In Spirit and in Truth
Philosophical Reflections on
Liturgy and Worship

Wm. Curtis Holtzen
&
Matthew Nelson Hill, editors

CLAREMONT STUDIES IN METHODISM
& WESLEYANISM

Samuel M. Powell, Series Editor

*To Roman Holtzen
and Connor, Anna, Lucas, and Eva Hill*

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Abbreviations

A&K	*Analyse & Kritik*
ATR	*Anglican Theological Review*
IJPR	*International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAT	*Journal of Analytic Theology*
Man World	*Man and World: An International Philosophical Review*
RES	*Religious Studies*
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SJR	*Social Justice Research*

Acknowledgments

All scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Preface

Not long ago I would have said liturgy and philosophy were best kept entirely separate. After all, liturgy is about worship, ritual, devotion, and feeling. Philosophy relies upon reason, analysis, and criticism. *Real* philosophers would not be concerned with the symbolic, non-rational, or similar matters of the impenetrable heart.

Thankfully, my mind has changed. I now think liturgical ideas and practices can be fruitfully explored by philosophers. Such exploration can take a variety of forms and be done by philosophers working from various philosophical traditions and intuitions. And for Christian philosophers shaped by and interested in Christian liturgy, the move to explore worship and liturgy makes perfect sense.

Whether conscious of it or not, liturgists have always drawn from and been shaped by philosophy. Those leading worship or crafting liturgies may *think* their practices and language are solely theologically or ecclesially derived, but philosophy has always been influential. Think, for example, of the Christian debates about what is *really* happening when the Eucharistic bread and wine are consecrated. Consider the rationale given for how God "inhabits" our praise. Ponder the meaning of what God is doing at the "invocation," what believers are doing when they "hear a word from the Lord," or why so many have wondered what liturgical language *really* means.

This book, edited by Curtis Holtzen and Matthew Hill, further deepens my conviction that liturgy and philosophy can be friends instead of foes. The essays herein are diverse yet strong. The topics of exploration range widely, as do the philosophical intuitions and commitments of the essayists. The editors rightly note that this book fills a gap in the philosophical literature.

Finally, I want to note the context from which this book arose. As the introduction notes, most essays were written for a philosophy, liturgy, and worship conference conceived of and chaired by Holtzen. The event was the 14th annual Wesleyan Philosophical Society meeting. I was among the few who launched the society with the purpose of exploring a variety of issues from Wesleyan perspectives. I'm delighted that the society and its members have matured to the degree that this book, with its excellent essays, could become a possibility.

Thanks be to God!

Thomas Jay Oord

Introduction

Wm. Curtis Holtzen & Matthew Nelson Hill

If one picks up practically any book on the philosophy of religion, one will find treatises defining religion, exploring the nature of religious beliefs, articulating possible relationships between faith and reason, and, of course, assessing theistic arguments. However ubiquitous these avenues of study are, there is a glaring omission concerning the philosophy of liturgy and worship. As Christian philosophers it is natural for us to reflect on the nature of God, the boundaries of faith and reason, or the challenges of a world fraught with evil. But are not worship and liturgy just as foundational to the Christian as any other area of inquiry? Just as one can hardly claim to be a Christian—let alone a philosopher—without having thoughts about the nature of the divine, it seems equally as strange to be a Christian and not inquire about the nature of worship or the purpose of liturgy. While there are many fine books that address worship and liturgy from theological, sociological, or anthropological perspectives, the market is only sparsely dotted with books exploring the subject from a philosophical perspective. This book is a step toward filling that gap.

Nowhere in scripture is "worship" explicitly defined—yet most often it is denoted as a "bending" or "prostrating" oneself as a sign of reverence. The Divine who is being esteemed by those who bow is said to be "worthy" of this act. To worship is to acknowledge and proclaim the "worthship" of the one who is honored. Worship is seen in customary practices such as prayer,

offerings, and singing—or in the less formal and more subjective feelings of awe and adoration. In John 4 Jesus challenges the then-traditional notion of authentic worship, that it had to take place on the "right" mountain or by the "right" nation, and instead proclaimed, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." Jesus's words invite philosophical reflection and they summon the philosopher to muse about the meaning and aspects of worship.

Throughout the centuries, Christian communities have enacted various liturgies not only to develop communal bonds through worship but to bring individuals corporately closer to the divine. While all traditions rely on some form of shared worship, one might question the nature and essence of specific liturgical practices. Based on a series of lectures by contributing author Nicholas Wolterstorff, it is our attempt to locate this book at the intersection of philosophy and liturgy and to seek, in part, answers to some of the following questions: In what ways do repetition of liturgical practices become reenactments? How do trust and skepticism impact an individual during worship? What do philosophical inquiries have to do with theological praxis? Drawing on varied philosophical traditions from Kant to Lévinas, and diverse theological themes from confessions of sin to syncretism, this book points to practical conclusions that extend beyond intellectual exercises, and speaks to how we understand the nature of worship and the person of God.

Major Contributors and Chapters

Our book begins with esteemed philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff. Most of the essays in this book were inspired by Wolterstorff's acceptance of the invitation to give the keynote lectures at the 2015 meeting of the Wesleyan Philosophical Society. Because of this, the book will lead with Wolterstorff's contributing essay, "Liturgical Repetition and Reenactment." Here, Wolterstorff swims against the current of contemporary liturgical studies by first exploring the pervasive and diverse role

of repetition in Christian liturgical enactments. He then analyzes the nature of reenactments and concludes that while enactments of Christian liturgies are pervaded by repetition, they contain very little by way of reenactments, and that, in particular, a celebration of the Eucharist is not a reenactment.

Following Wolterstorff's chapter is Joshua Kira's "The Role of Phenomenological Description in Investigating Language: An Examination of Wolterstorff's Methodology in *Divine Discourse.*" In this chapter Kira seeks to investigate Wolterstorff's methodology of investigating language and practice as exemplified in his book *Divine Discourse*. Kira argues that Wolterstorff provides a compelling position that can make sense of diverse phenomena and thus may be significant in understanding liturgy. However, Wolterstorff may require supplemental methodologies and perspectives to assist in the circumscription of the field of phenomena that is to be investigated, in the provision of a teleological orientation that may be necessary for understanding the relationship between divine and human speech, and in the attempt to address the difficulty of linguist atomism. If this is done, then Wolterstorff's method may be a significant technique for the understanding of liturgical practice.

How shall we understand the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist? In his chapter, "The Eucharist as Linguistic Iconic Bodily Encounter," Brent Peterson explores the gift of the Eucharist primarily by considering the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet in conversation with Jean-Luc Marion, both of whom are undergirded by Heidegger and Lévinas. This chapter explores the challenges of onto-theology and a metaphysics of explicative causality specifically in regard to imagining the Eucharist. Rather than a scheme of "explicative" causality, both Marion and Chauvet offer a movement into the symbolic scheme of language, culture, and desire. Moreover, this chapter provides an imagination of the Eucharist as an iconic symbolic encounter, embodied in language.

Plato's *Protagoras* offers an early introduction to the philosophy of language, and it presents a genesis story for the existence of words. Language gets its start somewhere, to be sure, though the true origins of linguistics are surely lost in the mists of history and human evolution. In order to ward off common enemies and achieve common goals, synchronized efforts were needed. Words aim at common understanding, at mutuality and universality. Communication allows us to work together in the coordinated efforts that slay beasts, harvest crops, and call to prayer. In his chapter "After Fire, Words: Lévinas and the First Order of Language," Eric Severson outlines the itinerary Plato provides for the history of language and linguistics and then proposes, with the help of Emmanuel Lévinas, an alternate path. Severson points to a more primitive order of language that invokes responsibility before it turns toward understanding.

Quite often people are led in acts of worship—often by persons they hardly know. Should we not be suspicious of such persons and the liturgy they share? In the essay "Gadamer's Hermeneutic of Trust—Ontological and Reflective," Wm. Curtis Holtzen and Matthew Hill seek to show how Gadamer's position that all persons are ontologically interpreters rests on the notion that all persons are ontologically "persons of trust." This essay relies on Jürgen Habermas, a chief interlocutor for Gadamer who is commonly identified with the hermeneutics of suspicion, to explore Gadamer's hermeneutic as it relates to trust. Finally, this chapter concludes that Gadamer's hermeneutic of trust has the ability to be reflective and suspicious when we understand hermeneutics and liturgical practices chiefly through the metaphor of "conversation."

Many Christians talk about the corporate confession of sin as if it functions to prevent church from becoming a place of self-legitimation. As many liberation theologies point out, however, self-legitimation is not the problem, and in fact, *right* self-legitimation is precisely what many churches fail to do well. In "Legitimating Our Lives before God: The Confession of Sin and

the Creation of Self," Amanda DiMiele offers a feminist reading of Kierkegaard that makes a distinction between the modern "Self" and the selfhood received freely and daily as a gift from God. The corporate confession and forgiveness ought to be understood as one moment in which we receive this latter gift of ourselves back again.

Starting from the notion of worship as an autonomous moral response to God's grace, Joyce Ann Konigsburg, in her chapter "Worship as Compatible with Both Proper Human Autonomy and Relational Autonomy," argues that proper human autonomy is essential for deciding to participate in religious services that foster healthy divine and human relationships. Although communal activities such as worship appear to constrain individual free will and choice, relationality actually contributes to—plus enhances—personal autonomy. Each person, as well as the collective community, is an active subject who elects to engage in worship rituals. As a result, the practice of worship is compatible with both personal autonomy and relational autonomy.

In the chapter "Four on the Floor: Phenomenological Reflections on Liturgy and Music," John Brittingham argues that liturgy and music, while culturally informed, are thought of as much more static practices than phenomenological investigation reveals them to be. Following the lead of French phenomenologist Jean-Yves Lacoste, his main claim is that liturgy is the experience of deliberately ordered time, space, and otherness. One can, therefore, conclude that both musical performance and liturgical practices are oriented around a tradition that conditions their possibilities. Both music and liturgy operate historically, drawing from the past to construct the present. Moreover, both involve the very embodied experience of disposing oneself toward particular movements, practices, habits, and cultural contexts.

Understanding humans as loving beings, or *Homo liturgicus*, Rustin Brian's chapter "Beyond Syncretism: On the Competing Liturgies of US Civil Religion and the Church,"

examines the various and competing liturgies of the American Church and the nation-state. The goal is to consider how the liturgies of each form persons, and toward what end. In pursuing this comparison, it is argued that American Civil Religion, which was previously thought to be a classic example of syncretism, is actually a very carefully disguised co-opting of Christian faith toward the end of the love of the nation-state. Evidence for this is found in looking to many of the so-called "Founding Fathers" of the United States and their subtle, and yet intentional, Epicurean embrace of Nature and Nature's God, as opposed to the Triune God of Christianity.

We conclude the book with Isaac Wiegman's "Divine Retribution in Evolutionary Perspective," which explores how our understanding of Christian liturgy is interconnected with how we think about Hell, punishment, and divine wrath. It is argued that the traditional view of Hell presupposes a retributive principle concerning punishment. Moreover, there are plausible evolutionary explanations for the psychological processes that make this principle compelling. Moreover, the traditional view of Hell is undermined, unless biblical descriptions of divine wrath are taken quite literally. Finally, an alternative interpretation of divine wrath is developed along with a gesture at an alternative view of the relation between divine wrath and Christian liturgy.

It should be noted that this book is written with three kinds of audience in mind. First, it is written to scholars in the fields of theology and philosophy who are concerned with how to make sense of ideas of worship in light of philosophical inquiries. Second, this book is written to those who are interested in philosophy of religion, in particular Nicholas Wolterstorff's work. Third, it is written for pastors, lay leaders, and anyone else who wrestles with the nature of God in liturgical practices. Our hope is that the book will provide the epistemological framework with which such people can critically participate in worship.

Liturgical Repetition and Reenactment
Nicholas Wolterstorff

It is commonly said by liturgical scholars that a celebration of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper is a reenactment of Christ's last meal with his twelve disciples before his arrest and execution. Some liturgical scholars go further and suggest that the entire enactment of a Christian liturgy is a dramatic reenactment of episodes of biblical narrative. This latter position was espoused by, for example, the liturgical scholar Sigmund Mowinckel in his book *Religion and Cult.*[1] Mowinckel's interpretation of the liturgies of Judaism and Christianity was an application to these liturgies of his general concept of cult. Cult, he said, "always [has] a more or less clear dramatic stamp. It is a cultic drama. This can have a more or less realistic or symbolic form. In cult, that which happens is presented visibly through dramatic rites and symbols."[2] Further, "In the cultic festival, it is the past which is reenacted and the future which is created."[3] The liturgical scholar J.-J. von Allmen was of the same view. In his *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, he says, of the Christian cult, that when it is enacted "the past is reenacted and made present."[4]

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[1] Sigmund Mowinckel, *Religion and Cult: The Old Testament and the Phenomenology of Religion* (trans. John F. X. Sheehan; ed. K. C. Hanson; Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012).

[2] Mowinckel, *Religion and Cult*, 99.

[3] Mowinckel, *Religion and Cult*, 109.

[4] Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 34.

In his probing and suggestive essay "Liturgical Immersion,"[1] Terence Cuneo, a philosopher rather than a liturgical scholar, rejects the attempt of these liturgical scholars to fit under the one concept of reenactment all the ways in which enactments of Christian liturgy invoke episodes of biblical narrative. There is no one concept that covers all the cases; we should acknowledge and honor the diversity. Cuneo does hold, however, that the concept of reenactment fits a good many of the cases. As for the Eucharist, he takes for granted that it is a reenactment.

In this essay I will swim against the current and argue that there is very little by way of reenactment in Christian liturgies; in particular, a celebration of the Eucharist is not a reenactment. Enactments of Christian liturgy do incorporate a great deal of repetition, including repetitions of biblical episodes. A celebration of the Eucharist is obviously some sort of repetition, some sort of *doing again,* of what St. Paul and the writers of the synoptic Gospels report Jesus as having done at his last meal. But a repetition is not a reenactment. As we shall see in due course, a reenactment of X is a dramatic representation of X; a repetition of X is not a representation of X. Christian liturgical enactments, when they go well, do have a strong dramatic quality; but they incorporate very little by way of dramatic representation.

I will develop and defend these claims by first exploring the pervasive and diverse role of repetition in Christian liturgical enactments; I will then analyze the nature of reenactments; and I will conclude by arguing that, while enactments of Christian liturgies are pervaded by repetition, they contain very little by way of reenactments, and that, in particular, a celebration of the Eucharist is not a reenactment.

Act-Types Versus Act-Tokens

Fundamental in the discussion that follows is the distinction between types of acts and instances of those types. Let me use terminology familiar to philosophers and call the former of these entities *act-types,* and the latter *act-tokens.* Most act-types are universals; they can be multiply instantiated, their instantiations being particulars. To use alternative terminology: they can recur. Let us say that someone who instantiates an act-type after its first instantiation thereby *repeats* that act-type. It is act-types that are repeated, not act-tokens; act-tokens cannot recur. They can be imitated, but they cannot be repeated. As we shall see later, it is act-tokens that are reenacted. Therein lies the ontological divide between repetition and reenactment: it is act-types that are repeated; it is act-tokens that are reenacted.

No doubt some readers will be mystified by my comment that *most* act-types are universals; they assume that if something is a type, then necessarily it can be multiply instantiated and is, therefore, a universal. But not so. An example of an act-type that cannot recur or be repeated, and hence is not a universal, is *the action of first setting foot on the moon.* The act-token *Neil Armstrong's setting foot on the moon* is an instance of this act-type; and there can be no others. There could have been a different instance of this act-type than the one that is in fact the instance. Armstrong's companion, Buzz Aldrin, might have been the first to set foot on the moon, in which case the act-token *Buzz Aldrin's setting foot on the moon* would have been the only instance of the act-type of *first setting foot on the moon* and there could subsequently be no others. (I concede that to call an entity of which there can be only one instance a *type* is not entirely felicitous.)

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[1] Terrence Cuneo, "Liturgical Immersion," *JAT* 2 (2014): 117–39. The essay is also included in his book *Ritualized Faith,* forthcoming from Oxford University Press. Cuneo's essay, and my own earlier essay, "The Remembrance of Things (Not) Past," *Christian Philosophy* (ed. Thomas P. Flint; South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 118–61, are, so far as I know, the only essays by philosophers that address the issues I will be discussing in this present essay. The analyses I will be proposing differ considerably from Cuneo's; for the most part, however, I will refrain from pointing out where I disagree. My knowledge of Orthodox liturgies is heavily indebted to various essays by Cuneo.

Intentional Repetition

Those who participate in an enactment of some Christian liturgy do so by following what I call a *script*—that is, a set of prescriptions for what they are to do. The prescriptions are prescriptions for the instantiation of act-types, or more precisely, for the instantiation of types of *sequences* of act-types. These prescriptions are such that, by reference to them, many of the act-tokens performed in the enactment, and/or the sequence in which they are performed, can be judged as correct or incorrect. Suppose, for example, that the priest assigned to preside at an enactment of the Orthodox liturgy of St. John Chrysostom has spent the week reading medieval history and mindlessly opens the liturgy with the words, "Blessed is the fiefdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." He would have made a mistake. What he should have said is, "Blessed is the *kingdom* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Every act-token that one performs is an instantiation of a multiplicity of act-types. Neil Armstrong's setting foot on the moon was an instantiation of the act-type of stepping out of a vehicle, an instantiation of the act-type of setting foot on dry ground, and so forth, on and on. Most of the act-types of which one's act is a token never cross one's mind when one acts. And if the thought of some act-type that one is instantiating does not cross one's mind, then, of course, one does not think of oneself as instantiating that act-type, nor does one think of oneself as repeating that act-type; one does not think of that act-type as recurring in what one is doing. All this is true as well for participating in an enactment of some liturgy. But something quite different goes on as well, and noticing this is important for understanding liturgy.

By virtue of following the script for the liturgy, those who participate in an enactment of some liturgy have certain act-types in mind, and they aim at instantiating those act-types. They have in mind the comprehensive act-type *following the liturgical script,* and they aim to produce an instantiation of that act-type. As the liturgy proceeds, they also have in mind less comprehensive act-types that they aim to instantiate. They have in mind the act-type *praising God*, and they aim to produce instantiations of that. They have in mind the act-type *interceding with God*, and they aim to produce instantiations of that. And so forth. Let us call such actions *intentional instantiations*. One's action is an intentional instantiation when one has some act-type in mind and intends to produce an instantiation thereof.

When those who participate in an enactment of some liturgy intentionally instantiate some act-type specified in the script for the liturgy, what they do, of course, is *repeat* those act-types. Each of the act-types that they aim to instantiate, as they follow the script, has been instantiated many times before. Probably all of the participants are aware of this; probably all of them are aware of the fact that, by intentionally producing instantiations of certain act-types, they are repeating those act-types. They are aware of the fact that they are carrying on a liturgical tradition.

Perhaps some of them are not only aware of the fact that, by instantiating the act-types specified by the script for the liturgy, they are repeating those act-types; perhaps some of them have it as their intention to repeat those act-types. Sometimes it will not be clear which of these two kinds of intentions is being enacted: intending to instantiate the act-type in question within the context of realizing or believing that in so doing one is repeating that act-type, versus intending to repeat that act-type, that is, intending to instantiate it again. Nonetheless, intending to confess one's sins is not the same as intending to confess one's sins again.

An analogy may prove helpful. When the conductor at a rehearsal of some musical work stops the rehearsal and says to the players, "Let's play those last ten bars again and do it better this time," and the orchestra does what the conductor asks, he and the orchestra *intend to repeat* those ten bars. They do not merely intend to follow the score for those ten bars while realizing

that they (and perhaps others) have already done so; they intend to repeat the act-types specified by those ten bars of the score. They intend to instantiate those act-types again.

