast where it lay as if in some way it held him there” (48). It is now a gesture of endearment that Williams describes as “an undeclared renewal of love” (94). The contrast of Lester’s new hand gesture with that of her initial meeting with Richard indicates a new desire to redress the shortcomings of her love for him, but her selfishness is not so easily and completely reversed.

Williams notes that Lester realizes “She had pushed him away once,” that “Richard should no longer be pushed away,” and that “now she would not push him away” (89). However, her desires are still not entirely selfless; her new aspiration is tempered by a desire to possess him, which Williams clearly indicates is not a reflection of her love for Richard, but merely

another dimension to her selfishness. “She would call him and keep him,” Williams writes, willing even that he join her among the dead, “there with her, prisoner with her, prisoner to her. If only he too would die, and come!” (89). Lester’s concern is not for what is best for Richard, but for her own, personal consolation in death. Amidst the urgency of this new and perverse desire to possess Richard, though, Lester’s thoughts are interrupted by cries that evoke a better, purer desire.

The cries Lester hears are those of Betty calling out to the man she loves, Richard’s friend, Jonathan. At first, hearing these “calls of love” (90) compels Lester to recognize the defect of her desires and her need for help beyond herself. In this way, Betty serves as a catalyst for Lester’s salvation; her call proves to be instructive. Williams describes this pivotal moment in Lester’s journey toward salvation, writing, “This was she, damned; yes, and she was damned; she, being that, was damned. There was no help, unless she could be something other, and there was no power in her to be anything other” (89). Her recognition of her inability to achieve her own salvation and her response to Betty’s call of love, involve her in the small community of Richard, Jonathan, and Betty, which provides her the context out of which grows the opportunity to give of herself and, ultimately, find salvation.

In this way, Lester’s salvation becomes linked to Betty’s need. It is in her reconciliation with and service to another, specifically Betty, that she will become able to reconcile with Richard. Following the sound of Betty’s cry to the house in which Simon is holding her, Lester’s first encounter with Betty is, like her first meeting with Richard, brief but revealing. She recognizes that her initial intent to help Betty was facile and self-deceiving, demonstrated by the fact that she had ignored, snubbed, and despised Betty as a young girl (123). So, with a gesture echoing that of her meeting with Richard, Lester physically reaches out to Betty, though this

time more as a plea for help. Williams writes, “Where she had once refused to help [Betty], she was now left to need help. But that refusal had been laziness and indifference rather than deliberate malice—original rather than actual sin. . . . She threw out her hand, in an effort to grasp, here or there, Betty’s half-outstretched hand” (123). Although her sin against Betty had been less an active one, says Williams, than a product of her fallen human nature, her recognition of her former mistreatment of Betty is the initial step of her reconciliation with Betty. Williams indicates the sincerity of her sentiments, writing, “It was permitted to her to recognize it with tears” (123). As in Williams’ other works, rather than explicitly depicting God’s presence, he implies it. His wording suggests that God is at work “behind the scenes” of Lester’s journey to salvation, revealing to her not only the deficiencies of her behavior, but providing the appropriate emotional responses to those new insights. But Lester’s ability to reconcile requires her confession and repentance to Betty for her maltreatment of her, despite the fact that her offenses had occurred years earlier. For Williams, the practice of mutual forgiveness is essential to those belonging to the community of the City. “To forgive and to be forgiven,” he writes, “are the two points of holy magnificence and holy modesty; round these two centres the whole doctrine of largesse revolves. This is the pattern of our ‘actual situation’ in the Church, and ‘outside the Church is no salvation’” (*Image* 141). And while in the life of exchange “pardon as a disposition of the soul is a necessity,” in order to live more intensely in the love of the offended, the offender must desire it and ask for forgiveness of sins (*Image* 109-110). Williams contends that whereas forgiveness is always necessary, when it is coupled with confession a deeper level of love can be achieved, and such a confession is required of Lester.