They intend something else as well. Aware, as they are, of the instantiation they have just produced and of the fact that the conductor wants them to play the ten bars again so as to improve on that instantiation, they intend to produce an instantiation of the act-type *in addition to their previous* instantiation. Let me call such repetition *token-intentional repetition*—TI-repetition for short. TI-repetition occurs when, with a certain act-type in mind and with an already-performed instance of that act-type also in mind, one aims to produce an instantiation of that act-type *in addition to that act-token*. It is not the act-token X that one aims to repeat; that is impossible. Rather, with some act-type in mind and with some token X of that act-type also in mind, one aims to produce an instantiation *in addition to X* of that particular act-type—not just *another* instantiation of that act-type, but an instantiation *in addition to act-token X.*

As we shall see, one might have any of a number of different reasons for wanting to engage in TI-repetition. One common reason for doing so is that one wants to imitate the act-token in question, perhaps so as to mock the agent, perhaps so as to emulate the agent. Another common reason is that one wants to produce a better instantiation of the act-type in question than that instantiation. Our example of the orchestra playing the ten bars again is an illustration of this second reason; they want to produce a better instantiation of the sequence of act-types specified by the score than the one they just did produce. A bit later we will be getting to examples of TI-repetition that take place in liturgical enactments, and to some of the reasons for such repetition.

Liturgical Repetitions of Biblical Narrations

Christian liturgical enactments are like those of other religions in that they incorporate intentional instantiations of act-

types by virtue of the fact that the participants are following a script. As my musical example suggests, the same phenomenon is to be found in other areas of life: in performances of musical works, in performances of dramatic works, in performances of public rituals. What is somewhat unusual in Christian liturgical enactments is the way in which a text, specifically the text of the Old and New Testaments, provides a great deal of the material for the scripted actions. The closest analogue is Jewish liturgical enactments.

Whenever a story is told, whether it be told as fact, as fiction, or as a combination of the two, one can distinguish between the act of telling the story and the story told. Let us call the former of these *the narration* and the latter *the narrative*. Pervasive in enactments of Christian and Jewish liturgies are repetitions both of biblical narrations and of episodes in biblical narratives. As we will see later, a celebration of the Eucharist incorporates repetitions of both sorts. Let us look briefly at repetitions of biblical narrations that occur when the Christian liturgy is enacted; and then, at greater length, at repetitions of episodes in biblical narratives.

Enactments of most Christian liturgies incorporate the reading aloud of passages from the Christian Bible; many of these passages, though by no means all, are narrations. When one reads silently some piece of history, biography, autobiography, or fiction, and understands what one is reading, one becomes cognizant of the act-tokens of narration that the author or editor performed when writing his work and thereby cognizant of the narrative as well. It is tempting to think that listening to someone reading aloud a previously written narration is essentially the same as reading the passage silently, the only significant difference being that one gains cognizance with one's ears rather than with one's eyes of the author's acts of narration, and thereby of his narrative.

I submit that it is a mistake to yield to this temptation. When one listens to someone reading aloud a previously written

narration, one does indeed gain cognizance of the author's acts of narration, and thereby of his narrative. But one's gaining cognizance of those is now mediated by the reader's act of reading aloud the passage. No comparable mediation occurs when one reads the passage silently for oneself.

How should we understand this mediation? How should we understand what the reader is doing? Is she merely enunciating the words of the text, producing an auditory token of the words in addition to the inscribed token that she is reading? That seems to me implausible. That would be the case if the text was in a language that the reader knew how to pronounce but of whose meaning she had no idea. Let the example we are imagining not be like that. Let the text be in a language that the reader understands. Then, by uttering the words of the text, she is doing something else as well: she is *saying* something, performing certain illocutionary acts. Her enunciation of the words *counts as* her performance of certain illocutionary acts.

What might those acts be? What else could they be but acts that, all together, constitute presenting a certain narrative to the listeners, the same narrative as that which the author of the text presented. She is telling the story again, re-narrating the narrative. She is repeating the act-type of narrating the story, doing so intentionally, of course. It is her intention to produce another instantiation of the act-type of narrating this story. It is her intention that that act-type recur.

I assume that there is no essential difference between reading aloud a narrative passage and reciting it from memory. In the latter case it seems obvious that what the speaker is doing is repeating the act-type of narrating the story. Whether the speaker reads the passage aloud or recites it from memory, either way, the listeners become cognizant of her acts of narration, and thereby of the narrative that she narrates. And that narrative is the same as that of the biblical narration that she reads or recites.

The analysis I have proposed, of the liturgical reading aloud or reciting of some narrative passage from Scripture, gains

additional plausibility from analysis of a closely related liturgical phenomenon, namely, the *rehearsal*, as I shall call it, of some episode in a biblical narrative. What I mean by a "rehearsal" is a narrating of that episode wholly or in part in the speaker's own words rather than in the words of Scripture.

A component in all mainline Eucharistic liturgies is a rehearsal of some of what Jesus said and did at his last meal with his disciples. The text of this rehearsal draws on the four biblical accounts of that episode, but it almost never confines itself to using the words of any one of them. It is a new composition, differing in its details from one liturgy to another. When the priest or minister reads this part of the liturgical text, quite clearly what he is doing thereby is re-telling, re-narrating, the episode. He is repeating the act-type, already instantiated by Paul and the authors of the three synoptic Gospels, of narrating what Jesus said and did at his last supper—repeating that act-type intentionally, of course, not coincidentally.

If this is the correct analysis of what the presider is doing when he reads one or another of the Eucharistic texts that draws on the four biblical accounts without confining itself to the words of any one of them, then surely it is also the correct analysis of what would be going on if the Eucharistic text did confine itself to the words of one of the four biblical accounts. In reading the Eucharistic text, the presider would be re-narrating that episode, repeating the act-type of narrating that episode, doing so in the very words of one of the biblical accounts. And that, then, is also how we should understand what is going on when some other narrative passage of Scripture is read or recited.

The Eucharistic texts for the priest's or minister's rehearsal of what was said and done at Jesus's last supper are based on what St. Paul and the three synoptic Gospel writers report as having been said and done; they do not, to the best of my knowledge, go beyond what is reported. They each make a selection from the various reports and combine these selections into a coherent account; but they do not extrapolate. They are

restrained in that respect. By contrast, the Orthodox liturgy for Vespers on Holy Friday is astoundingly nonrestrained.

In the course of the liturgy the people (choir) sing these words:

> Joseph [of Arimathea] with Nicodemus took you down from the tree. . . ; and looking upon you dead, stripped, and without burial, in his grief and tender compassion he lamented, saying, "Woe is me, my sweetest Jesus! When but a little while ago the sun saw you hanging on the cross, it wrapped itself in darkness: the earth quaked with fear and the veil of the temple was rent in twain. And now I see you for my sake submitting of your own will to death. How shall I bury you, my God? How shall I wrap you in a winding sheet? How shall I touch your most pure body with my hands? What song at your departure shall I sing to you, O compassionate saviour?[1]

A bit later the people (choir) sing these words:

> The pure Virgin Mother wept as she took him on her knees; her tears flowed down upon him, and with bitter cries of grief she kissed him. "My son, my lord and God, you were the only hope of your handmaiden, my life and the light of my eyes; and now, alas, I have lost you, my sweet and most beloved child.... I see you, my beloved child, stripped, broken, anointed for burial, a corpse.... In my hands I hold you as a corpse, O loving lord, who has brought the dead to life; grievously is my heart wounded and I long to die with you.... I reflect, O master, how never again shall I hear your voice; never again shall your handmaiden see the beauty of your face as in the past; for you, my son, have sunk down before my eyes.... Release me from my agony, and take me with you, O my son and God.... Leave me not to live alone.[2]

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[1] Kallistos Ware, *The Lenten Triodon* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), 615–16. In my quotations from *The Lenten Triodion* I have modernized the grammar and the capitalization.

[2] Ware, *Lenten Triodon*, 618–20. In "Liturgical Immersion," Cuneo says about these two hymns: "The liturgical script... invites the participants to take up something like Joseph of Arimathea's and Mary's first-person perspectives on

These passages are extraordinary in the degree to which they flesh out the biblical narrative beyond what the biblical narrations report. The biblical writers present neither Joseph nor Mary as having spoken the words that are here attributed to them. These are words that they *might well* have spoken; but they are not words that the biblical writers report them as *having spoken*. The restraint of sticking with what we are told has been thrown off, and we have entered the domain, as it were, of fictional realism. The passages are also extraordinary in the intensity of the emotions expressed.

When the Orthodox Vespers liturgy for Holy Friday is enacted and the people (choir) sing these words, are they rehearsing the biblical narrative of what transpired after Jesus was taken down from the cross? Are they re-narrating that episode? Is the act-type of narrating that episode recurring, and are the people (choir) intentionally repeating that act-type?

Yes and No. The act-type of narrating that episode is indeed recurring. But the episode is being fleshed out well beyond anything that we find in the biblical narrations. So though the general act-type of *narrating that episode* is being repeated, the more specific act-type of *narrating it as the biblical writers narrated it* is not being repeated. In part the people are repeating the biblical narration of the episode, in part they are fleshing out the narrative beyond the biblical narration. In the conclusion of our discussion we will consider what the liturgical function of such fleshing-out might be.

Jesus' death and burial." See p. 120. I think that, strictly speaking, that is not correct. The people, when singing these words, are not speaking in the voice of Joseph and of Mary; they are speaking in their own voice and saying what Joseph and Mary said. In my text, the words attributed to Joseph and to Mary are in quotation marks—correctly so. Of course, it may be that when the people sing these words, it feels to them as it would feel if they were speaking in the voice of Joseph or of Mary.

Repetition of Episodes in Biblical Narrative

We have been discussing the repetition, in enactments of Christian liturgies, of biblical narrations, these repetitions taking the form of reading aloud or reciting the words of those narrations or rehearsing in our own words episodes from the narratives. Let us move on to liturgical repetitions of *episodes* from the narratives. Recall my use of the terms "narration" and "narrative." Given the telling of a story, the narration is the act of telling the story; the narrative is what is told. In the enactments of Christian liturgies, not only are there repetitions of biblical narrations; there are also repetitions—intentional repetitions—of episodes from the biblical narratives. What is intentionally repeated is not the act-token that the biblical narration reports as having happened—that cannot be repeated—but some act-type of which that token was an instantiation.

Enactments of Christian liturgies often include a recitation by the people of what is known as "The Lord's Prayer." Typically the leader introduces the recitation with some such words as these: "As our Lord taught us, let us pray." What then follows is an intentional repetition, by the people, of the act-type *praying the prayer that Jesus prayed.* More specifically, what follows is a *token-intentional repetition* of that act-type. Recall what I mean by the term TI-repetition. TI-repetition occurs when, with a certain act-type in mind and with an already-performed instance X of that act-type also in mind, one aims to produce an instantiation of that act-type *in addition to X*. The introductory words of the leader, "As our Lord taught us, let us pray," make it unmistakably clear that what then follows is a TI-repetition by the people of the act-type, praying the prayer that Jesus prayed. The people are intentionally instantiating an instance of that act-type *in addition to* that first instantiation.

Could it be said that the people are *imitating* what Jesus did, that is, imitating that act-token? It is act-types that we repeat, it is act-tokens that we imitate. Is the congregants' praying the Lord's Prayer a case of repetition-by-imitation?

I think it is. Typically when we speak of A imitating B, we tacitly distinguish *what* B did from *how* he did it; and we attribute to A an imitation of how B performed the act in question. We speak, for example, of imitating how someone speaks, of imitating of how he gestures when delivering a speech, etc. We know nothing of Jesus's manner of speaking, other than that he spoke in Aramaic, so we cannot imitate his way of speaking when he prayed the Lord's Prayer. What we can do, though, is imitate his way of praying; and that is what we do when we recite the Lord's Prayer.

What is the point of enacting a TI-repetition of the act-type of praying the prayer that Jesus prayed? What is its liturgical function? The introductory words spoken by the leader make its function clear. In Matthew 6, Jesus is reported as discussing with his disciples some of the dos and don'ts of praying. He concludes the discussion with the words, "Pray then in this way;" and he then prays what has come to be called "The Lord's Prayer." In short, Jesus presented his praying of this prayer as paradigmatic of praying. Accordingly, when the people pray this prayer in the course of their liturgical enactment, they are *emulating* what Jesus did—emulating that act-token. They are taking that act-token as paradigmatic for their own praying. The liturgical function of repeating-by-imitating what Jesus did is that thereby we emulate Jesus in what he did.

An even more striking example of liturgical TI-repetition functioning as emulation of something Jesus did takes place in many liturgical enactments on Maundy Thursday (the day before Holy/Good Friday). In the Gospel of John (chapter 13), Jesus is reported as washing the feet of his disciples as they are assembled for what would prove to be his last meal with them. At the conclusion of this foot-washing, he explains what he has done:

> Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you

an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (13:12–15)

In many liturgies for Maundy Thursday this passage is read aloud, and the minister or priest then washes the feet of a few members of the congregation. Typically they then, in turn, wash the feet of others. Clearly this is a TI-repetition of what Jesus did that functions as emulation. To articulate the ontology: a repetition of the act-type of *washing the feet of others* by imitating Jesus's doing so functions as emulation of Jesus's act-token of washing the feet of his disciples. This is particularly clear in the Orthodox liturgy for Matins on Maundy Thursday when the people (choir) sing this:

> Let us remain at the Master's side, that we may see how he washes the feet of the disciples and wipes them with a towel; and let us do as we have seen, subjecting ourselves to each other and washing one another's feet.[1]

Another example of TI-repetition functioning as emulation of an episode in a biblical narrative occurs on Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter. All three synoptic Gospels report that as Jesus approached Jerusalem for what would prove to be the last time, a large crowd turned out to welcome him. They spread their cloaks on the road, waved branches cut from trees, and shouted:

> Hosanna to the Son of David!
> Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
> Hosanna in the highest heaven![2]

In many liturgical enactments on Palm Sunday, congregants enter the church waving palm branches and singing an adaptation and expansion of what the crowd shouted on that day long ago when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time. This is clearly a TI-repetition of that episode in biblical narrative, and quite clearly it also functions as emulation. In this case, however,

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[1] Ware, *Lenten Triodon*, 552.
[2] This is Matthew's report (21:9) of what the crowd shouted. Mark's report (11:9–10) and Luke's (19:38) are both slightly different.

it is not emulation of something Jesus did but emulation of what the crowd did.

While we are on the topic of liturgical TI-repetition for the purpose of emulation, it is worth noting that in the liturgies of the Orthodox church for various special days, the people rather often declare that they are emulating, or enjoin themselves to emulate, something done by a person (or character) in one of the biblical narratives. What they declare or enjoin themselves to emulate sometimes extends well beyond what can be enacted in the liturgy. Here are two examples from the text of the Orthodox liturgy for the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee.[1]

> Let us make haste to follow the Pharisee in his virtues and to emulate the Publican in his humility…. In our prayer, let us fall down before God, with tears and fervent cries of sorrow, emulating the Publican in the humility which lifted him on high; and let us sing in faith: O God of our fathers, blessed art thou.[2]

> As the Prodigal Son I come to you, merciful Lord. I have wasted my whole life in a foreign land; I have scattered the wealth which you gave me, O Father. Receive me in repentance, O God, and have mercy on me…. With the words of the Prodigal I cry aloud: I have sinned, O Father; like him, receive me now in your embrace and reject me not.[3]

And here is an example from the Orthodox liturgy for Holy Friday:

> Following the example of the righteous thief [on the cross] we cry with faith: Remember us also, Saviour, in your kingdom.[4]

The three examples just given, of the congregants declaring that they are emulating, or enjoining themselves to emulate, some act performed by someone in one of the biblical

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[1] Four Sundays before the beginning of Lent. I thank Terence Cuneo for calling these examples to my attention.
[2] Ware, *Lenten Triodon*, 105, 107.
[3] Ware, *Lenten Triodon*, 113, 116.
[4] Ware, *Lenten Triodon*, 589.

narratives, have all been taken from one of the Orthodox liturgies. Such declarations and injunctions occur in the enactment of other liturgies as well; for example, during, the Christmas season in my own congregation the people say, at the conclusion of the Eucharist and just before they are sent forth, "And just as the Magi went home another way after meeting you, change and direct us, O Lord, that we might do your will as we depart from this place." For the most part, however, such declarations and injunctions are to be found in the hymns available for singing rather than in any fixed liturgical text. A vivid example is the evangelical hymn, "Dare to Be a Daniel," composed by Philip P. Bliss in 1873. The first stanza and the refrain go as follows:

> Standing by a purpose true,
> Heeding God's command,
> Honor them, the faithful few!
> All hail to Daniel's band!
> *Refrain*
> Dare to be a Daniel,
> Dare to stand alone!
> Dare to have a purpose firm!
> Dare to make it known!

Reenactments

More could be said about liturgical repetition. But let us move on to consider the nature of dramatic reenactments, and then address the question whether enactments of Christian liturgies incorporate reenactments of episodes in the biblical narratives.

Perhaps some readers would call everything that I have called a repetition, a reenactment. I doubt that that is a correct use of the term. But I do not wish to argue the point. Suppose that it is a correct use of the term. Then the thing to be said is that the term "reenactment" has two significantly different meanings. It means both *a repetition* and what I call a *dramatic reenactment*. And these are not the same. What we repeat are act-types and event-types; what we reenact are act-tokens and event-tokens. A

dramatic reenactment of some act- or event-token may incorporate intentional repetitions of certain act- or event-types of which the reenacted token was an instantiation; most of them do. But a dramatic reenactment is not, as such, a repetition.[1]

The waving of palms on Palm Sunday is a repetition of (some of) what the crowd did when Jesus entered Jerusalem; it is a repetition functioning as emulation. But it is not a reenactment of Jesus' entry. If a reenactment is what is wanted, we can do much better than that! Children do better when they put on a Christmas pageant complete with a few sheep, a couple of shepherds, some angels, the baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, a manger with straw, a star, three wise men, and so forth.

Some of the liturgical theologians who describe enactments of one or another Christian liturgy, in whole or in part, as *reenactments* of episodes in biblical narratives, explain that what they mean by "reenactment" is *reactualization.* They hold that when a Christian liturgy is enacted, certain biblical episodes are made actual again. That is, those event-tokens and act-tokens are made actual again. Or, as some of them put it, they are made present again. I discuss this view in some detail in my essay "The Liturgical Present Tense,"[2] and will discuss it no further here other than to say that, in my view, it has to be rejected. Even if it is ontologically possible for act-tokens to be reactualized, which I doubt, it is clear that Mary has not given birth multiple times to the infant Jesus.

Let us imagine a dramatic reenactment of some historical episode—call it, for short, an "historical reenactment." The American Civil War effectively ended on April 9, 1865, when General Robert E. Lee, the head of the Confederate army, surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant, the head of the Union army, in the courthouse located in the tiny Virginia village of

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[1] Rather than always adding the adjective "dramatic," I will often speak just of reenactments.

[2] See Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower, eds., *Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Appomattox. Every book about the Civil War describes the surrender. The courthouse is still standing; it is now part of a National Historical Park.

An historian who writes about the end of the Civil War presents to us his narrative of how the surrender went. As we saw earlier, that same narrative can be re-narrated by reading aloud the written narration, by reciting it, or by telling the narrative in one's own words. But verbal narration is not the only way in which a narrative of Lee's surrender can be presented. It can also be presented by the staging of a dramatic representation of the surrender.

As preparation for such a dramatic representation, one person would be assigned to play the role of Lee, and another would be assigned to play the role of Grant. The person assigned to play the role of Lee would be dressed as Lee would have been dressed, and the person assigned to play the role of Grant would be dressed as Grant would have been dressed. A number of men would be assigned to play the roles of Union soldiers and would be dressed as Union soldiers were dressed at the time; others would be assigned to play the roles of Confederate soldiers and would be dressed as Confederate soldiers were dressed. Those playing the roles of Union soldiers would be carrying guns.

When the time came for the dramatic representation to begin, those playing the roles of Lee and Grant would arrive at the courthouse on horseback, and a number of those playing the roles of soldiers would also show up on horseback. By acting in their assigned roles according to the script, and by employing various entities as props—guns, horses, a desk, etc.—they would be presenting to viewers and listeners a narrative of what happened there in Appomattox on April 9, 1865.

What I have been calling a "dramatic representation" of Lee's surrender would be an historical reenactment of the surrender. To reenact is not to repeat but to represent. A repetition of Lee's surrender would be another surrender; it would be another instantiation of the act-type of surrendering

one's army to one's opponent. In an historical reenactment of the surrender, no surrender takes place. The person playing the role of Lee represents Lee surrendering; but to represent Lee surrendering is not to surrender. And since the actor does not actually surrender, there is no surrender imitating Lee's surrender, and hence none emulating Lee's surrender. Of course, some of the things the actor does are imitating repetitions of what Lee did; getting off a horse and walking up the steps of the courthouse repeats-by-imitating what Lee did. But most of the repetition-by-imitation of what Lee did is in the service of representing what Lee did.

By no means does everything that actors do in reenactments function representationally. Indeed, most of what they do does not function representationally; it takes considerable interpretive skill to discern what does and what does not so function. If the actor playing Lee swats away a bee buzzing around his head as he ascends the steps of the courthouse, we do not interpret that as representing Lee having swatted away a bee as he ascended the steps. On the other hand, if the actor is quite obviously only pretending to swat away an insect, we will be in some doubt as to how to interpret his action. Perhaps the organizers of the event read in some letter from the time that Lee swatted away a bee as he ascended the steps and decided to write into the script for the reenactment that the actor playing Lee would pretend to swat away an insect as he ascended the steps; then his doing so would count as representing Lee as having swatted away an insect.

Historians who write about Lee's surrender implicitly present their narratives in the assertoric mood: they assert that this is how it went. So too, those who stage an historical reenactment of some episode implicitly present their narrative assertorically: they assert that things went as they represent them as having gone. This explains why it is that one of the most common criticisms lodged against historical reenactments is that they are not faithful to the facts. Critics charge that what the

reenactment at a certain point presents as having happened did not in fact happen, or that important aspects of what did happen are not presented in the reenactment.

My imaginary example has been that of a live historical reenactment. Reenactments of historical events can also take the form of film reenactments. A film reenactment of some historical event is seldom created by filming some live reenactment of that event. Film reenactments are *sui generis.*

Live reenactments and film reenactments each have their own attractions and drawbacks. Anyone viewing a live reenactment is drawn into the performance by the slight bit of tension that he or she feels. No matter how well rehearsed the reenactment may be, something may go laughably or calamitously wrong. The horse carrying one of the principals may stumble, throwing him to the ground, the fall fracturing his left leg so badly that he cannot continue. Nobody experiences that sort of tension in watching a filmed reenactment. The great advantage of filmed reenactments, on the other hand, is that they can be viewed at many different times and in many different places. One has to be in Appomattox on April 9 of some year to view the live reenactment on that date of Lee's surrender; that limitation does not hold for viewing a film reenactment of the surrender.

On November 4, 1979, Iranian activists stormed the U.S. embassy in Teheran. Six of the staff escaped and hid in the home of the Canadian ambassador; the others, more than fifty, were taken hostage. Tony Mendez, a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency specialist, eventually succeeded in getting the six out of the country in a derring-do escape. He described the escape in his book *The Master of Disguise.* The film *Argo*, directed by Ben Affleck, is a film reenactment of the escape; it depends heavily on the book for its information. Though the film received widespread acclaim, it has been criticized for not being true to the facts at certain points.

Solomon Northup (1808–1863?) was a free-born African American who farmed in New York State. In 1841 he was kidnapped by slave traders and sold to a plantation owner in Louisiana. In 1853 he managed to escape and wrote a memoir titled, *Twelve Years a Slave*, published in the same year. The 2013 film *Twelve Years a Slave*, directed by Steve McQueen, is advertised as "based on" the book. I am not aware of the film being criticized for not being true to the facts of Northup's kidnapping, enslavement, and escape.

Ben Affleck got the information for his film *Argo* from Mendez's book *The Master of Disguise.* Steve McQueen got the information for his film *Twelve Years a Slave* from Northup's book *Twelve Years a Slave.* The former film has been criticized for inaccuracies; the latter has not. Why the difference? Is the difference perhaps due to the fact that the latter film—so far as anybody knows—is true to facts at every point? No, that is not why the two films are treated differently. *Argo* is presented, in the publicity for it, as an historical reenactment. The implicit claim of the director is that it presents how things went; it has been treated by critics and viewers accordingly. *Twelve Years a Slave* is not presented as a reenactment; the director does not implicitly claim for it that it presents how things went. Its advertising claims no more for it than that the story it tells is *based on* the story that Northup told in his book. To say that it is based on Northup's narrative is to disclaim fidelity to Northup's narrative.

Shakespeare's historical plays are based on historical episodes; they make no claim to being reenactments of historical episodes. No one takes the text of, say, *Julius Caesar*, to be the script for performing a reenactment of certain episodes in ancient Rome. We do not criticize it for not being true to the facts. Historians may take note of discrepancies between what happens in the play and what we know to have transpired in ancient Rome. But we do not charge the play with inaccuracies on account of these discrepancies.

Is a Celebration of the Eucharist a Reenactment?

Suppose that my analysis of what constitutes a dramatic reenactment is correct. Is a celebration of the Eucharist a reenactment of (some of) what transpired at Jesus's last meal with his disciples? St. Paul and the writers of the synoptic Gospels composed verbal narrations of what happened at that last meal. Is a celebration of the Eucharist an alternative way of presenting the same episode? Included in every celebration of the Eucharist is a brief "rehearsal," as I called it, of what transpired at that last meal. Is that last meal presented to the congregants twice, first by a verbal narration when the presider rehearses what transpired, then by dramatic reenactment when the presider takes bread, breaks and blesses it, takes wine, pours it out and blesses it, and offers the bread and wine to the congregants and they take, eat, and drink?

One can imagine a reenactment of Jesus's last meal. One person would play the role of Jesus. That is how one of the Greek church fathers, Theodore of Mopsuestia, described the role of the presider at the Eucharist in one of his catechetical homilies: "The duty of the High Priest of the New Covenant [i.e., Christ] is to offer this sacrifice which revealed the nature of the New Covenant. We ought to believe that the bishop who is now at the altar is playing the part of this high priest."[1] There would be twelve people playing the roles of the disciples. And they, along with the person playing the role of Jesus, would be seated around a table with some bread and wine on the table. At a certain point, the person representing Jesus would pick up the bread and say some such words as these: "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this as a memorial of me." He would then offer the bread to the people representing the disciples, and they would then eat the bread. The person representing Jesus would then take a cup of

wine and say some such words as these: "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me." He would then pass the cup to those representing the disciples, and they would drink from it.

Celebrations of the Eucharist are not even remotely like this. Typically there are more than twelve people present, in addition to the priest or minister. So which, of all those present, are playing the roles of the twelve disciples? No designation has been made. And what role in the reenactment is being played by those who are not representing disciples? The role of onlookers? But they are not onlookers; they too eat the bread and drink the wine. And we can be confident that there were no onlookers at Jesus's last supper.

As for the minister or priest playing the role of Jesus: the words of the text for the liturgy are not right for that. If the priest or minister were playing the role of Christ, he would, when inviting those congregants who were playing the roles of disciples to take and eat the bread, utter the following words, or words very much like these: "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you." In no Eucharistic liturgy that I know of does the priest or minister do that. In every case, he or she utters these words in the course of rehearsing what took place at Jesus's last meal and as a quotation of what Jesus said. Let me quote the relevant section of the rehearsal in one of the Episcopal texts for the liturgy:

On the night he [Jesus] was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat. This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."[1]

What the Episcopal priest says to the congregants when, a bit later, he invites them to take and eat the bread and drink the wine, is not those words but these: "The gifts of God for the

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[1] Quoted by Paul Meyendorff in his "Introduction" to St. Germanus of Constantinople, Germanus, *On the Divine Liturgy* (trans. and ed. Paul Meyendorff; Boston: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 29. I owe this reference to Terence Cuneo.

[1] Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer* (1979 ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 362–63.

people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving." These are not words that Christ spoke at his last meal. The priest is not playing the role of Christ at his last meal, nor are twelve congregants playing the roles of the disciples at that last meal. Celebrations of the Eucharist are not historical reenactments.

The synoptic Gospels report that Jesus, in the run-up to what would prove to be his final meal, directed two of his disciples to find a room where they could eat the Passover meal together. What Jesus said and did at his last meal was set within the context of a celebration of Passover. And there can be no doubt that the annual celebration by Jews of the Passover is a reenactment of Israel's last meal in Egypt. That might lead one to think that a celebration of the Eucharist likewise has the structure of a reenactment but with a different focus, not a reenactment of Israel's last meal in Egypt but a reenactment of those startlingly new things that Jesus said and did, things that no Jew, in celebrating the Passover, would ever have said or done. My argument has been that a close scrutiny of what is actually said in a celebration of the Eucharist makes clear that, whatever plausibility this idea may initially have, it has to be rejected.

We reach the same conclusion, that a celebration of the Eucharist is not a reenactment, when we dip into the theology of the Eucharist. There are, of course, many theologies of the Eucharist. For the purposes at hand I have no choice but to take one particular Eucharistic theology and analyze it with our questions in mind; it would be impossible to run through all the extant theologies of the Eucharist and say what has to be said concerning each of them. Because John Calvin's theology of the Eucharist is the one that I favor, let me choose it.

It was Calvin's view that, by way of the priest or minister offering the consecrated bread and wine to the congregants, Christ is offering himself to them—offering to dwell within them so as to sanctify them. The priest's or minister's act of offering the consecrated bread and wine to the congregants counts as Christ

offering himself to them. And a congregant's act of taking and eating the bread and drinking the wine counts as his or her acceptance of Christ's offer.

If this is one's theology of the Eucharist, one will reject the suggestion that a celebration of the Eucharist is an historical reenactment of what transpired at Jesus's last meal. On Calvin's interpretation, the Eucharist, at the point of the offering, taking, and consuming of the bread and wine, is not backward-oriented but present-oriented. The acts performed by the presider and the congregants are not acts of role-playing that count as representing what happened two thousand years ago. Rather, the presider's act of offering the bread and wine counts as Christ here and now offering himself; and the people's acts of taking and consuming the bread and wine count as their here-and-now acceptance of Christ's offer. No role-playing is involved.

When the presider offers the bread and wine to the congregants and they take and consume them, the presider and the congregants are obviously engaged in TI-repetition of certain act-types that were instantiated at Jesus's last meal; just before these acts are performed, the presider has rehearsed what took place at that meal and thereby brought that meal to the attention of the congregants. By contrast, the act that Christ now performs by way of what the presider does, the act—namely, of offering himself—though it is a repetition of what Christ did at that last meal, is not a token-intentional repetition. Christ does not now have his eye on that initial instantiation of the act-type of offering of himself and intend now to bring about another instantiation in addition to that one.

A celebration of the Eucharist is a not a reenactment of what took place at Christ's last meal but is (in part) a complex, layered repetition thereof. Its liturgical function is neither of the two that we took note of earlier, re-narration and emulation. If we need a name, best simply to call it *eucharistic* repetition.

Are There Liturgical Reenactments?

Dramatic reenactments occur rather seldom in enactments of Christian liturgies. Enactments of Christian liturgies pervasively invoke and employ episodes from biblical narratives. The congregants sing about such episodes; at a good many points they repeat such episodes; preachers interpret and apply such episodes. Seldom, however, do the participants reenact such episodes. Christmas pageants are reenactments of events surrounding the birth of Christ, but seldom are these pageants incorporated within a liturgy. The most striking example of a liturgical reenactment that I know of is the reenactment of Christ's entombment that takes place in the Orthodox liturgy for Vespers on Holy Friday.

What the Orthodox call an *epitaphion* is an icon that depicts Christ after he had been removed from the cross, lying supine, his body ready for burial. At a certain point in the enactment of the Orthodox liturgy for Vespers on Holy Friday, the people (choir) sing, "Noble Joseph, taking down thy most pure body from the tree, wrapped it in clean linen with sweet spices, and he laid it in a new tomb."[1] While this is being sung, the priest takes the church's epitaphion from where it has been hanging, wraps it in a white cloth, and leads a procession that ends with his laying the epitaphion on a table decorated with flowers set up in the center of the church. By laying the epitaphion on the table, the priest reenacts the entombment of Christ. The people sing about the entombment; the priest reenacts the entombment.

The epitaphion is so unlike a corpse, and the table so unlike a tomb, that one might be inclined to employ the very general term "symbolize" and describe the priest's action as symbolizing the entombment rather than reenacting it. Sometimes the table has a canopy over it; that makes it more like a tomb. And sometimes the epitaphion is laid on a bier or catafalque; either of those is more reminiscent of a tomb than is

a table. Neither of them is very much like a tomb, however; and the epitaphion is not very much like a corpse.

Be that as it may, I think the ceremony is nonetheless best interpreted as a reenactment of Christ's entombment. The priest plays the role of Joseph, the epitaphion functions as a prop standing in for Christ, and the table functions as a prop standing in for a tomb. The priest's action of wrapping the epitaphion in a white cloth reenacts (represents) Joseph wrapping Christ's body in a linen cloth; and the priest's action of laying the wrapped epitaphion on the table reenacts (represents) Joseph laying Christ's shrouded body in a tomb. It does not matter that the epitaphion does not look much like a corpse; it depicts the dead Christ, and that is enough. And it does not matter that the table does not look much like a tomb. In general, it is not a condition of something functioning as a prop that it look a good deal like what it stands for. What stands for a star in Christmas pageants usually does not look very much like a star.

Perhaps the Orthodox liturgy contains at least one additional example of a dramatic reenactment, this one even more striking than the reenactment of Christ's entombment. My English translation of *The Lenten Triodion* of the Orthodox church gives to the Sunday before Lent the title, "The Sunday of Forgiveness, On Which We Commemorate the Casting Out of Adam from Paradise." The liturgy for Vespers on the Saturday preceding the Sunday of Forgiveness opens with the people (choir) singing the following remarkable words:

> The Lord my creator took me as dust from the earth and formed me into a living creature.... He honoured me, setting me as ruler upon earth over all things visible.... But Satan the deceiver, using the serpent as his instrument, enticed me by food; he parted me from the glory of God.... In my wretchedness I have cast off the robe woven by God, disobeying your divine command, O Lord, at the counsel

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[1] Ware, *Lenten Triodon*, 616.

of the enemy; and I am clothed now in fig leaves and in garments of skin.[1]

How are we to understand what is going on here? Quite clearly the people are playing the role of Adam. They are not singing *about* Adam; they are playing the role of Adam. Are they doing so in the course of a reenactment? I think they are; they are reenacting Adam's lament. Adam's lament is not mentioned in Scripture, let alone described in Scripture. It is an imagined lament. Imagined though it is, it nonetheless has the air of verisimilitude. This is how Adam might very well have lamented.

Many people, myself included, do not believe that the name "Adam" in the book of *Genesis* stands for an historical figure. The examples of reenactments that I have thus far offered have all been examples of reenactments of what I take to have been historical events; I have referred to them as "historical reenactments." What this example shows is that we can not only reenact the doings of historical persons but also of characters in some narrative. I will forego articulating the ontology of such reenactments.

There is another point that should be made about the reenactment of Adam's lament in the Orthodox liturgy. It seems to me unmistakable that the congregant, in singing the words I have quoted, is not just reenacting (representing) Adam's lament; in doing so she is expressing her own lament, lamenting her own fall into wretchedness. She is not just representing Adam's lament by repeating the words of his lament. She is repeating the act-type that Adam instantiated by enunciating those words, namely, lamenting one's fall into wretchedness.

What Is the Point?

I think we do not exaggerate if we describe enactments of Christian liturgies as obsessed with biblical narrations and narratives. Over and over, in many different ways, the narrations and narratives are invoked and employed. What we have focused on in this essay are repetitions of biblical narrations and repetitions and reenactments of episodes from biblical narratives. What is the point of all these repetitions and reenactments?

In his essay "Liturgical Immersion," Terence Cuneo suggests that the point is that the participants become what he calls "immersed" in the narratives. He explains what he means by this by describing in some detail the experience of being absorbed in the narrative of some work of history, biography, autobiography, or fiction. Liturgical immersion is like that, he says. The aim of the repetitions and reenactments of episodes of biblical narrative is that the participants be immersed in the narratives, be absorbed by them.

I have my doubts. I think it is plausible to say that at least one of the intended functions of the re-narrations of biblical narrative that occur in enactments of liturgy is that the congregants be immersed in those narratives. I also think it plausible to say that one of the intended functions of the often-vivid elaborations of biblical narrative that occur in Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant hymnody is that the participants be immersed in those narratives. But that does not seem to me the intended function of those repetitions that function as emulations. The intended function of praying as Jesus prayed is not that we immerse ourselves in the biblical narrative concerning that episode, but that we emulate Jesus. So too, immersion in the narrative does not seem to me the intended function of Eucharistic repetitions. On Calvin's analysis, the intended function of Eucharistic repetitions is that Christ here and now offer himself to us and that we here and now accept that offer; to this I would add that its intended function is also that we celebrate the Eucharist as a memorial of Christ.

So far as I can see, there is no general answer to the question, why all the repetitions and reenactments? We can describe the rationale or intended function of these sorts of repetitions and of those sorts of reenactments. But to the disappointment of the theorist, there is no single rationale or

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[1] Ware, *Lenten Triodon*, 168.

intended function that covers all the cases. The church mines Scripture for art, for music, for poetry, for ethics, for imagery, for liturgy, for understanding, for wisdom, for faith, for hope, for love. Why does it do that? Count the reasons!

The Role of Phenomenological Description in Investigating Language *An Examination of Wolterstorff's Methodology in* Divine Discourse

Joshua Kira

Liturgy is a compelling topic of discussion for the philosopher of language in that it appears that there are many instances of nonstandard language usage. Moreover, the long history of liturgical worship, its religious significance to many traditions, and the scarcity of philosophical inquiry on the subject makes it ripe for investigation. I, however, will not be talking about liturgy directly, but the type of methodology that Nicholas Wolterstorff employs when he examines human speech with an application to liturgical language. His phenomenological methodology has many tangible benefits and has been utilized with great effect in analytic philosophy, not to mention in his own career. It is this type of method that he employs when looking at liturgical language. My chapter will attempt to show that his phenomenological methodology has certain limits that may require supplemental thought, while still being of significant usefulness in linguistic contexts. This chapter will first provide a specific understanding of what is meant by a phenomenological methodology as well as how Wolterstorff's work appears to fit the description. Next I will provide a brief description of two other methods and begin to compare all three. Then, a short criticism will be provided, with the other perspectives in view, as to how

Wolterstorff's work in *Divine Discourse*[1] could be further refined and supported by alternated methodologies. Finally, I will posit an examination of how these criticisms can guide a phenomenological analysis of liturgy.

What Is a Phenomenological Methodology?

Phenomenology is often understood in terms of historical movements in the vein of Hegel and Heidegger, or within a particular subsection in the field of philosophy. However, phenomenology may also be understood as a type of methodology for investigating philosophical concerns, no matter what their field. Such an understanding will naturally relate to the other way in which phenomenology is used, but will be focused more on the manner of achieving the answers to philosophical questions, rather than on the answers themselves. A phenomenological methodology, though difficult to define, is at its core an approach "from below." For the purpose of facilitating discussion, it might be understood as an investigation of something—whether an entity, practice, or concept—by looking at those instances that are recognized as exemplifying the subject of observation. These concrete and particular instances are then analyzed until the heart of what makes them exemplifications is uncovered. In the conceptual realm, an idea is sought that will make sense of different phenomena, with that idea being qualified and revised until it can make sense of the requisite phenomena. Understood this way, there are a few significant characteristics that can typically be found in a phenomenological methodology.

First, primacy is given to the diversity of the phenomena, such that the goal of the investigation must reckon with all of those cases that are recognized as being examples of a specific idea. This can be understood in distinction from certain metaphysical perspectives, whereby an individual may have reasons, separate from the phenomena, to hold a general theory. For example, one may have theological or philosophical reasons to hold to a substance theory of being, such that the model is held firmly and all particulars must be reconciled to that theory. The phenomenological perspective is the other way around. The phenomena hold sway such that the theory will constantly be modified until it sufficiently covers all of the particulars investigated. Thus, the theory is tied so tightly to the phenomena that where the phenomena lead, the theory must follow.