Though asking for help from Betty is not easy, Lester implores Betty to recall their childhood experiences. When Betty dismisses the memories as unimportant, Lester is not

released from that responsibility. The onus of her confession is more difficult than she had initially realized:

She had prepared herself to ask for forgiveness but that, it seemed, was not enough. She must herself bring the truth to Betty's reluctant mind; nothing else than the truth would be any good. She would not be able entirely to escape from those swirling images of the past...She said—it was the most bitter thing she had ever done; she seemed to taste on her tongue the hard and bitter substance of that moment—she said, 'Try and remember.' (130)

Having made the difficult confession, Lester begins to feel the “dim beginnings of exalted peace,” experiencing a flicker of joy (131). As in *Descent into Hell*, joy is the manifestation of salvation, the product of the interchange of members of the divine kingdom. Lester's initial hint of joy gives way to a more profound sense of joy and laughter by both women as forgiveness is extended and received. For Lester that forgiveness becomes the means by which relationships are restored, first with Betty and then potentially with Richard. Williams writes that Lester

knew quite clearly that Betty had—forgiven her. The smile, the warmth, the love-lines, were forgiveness. . . . Let [Richard] come to her in turn and she would show him what forgiveness was. Till now she had not really understood it; occasionally in the past each of them had 'forgiven' the other, but the victim had not much liked it. But now—by high permission, yes. And if Richard and Betty, then others; if this permission which now directed her life allowed, others. (137)

Williams depicts the inadequacy of Lester's earlier understanding of forgiveness by describing Richard as a “victim” of that forgiveness. The tone of the passage reflects Lester's mounting joy and growing capacity for reconciliation with others. Although Moorman argues that Williams

“seems consciously to avoid not only anything resembling Christian allegory, but also any overt reference to the icons and symbols of Christianity” (47), Lester’s efforts are clearly being directed by the one who provides the model of forgiveness. In *The Forgiveness of Sins*, Williams says that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are both acts of forgiveness that oblige his followers to extend forgiveness to others: “‘Everyone which is perfect shall be as his Master,’ and perfection being the only thing he required, the disciple was to forgive, of his own choice, as well as, of his own choice, to be forgiven” (67). The mutual exchange of forgiveness, in the economy of the City, is the substance of relationship. And Lester’s experience of true forgiveness from Betty—granted by divine consent and assistance—results in a more perfect insight into the real nature of forgiveness, one that results in deeply felt joy. Having more fully grasped the real essence of forgiveness, Lester is then able to forgive Richard and, consequently, others.

Lester’s salvation is further realized in her participation in Betty’s rescue from the conspiracy of Simon. The night Simon intends to kill Betty and release her into the world of the dead, Betty asks Lester to remain with her. When she calls out to Lester, Williams describes it as “the same timid proffer of and appeal to friendship which Lester had once ignored” (156). This time, however, Lester responds. Betty’s second cry for help elicits Lester’s new desire to be useful. In fact, Lester finds herself unable to do anything but help. As Betty falls under Simon’s spell, Williams writes that Lester becomes “incapable of any action except an unformulated putting of herself at Betty’s disposal” (158). And as Simon intones the reversed Tetragrammaton, Lester makes the ultimate sacrifice. She substitutes herself in place of Betty in a scene that clearly recalls the imagery of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ himself. Williams describes Lester as

leaning back on something, some frame which from her buttocks to her head supported her; indeed she could have believed, but she was not sure, that her arms, flung out on each side held on to a part of the frame, as along a beam of wood. In her fighting and sinking consciousness, she seemed to be almost lying along it, as she might be on a bed, only it was slanting. (159)