Second, which is somewhat an offspring of the first point, a phenomenological methodology will typically be limited in scope. Because the theory is tied to the phenomena, if one begins to theorize too broadly, then the phenomena become too numerous and diverse to bring together under one simple idea. In essence, the diversity of the phenomena resists sweeping generalizations or in-depth analysis. The one employing such methodology typically has a more modest goal than to develop a theory that can cover all possible entities and activities of life. For this reason, a key moment in a phenomenological consideration will be in the circumscription of a field of study.

Third, a phenomenological methodology will typically focus on what is typical or "normal." In philosophy of language, the Wittgensteinian concern of understanding language as it is typically used in real-life situations will come to the forefront. Even Heidegger, though prone to the types of sweeping theories often associated with phenomenology, began his study of being with a simple rural workshop[1] and the activities associated with that context. Thus, language will be understood in the context of the diverse lives and practices to which it is related.

Understood in terms of the primacy of phenomena, a propensity for theories of limited scope, and a focus on normal language usage, Wolterstorff's methodology in *Divine Discourse*

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[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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[1] See especially Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (trans. Joan Stambaugh and Dennis J. Schmidt; New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 14–18.

could rightly be called phenomenological. When deriving his theory of divine speech, he looks at the diverse ways in which speech is normally used. Basing his work largely on John Searle's modification of John Austin's speech act theory,[1] Wolterstorff proposes to understand speech as being identified with the production of illocutionary actions. In doing so, Wolterstorff attempts to limit his scope to the manner in which speech can explain some of the historical perspectives concerning the Bible. Though he must broach theological issues like inspiration and revelation, as well as philosophical ideas like epistemology and ethics, he does his best to stay firmly within the philosophy of language and not move too far outward. Moreover, in scrutinizing examples and counterexamples, he displays a preference for normal usage and not extraordinary cases. Though he starts his discussion with Augustine's conversion, an event that appears highly out of the ordinary, Wolterstorff connects Augustine's ideas with what he believes many, if not most, Christians throughout the centuries have believed concerning Scripture.[2] This fact, along with the recognition that the speech act theory that he employs gives similar preference to typical usage, makes Wolterstorff's work an exemplary instance of phenomenological methodology. Furthermore, if one were to look at how he philosophizes in other fields, similar techniques can be found. Whether it is the analysis of belief formation in his brand of Reformed epistemology[3] or the aesthetic sensibilities displayed in

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[1] Though Wolterstorff does interact with Searle (see Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 80, 193), he does not speak of the inception of his own understanding of speech act theory. However, the movement from examining the locutionary act to that of investigating propositions appears to be influenced by Searle's own movement in John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Also see John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (ed. James Opie Urmson and Marina Sbisà; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[2] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse,* 1.

[3] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?" *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (ed. Alvin Plantinga

Art in Action,[1] Wolterstorff shows that he is phenomenological, in the nonpejorative sense of the word.

Comparison with Other Types of Investigative Methodologies

In assessing a method of investigation, it is often helpful to understand other types of methodologies, with the ensuing contrasts helping to clarify the benefits and difficulties of each. Two shall be mentioned here as a foil for Wolterstorff's preferred perspective. The first, which was mentioned earlier, is a metaphysical approach. Metaphysical perspectives seek a unity of understanding that allows for movements across disciplines and also provides a framework to help orient one's further study. They tend to be broader in nature, since the whole of reality is set aside for investigation. In terms of language, metaphysical approaches will typically not allow for the examination of language itself, since its vast diversity resists the type of unifying theory sought. Thus, philosophy of language may be seen as a subsection of another field to which metaphysics has a greater affinity. This type of method can be found in Catholic and early Reformed scholasticism, whereby language is treated as an epistemological issue and epistemology is brought into relationship to ontology and metaphysics. An example can be seen in the relationship between the order of being and the order of knowing, with language being seen as a primarily epistemic category.

The second methodology that can help clarify the strengths and weaknesses of Wolterstorff's position is a theological position. In this standpoint, a particularly Christian perspective is the starting point for the investigation of language. One sees this clearly in Karl Barth, where it is given philosophical

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and Nicholas Wolterstorff; South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 185–220, here 155. See also Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 13–15.

[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

application in the hermeneutical theologian, Eberhard Jüngel.[1] For Barth, human speech is understood in terms of divine speech, since God is the primary speaker. Thus, the Word of God in Christ is the primary category of speech, with language being a mode of its presentation among humanity. In respect to the way humans can speak about God, Jüngel summarizes his predecessor as follows: "Barth asks that question on the presupposition that speech of God is meaningful and possible as man's talk about God on the basis of God's own direction, which fundamentally transcends all human causation."[2] Thus, the question of human speech, especially in the Christian context, is first a theological question concerning how the God who speaks gives Godself over to be the object of speech in humanity.

Each of the different methodologies has benefits and difficulties. The metaphysical methodology has the benefit of unity in that the large scope of the theories it provides allows for the incorporation of many fields under one model. When the theory is posed, there are typically inherent relations between language, knowledge, being, etc. Yet there are times when such a method has a difficulty of producing theories capable of dealing with the diversity of phenomena that are receiving explanation. The theological methodology provides a sense of teleology to language, in that God and God's creative act provide a natural directedness to the contingent realities contained therein. However, the theological methodology can produce perspectives that are out of touch with actual language usage and/or can insulate theology from other disciplines so much that any interdisciplinary dialogue appears impossible.

What then are the benefits and detriments of a phenomenological methodology? The first major benefit of such a method is that it actually connects to human life and language. Whether you agree with his conclusions or not, it cannot be denied that Wolterstorff provides a textual hermeneutic that is actually practicable by the everyday person. Continuing the theme of activity and activism that can be seen in his writing, Wolterstorff continues a long line of concerns about personal practices and piety that diverged when Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus differed on the question of whether theology was a practical science. At least part of their divergence stems from their disagreement over the preeminence of the interior faculties—with Aquinas siding with the intellect and Scotus inclined toward the will. With Scotus's direct influence on Martin Luther and mediated influence on John Calvin, the Reformation stressed an activism in regard to personal conduct and an antitheoretical tendency in terms of philosophy and theology. Merold Westphal, though not delving into the historical backdrop for his positions, does recognize these penchants within Wolterstorff's work. Westphal sees the theory of speech developed in *Divine Discourse*, summarizing the book by writing:

> [Wolterstorff's work] involves a decentering of the theoretical, the indicative, the constative: assertion is no longer the privileged speech act. Language is much more diverse than merely telling others what we believe to be the case. Luther understood this when he somewhere said that we should ask of every passage of Scripture we read not merely the question, What does it tell me to believe? but also the questions: "For what does it tell me to give thanks?" "For what does it tell me to repent?" and "What does it tell me to do?"[1]

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[1] The perspectives of both are present in Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* (trans. John Webster; London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Eberhard Jüngel, *Gottes sein ist im Werden: Verantwortliche Rede vom sein Gottes bei Karl Barth eine Paraphrase* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986).

[2] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 1.

[1] Merold Westphal, "On Reading God the Author," *RES* 37.3 (2001): 274. It also appears that something similar is influential in Wolterstorff's development of Reformed epistemology. See Wolterstorff, "Can Belief in God Be Rational?"

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Westphal also mentions that Wolterstorff is reluctant to engage in the type of ontotheology that does not allow for the primacy of religious concerns in the individual life.[1] There are times when metaphysical approaches appear to allow for philosophical concerns to override Christian ones, while theological methodologies can provide perspectives that are fractured and separated from how language is actually used. One example can be seen in Ingolf Dalferth's claim that hermeneutical theology, which begins with a Christian concept of word and speech, ends up providing a tripartite hermeneutic that is both disjointed and impractical.[2]

The second benefit of a phenomenological methodology is that by being tethered to instances of language in real life, it gives proper attention to the diversity of human language. Wolterstorff attempts to deal with the many different types of speech acts with a definition of speech that draws together themes found in the varying illocutia. By seeing speech as a way of acquiring normative stances, a general understanding is provided that incorporates aspects of assertions, commissives, directives, and declaratives. Wolterstorff moves on in his book to deal with metaphorical language, various tropes, as well as other aspects of speech. When developing his theory, he takes seriously

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[1] Westphal writes, "Or, Wolterstorff might add, theology, including philosophical theology, should talk about a God who talks. For Wolterstorff is engaged in the very Heideggerian task of overcoming metaphysics in its ontotheological sense (which is perhaps not its only sense)." Merold Westphal, "Review Essay: Theology as Talking About a God Who Talks," *Mod Theol* 13.4 (1997): 526.

[2] Ingolf U. Dalferth, "God and the Mystery of Words," *JAAR* 60.1 (1992): 96. In summary, Dalferth argues that Jüngel essentially uses three hermeneutics in conjunction with reference to Scriptural texts. In terms of the texts themselves, he claims that Jüngel uses authorial intention. With regard to the meanings of the texts, Dalferth argues that a structuralist approach is employed. And, in relation to the theological use of a text, he believes that Jüngel uses a reader-response theory. With no metatheory to hold these hermeneutics together, Dalferth argues that his predecessor's work shows an exegetical tendency that is inconsistent and, perhaps, unusable.

the cases of speaking that do not fit well with his perspective and attempts to show where the harmony lies. Whereas metaphysical approaches seek unity in such a way as not always to pay attention to the multiformity of linguistic usage, and theological approaches have difficulties moving from the singularity of divine speech to the diversity of human speech, a phenomenological methodology resists reductionism even when seeking a unified theory.

The Difficulties of a Phenomenological Methodology

As is often the case with methodological questions, the greatest benefits can also be the strongest disadvantages. Many of the difficulties within *Divine Discourse* are reflections of the distinctives found in the phenomenological methodology, with three being worthy of mention. It should be recognized in working through these that none of them in any way show that Wolterstorff's manner of investigation is irretrievable, only that his method may require supplement.

The first difficulty of a phenomenological methodology is its initial attempts to circumscribe a field of study. The primacy of phenomena and limited scope of phenomenological inquiries mean that a small subset of phenomena is actually investigated. This initial choice often becomes the defining feature of the theory that comes from its study. Heidegger recognized this occurrence and in the introduction to *Being and Time* he wrote:

> Scientific research demarcates and first establishes these domains of knowledge in a rough and ready fashion.... The resulting "fundamental concepts" comprise the guidelines for the first disclosure of the domain.... The real "movement" of the sciences takes place in the revision of these basic concepts, a revision which is more or less radical and lucid with regard to itself. A science's level of

development is determined by the extent to which it is *capable* of a crisis in its basic concepts.[1]

Heidegger is basically claiming that a "prescientific" understanding of what should be included in a domain of study will guide the initial investigation, while the maturity of a science can be seen in its ability to redefine its domain, especially when its initial concepts become untenable. Thus, the choice of what to investigate is a fateful decision.

Wolterstorff begins with human speech when investigating divine speech, since it has been the conviction in many Western religions that God speaks and, specifically in the Christian tradition, that He can speak through human words. Thus, the possibility of God speaking through human speech is a preoccupying question. For this reason, Christ as Word is absent from his discussion. Thus he writes:

> What's true is this: I have not, in this book, focused attention on that mode of divine discourse which Christians regard as central; I have not focused on God's speaking in Jesus Christ. It would, on another occasion, be eminently appropriate to do that.[2]

This omission is a very significant decision in that understanding Christ as the speech of God may require a certain view of how God speaks in general. If this is so, the phenomenon of divine speech through the incarnation may not be separable from understanding divine speech in general. Thus, the circumscription of the field of study may not be wide enough for Wolterstorff to provide an understanding of divine speech in general and thus speech in general. In fact, it might be argued that certain theological methods of investigating language, especially of the Barthian strain, are essentially a phenomenological examination of the Scriptural material concerning the divine speech, with its resulting implications to human speech. Thus,

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[1] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh and Dennis J. Schmidt (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 9–10, *emphasis* in original.

[2] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse,* 296.

Wolterstorff's position may require some revision if he wants to provide a general description of speech.

Furthermore, a phenomenological investigation must be open to a revision of its own understanding to take into account those phenomena that do not fit well with its initial concepts. An example may be illuminating: When describing the appropriation of speech by an individual, Wolterstorff uses the example of someone who is authorized and deputized to speak for another. A White House press secretary, for instance, or an administrative assistant. In doing so, however, there are certain exigencies that remain unexamined. If a press secretary were to say something incorrect, immoral, or embarrassing on behalf of the president, the administration could simply distance itself from the speaker and portray her as a "loose cannon." However, if the president had the ability to prevent such speech, and if that type of speech were to be uttered, then the president could be seen as being at fault. Here is where the analogy breaks down. Presidents obviously cannot prevent such utterances, but God, at least from the Calvinist perspective, can. Thus, Wolterstorff's own theological position may require him to consider a model of divine speech that can deal with the disanalogies between human and divine appropriation.[1] One possibility would be to include an understanding of inspiration, but Wolterstorff is reluctant to do this, since he believes the appropriation model is sufficient to deal with questions of God's relations to the human illocutionary action.

Additionally, the disanalogies of appropriation may make it difficult to relate human and divine speech within Scripture in such a way that one can discern the illocutionary act God

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[1] It could be argued that something similar is also occurring when Wolterstorff examines revelation and its comparison to speech (Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 31–35.). He wants to argue that speech is different from revelation (at least of the transitive type) in that the listener's reaction is part of the success conditions for the act of revelation, but not so for speech. However, if God can cause a reaction, then revelation will successfully occur if God so chooses, similar to speech.

performs by way of the human illocutionary act, especially when they diverge. Where the president typically performs the same illocutionary act that the press secretary performs, this is definitely not the case between God and the authors of the text, as Wolterstorff himself recognizes, in many portions of Scripture. Maarten Wisse notices this difficulty in looking at the concept of "transitive double agency discourse."[1] He writes,

> We could regard double agency transitive discourse as a species of appropriated discourse, but we should realize that the thread of similarity between the appropriating and the appropriated discourse is rather thin compared to non-transitive instances of appropriated discourse.[2]

Thus, there may be some revision necessary to allow for phenomena that are resistant to appropriation models or a normative theory of speech.

The second difficulty with a phenomenological description of speech is that it does not give significant attention to teleological perspectives that may affect how one construes the activity. Phenomenology is at its best in speaking of what is occurring, but not always as to *why* it occurs. This appears to be part of the motivation for Wolterstorff employing a largely instrumental perspective on speech. He understands the diverse phenomena of speech in terms of what is done in them, and defines speech itself as a way of taking up normative stances.[3] However, there may be reasons to think such an instrumental perspective will not be sufficient to describe what is occurring in divine speech. In his own examination of the purpose of speech, Wolterstorff simply says, "We cannot imagine a human life devoid of speech actions."[4] However, he does address whether it is possible to imagine divine life in such a way. For God, speech appears to be, in an instrumental sense, superfluous. If God could

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[1] Maarten Wisse, "From Cover to Cover? A Critique of Wolterstorff's Theory of the Bible as Divine Discourse," *IJPR* 52.3 (2002): 159–73.

[2] Wisse, "From Cover to Cover?" 171.

[3] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 35.

[4] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 86.

perform an illocutionary action without the needs of human speech, then the question naturally arises as to why human speech is involved at all.

The answer—though Wolterstorff would not likely want to move this direction—may occur in the area of revelation. Agreeing with Searle, he recognizes that certain sincerity conditions are associated with speech acts, such conditions often revealing something about the speaker. Moreover, he also recognizes that there may be a revelatory correlate to speech when God is involved.[1] Though right in holding, contra Paul Helm,[2] that there is a difference between speech and revelation, Wolterstorff may have to be open to the possibility that the issue of revelation may not be as separable from divine speech as he claims, if for no other reason than that speech acts appear not to have the same instrumental value for God as they do for humans. Revelation may provide a teleology to speech that shows why God may value its use even when he does not need to use it to perform illocutionary actions. This type of reasoning is further buttressed by the unusual phenomena of God performing certain speech acts where God is not seeking its intended effect. For example, it is possible, at least from certain theological perspectives, that God could give a command knowing full well that it will not be obeyed. If that is the case, then the command is performing another function entirely. Perhaps, then, it takes on the expressive quality of its sincerity conditionals in showing what God desires. Thus, the difficulties that a phenomenological methodology has with questions of purpose may mean that it cannot fully understand how divine speech is actually functioning.

The last difficulty is a somewhat Wittgensteinian criticism related to the danger of linguistic atomism. Analytic philosophy has often used the pragmatic method of simplifying issues until they can be properly described by a theory. Thus, language is not always treated in conjunction with the web of

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[1] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 21.

[2] Paul Helm, "Speaking and Revealing," *RES* 37.3 (2001): 249–258.

beliefs and practices with which it is necessarily embedded. Wolterstorff, fortunately, does not make this mistake overtly, as he seeks a type of holism that does not simply tear linguistic usage from the customs and institutions to which it is related. Yet the difficulty of religious language is that God appears to be an inherently unusual subject. Speech by God or about God does not appear to be normal language usage and thus seeking to use typical interpretive and analytic methodologies may not completely work.[1] Wolterstorff attempts to remedy this by pointing to the historical Christian perspective that holds that God condescends to speak in human terms, thus potentially removing the uniqueness of God from the picture. Whether he is successful or not, it still may be the case that such an analysis will be overly reductive.

An Application to Liturgy

The three difficulties of a phenomenological methodology, therefore, are the complexity of circumscribing a field of study, a failure to give proper recognition to teleological insights into language, and a linguistic atomism that may pull language from the greater context in which it resides. These difficulties can provide a corrective to how such a method would attempt to analyze and explain liturgical practices.

Liturgy, as a phenomenon, is difficult to describe in specific terms. Some definitions of liturgical practice are so general that they would essentially include any dutiful activity, whether religious or not. Other definitions would be so narrow that liturgy would not provide diverse enough practices to be fertile ground for the type of methodology that Wolterstorff employs. Thus, the application of a phenomenological method would require a serious discussion of what should be understood as liturgy, as well as a willingness to refine the area of study if any

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[1] For Wolterstorff's justification of focusing on normal language usage and typical interpretive methodologies, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Resurrecting the Author," *Midwest Stud. Philos.* 27.1 (2003): 4–24.

particular practice is investigated that is both seen as liturgical and is unable to fit under the proposed theory.

Moreover, phenomenological description is especially strong concerning those practices that are instrumental in nature, but, as was posed earlier, is far less at ease in a context where teleology is significant. If liturgical practice has a strong sense of teleology, which most would argue that it does, then phenomenological methodologies may not be able to provide a comprehensive picture. Just as Wolterstorff's theory of divine speech may require a supplemental theological perspective, so might a theory of liturgy. This leads into the third difficulty. An examination of liturgical language, if it requires a theological backdrop, inherently includes more than language usage—there is a wealth of beliefs, practices, customs, institutions, etc., that are related. Thus, to analyze may require a wide phenomenological practice that would have to include an examination of epistemological issues, sociological descriptions, and possibly even an examination of metaphysical theories. Consequently, a phenomenology of liturgy is extremely complex and may force the philosopher to foray out of philosophy of language and culture into many other related fields.

Conclusion

Wolterstorff's work in *Divine Discourse* is admirable for many reasons and I am in substantial agreement with his conclusions. There does not seem to be a good reason to believe that God cannot speak through human language. Moreover, his phenomenological methodology prevents the type of elitism concerning language whereby only the scholar could perform interpretation, while doing an admirable job of dealing with the diversity of language found in real human lives. However, in order to refine an understanding of how human and divine speech relate, one may require the resources of other perspectives and methodologies. There are three specific areas where Wolterstorff's work may need support: the field of phenomena

that are picked out for investigation, the teleological perspective that may affect the way in which one relates human and divine speech, and the remedy for linguistic atomism. If those gaps are filled, then *Divine Discourse* may provide not just a formidable view, but perhaps the preferable view, of how to understand the idea that God speaks. Furthermore, its methodology may afford a foundation for the investigation of liturgical practice.

The Eucharist as Linguistic Iconic Bodily Encounter
Brent Peterson

How shall we worship in Spirit and Truth? The question is not if persons worship individually or communally, but what do they worship? What is peculiar about the embodied practices of Christian communal worship? Aidan Kavanagh (and Sarah Coakley) firmly contends that *first-order theology* is the Church in prayer, first being prayed, and then invited into the very communion of the Triune God.[1] Jean-Luc Marion and Louis-Marie Chauvet both suggest that communal worship is a divine–human encounter where humanity is invited to resist the idolatry of worship as theological predication, birthed from metaphysics and hence ontotheology. Conversely, worship invites a response to the gift of divine love through iconic praise. In this sense communal worship is a paradigm for all Christian theology, inviting persons into the response of the divine gift of Godself, rather than idolatrously assuming that the human subjectivity of metaphysics constitutes God as Being.

This conversation begins apophatically by calling for repentance from practices, methodologies, and imaginations that miss the mark of God's invitation for communal worship. At the outset, Marion's critique of metaphysical idolatry and celebration of iconic praise creates a space to consider the work of Louis-

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[1] Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology: The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1981* (Minneapolis: Liturgical Press, 1992), 85.

Marie Chauvet, who asserts that worship is a symbolic-linguistic-bodily encounter with the presence of the absence not only of God, but of others and myself. In this encounter with God there is an invitation to respond and receive this divine gift with a return-gift. One's reception is marked by a dispossession into a communion in the body of the crucified Christ.

Critique of Ontotheology

With first praise and then critique of Heidegger, Marion and Chauvet castigate ontotheology as the operation within metaphysics as idolatrous. Marion and Chauvet suggest that Heidegger is right in what he rejects, but wrong in what he affirms. Marion contends that the critiques of Feuerbach and Nietzsche demonstrate the failure of metaphysics that simply fostered the birthing of idols, killing God. Put simply, the danger is this: Humans first think Being, then out of that think God. "Heidegger insists, the fundamental difference between Being and beings (the ontological difference) is forgotten and covered."[1] For Heidegger, there is an ontological difference between beings and entities. Drawing upon Heidegger, "Metaphysics believes itself to have produced an explanation of being when in fact it has only ontically reduced being to metaphysics' representations utterly forgetting that nothing that exists 'is.'"[2] In this way, for metaphysics (therefore ontotheology), God is the "being of entities" or "the most entity of entities," where Being is reduced to rationality, the contextual human subject.[3] Both Marion and Chauvet call for a fundamental shift in the conversation away from metaphysics and ontotheology to language and the symbolic. Not the reverse of the metaphysical world, but "another epistemological terrain."[1]

As God is beyond Being for Marion, God saves the gift of Godself precisely because God is not, and does not have to be. "For the gift does not have first to be, but to pour out in an abandon that, alone causes it to be; God saves the gift in giving it before being."[2] Divine kenosis kairotically precedes Being. God loves before Being. To be clear for Marion the question is not if God can attain Being but what is the "possibility of Being's attaining to God."[3] God gives Godself to be contemplated and prayed and, as gift, inviting persons to be. As opposed to metaphysics and ontotheology, Marion calls for a recognition of the gift that precedes and makes possible the response via praise, not predication.

Idol

Within Marion's critique of metaphysics and ontotheology, he names two theological approaches for worship, those of the idol and the icon. Idol and icon are more about one's liturgy (work), rather than classes of distinct beings or objects. The question that arises within the concept of liturgy is, who is actually doing the work?

For the *eidolon,* it is known by the fact that one has seen it (*oïda).* The idol presents itself to her gaze "in order that representation, and hence knowledge can seize hold of it."[4] For an idol there is no gift, but a robbing/violating/stealing of the object's appearance by the gaze, which dazzles and immediately crystallizes the moment as one's possession of comprehension. The fabricated thing is not intrinsically idolatrous, but becomes

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[1] Thomas A. Carlson, "Postmetaphysical Theology," *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61.

[2] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinter-pretation of Christian Existence* (trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont; Minneapolis: Liturgical Press, 1995), 27.

[3] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 27.

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 27.

[2] Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-texte* (trans. Thomas A. Carlson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 3.

[3] Marion, *God without Being*, x.

[4] Marion, *God without Being*, 10.

a god, only from the moment when the gaze has decided to fall on it, has made of it the privileged fixed point of its own consideration; and that the fabricated thing exhausts the gaze presupposes that this thing is itself exhausted by the gazeable. The decisive moment in the erection of an idol stems not from its fabrication, but from its investment as gazeable, as that which will fill a gaze.[1]

Idol as Invisible Mirror

For Marion it is essential to consider that one characteristic of the visibility of the idol is that the gaze ceases. With pretentious immediacy, there is movement from dynamic encounter to static comprehension, possession, and objectification. Yet ironically the gaze did not see the visible, "since it did not transpierce it—to transpierce it piercingly. In each visible spectacle, the gaze found nothing that might stop it; the gaze's fiery eyes consumed the visible so that each time the gaze saw nothing."[2] After the gaze's quest turns up nothing, "the visible finally becomes visible to the gaze because again literally, the visible dazzles the gaze."[3] The idol offers the gaze the first visible; yet this first visible as a transmitter returns the gaze to itself.

> The idol thus acts as a mirror, not as a portrait: a mirror that reflects the gaze's image, or more exactly, the image of its aim and of the scope of that aim… That the mirror remains invisible, since the visible dazzles the gaze, makes it so that the idolater never dupes, nor finds himself duped; he only remains—ravished.[4]

Divine Coming through Idol

For Marion, in idolatrous worship the divine is not completely absent. In the idol, the divine comes into visibility

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[1] Marion, *God without Being,* 10.
[2] Marion, *God without Being,* 11.
[3] Marion, *God without Being,* 12.
[4] Marion, *God without Being,* 12.

for which the human gazes watch; but this advent is measured by what the scope of particular human eyes can support, by which each aim can require visibility in order to admit itself fulfilled. In short, the advent of the divine is fixed in an idol only if the human gaze is frozen and, thus, opens the site of a temple.[1]

Thomas Carlson summarizes that with the idol there is

> visibility only according to the prior conditions and limits of the human subject's intentional consciousness; therefore, within the idolatrous mode, my vision of the divine proves to be an indirect or invisible mirror of my own thinking, thus obfuscating the definitive otherness and incomprehensibility of the divine.[2]

The danger is of the illusion of the divine, which is really a dazzled invisible mirror of self.

Idolatry of "Dazzling" Christian Worship

In light of the dazzling spectacle covering the invisible mirror of the self, in what ways do persons gathered under the pretense of Christian communal worship measure and delimit the encounter with the divine? In what ways does the dazzling spectacle over the fixed gaze simply reduce god to the mirror? Hence, God is dead and we have killed that god. How often is our worship a place where our gaze is frozen, dazzling over the invisible mirror?

As idol and icon are two manners of being, Christian worship can subtly and quickly move from icon to idol, a clear transgression of the Word. But with confession God may transform it back from idol to icon, a repentance toward a first being seen and being known, which then offers the gift of seeing and knowing, even through a mirror darkened.[3]

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[1] Marion, *God without Being,* 13.
[2] Carlson, "Postmetaphysical Theology," 60.
[3] 1 Corinthians 13:12.

Icon

While the idol is a product manufactured by the first, visible, frozen gaze, with the invisible mirror marking off the *invisable*, the idol provokes a vision. Conversely, "The icon is not seen, but appears."[1] For Marion, icons always come as gifts. "Whereas the idol results from the gaze, [much like a bad eisegetical hermeneut] the icon summons sight in letting the visible (here, Achilles) be saturated little by little with the invisible."[2] In this way the invisible irrupts in the visible. Marion is influenced by Emmanuel Lévinas, here affirming,

> the visibility of the divine would irreducibly precede and therefore exceed the conditions and limits of any intentional consciousness; in the iconic mode of vision, therefore, I do not constitute the divine in its visibility, but rather, through a radical reversal of intentionality, I am first envisaged and thereby constituted by a divinity whose otherness exceeds my intention and comprehension.[3]

With Paul in Colossians 1:15, Christ is the icon-exemplar, an icon of the invisible God. Hence the icon is not of the visible, but of the invisible.

> Even presented by the icon, the invisible always remains invisible; it is not invisible because it is omitted by the aim (invisable), but because it is a matter rendering visible this invisible as such—the unenvisageable. That the invisible should remain invisible or that it should become visible amounts to the same thing, namely, to the idol, whose precise function consists in dividing the invisible into one part that is reduced to the visible and one part that is obfuscated as invisable.… The icon, on the contrary, attempts to render visible the invisible as such, hence to allow that the visible not cease to refer to an other than itself.[4]

While the gaze is frozen for the idol, the icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on the visible, "since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible.… The gaze can never rest or settle if it looks at an icon; it always must rebound upon the visible.… the icon makes visible only by giving rise to an infinite gaze."[1]

The Gift of the Presence of the Absence

As the invisible divine irrupts into the visible as gift, for Marion and Chauvet there always must be recognition that within the presence there is simultaneously the absence of God. Chauvet draws upon Marion, who is drawing upon both Heidegger and Lévinas, to suggest that the theological and philosophical task are *homologous* in their approach. In both fields:

> there is a slow work of apprenticeship in the art of "un-mastery," a permanent work of *mourning* where, *free of resentment,* a "serene" consent to the "*presence of the absence*" takes place with us little by little. In gospel terms (Eucharistic), this is a work of conversion to the presence of the absence of God who "crosses himself out" in the crushed humanity of this crucified One whom humans have reduced to less than nothing and yet where, in a paradoxical light, faith confesses the glory of God.[2]

As the invisible invades and saturates the visible, the gift of revelation comes in distance,

> which embodies a love beyond Being. Moreover, it is the discipline of the Eucharistic reception of the gift, as Lévinas puts it to "hold ourselves in the trace of the Absent." To hold oneself there, one must unfold a discourse that keeps permanently alive in itself the wound of an Otherness which, always beyond our grasp, nonetheless leaves its trace in the humble call of the neighbor.[3]

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[1] Marion, *God without Being*, 17.
[2] Marion, *God without Being*, 16.
[3] Carlson, "Postmetaphysical Theology," 60.
[4] Marion, *God without Being*, 18.

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[1] Marion, *God without Being*, 18.
[2] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 74.
[3] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 75.

The encounter with the presence of the absence of God always comes as a gift. It is awaiting the presence, wanting nothing, not counting on success. In this way God's greatest and perhaps first kairotic and kenotic gift is an awareness of the absence of God. Chauvet draws upon Heidegger here in noting that such an absence is not a static black hole, not a deficiency, but an absence that invites us to a deep encounter with the Absent. For Chauvet this is the place of the poet. The poet is "to be without fear before the apparent absence of the god, not to run away but, starting from this relation to the absent god, remain in a *mature proximity to the absence* long enough to safeguard the word which at the beginning names the 'High One.'"[1] Yet the absence not only provides the appropriate space or breadth to encounter God, but it is in this absence that humans receive the gift of other creatures' absence and thus their own absence. "Absence is the place from which humans can come to their truth by overcoming all the barriers of objectifying and calculating reason."[2] In this way, without encountering the absence of God, myself, and others, all encounters of presence move toward a toxic self-reflective idolatry.

Language as Symbolic Mediation

In this way, the gift of the presence of the absence of God comes symbolically through language. The gift of language is always beyond full comprehension or exhaustion. Language always comes as a gift with distance. Similarly, Chauvet calls for a repentance from the scheme of "explicative" causality in language and embraces rather the symbolic scheme of language, of culture, of desire: "We set up a discourse from which the believing subject is inseparable—language is inseparable from being or Dasein from Sein. We grasp only what we are grasped by."[3]

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 62. Drawing upon Martin Heidegger, *Approche De Hölderlin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

[2] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 63.

[3] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 22.

The symbolic order in which language participates is a form of mediation. "Like the body, language is not an instrument but a *mediation;* it is *in* language that humans as subjects come to be."[1] Humans cannot possess language, but rather are possessed by it. Thus, for Chauvet, "language does not arise to translate after the fact a human experience that preceded it; it is *constitutive* of any truly *human* experience, that is to say, significant experience."[2] Language moves beyond the recognition of existence, but constitutes it, as gift.

In the Eucharist, the Word comes as gift, constituting us as persons in the body of the crucified One.[3] However, liturgy is often considered to be my work and your work. Moreover, liturgy is not to be understood as the work of the people, but the work of the One for the sake of the many. Into this the church is breathed, birthed, and united into the mutilated body of the resurrected One.

As a symbolic gift, language puts the real at a distance. But this lack-in-being saves the subject. The law of culture anchors the subject by dividing it. There is no access into the symbolic order where the subject is capable of recognizing itself in the representations of itself. Yet as language divides human beings by signifiers, this is the very thing that makes them human. What divides people, the place of their alienation, also offers the same space as their opportunity to become. However, this alienation is necessary to keep the real at a distance. "The imaginary is the psychic agency that tends to deny the lack, to erase the difference, to fill up the distance separating humans from the real."[4] To receive the gift of the Holy One, oneself, and others requires an openness to God, oneself, and others. To receive this

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 87, all italics original, here and following.

[2] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 87.

[3] For the sake of clarity, the term Eucharist will be used throughout this paper to mean the entire service of Word and Table and beyond.

[4] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 96.

presence of the absence is to consent to never being able to leave mediation behind—mediation of the symbolic order that always already precedes human beings and allows them to become human because they start from a world already humanized before them and passed on to them as a universe of meaning. It is impossible to seize the "real," which is by its very definition what humans fail to reach. But the psychic agency of the imagination, on the basis of the primary narcissism, is bent on making each of us believe the contrary; and each one of us is consumed by such a strong wish for omnipotence and domination over things that it is as if we were possessed by an irresistible need to believe in this fantasy and thus to believe in ourselves.[1]

For Chauvet, it is essential that exorcising the demon of the real actually provides an opportunity. "It is precisely in the radial loss of this 'paradise' [grasping and dominating the real] and in the consent to the absence of the Thing that the possibility for the subject to correspond to the Truth emerges."[2] The subject then receives the gift of a permanent becoming as a process always ongoing,

> to renounce to win back its lost paradise, its own origin, and the ultimate foundation which would explain its existence. Its task is to consent to be in truth by accepting the difference, the lack-in-being, *not as an inevitable evil but as the very place where its life is lived.*[3]

From Predication (Idol) to Praise (Icon)

The response to God's gift of linguistic revelation resists predication, but rather moves toward praise. Drawing upon the divine names, theology in the fifth- and sixth-century writings of Dionysius holds that the primary and highest name of God comes

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 98.
[2] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 99.
[3] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 99.

not through metaphysical predication, but in "theological praise and goodness or love."[1]

Marion notes,

> Thus, supposing the praise attributes a name to a possible God, one should conclude that it does not name him properly or essentially, nor that it names him in presence, but that it marks his absence, anonymity, and withdrawal—exactly as every name dissimulates every individual, whom it merely indicates without every manifesting.[2]

As God comes to us through the gift of the Name—as Yahweh Names Godself in Exodus 3:14—Yahweh remains hidden; a revelation as the presence of the absence.

Body as Linguistic Encounter

When contrasting symbol with sign, a symbol marks the very limits of language. Like language, the body is matter that is culturally instituted as speech. By challenging the instrumentalist view of language, "Humans do not ex-sist except as corporality whose concrete place is always their *own bodies*. Corporality is the body's very speech."[3] In this way the symbolic order takes root in bodies. As Lévinas envisions the body, "'as the regime of the separation' that allows us to 'overcome the very otherness of what [we] must live by'…. The body is the binding, the space in the middle where both identity and difference are symbolically connected under the authority of the Other."[4] The body is the very stage that gives liturgy its space.[5]

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[1] It would be interesting to compare the Divine Names in the Christian tradition to the 99 Names for Allah in the Muslim faith. Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name," *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 29.
[2] Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name," 29.
[3] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 146.
[4] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 147.
[5] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 355.

When thinking about the Eucharist, Marion notes an encounter by the unthinkable in the person of the Word incarnate. Interpreting the gift of the Name in and through the incarnate Word, Marion argues that this unnameable Name, the revelation of the hidden as hidden, 'comes to us as the unthinkable within the thinkable, because the unthinkable *in person* [bodily] delivers it to us.'[1]

Therefore, praise refuses the temptation of predicative discourse following the Christ-irruption of life, death, and resurrection. Just as the Word receives his Name from the Father in distance and submits his will to the Father's will even unto death, so does the theological subject receive its language in such a way that any possession of meaning through predication would be lost, and predicative discourse would 'die' through negation and silence. But just as Christic [bodily] death gives way to [bodily] resurrection, so does the bottomless silence of the theological subject give way to infinite proclamations of praise.[2]

This practice is a move from predication to praise, from discourse to prayer. This language is beyond affirmation and negation. For the Christian, this is a discourse of praise responding to the gift of Christ, and "it does so in the measure that it states nothing positively or negatively about the nature of the essence of God, but rather directs itself endlessly toward God in a linguistic movement of love or desire."[3]

For Chauvet, the Word as language is the Creator of the World; Word confers being. The Word precedes us. We are not sovereign. Word alone permits coming into presence. It is in language that the world becomes for us a world that speaks, both transitively and intransitively; it speaks us and speaks to us.[4]

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[1] Thomas Carlson, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Third Letter," *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (ed. Colm Luibhéid and Paul Rorem; Minneapolis: Paulist Press, 1987), 66.

[2] Carlson, "Pseudo-Dionysius," 67.

[3] Carlson, "Pseudo-Dionysius," 68.

[4] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 89.

Chauvet notes that this is absurd from the view of traditional metaphysics, which often sees language only as an attribute that humans possess and as an instrument for bestowing a name on something that is already there, already represented, or as a simple means for displaying what presents itself by itself. Marion calls this causality of language an idolatry, with the fixed gaze bedazzling in front of the invisible mirror.

Language Invites Response

As revelation comes as an iconic linguistic embodied gift, it invites a response in order to embody this gift. While every gift obligates a return-gift as a sign of gratitude,

> the gratuitousness of the gift *carries the obligation of the return-gift of a response.*… This graciousness qualifies the return-gift as beyond-price, without calculation—in short a response of love. *Even the return-gift of our human response thus belongs to the theologically Christian concept of 'grace.'*[1]

For Chauvet, the believing subject's relationship to God can only come through mediation, of which the sacraments constitute the primary symbolic expression. Refusing to answer the gift is a refusal to receive the Word as gift. In this way, the giving of ourselves is our oblation of what we have received.

Humans live this giving response through reception and repetition of the gift itself. The gift of language always proceeds preveniently. We always respond late "to the gift that gives me to myself."[2] This gift can never be mastered or possessed, but offers life through releasing it and offering itself back to oneself. This liberation becomes the foundation of the Eucharist as a divine-human encounter where God presents Godself as a gift of the presence of the Absence to be received through the linguistic/bodily act of the return-gift. The gift can never be

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 108–09.

[2] Carlson, "Pseudo-Dionysius," 65.

captured or mastered or move toward predication based on the knowledge that I own and possess.

Myself and Other Receive the Gift of Being Named

This exchange becomes, perhaps, a major move; not only is there danger of ontotheology and metaphysics for God, but for each person as well. Sin can be defined as holding others as an idol to my own human subjectivity. Not only does one receive the gift of the Divine Name, one also receives the gift of one's own name, and the name of others are received as iconic gifts where there is a symbolic exchange but also awareness of the presence of the absence of the other, which refused any claims of comprehension, thus control. Without such an awareness of the absence there is the idolatry of immediacy wherein the invisible mirror provides a toxic fixation of that which sparkles while underneath the invisible mirror.

Symbolic Exchange

With the necessity of the distance, Chauvet provides an image of how subjects can then be in relation with other subjects, as the doxological encounter of the return-gift in the divine with other creatures. This encounter is not an exchange based on the order of value, or the obligatory gift, a mandatory generosity. This exchange is a gift without price, it is gracious.

For the symbolic essence of the gift is precisely characterized not by the worth of the object offered—this can be practically nothing in terms of usefulness or commercial value, and yet the 'nothing' offered is received as a true gift—but by the relationship of alliance, friendship, affection, recognition, gratitude it creates or recreates between the partners. *It is the subjects who exchange themselves* though the object; who exchange, *under the agency of the Other,* their *lack-in-being* and thus come before each other in the middle of their absence

deepened by their exchange, in the middle of their difference experienced radically as otherness because of their exchange.[1]

This exchange is a gift of non-value, which cannot become an object of calculation or price. Moreover, in Wesleyan terms the gift comes preveniently. "We are not the origin of our own selves but that we receive ourselves from a gift that was there before us. A free gift, which can in no way be demanded and which we can in no way justify."[2] For Marion the two zenith exemplars of this gift are the Eucharist and the confession of faith.