Lester, then, receives the effects of Simon's efforts to separate Betty's soul from her body, thus saving Betty from death. Trowbridge points out that "Here is Williams's 'Doctrine of Substituted Love'" (an allusion to the chapter so entitled in *Descent into Hell*) "in which is seen his profound understanding of the meaning of the Atonement" (3). Williams describes Lester's act of substitution, writing, "She had suffered instead of Betty, as Betty had once suffered through her; but the endurance had been short and the restoration soon" (164). The imagery of Lester, arms outstretched, reclining on a beam of wood, clearly recalls the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus and Williams' statement in *What the Cross Means to Me* that "It was the Cross which sustained Him" (174). It suggests both Lester's reliance on Him for her own salvation and the model for her efforts on behalf of Betty. The mutuality of help in Christian community is underscored when Betty rescues Lester, in turn, from the dissolution resulting from Simon's act. In her sleep Betty calls out Lester's name, and Williams notes that while "It became—hardly the Name," it was "at least a tender mortal approximation to the Name" (162). While Betty does not call on the Name of God, exactly, it is enough to call out for help from another. Because Christ mutually co-inheres with God and Christ with His Church, it is enough, Williams implies, for Betty to rely on a member of the divine community. Her plea to an approximation of the Name juxtaposes Simon's misappropriation of God's name; and when Betty cries out for Lester, the power of community is forceful enough to counteract Simon's efforts.



Along with her new determination to forgive Richard more deeply and more profoundly than she had forgiven him previously, Lester's service to Betty releases in her the power to properly love Richard also. In a subsequent meeting, Lester has the opportunity to express her newfound sentiments toward Richard. She tells him, "I'm so sorry . . . I'll wait for you a million years," and Williams writes that "She felt a stir within her, as if life quickened . . . If Richard or she went now, it would not much matter; their fulfillment was irrevocably promised them, in what manner so-ever they knew or were to know it" (169). The impatience she had expressed in waiting for Richard in their first meeting after her death gives way to an infinite patience rooted in a more mature love, evidencing the achievement of her reconciliation with Richard. As a result of her substitutionary experience with Betty, Lester arrives at a deeper understanding of this kind of love: "Dimly there moved in her, since her reconciliation with Betty, a sense that love was a union of having and not-having, or else something different and beyond both. It was a kind of way of knowledge, and that knowledge perfect in its satisfaction" (181). Lester discovers that the love intrinsic in her relationships with others in her community paradoxically requires a unity that is mutually intimate and yet precludes possession.

In the same way that Lester must compel Betty to remember accurately the nature of her mistreatment of Betty to effect an authentic reconciliation, Lester acknowledges her own boorish treatment of Richard. When she admits to having been "tiresome" and "beastly" to him, Richard assures her, "You've never been tiresome." But when urged to "speak true now" Richard concedes the reality of what she says. He hears Lester's confession, acknowledges its truth, and forgives her. But Lester more plainly articulates her confession to Richard in their final encounter. She tells him, "Dearest, I did love you. Forgive me. And thank you—Oh Richard, *thank you!* Goodbye, my blessing" (269). And in the mutuality of their last, sincere confessions

and pardons, the reconciliation of Lester and Richard is complete. In *The Forgiveness of Sins* Williams says,

all relationship must thrive or decay by what it holds within it, by its elements, it is from such forgiveness that the relationship must thrive. But then, since mutual love thrives from mutual acts, the forgiveness must be a mutual act, an act of agreement. Love, indeed, in that sense is mutuality; the effort to practice love is an effort to become mutual; that is where it goes beyond what is generally called ‘unselfishness.’ (72)

Once her relationships with Betty and Richard are fully restored and forgiveness exchanged, the unity of their small community is complete.

Because Lester is dead and heaven is part of Williams’ Christian cosmography, the novel does necessitate some kind of explanation of what ultimately happens to Lester in the afterlife. But Williams’ description of Lester’s final end is very minimal. He describes Lester’s final appearance this way: “the brightness quivered in the air, a gleam of brighter light than day, and in a flash traversed all the hall; the approach of all the hallows possessed her, and she too, into the separations and unions which are indeed its approach, and into the end to which it is itself an approach, was wholly gone. The tremor of brightness received her” (269). Williams’ use of “hallows” recalls the novel’s title and the Christian celebrations of All Hallows (All Saints Day) and its Eve, which honor all the saints, both alive and deceased. Even as she experiences the “separations” from her relationships in this world, the brightness signifies the approach of “unions” in the community of saints. While Williams is intentionally ambiguous about the afterlife, he clearly depicts Lester’s as an optimistically bright end, one that contrasts sharply

with that of Evelyn's, whose consistent separation from others offers no hope of any eventual unions.

Lester's death also provides the impetus for Richard's salvation. Her death prompts him to reflect on his attitudes and behavior toward Lester. The well being of his relationship with Lester and, indeed, the salvation of his own life hinge on his ability to come to terms with his trespasses against her. When Richard becomes aware of a crisis in the relationship between Jonathan and Betty, his sympathies for others becomes the catalyst for him to consider who Lester was in her own right, and not merely who she was to him. "It occurred to him then that he had on the whole been in the habit of thinking of Lester only in relation to himself. He saw suddenly in her the power that waited for use, and he saw also that he had not taken any trouble about that power; that he had, in fact, been vaguely content to suppose it was adequately used in attending to him" (46). And when he considers the possibility that Lester had been equally as guilty of neglecting him, he acknowledges that she had been "not as guilty; she knew more of him in himself than he had ever troubled to know of her in herself" (46-47). Richard's new awareness of Lester as an individual becomes linked to his spiritual journey and recalls Williams' statement that "Only in the community can 'the individual' gain his individuality" (*Image* 141). Until he sees Lester as a separate being, genuine union with her is not possible. "Till that night," writes Williams, [Richard] had not known how very nearly he had loved her" (96), and that memory evokes in him a spiritual response that Williams describes as a "type of primitive remorse, for he was not yet spiritually old enough to repent" (97). In fact, Richard is not yet, at this point, even a theist. Despite feeling that he is participating in the salvation of Lester, Williams writes, "he did not . . . feel he had abandoned his agnosticism for what he knew to be Jonathan's belief. Rather his very agnosticism rose more sharply and healthily within him"

(148). Though he is described as existing in some type of pre-redemptive state, he is honest about his convictions, and that is critical to Williams. According to Spencer, in his youth, Williams “acquired both a genuine humility and a kind of tolerant skepticism, what he called ‘the quality of disbelief.’ It was Williams’ contention that all human knowledge is limited and uncertain” (11). So for Williams, Richard’s sincere agnosticism is a creditable step in his progress toward salvation. His linking of loving commitment to others with one’s spiritual condition is unmistakable. Richard’s salvation is not a matter of his theology, but of his ability to love.

Learning to love someone else, then, becomes the crux of Richard’s salvation; mere honorable behavior is insufficient to experience authentic relationship. When Richard contemplates the differences between himself and Lester, he realizes that even during her life, there had been differences between him and Lester: “Kindness, patience, forbearance, were not enough; [Richard] had had them, but she had had love. He must find what she had—another kind of life. All these years, since he had been that eager child, he had grown the wrong way, in the wrong kind of life. . . . He must, it seemed, be born all over again” (215). Here, Williams invokes the biblical language of salvation to describe the path, the life, which results in loving others. As he considers his new insight and awaits the coming of Lester in the clay dwarf of Simon’s creation, he asks Betty, “Why isn’t one taught how to *be* loved? Why isn’t one taught anything?” (228). His questions reflect a growing grasp of the nature of the exchange of love. That he will eventually achieve success on his own journey toward salvation and become receptive to both the giving and receiving of love is suggested by Betty’s assurance to Richard. She tells him, “Don’t worry . . . we can’t be taught till we can learn” (228). While hope for Richard’s salvation is implicit in his ability to learn, to this point his understanding of love is still inadequate.

Like Lester, Richard must learn the difference between love and possession and reject any impulse to possess Lester. When Richard meets Lester once again, the meeting becomes the moment of reconciliation, of honest interchange, of confession and forgiveness. To Lester's confession of being tiresome and beastly, he replies, "And what in all the heavens and hells, and here too, does it matter? Do we keep accounts about each other?" (233). Yet he is unable to accept the fact that Lester's going requires a more complete separation; it is a distinction between what he desires and what "ought to be." As a result, "The new birth refused him," writes Williams, and "He was as yet ignorant of the fact that this was one method of its becoming actual. He despaired" (238). Although the evolution of Richard's thinking is not disclosed by Williams, as the fulfillment of the small community's opposition to the work of Simon nears, he eventually comes to the realization that "certain departures have to be," and that relationship is not possession, but requires that one allow the other to do what she must do (260). He finally begins to accept the fact that loving Lester and experiencing real union with her—even after her death—also requires him to relinquish all holds on her in order to endure the inevitable separation that is to come. That the reader is to infer that he has begun to experience his salvation is evident in his appearance. He is described as "still young and already a master in a certain knowledge of that City . . . it was Richard over whom the Acts of the City more closely hovered, and he whose face, like Lester's, once in Betty's room, was touched with the somber majesty of penitence and grief and a young death" (267). Richard's new understanding of the City, of the eternal community of God, and its laws, provides the basis for his reconciliation to Lester's departure and evidence of his salvation.