Eucharist—Presence of the Absence

In the Eucharist, the Word leaves the text to be made flesh; wherein love makes the body (and not the reverse). "The Eucharistic gift consists in the fact that in it love forms one body with our body. And if the Word is also made body, surely we, in our body, can speak the Word. The extreme rigor of charity restores to us speech that is finally not silent."[3] It is in the reception of the gift that we receive the gift of our bodily selves. This symbolic encounter always recognizes the gift of the presence of the absence of God, myself, and others. When one confesses grasping for the illusion of immediacy, and thus attempts at control masking insecurity, only then can persons be ready to receive.

> To give up the hope of finding the lost body of Jesus by consenting to meet him, alive, in the symbolic mediation of the Church thus requires a good joining of the elements in their mutual differences.… Now, as risen, Christ has departed; we must *agree to this loss* if we want to be able to find him.[4]

Similar to the disciples on the Emmaus road, only in the vanishing (loss) of Christ's presence could a testimony of the transforming bodily encounter occur. Moreover, for Chauvet,

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 107.
[2] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 108.
[3] Marion, *God without Being*, 104.
[4] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 177.

It is precisely in the act of respecting his radical absence or otherness that the Risen One can be recognized symbolically. For this is the faith; this is Christian identity (only mediated in the Church according to the faith). *Those who kill this sense of absence of Christ make Christ a corpse again.*[1]

The Church makes us Christian by reminding us that our alliance with God is only lived out in the mediation of alliances with all others,

and not in the imaginary direct contact with him that presupposes his 'full' presence. In directing us toward this alliance with others as a privileged place where the body of Christ comes into being, *the liturgical assembly constitutes the fundamental 'sacramental' representation of the presence of the absence of God.*[2]

Only as we are captured by the gaze of others can we encounter the presence of the absence of God and thereby receive ourselves.

Gift-Reception-Return Gift

This return-gift as ethics is thoroughly based on the graciousness of God and as such is doxological. "The theological import of an ethics lived as the prime place of a liturgy pleasing to God. The body is henceforth, through the Spirit, the *living letter* where the risen Christ eschatologically takes on flesh and manifests himself to all people."[3] This return-gift embodies the reception of ourselves as gifts and is the eschatological liturgy of the Body of Christ.

To become historically and eschatologically the body of him whom they are offering sacramentally, the members of the assembly are committed to live out their own oblation of themselves in self-giving to others as Christ did, a self-giving called

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 179.
[2] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 188–89.
[3] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 264.

agape between brothers and sisters.[1] The response to the gift is embodied by offering our bodies back to God in thanksgiving. "Christians do not appropriate God's gift except in dispossessing themselves of it through the oblation of giving thanks."[2]

Iconic Worship

So when is worship idolatrous? When does it dazzle our first gaze, covering over the invisible mirror? When does it leave us gluttonously starved and ravenous, under the illusion of feeling good and whole? Conversely, how can our worship invite us into an iconic gratuitous encounter with the presence of the absence of God, others, and myself? How can the demon of immediacy and the real be exorcised so that the trace of the absent captures our infinite gaze? How can we be open to an encounter of iconic worship where we are first prayed and sung, which then invites us into our response as a doxological return-gift of dispossession into the mutilated, broken, and bleeding yet also resurrected and glorified body of Christ by the Spirit? The answer to these questions leads us more faithfully to worship in spirit and truth in and for the glory of the Triune God.

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[1] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 277.
[2] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 279.

After Fire, Words
Lévinas and the First Order of Language
Eric Severson

Greek mythology gives us the tale of brave Prometheus, who is forever the embodiment of humankind's brazen capacity to challenge the gods and steal their secrets. Like in the tale of Adam and Eve, the allure of sharing the treasures withheld from humankind was too great for Prometheus to resist. The profound sacrilege of Prometheus was the brazen theft of the great power of fire. Fire makes civilization possible, gives us the ability to cook, forge, build, and survive. According to the version of this myth that interests Plato in the *Protagoras,* the theft of fire—for which Prometheus is subjected to eternal torment—was an effort to tip the balance for humanity.[1] The gods had equipped the other animals with some power or defense against extinction, such as fangs, fur, or flight, but the human being stood naked and vulnerable. Worried that this might leave humankind vulnerable to extinction, Prometheus snuck into the workshop of the god Hephaestus and slinked away with the great tool of fire, along with the art to make use of it. He stole, in that moment, everything humans need for warmth, protection, power, and security. By this theft Prometheus bared fists and teeth at the gods. Humans, with their newfound divine fire, became partly divine.

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[1] Plato, *Prot.*, 320c–322a.

Through the mouthpiece of Protagoras, Plato introduces us to this dawn of civilization. With fire alone we can huddle in caves, roast our kill, and warm our bodies, but we stand little chance against the wild world with its great beasts, packs of wolves, and hungry predators. Another great innovation was needed for humanity to harness this fire: language. Protagoras summarizes: "He was not long in inventing articulate speech and names; and he also constructed houses and clothes and shoes and beds, and drew sustenance from the earth."[1] The theft of fire was only the beginning. Along with the torch that Prometheus brought back to humankind, he carried another treasure: the seeds of language. The power of language, and the bold theft of this ability from the gods, rivals fire in its importance. With words—with language—we are able to coordinate efforts, accumulate followings, gather and command armies, train apprentices, sustain traditions, tell stories, and sell vegetables. Fire may save our lives, but it is through language that we live them.

This little piece of Plato's *Protagoras* is an early introduction to the philosophy of language, and it presents a genesis story for the existence of words. Language gets its start somewhere, to be sure, though the true origins of linguistics are surely lost in the midst of history and human evolution. As the dialogue turns to the question of words, it becomes clear that Protagoras, the title character of the dialogue, thinks language was originally a kind of strategy. In order to ward off mutual enemies and achieve common goals, synchronized efforts were needed. Words aim at shared understanding, mutuality, and universality. Communication allows us to work together in the coordinated efforts that slay beasts, harvest crops, and call to prayer. In the following pages I will first outline the itinerary Plato provides for the history of language and linguistics, and then I want to propose, with the help of Emmanuel Lévinas, an alternate path.

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[1] Plato, *Prot.*, 322a, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Rockville: Serenity Publishers, 2009), 40.

Linguistics Reconsidered

Linguistics is a fascinating and unwieldy discipline. The study of language is ancient, though it seems likely that for many millennia humans used language without wondering much about its meaning. There is something peculiar about the discipline of talking about talking. Liturgical linguistics, unsurprisingly, began in earnest when people began to fret about whether they were using the right words to worship.[1] The performance of reading the ancient Hindu Vedas required careful attention to the grammar, pronunciation, and interpretation of the texts. Some of the first ideas about verbs, nouns, and the structure of sentences arise from concern about proper worship. The early Hindu grammarians were interested first in language as performance. Humans appear to have turned to look with interest at language as a subject of study for the sake of liturgy, for the work of praise.

Yet it is often the Greeks that are given credit for the first earnest studies of language.[2] Plato and Aristotle identified and differentiated between genres, meters, and purposes for speech and writing. The Platonic dialogues are filled with reflections on language and communication. Protagoras provided one of many efforts to understand the original purpose of language. The Sophists questioned the very possibility of language, and whether or not we can ever utter a word that means the same thing to different people.[3]

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[1] For a fascinating discussion of the earliest history of linguistics that points to the importance of the proper transmission of liturgy, see Frits Staal, "The Science of Language," *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (ed. Gavin Flood; Oxford: Wiley, 2008), 348–359, esp. 348–350.

[2] For a discussion of the key players in ancient Greek linguistics, see Casper de Jong and Johannes van Ophuijsen, "Greek Philosophers on Language," *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language* (ed. Egbert J. Bakker; Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 485–98.

[3] Deborah Modrak, "Method, Meaning, and Ontology in Plato's Philosophy of Language," *Linguistic Content: New Essays on the History of Philosophy of Language* (ed. Margaret Cameron and Robert J. Stainton; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 27.

For my purposes here, I want to establish the claim that the Western study of language has always been about creating understanding, about coordinating ideas, and about unifying minds. If language-as-liturgy operates otherwise than by the Greek patterns for linguistics, then Western studies in language have not attended to this difference. Language, in classical and contemporary discussions, aims at the synchronization of ideas. Consider Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who almost comically endeavored to create the perfect language. Leibniz was convinced that if we define each word with exactitude and specificity, so that no misunderstanding could occur when a word or symbol is invoked, the great blight of linguistic confusion could be lifted from humanity.[1] He even learned Chinese in the hope that he could use the complex and often very specific written symbols of Mandarin to overcome the maddening ambiguity of European languages.[2]

Ludwig Wittgenstein challenged this mathematical configuration of language, which he deemed to be a peculiar abstraction from the more nuanced ways in which we give and receive words. According to Wittgenstein, sounding more like Protagoras than he lets on, words are invoked amid the complex dynamics of our lived situation.[3] When we need to slay the wild beast, guttural grunting is forced into sounds that can be recognized. For Protagoras, the first words may have been "fight!" and "run!" These terms form a tight and specific language game, but quickly accumulate a growing grammar that is radically specific to the lived situation. Languages are living and amorphous entities, constantly shriveling and growing and morphing.

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[1] Egbert J. Bakker, *Companion to the Ancient Greek Language* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 103–04.

[2] Bakker, *Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 47, n. 1.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation*, trans. Gertrude E. M. Anscombe, 50th Anniversary Commemorative Edition (Hoboken: Wiley, 1991), 153. Wittgenstein uses the example of a smile, which can be kind or malicious depending on the circumstances, despite having otherwise identical appearances.

Sometimes these shifts are seismic and purposeful, sometimes they are unfortunate and accidental. Wittgenstein used the example of builders to illustrate the nature of a language game:

> The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones: blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam." A calls them out;—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at a call. Conceive this as a complete primitive language.[1]

A couple of years ago I built a new house for my family, although I hired various subcontractors to do much of the work. It so happened that the people that I hired did not always speak English. When I hired some laborers to hang drywall on my house, I realized that it would be a great advantage to share some common words. I memorized the Spanish words for drywall, screw, heat, wall, ceiling, and corner, and a host of other words that I wanted to be able to use as I supervised their labor. Amused at my poor translations, these men tweaked their own use of the Spanish words to match my mutilations. And so we worked with odd-sounding neologisms, a "Spanglish" of our own, to meet the tasks before us. Some of the "words" we used are now fading into oblivion; some share in ongoing language games.

Critical to my claims in this chapter is a critique of the history of Western linguistics. My hunch is that language, at least in the West, has always been bent toward the direction of synchrony. For Protagoras, the synchrony of language allows us to surround and slay the great cave bear that is now long extinct—driven out of existence by the mighty weapon of language. For Wittgenstein, language is the dynamic process by which we utilize noises and utterances in a game of meaning, a game that is quite serious when we need to use the right "beam" or "block" to build a house. In all cases, the purpose of the language is correlational.

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[1] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 6.

The aim, in all studies of language that I can find, is to understand the means by which sounds, words, and grammars can establish shared meaning and understanding. This is an important claim, with its roots in the mists of history and its supporters across the wide range of contemporary linguistics: language is first of all about understanding.

This journey is, of course, beset by a host of difficulties. As Leibniz discovered, perfect synchrony is harder to achieve than it might seem at first glance. The power of synchronized human behavior, however, is undeniable. Remember that it is linguistic synchrony that allowed the massive construction of the God-defying tower of Babel, and the curse of multilingualism is God's attempt to strip humankind of this synchrony. After Babel, words never mean quite the same thing between those who would toil in this world. We labor and love with a linguistic divide that separates us. We can never be quite sure that we mean the same thing by the words we use. But perhaps there is a blessing in Babel's curse, and perhaps the distance between utterance and understanding opens us up to something more important that is happening when we speak and when we write.

The Ossified

Emmanuel Lévinas suggests that we've been duped into thinking that language is primarily about synchrony. Even philosophers with interest in Lévinas have paid limited attention to his radical critique of the history of language. Lévinas spent a great deal of time and energy on language in the later decades of his career. His second major book, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, develops a whole new way to think about linguistics. Yet the verbiage he deploys to help readers understand this critique is thick and challenging.[1] His principle suggestion is that language has a deeper and more primary

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[1] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (New York: Springer, 2013).

function. If Lévinas is right, then everything we say about language and linguistics may need to be reconsidered.

Lévinas suggests that language has two layers. He calls these layers the "Saying" and the "Said," but, at least in English, these terms often confuse.[1] Instead, I am going to use the terms "the *utterance*" and "the *ossified*" to refer to these functions of language. We are accustomed to dealing with language as something *ossified.* A word that is written down on paper is subject to an obvious ossification. Words can be written on tablets and buried for eons; they can be sent to the far reaches of the universe on laser-printed discs. They can be etched in sand before the tide, written in crayon, or tattooed on a forearm. As ossified, language becomes a third object, something external to the author of the words. Ossified words are available for examination and analysis. Author and reader can observe the ossified alongside one another, and new discoveries can be made by both. The ossified word is an object, a thing, subject to examination, dissection, and interpretation. The ossified has handles, for our words are formed from deeper grammars than we know, with richly intertwined etymologies and histories. And through the investigations of the ossified word we learn much about life, about human existence. We gain knowledge and understanding.

Lévinas does not wish to attack the vaunted practice of "understanding." It is with understanding that we learn, eat, grow, produce, enjoy, build, live, and thrive. There is an intoxicating and fiery power here, where we find out that we can make not just fire but also meaning. We can imagine, create, invent, and share these movements with words that invoke common understanding. And the goal—in line with Plato, Protagoras, Wittgenstein, Chomsky, and the other titans of linguistics—is *synchrony*. However we go about it, and however we understand the functional dynamics of language, all studies of language have presumed that we speak to synchronize our

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[1] Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 5–7.

understanding with that of the other person. And so the ossified reigns.

Ossification happens instantly and instinctively. In the instant that words and phrases meet my ears, or the written word meets my eyes, a kind of hardening has taken place. When my neighbor speaks, her voice box rattles the air and then the tiny bones of my inner ear. Remarkably, these fascinating bones are called *ossicles*, and they turn sound into objects. The noises I make when I speak are familiar to the one who hears them, even if the Sophists were right to worry about any exact correlation between what I say and what someone else hears. Perhaps the listener feels some dissonance as my accent or vocabulary fails to align precisely with previous versions of these words.

A few years ago a student named Hee-kyung took my philosophy class and approached the discipline with voracious curiosity. She was also learning English, alongside the challenging concepts of Western philosophy, and trying to relate her native Korean language to the words and ideas she was hearing in class. After each lecture, Hee-kyung came to me with a list of words that she had written down during the discussion. The words on her paper were abstracted from the moments in which they were "said." We could discuss their meanings—the definition of each word—but under examination they turned into a different beast entirely. The words we write down become "ossified" on a piece of paper, and as we read the written word it is like a cadaver on the operating table of our minds. We can dissect the word with etymology and compare it to similar terms that are more familiar. The words are available, abundantly present, but they are no longer alive. We can constellate the word with the terms around it, using the "language game" in which the word appears to better understand its meaning. In all these ways, and many more, we take the event of speech and render it firm, secure, and gripped by sounds and syntax and memory.

And we share this common hermeneutic endeavor. We want to understand what words mean, to use them well, and to

appreciate their complexity and diversity. In this very moment I am doing this, quite precisely. I run the word "ossified" up the mast like the sail of a ship, and then I appeal to the common understandings of my reader, which I hope will fill the sail with wind. My goal, of course, is to deliver a new synchrony, a kind of neologism without violating the dictionary. To use the word "ossified" in this manner is to sail into new waters, if only slightly, and create headway toward a better understanding of language itself. The new synchrony occurs in the moment we all gather like linguists around this new Rosetta Stone, looking at the same ossified object. We poke and prod at the stone—at the word, the bone-hard product of our verbal labors—perhaps tweaking and refining our understanding until it is shared as synchronously as possible. And as we learn from Protagoras, these kinds of synchronies are what makes the world move forward. It is by way of this language game that we make, mend, and move the world.

Lévinas does not attack this synchrony, nor suggest that we abandon our noble study of the ossified language that we hear, write, read, and understand. He proposes instead a different way of reading, a method that could loosely be called exegetical. Lévinas struggles against the way synchronic approaches to language leave us operating in a linguistic echo chamber.[1] With no serious success in language, perhaps beyond the cold geometry that comforted Leibniz, we speak amid an "ineffable sadness of echoes."[2] Language is a series of missives, sent like notes in bottles from one island of understanding to another. Perfect synchrony is impossible, so language is about moderating and mitigating our failure to answer the call of Leibniz.

The Utterance

Lévinas questions the presumption that synchrony is the primary aim and mode of language. His suggestion is that

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[1] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Outside the Subject* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 148.

[2] Lévinas, *Outside the Subject*, 148.

something more primitive, more holy, is at work in the phenomena of speech. This first order of language I am calling the *utterance*; it is the event of speaking, which is carried only indirectly and discretely in the ossified. The utterance is primitive, ancient, guttural, and personal. He writes: "this pre-original saying does not move into a language, in which saying and said are correlative of one another, and the saying is subordinated to its theme."[1] If the ossified is an object, then the utterance is an event. Events can be examined, of course, but not as events. The minute we place an event under examination it becomes something else, a corpse of what it once was. Lévinas suggests that the utterance of words is the primary mode of language. Talking about it will be difficult, since we struggle to speak of that which does not fall readily onto the table for investigation. Ossified language, on the other hand, holds still for the examination. An utterance, however, is an *event*. The event of an utterance lingers as a trace in what is remembered, in the ossified. We must bear in mind that Lévinas may be wrong when he suggests that the utterance, the *saying*, is not entirely lost to us on our little islands so far away from a true understanding of the one who speaks or what she means. To attend to the utterance of the other person is never more than a hopeful act, an act that resists the despairing conclusion that we never really speak to anyone.

According to Lévinas, the utterance remains in the ossified, but only as a trace. And this trace is not a particularly complicated exegetical mystery. On the Rosetta Stone there might appear a mysterious symbol that invites research and hermeneutical investigations, a marking that reveals partial meaning but hides nuance. Lévinas points to a trace of another kind, the reverberation of the event of the saying, the remnants of the utterance that lay undetected in the ossified word.[2] The trace is the fleeting and ephemeral presence of that which was

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[1] Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 6.
[2] Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 12.

never quite presented—never quite given into the game of signs and indicators.[1] The utterance remains in the ossified not as a particularly challenging clue, not as a key that might unlock hidden meaning, but as the reverberation of the alterity of the one who has spoken. The trace of the utterance is not left with intention, for it does not share in the intentionality of the ossified. That which has been *said* aims toward the Holy Grail of synchrony and mutual understanding. The utterance says more, and less.

Last night my five-year-old son, Luke, awoke with a nightmare that was exacerbated by an illness and he was utterly disoriented. I could not tell, at first, what words he was trying to say between his sobs. Eventually I realized he was looking for something amid his pillows and blankets, and saying something like "I can't find it! I can't find it!" The relatively unhelpful word "it" was suddenly of utmost importance to him—and to me—in that moment. What ensued was an earnest effort to reach synchrony, to arrive at a common understanding. The "it" turned out to be a stuffed animal, a toy jellyfish, of all things. The toy had been of nearly zero importance to him during waking hours, but suddenly in the midst of his feverish dream it was of vital importance.