Like Lawrence Wentworth and Lily Sammille in *Descent into Hell*, Evelyn Mercer, however, represents Williams' vision of the path and consequences of those who reject the way

of love and community. Despite Lester's best efforts, Evelyn refuses every effort to draw her into their circle of friendships. Evelyn, who has died as a result of the same plane crash as Lester, announces to Lester shortly after they meet that she had been fond of Betty (14). Yet, moments later, she reveals her real sentiments toward Betty—and others. "Even if I do hate Betty," she concedes to Lester, "I hate everyone except you; of course I don't hate you; I'm very fond of you. You won't go away, will you?" (18). Even Evelyn's "affection" for Lester is clearly self-serving. She is fond of Lester only as long as Lester fills her need for companionship. Weeks notes that Evelyn's desire to "hold on to people and things" prevents her from experiencing co-inherence. (72) This is true only in that Evelyn's desire to hold onto others arises not out of any regard for them, but only as they are able to serve her needs. Evelyn eventually voices her hate for all those around her; she even hates her own mother. When Lester suggests going to Evelyn's mother's house, Evelyn says, "No; no. I won't see Mother I hate Mother" (22). And, as Evelyn waits for Lester and Betty as they reconcile, Williams indicates that "as for Lester, [Evelyn] hated Lester too . . . She hated being alone in this place with Lester" (137). For Williams, this hatred of everyone else does have eternal consequences. Evelyn's hatred becomes fixed in her immortality: "on her face was the look . . . [of] hate relieved from mortality, malice incapable of death" (138). Evelyn becomes fixed in her hatred for others. Her malice is underscored when Evelyn, in the clay dwarf formed by Simon, tells Betty, "I only want to see you cry" (235) and "I want you to be frightened of me" (236). And even when Betty continues to extend her friendship to her, Evelyn tells her, "I don't want you now" and "I hate you" (239). Entrenched in her self-centeredness, Evelyn similarly rejects Lester's confession and entreaty. Lester says to her, "I'm sorry if I've been . . . stupid. It was wrong. If I ever made use of you, come and make use of me. I only want you to. I do. I do. Let's go and see what we can find" (268). But Evelyn's final

rejection of a community based on such love freely—and sacrificially—offered results in a final breakdown of her humanity. The description of Evelyn’s end is worth noting. Williams writes that all those in Simon’s hall “saw the immortal fixity of her constricted face, gleeful in her supposed triumph, lunatic in her escape, as it had once a subdued lunatic glee in its cruel indulgences; and then she broke through the window again and was gone into that other City, there to wait and wander and mutter till she found what companions she could” (269). Although Williams is loath to speculate on what eternal destination awaits his characters who refuse to engage in the community of the City of God, he does suggest a dark ending for Evelyn—like Lily Sammille—an eternal existence among the damned.

Williams’ belief that salvation occurs in community is rooted in his Anglican theology. His convictions that the Tripartite God created man to be in community with Himself and with each other and that He both provided and modeled the means of living in community through his substitutionary death and resurrection establish the foundation on which he constructs his depiction of salvation in his work. *Region of the Summer Stars*, *All Hallows’ Eve* and *Descent into Hell* all portray his belief that salvation is not merely a prayer or a response to an altar call, as many modern evangelical Christians believe, but is the practice of mutual exchange of confession, forgiveness, and substitution within His community. They also depict the profound satisfaction and joy experienced by those who live in such communities—and the ominous alternative for those who choose to isolate themselves instead.

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