In the effort to reach an important synchrony, to meet a need within "being," the importance of the pursuit can hardly be overstated. Those who abandon the effort to synchronize understanding will find themselves offering water to people who are drowning. What Lévinas suggests about the trace is no threat to the structure of communication, and never an abandonment of the effort to comprehend. Lévinas instead wonders whether understanding is principle in communication, and whether something more primitive and crucial has not already taken place even as we gather the sounds we hear into comprehension and understanding. With my son, the "something" that preceded the effort to synchronize was clearly *responsibility*. The voice that

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[1] Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 15.

called out to me in the dark of night called *my name*. I was responsible for the suffering that the voice carried, even before his cries shook the air. The arrival at understanding was carried forward by this component of language—this is a more primary dialect. And the "something" that precedes understanding is best labeled *responsibility.*

There is a game of synchrony underway, of course, as we try to find a way to communicate such that the proper need is met. But deeper than understanding is an event of language, a thing that is happening when Luke speaks. This event is prior to, and not chiefly interested in, the pursuit of synchrony. His words move from his face to mine. Quite aside from, and prior to, the wrestling for understanding there is *obligation*. His words—his cries—bind me to him. My pursuit of synchrony now takes on a whole new meaning. The ossified meaning matters, and uncovering it is crucial. Yet before and beyond this effort to interpret, the utterance has transformed and transfigured this encounter. Before I have attempted to understand I am already, without remainder, rendered responsible for the cry. This responsibility is the fundamental feature of language. Understanding is second; responsibility is first.

Since this first order of language occurs before I am braced for it, and before I seek to understand it, it also occurs in passivity. Lévinas calls this passivity, which is deeper than the active passivity of listening, a "passivity more passive than all passivity."[1] The first event of language occurs not as a present moment just missed, but before any time that I could call my own. Lévinas calls this time-before-time "diachronic time."[2] The event occurs before bracing, before preparation, and therefore before conflict or violence. Here, too, Lévinas is proposing a novel configuration of language with little or no precedent in the history of philosophy. Language has been understood, universally, as aiming toward synchrony and understanding. Yet according to

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[1] Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 14.
[2] Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 14.

Lévinas, the first work of language is well underway before these modes are activated. In the murmur on a baby's lips there is meaning, perhaps even meaning that sagely pediatricians might interpret, but these are secondary games to the more important action of the face of the other. The first movement of language is obligation.

This first move of language renders me responsible before I can even gather enough understanding to determine whether such a debt is justified or fair, or how it fits within the broader scope of human relations and morality. I stand, before my child, before my neighbor, before the stranger, latched to her need. I work for understanding and I do so bound to a history that is not my own, a time older than the linear history that defines and confines the ego. The summons of my son, in suffering, suspend the project of understanding and demand a rearrangement of priority. I am now first of all responsible; it is responsibility that drives me to understand and to unpack the ossified words that my ears have caught. I speak and I seek synchrony because I have been rendered responsible. Because the cry of the other precedes my assemblage of ideas and knowledge, the need of the other is not some feature of the world as it is configured, metaphysically or ontologically. The utterance of the other, the trace in Luke's face and words, catch me before understanding has even begun. I could make video recordings of this communication and analyze each movement or sound for the sake of synchrony. Every scrap of data could be examined and unraveled. But still the trace would escape. The trace of the other in the ossified word is responsibility. And so it is my obligation to my neighbor, which constitutes and sustains me, that is so easily missed in the study of language. Linguistics has failed us; it has pointed only to a secondary manifestation of language.

Perhaps there is at least one exception. What happens when people are taught to use words in prayer? In what mode of communication is the language of liturgy? It is worth remembering that the study of language in earnest begins with

Hindu liturgists. They turned to look at words for the sake of praying rightly.[1] In the effort to better understand the more primitive function of language I will conclude with some reflections on the dynamics of prayer and liturgy. Perhaps in the linguistic posture of prayer we find an indication that this first order of language is less foreign than it might first appear.

In prayer, language appears to operate differently, at least for many people. Christians often pray "thy will be done," and this utterance aims at something other than synchrony. Many Muslims condition their future plans with the simple phrase "Insha'Allah," which means "if God wills." These phrases unsettle the ossified, rendering statements in an alternative register. Magic and incantations may aim at synchrony, as efforts to wrestle some future into reality by including the proper formula. The phrases "thy will be done" and "Insha'Allah" point away from this effort; any prayer offered in this mode directly refuses the power to reduce prayer to synchrony.

Prayers themselves are often clumsy assemblages of words and sounds and cries that long for the holiness of God to be manifest in the banality of the world. Perhaps there is something to Lévinas's suggestion that when we listen to the speech of the other we are listening to a *prayer*. Likewise, when we speak to the other person perhaps we are first of all *praying,* anarchically, before we are cobbling together "meaning" and "sense." The speech of my neighbor is first of all an utterance, and to follow the trace of this utterance in the ossified words that my ears gather is to find that the trail that leads me toward an obedience and reverence that precedes understanding.

If, as I suggested at the outset, the earliest efforts at the study of linguistics were undertaken for the sake of ortho-liturgy, then linguists may have been aware from the beginning that language is more than synchrony. Before it gets busy on grammar or language games, the science of linguistics is heavy with the first

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[1] Frits Staal, *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 348.

order of language, the order of obligation. Liturgy aims not a synchrony, at least not first of all. In prayer, listening and speaking aim not at understanding but at reverence. Prayer remembers the first move of speech, the gentle and primitive communication that seeks not understanding but love, service, and humility. And here I point to prayer not as a moment in liturgy, or as words addressed to God *per se*, but as a symptom of the first burden of language. Responsibility precedes understanding. Yet in the fanfare that surrounds our pursuit of synchrony, the quiet whisper of the first order of language is easily swallowed up and forgotten. And with it, the trace of the other offered beneath the façade of synchrony and understanding.

The appearance of this trace moves to me from the face of the other, but it has done so before I can catch this movement in my present. The trace appears as a fleeting utterance in the faces of those who suffer, the faces of the least of these, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. This movement comes to me otherwise than by the expression of a synchronizable idea. The words matter, to be sure, but before my ossicles convert them to some sense—something sensible—I have already been rendered responsible. And perhaps this is the means by which the banality of existence is fractured by holiness. Language as before-understanding-begins summons from the faces of suffering, arriving first as a move of gentle anarchy—from Eden, from a time-before-time—as utterances of that which words will never catch. And so comes the holy into the banality of the world, in manger, as bread and wine and water, as stranger, widow, orphan, hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, and destitute. If this is the case, then what we miss when we concede language to the synchronic ventures of Protagoras and Wittgenstein is abundantly serious. Language in this first register is an ethical positioning, a situatedness *vis-à-vis* the neighbor. The first work of language can be ignored, but perhaps at great peril. To be spoken to is to be positioned in the world, and to be positioned in the posture of primordial responsibility.

Gadamer's Hermeneutic of Trust— Ontological and Reflective

Wm. Curtis Holtzen & Matthew Nelson Hill

Hermeneutics of trust are not limited to philosophical investigations and can be found in many disciplines, including Christian liturgical studies. One cannot enter into the practice of worship without encountering and interpreting how one trusts— and mistrusts—the liturgy that is part and parcel to the Christian faith. Hans-Georg Gadamer has a hermeneutic of trust that proves helpful in exposing not only the core traditions in worship, but also the central sacraments in which Christians engage.

Gadamer's Hermeneutic of Trust

In contrast to modernist hermeneutics, which often champion suspicion, distrust, and methodological doubt, Gadamer's hermeneutic of trust utilizes a principle of charity, or as Gadamer calls it, "good will." For Gadamer, a person of good will "does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person says in order to prove that one is always right, but one seeks instead as far as possible to strengthen the other's viewpoint so that what the other person has to say becomes illuminating."[1] But, Gadamer adds, "This is nothing more than an observation."[2] Such a simple "observation," however, has

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and R. E. Palmer; New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 55.

[2] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 55.

produced one of the more significant philosophical debates of the last half-century.[1] In particular, numerous questions pertaining to liturgical practices have arisen: If one has such "good will" toward historical prayers or a traditional understanding of the sacrament, can that one ever question its authority? Is there a healthy amount of mistrust a critically thinking practitioner can have? Could one rest on the knowledge that he or she has done due diligence with regard to skepticism prior to the liturgical practice in order to be fully enveloped by the liturgy? In what sense is the practitioner actually dependent on the liturgy, and not the other way around?

To start answering these questions, we can look to Gadamer's principle of good will, which is the impetus for his hermeneutic of trust. By all accounts, the offering of good will is a risky act when the goal is to be correct in one's opinion. However, if the goal is to understand *before* being understood, this act of good will is a move in the direction of trust toward the authentic contribution of the other. Gadamer never speaks of his philosophical hermeneutic as a "hermeneutic of trust," per se, but he does use key metaphors throughout his writings that call upon the reader to imagine and envision hermeneutics as a tradition of trust. He speaks of interpretation as "play" and interpreters as "players,"[2] and interpretation is envisaged as a "conversation" with the "text" in which a person "opens himself to the other."[3] Moreover, interpretation is viewed in terms of a "fusion of horizons" in which understanding takes place when new traditions are woven into existing ones.

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[1] The idea of "charity" as a principle of interpretation is not new. Some have suggested it dates back to Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 13 to have love be the basis of Christian doctrine, and that later this was developed into a full theory by Augustine. For a brief, but interesting, history of the "principle of charity" see Petru Bejan, "Trust as Hermeneutic Principle," *Balkan Journal of Philosophy* 1 (2010): 41–46.

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 101–10.

[3] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 385.

The elements of trust in Gadamer's hermeneutic run deeper than this sense of good will. In Gadamer's fashioning a hermeneutic that is ontologically centered—that is, a hermeneutic that posits that interpretation is part of human nature and inescapable—he has crafted a hermeneutic that is ontologically dependent upon trust. While trust can be defined in many different ways, all trust assumes some kind of reliance. To trust is to take a risk in the hope of a future security. In hermeneutical terms it is to expect that meaning is possible, but not without risk.[1] Trust, as most often depicted in *Truth and Method*, is not something we willfully engage in or woefully eschew, but it is simply our dependency on the other. We are ontologically contingent and unable to attain meaning prior to the application of trust. Stated differently, we look and leap simultaneously. While many would define trust as Joseph Godfrey does, "to be willing and able to accept enhancement,"[2] in the Gadamerian sense, it is not a *willingness* to accept enhancement but rather the *recognition* that enhancement is only possible once we recognize the ontological reality of philosophical hermeneutics. Annett Baier's discussion of "infant trust" may better fit a Gadamerian hermeneutic of trust. Baier writes, "A young child too is totally dependent on the good will of the parent, totally incapable of looking after anything he cares

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[1] It is interesting to note how closely the notion of risk is tied to the notion of trust especially with regard to liturgical studies. William T. Cavanaugh, in his article "The Body of Christ," shows how connectedness to the other always involves some risk. "The Christians at Corinth thought that the humiliation of the poor by the rich was unrelated to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul told them otherwise. Here we see that the eucharist not only produces unity but requires it. The eucharist is not just a balm for the soul; it is a public act of the church that disciplines the bodies of its members. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the one body of Christ is formed, in which the sufferings of others become my sufferings and simultaneously the sufferings of Christ himself (1 Cor 12)." See William T Cavanaugh, "The Body of Christ: The Eucharist and Politics," *Word & World* 22.2 (2002): 176.

[2] Joseph J. Godfrey, *Trust of People, Words, and God: A Route for Philosophy of Religion* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 75.

about without parental help or against parental will."[1] Gadamer, like Baier, sees hermeneutical trust as being outside our ability to willfully offer or withhold.

Gadamerian trust may also be loosely analogous to what some understand as human-divine trust in that we are absolutely dependent upon God for our life and being. We may at some point become aware of our dependency and perhaps even rebel against it, but are finally unable to rise above such contingency. This dependence is not a contractual trust, but a consciousness of reliance, and the kind of trust most expressly found in Gadamer's hermeneutic.[2]

As alluded to above, Gadamer sees his hermeneutic as a corrective to the philosophies of interpretation that follow in the Cartesian tradition, which are most exemplified in the Enlightenment project concerned with attaining objective and autonomous knowledge. Modernist philosophies see hermeneutics as a task that one performs in order to move on toward knowledge. Instead, we begin and end—enter into and exit—with the task of interpretation. Furthermore, the more one can rise above or distance oneself from the act of interpretation, the more objective and critical the interpreter can be, and the clearer the meaning will become. Gadamer argues that hermeneutics is not a task we perform but an ontological status. In other words, hermeneutics is not a task we perform but the way we live. As Gadamer writes in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, "My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing."[3] Following Heidegger's conception of *Dasein*, Gadamer argues that we all belong to a tradition; we are thrown and immersed in it and

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[1] Annette Baier, "Trust and Antitrust," *Ethics* 96.2 (1986): 241.
[2] This paper hopes to demonstrate that this reliance is not the only kind of trust Gadamer assumes in his hermeneutic.
[3] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxviii.

formulated by it.[1] Because of our "thrownness," we are in no position to objectively assess and judge tradition or history. Instead we come to understand within history when we open up ourselves to dialogue with our particular tradition, liturgical or otherwise. But alas, this conversation is a process of good will and trust. We are not in a position to assess whether we should trust or distrust, but we merely *are* interpreters—we are those who trust.

Gadamer emphatically places us within tradition, or better yet, traditions. Our traditions and history ground us and we cannot rise above our traditions in such a way as to objectively assess our traditions. But at the same time, our traditions give us a place to stand, a vantage point from which we are able to see anything. Our vision or vantage is conditioned as well by our history. We cannot rise above our historicity, which makes even our reason (method) dependent on a history and liturgical tradition. The result is that history is not something we can dissect as if it were a corpse, for we *are* history, and our history is living. Believing we are above tradition results in a distorted image of ourselves. Thus, the dissection of history, from a Gadamerian perspective, is not an autopsy but a self-inflected vivisection. History, then, is not something that belongs to us; rather, "we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves though the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in family, society, and state in which we live."[2] For the purposes of this paper, we can extend these processes to the liturgical practices in which we worship—including the sacraments, Church calendar, feasts, and creeds. All of this leads Gadamer to argue that we are prejudiced by our traditions. Not in an inherently negative sense, but in that we all make judgments relative to our traditions or historicity. Our

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[1] Merlod Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (The Church and Postmodern Culture; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 70.
[2] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276.

traditions shape both our world and how we see that world. "What tradition sets *before* us will be understood in terms of what tradition has already done *within* us."[1]

Gadamer's discussion of tradition and our historical "thrownness" into the world calls for us to consider our relationship to tradition as a "conversation of trust." This milieu is not a relationship from which we can step back and assess before entering into it, because even the notion of "stepping back" and "freely assessing" is an idea that is dependent upon a particular tradition. This context is an "infant trust." Here, Gadamer's embedded or ontological hermeneutic is key in helping expose this relationship. Those engaged in liturgical practices must engage their tradition in order to fully know it, and have no choice but to trust their tradition if they are to fully understand it. They are in no position to radically doubt their pre-understandings and are forced to trust their judgments as formulated by their tradition, even as they engage in critique. As Dan Stiver notes, "We cannot stand outside of history and manipulate it as we will, but we are in history and are 'played' by it as much as we 'control' it. To think that we can escape this immersion in history and in our situation is an illusion."[2] This embedded trust is what Gadamer calls "historically effected consciousness" and it is an ongoing process.[3] More precisely, a liturgical practitioner's trust in his or her tradition is not a means to an end, as it is unending and never truly finalized. As Gadamer says, "To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete," meaning that trust is a continuing process and not something one engages in for a different end.

[1] Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* 73.
[2] Dan R. Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story* (Hoboken: Wiley, 1996), 93.
[3] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301.

Gadamerian Method and Liturgical Conversations

Beyond a hermeneutic of trust, Gadamer's understanding of method can be particularly helpful for how we understand practicing the Christian faith rooted in liturgical traditions. In Gadamerian thinking, method is the means by which modern thinkers have come to eschew trust in tradition, or at least shift focus from tradition and authority to autonomous reason and progress. Gadamer is not necessarily anti-method, but in the words of Merold Westphal, Gadamer sees truth *beyond* method.[1] He seeks to expose the fallacy that method is the only means to truth and guarantees truth. Those who preach the gospel of method and the evils of prejudice ironically miss the fact that they are evoking a tradition and exhibiting prejudice against prejudice. As stated above, we can never fully distance ourselves from our liturgical traditions; to think we can—via method or by other means—sets some to think they can dominate, dismantle, and dissect sacred liturgies, when in reality, according to Gadamer, we all must recognize our subordination to a particular tradition. In an act of trust we are to "open ourselves to the superior claim the text [or creed] makes and to respond to what it has to tell us… subordinating ourselves to the text's claim to dominate our minds."[2] While to modernists this will certainly sound naïve and even dangerous, Gadamer is not suggesting that our trust in tradition is blind, but rather unavoidable. There are no guarantees in hermeneutics; even trust in method is fraught with errors, for we are fallible beings; but the error is compounded when method and reason are believed to be transcendental. For Gadamer, method is not a means of escaping tradition and thus not a means of escaping trust.

Gadamer concludes his section on "historically effected consciousness" and previews his discussion of language by saying, "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own

[1] Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* 83.
[2] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 311.

point of view, but being transformed into communion in which we do not remain what we were."[1] Dialogue and conversation, when one truly seeks to understand the other, is a risky venture. It requires what Gadamer famously calls a "fusion of horizons." Understanding without method is not discovery but construction. Understanding, for Gadamer, is a dynamic conversation characterized by openness and consciousness.[2] This openness in conversation is characterized by Gadamer as the means in which we and our interlocutor move closer to unity:

> Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understand not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of this opinion, so that we can be one with each other on the subject.[3]

Conversation is the process by which the fusion of horizons is possible and thus understanding. While modernist hermeneutics sought to understand *before* exposing oneself to the other, Gadamer argues exposure and openness *is* the only process of understanding. In this sense, conversation with the "other" can refer to the texts, creeds, God, and even other worshipers, among which dialogue is necessary in liturgical practices. One cannot take the Eucharist, per se, without entering a Gadamerian conversation with all of the above.

Conversation is linguistic and Gadamer says, "Being that can be understood is language,"[4] thus bringing us back full circle to ontology and philosophical hermeneutics. Once again, Gadamer is not expressing how language should be used but how it is that language actually uses us. The world, according to Gadamer, is verbal and linguistic: "Language is not just one of

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[1] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 379.
[2] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.
[3] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 389.
[4] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 474.

man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. But this world is verbal in nature."[1] Gadamer's point is that we have no way of rising above our language in order to test and assess it; language is our world. And if language is our world, conversation is our way of living, as the German romantic poet Hölderlin said, "we are a conversation."[2]

Westphal lists four features of Gadamerian conversation, all of which depend on trust. First, Gadamerian conversation "requires an openness, even a vulnerability, to the voice of the other,"[3] where "openness to the other... involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so."[4] This openness and this vulnerability are only prudent when one expects the outcome to be fruitful. It is not risk for risk's sake but an act of trust and good will to the other through the process of interpretation. Second, the conversation with the text "puts us in question," and the proper response is not merely to answer, but to formulate new questions for the text and ourselves. This conversation leads to the third feature: "when conversation takes place willingly and humbly, the partners 'are far less the leaders of it than the led... All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own.'"[5] To allow oneself to be led by the conversation requires trust that the process will lead somewhere, often when these are places we did not wish to go. Westphal's final feature is one that we already discussed above: that the goal of conversation, and thus interpretation, is not to "win" by asserting one's own point but to be transformed in such a way that we are never quite the same. Gadamer understands that "not every dialogue is fruitful, but it

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[1] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 443.
[2] Quoted without reference in Chris Lawn, *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 80.
[3] Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* 115.
[4] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 361.
[5] Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* 383.

should at least aim at being a dialogue" and not simply two monologues.[1]

This brief exploration of key elements of Gadamer's hermeneutic hopefully demonstrates how wedded Gadamer is to the necessity of trust when seeking to understand. Trust is not merely another method that is used in the discovery of meaning. Instead, trust is ontological and fundamental to language, history, and tradition. For Gadamer there is no method, or *techne,* that we can employ to alleviate all risk. Truth is worked out in dialogue, in questioning, and following the conversation where it wills, or perhaps, as it "plays" out. But this truthful setting is only possible if one is open to the claim that the other may have something worth hearing and trusting that truth is not distant.

Suspicion of Gadamer's Ontological Trust

It should come as no surprise that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic has had its critics, a fact which has in several cases led to very famous philosophical debates. Those championing a hermeneutic of suspicion have come at Gadamer from both modernist and post-modernist perspectives.[2] The intent of this section is to explore one major critic of Gadamer in terms of trust and distrust.

Jürgen Habermas is a critic who appreciates Gadamer's theory regarding contextuality. He affirms Gadamer's notion that pure objectivism is an illusion when he writes, "Gadamer's first-rate critique of the objectivistic self-understanding of the cultural sciences… hits not only historicism but also the false consciousness of the phenomenological and linguistic executors of its legacy."[3] Gadamer, however, has gone too far in his critique,

according to Habermas, and "unwittingly obliges the positivistic devaluation of hermeneutics."[1] By placing hermeneutics "outside the control of scientific method" Gadamer loses the necessary "methodological distanciation of the object."[2] Method and distance, according to Habermas, allow for the objectivity necessary to avoid putting our trust in those persons, texts, and ideological systems that are inherently untrustworthy. Habermas's critique of Gadamer relies on a hermeneutic of distrust and a systematic suspicion of tradition, authority, and political powers.

Habermas agrees with Gadamer that tradition is embedded in language, that language is "a kind of metainstitution on which all social institutions are dependent." Nevertheless, he makes the point that language is "*also* a medium of domination and social power; it serves to legitimate relations of organized force."[3] Habermas criticizes Gadamer for not taking into account the fact that language all too often distorts meaning and keeps dialogue from doing what it is meant to do: free individuals from politically oppressive powers. According to Chris Lawn, "Habermas wants what Gadamer wants, namely, edifying forms of dialogue, but what he terms 'unconstrained dialogue' is only possible once the structures of ideology have been rooted out by the power of reason."[4] Unfortunately, according to Habermas, Gadamer's ontological hermeneutic "proves inadequate in the case of systematically distorted communication."[5] For Habermas:

Hermeneutics has taught us that we are always a participant as long as we move within the natural language and that we cannot step outside the role of a reflective

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Man World* 17.3 (1984): 322.

[2] For an exploration of one critique from a postmodern approach see Diane P. Michelfelder and R. E. Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

[3] Jürgen Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," *Understanding and Social Inquiry* (ed. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy; South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 344.

[1] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 355.

[2] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 355.

[3] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 360.

[4] Lawn, *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 129–30.

[5] Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique* (ed. J. Bleicher; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 191.

partner. There is, therefore, no general criterion available to us which would allow us to determine when we are subject to false consciousness of a pseudo-normal understanding and consider something as a difficulty that can be resolved by hermeneutic means, when, in fact, it requires systematic explanation.[1]

When individuals are ontologically locked into language, and thus tradition, according to Habermas there is no means of critique of that tradition—whether religious or social. In short, Habermas argues we need a means by which to account for ideology, a kind of methodological reflection in order to get beyond suspicion.

Habermas raises a significant concern in terms of trust and suspicion. If we are ontologically bound to tradition and language to the extent that we are unable to critique our traditions and language, trust is of little benefit. Like the child of infant trust we are at the mercy of the Fates to determine whether we trust a loving and caring parent or an abusive and controlling parent.[2] Matthew Foster summarizes Habermas's fundamental objection in that any hermeneutic that "cannot establish some autonomy from the tradition which it interprets succumbs to relativism. It cannot be distinguished from the tradition it interprets and thereby becomes unavailable to the practical project of emancipating us from 'traditional' claims which are false but appear to be legitimate."[3] Habermas is right to be suspicious, that is to raise questions about our ability to assess the trustworthiness of our traditions. If Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic cannot account for abuses of authority, ideological language, and oppressive traditions, then

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[1] Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," 191.

[2] Furthermore, many Heideggerians were either silent about Nazism, complicit, or active in the party, like Heidegger himself. Gadamer, it seems was simply silent during the war, psychologically distancing himself from Nazism. But, doesn't the silence speak loudly against philosophical hermeneutics' ability to be critical? Had Gadamer spoken out during or even after the Holocaust he may have been in a position to alleviate this concern.

[3] Matthew R. Foster, *Gadamer and Practical Philosophy: The Hermeneutics of Moral Confidence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 125.

Habermas is right that Gadamer leads us down a cul de sac of relativism. Of course, this may simply be the situation we are in; it could be that relativism is a basic aspect of our ontological state. However, this is not coherent with Gadamer's notion of reflective trust, as we see in the section below.

While Habermas may be correct that Gadamer's ontological trust invariably leads to relativism, his solution may have significant problems of its own, especially in his seeking to avoid all forms of trust for suspicion. Habermas seems to desire a critical theory or method, that is, a rationality that can "reach beyond itself to an absolute consciousness."[1] Habermas believes we have the ability to perform a kind of trans-traditional or trans-linguistic reflection, a kind of "meta-hermeneutic;" and that while "always bound up in language, reason always transcends particular languages; it lives in language only by destroying the particularities of languages through which alone it is incarnated."[2] The transcendent reflection begins when we are free to say what we think, unconstrained by authority or tradition. Habermas's sense of "reflection" is an awakening, an awareness of what was once obscured. Reflection, especially reflecting on traditional creeds and texts, requires a "higher ground" from which the interpreter can see beyond local context and thus employ a universal reason. In a sense, Habermas seeks to move beyond interpretation to epistemology. But Gadamer argues that this is a "false objectivism" and that Habermas's critique "is in itself a linguistic act of reflection."[3] Habermas has not risen to a place of universal reason by means of reflection, but has simply highlighted one part of his Enlightenment tradition while darkening another. In other words, Habermas seems to have

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[1] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 359.

[2] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 359.

[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (ed. and trans. David E. Linge; Berekely: University of California Press, 1976), 18–43, here 29–30.

forgotten to point the suspicious finger of Enlightenment critique at himself. Habermas is suspicious of all traditions except his own.

It could be said that Habermas is not actually engaging in a hermeneutic of suspicion or distrust but in a hermeneutic of mistrust. Habermas believes quite deeply that universal reason and reflection can lead us to higher ground from dangerous ideologies and oppressive systems. But this concept is actually a mistrust because Habermas seems blind to the fact that he is actually engaging in trust. Moreover, is the Enlightenment idea of universal reason, which has disdain for all trust, the thing in which to place one's trust? To put one's trust in the power of a reason that is beyond self-reflection is indeed dangerous.[1] Ironically, Lawn writes, "Gadamer is deeply suspicious of such trust in the power of universalized reason, to which his rehabilitation of prejudice bears witness."[2] Habermas has not eliminated trust in tradition; he has simply shifted it and, more problematically, buried it in his on ideology.

It seems that if Habermas is correct and if Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic cannot be reflective in a manner that fosters some kind critical appraisal of tradition, then we are left with a form of relativism. However, Habermas's critical theory, when taken to its logical conclusion of universal suspicion, gives us an *ouroboros* of reasoning that cannot get past its suspicion of all things, including itself. This kind of suspicion begins in doubt but can only end in nihilism. However, it may not be the case that ontological trust denies any and all forms of analysis or criticism. In other words, Gadamer may actually provide ways for us to weigh better and worse acts of trust.

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[1] One can be reminded of Linus, who waits in the pumpkin patch believing that if he is sincere enough the Great Pumpkin will visit and bring him toys.

[2] Lawn, *Gadamer*, 130.

Reflection as Conversation

Perhaps there is a middle ground between ontological trust and suspicion that one could hold when worshiping through liturgical practices such as creeds and prayers. There needs to be a way in which we move "beyond" ontological trust without the delusion that the only way in which we can critically reflect is by a method of universal reason. Gadamer embraces a "both/and," rather than an "either/or" as found in hermeneutics of distrust. One can be both traditional *and* critical, trusting *yet* cautious while practicing Christian liturgy. We are not in chains, bound to history like Plato's cave prisoners. In Gadamer we are tethered, forever attached to history, but with the freedom to move about and see different perspectives even if we cannot see all perspectives. As Robert Dostal notes, "To be simply bound to our history would be to fail to recognize our own historicity."[1] We have moments of transcendence within our finitude which allow us greater understanding.

Gadamer has several models or metaphors of interpretation (play, translation, application of law or doctrine) but, as highlighted above, it is his notion of "conversation" that is most applicable here. Thus, within the reality that we are thrown into tradition there is also the reality that we can converse with other traditions and, in time, our own. In a sense, it is not as if tradition is an inviolable speaker and we simply its listeners, for we have the ability to talk back. However, we never have the first word. As conversation partners with tradition/history we must recognize that we have learned to speak by the tradition to which we now speak. But this begins with the belief, assumption, or better trust that tradition, history, and language are worth conversing with. As Lawn points out, "Social life depends on our acceptance of everyday speech as trustworthy. We cannot order a taxi without this trust."[2] The point is this: trust is our first

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[1] Robert J Dostal, "The World Never Lost: The Hermeneutics of Trust," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47.3 (1987): 433.

[2] Lawn, *Gadamer*, 129.

principle of conversation with the liturgy, others, and God—but it is not the only principle. Gadamer's embedded trust in his conception of conversation is helpful for worshipers.

It is key that Gadamer speaks of the "art" of conversation. That conversation can be conducted better or worse, in ways open or closed, means that while conversation is necessary for interpretation (or is interpretation), how it is done requires mindful participation. How one enters (or finds oneself in) the conversation is determined by one's trust in the other and the art itself. Openness to the text is a choice one makes; it is an act of authentic conversation as opposed to statements made to, and often past, the text. It is defined by the "knowledge of not knowing" which allows for questions and truth to emerge. Inauthentic dialogue is without trust; it does not risk itself in the difficult task of asking questions. "To someone who engages in dialogue only to prove himself right and not to gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them. There is no risk that he will be unable to answer a question."[1] The model of dialogue that utilizes trust is that we speak with, and listen to, the other (tradition, liturgical creeds, prayers, etc.). Noncritical engagement with tradition is mute, never speaking, only listening and thus never forming questions. This laissez-faire conversation is an inauthentic form of dialogue. Another inauthentic form is when we never allow the texts, creeds, prayers, or fellow practitioners to really speak. It is when we have all the questions and these questions must be settled before the tradition is granted any authority—that is, deemed worthy of listening to. Conversation is risky, but it seems without it there is no way forward, only illusion.

Gadamer understands the conversation with tradition and relation to authority to be unforced. He says, "Authority can rule only because it is freely recognized and accepted. The obedience that belongs to true authority is neither blind nor

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[1] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 363.

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slavish."[1] In terms of trust, authority can only rule when we willfully trust it, and here "rule" implies a conversation partner whose truths are worth hearing and applying. The risk and trust of entering a conversation is not blind, but can allow us to reflect upon and see the authority that tradition might rightly have. Conversation may also bring about the recognition that a tradition no longer has a right to authority. Gadamer clearly claims that authorities decline and criticism of authority is sometimes emancipatory.[2] Only in conversation and the fusion of horizons, however, can we rightly offer critique.

Gadamer speaks of "insight" when conversing with tradition. This notion does not differ greatly from Habermas's "reflection" other than it seems more willing to accept authority rather than simply critique it. Gadamer suggests that insight is the root of authority. Authority cannot demand that we "recognize" it, or see what is not there. Authority, by means of insight, allows a person to "take possession of what he has obediently followed," but, as Gadamer says, the one who comes of age need not take possession.[3] Authority in tradition and language is not utterly beyond our control, but neither is it absolutely within our control. From our traditions we gain insights concerning traditions. In this case insight can function as a kind of confidence, a trust that has reasons for its commitment. In short, it is a reflective trust.

Gadamer uses the highly connotative term "prejudice" to discuss how it is we can and should enter the conversation. He writes, "Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us."[4] In this sense prejudice is akin to trust. Prejudice means we bring something of ourselves to the conversation, our horizon; we do not check everything at the door and enter philosophically empty-handed.

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[1] Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function," 34.
[2] Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function," 34.
[3] Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function," 34.
[4] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* 9.

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This would be not only impossible but rude as well, for the conversation is like a church potluck, to which everyone brings enough to share as they partake in the dishes of the others. To attend the hermeneutic potluck as Habermas suggests, we bring nothing to the table and refuse to eat until the offering has been thoroughly shown to be tasty. Gadamer says, "Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity."[1] But this does not mean "we are closed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portal those things that can produce a pass saying."[2] In keeping with the potluck image, we need not go back for seconds of everything offered. We have tasted what we have been given but now we may go back for what spoke to us culinarily. That is, we found what was truly insightful. Perhaps when the conversation is offered again we will have had opportunities to have broadened our horizons and learned to appreciate new foods.

In a bit of irony, Gadamer shows that his hermeneutic can be critical of tradition by criticizing the Enlightenment tradition. Gadamer's critique goes beyond his famous exposing of the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice. He writes, "the Enlightenment is a mistake fraught with ominous consequences. In it reflection is granted a false power, and the true dependencies involved are misjudged on the basis of a fallacious idealism."[3] Without careful conversation we may be granting power to those who have no right to it. Enlightenment prejudice is now played out as a hermeneutic of distrust. However, here the trust is blind, for the Enlightenment disciple has put all his trust in a transcendental reason, which he believes to be real, but cannot be certain. Having never experienced the transcendental reason means that there is no insight into its authentic authority. In fact, there is no conversation, only slavish obedience to its promise of liberation—a liberation that neither

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[1] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 9.
[2] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 9.
[3] Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function," 34.

Habermas nor others can say they have ever experienced. Gadamer has been criticized on the point that his philosophical hermeneutic is unable to criticize, but from my reading, that is what *Truth and Method* is: a critical engagement of the modernist hermeneutical tradition.

Habermas sought out a means of rising above tradition and language in order to critique tradition and language, but Gadamer claims that not only is this elevation impossible, but that it leads to a false objectification and even greater distortions. Our task is not to escape tradition and language but to listen and, in turn, be heard. But there is no safe, risk-free starting place for the conversation to begin. Gadamer writes,

> The dialogical character of language… leaves behind it any starting point…. What we find happening in speaking is not a mere reification of intended meaning, but an endeavor that continually modifies itself, or better: a continually recurring temptation to engage oneself in something or to become involved with someone. But that means to expose oneself and to risk oneself. Genuinely speaking one's mind has little to do with a mere explication and assertion of our prejudices; rather it risks our prejudices— it exposes oneself to one's own doubt as well as to the rejoinder of the other.[1]

While doubt and suspicion are not prominent in Gadamer's hermeneutic, they are there. There are doubts and suspicions of traditions and authorities that demonstrate themselves to be illegitimate. Furthermore, as noted above, doubt and suspicion extend to the self as well. When our prejudices are exposed this is not only an act of trust but at the same time an act of suspicion. We are suspicious that we have all truth and meaning worked out. We lay open our prejudices simultaneously in an act of trust and doubt, believing our prejudices are a means to the truth while doubting they are true in themselves.

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[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 26.

While this essay has focused on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic and its relationship to trust, it should be noted that to trust means to entrust; to risk what is good and valuable for greater enhancement. But just what or who is it that Gadamer trusts and what is it that is entrusted? To answer the second part first, Gadamer regularly uses the imagery of opening oneself to the other and exposing one's prejudices. Essentially, as ontological interpreters, we risk our interpretation of our selves every time we openly engage in conversation. Furthermore, we are our interpretation of our selves, and to risk our interpretation by this exposure is to risk our very being. The Cartesian self has no being in Gadamer's hermeneutic; there is no fixed "I" that interprets the world from a privileged place. We are our hermeneutic in the very same manner that the world is our hermeneutic. We are found in, and created by, our traditions, narratives, liturgies, and fellow worshipers. As we discover new horizons we discover ourselves all over again. To whom or what do we entrust ourselves? For Gadamer it is the conversation itself. Not that we fully entrust our self to the other, for we may learn in the conversation that the other is not altogether trustworthy. Instead, it is in the process of hermeneutics through the continuation of dialogue that Gadamer believes the self will be made anew and that we discover what is trustworthy and what is not. In a strange sense, Gadamer's trust is in trust itself; that is, it is in exposing and risking one's self in the process of conversation while one is trusting that the conversation will enhance and give insight.

Conclusion

Ernest Hemingway is credited with saying, "The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them." This applies not only to persons but also to traditions, texts, and liturgies. The circle we find ourselves in is not merely a hermeneutical circle but a circle of trust. We are in relationship with a world (*Weltanschauung*) in which we awake only to find that we have trusted this world and its language all along. And now that we are conscious of this fact, the question is not whether we will continue to trust or distrust but whether we will employ the right manner in which to engage this trust and converse with the other.

Legitimating Our Lives Before God
The Confession of Sin and the Creation of Self
Amanda DiMiele

I once knew a professor who opened his weekly lecture with the Book of Common Prayer's confession of sin and did not conclude with an absolution of any kind. The professor explained that in the endeavor to articulate truth from the academy, he wanted a continual reminder that our ability to know is limited and often destructive. He hoped to engender humility in himself and his students—humility that would enable both charitable readings of others' work and an openness to correction. I deeply appreciate these sentiments and the intended sensitivity of this professor. Yet, I cannot help but wonder about the bodies in his classrooms that did not look like his. There were women, many of them women of color; there were people who had survived or were surviving abuse; there were people grappling with denominations that told them that their bodies could not stand behind a pulpit. I wondered: how were they shaped by this weekly ritual? What were they negotiating within themselves as they recited this confession framed as a mechanism for instilling the virtue of humility? More broadly, how do Christians in general imagine the liturgical function of the confession of sin such that for many people the forgiveness can be optional? Is any recognition of guilt not explicitly embedded in the specific forgiveness of Jesus properly called Christian?

At stake in these questions is the ability of all people, to echo Walter Brueggemann, to legitimate their lives before God.[1] In my experience, language of self-legitimation tends to make Christians uncomfortable. We worry about church becoming a place we go to "justify and legitimate ourselves,"[2] but that fear misidentifies the problem. Empowering people to legitimate themselves *rightly* is precisely what many churches fail to do well. We can often see that failure operating in destructive theologies of confession. In those cases, the confession functions as a kind of "virtue machine" for producing humble subjects—"humility" here denoting feelings of inferiority or self-abnegation. Against this view, I will argue that the confession, together with the forgiveness, can and ought to function as a moment of liberation. It is the moment in which we are reminded that it is never up to us to produce ourselves as any kind of subject, virtuous or otherwise. The liturgical moment of the corporate confession and forgiveness is pure gift—the gift of the self that God daily creates and gives each one of us to be while we are yet sinners.

To arrive at this conclusion I rely on Søren Kierkegaard, especially his *Sickness Unto Death*. In the first part of this essay I use Kierkegaard, along with the work of black feminist Denise Ferreira da Silva and a handful of others, to introduce what I see to be the real problem at the root of destructive theologies of confession: a failure to grapple with the "modern Self," an historically particular construct out of 17th- and 18th-century European philosophy that presents a paradigm of human being grounded in colonial European whiteness and maleness. Throughout this paper I will distinguish between this "modern Self," the historical-philosophical image of the human being, and the self (sans the capital "S" to facilitate clarity), the more general sense of being conscious of one's own identity. I am arguing that

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, "Breaking the Silence." The Work of the People. *www.theworkofthepeople.com/breaking-the-silence* (accessed 9/7/2016).
[2] Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2006), 211.

the former, the modern Self, is the construct that confessions which focus on producing "humble" subjects attack. Such confessions are right to see the modern Self as a problem, but as I will go on to argue in the next part of my essay, confession-as-humbling-mechanism fails to adequately address that problem. Kierkegaard brings us much closer to a solution to the problem of the modern Self by gesturing toward an alternative understanding of selfhood. In the final part of this essay, I concretize this theoretical work through the examples of two Protestant liturgies of confession.

The Problem of the "Self"

Silva gives an incredibly nuanced critique of the modern Self—what she calls the transparent "I" or the Subject—in her important book *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. This Self or Subject is the figure of the human being as developed in the work of thinkers like Locke, Hegel, and Kant—a figure who is exclusively European, white, and male.[1] Silva argues that that these narrow parameters for humanity intentionally exclude white women, men of color, and above all, women of color from the category of the Subject (i.e., the fully human) in the service of wider colonial interests. These inherent gender, racial, and historical-political dimensions are pivotal to bear in mind moving forward (my choice of masculine gendered language with regard to the Self intentionally helping us to do that). For our purposes, however, I

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[1] Proving this claim is one of the main endeavors of *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, and Silva does it exhaustively. For the sake of this paper, one brief quotation serves as an example of the specifically racial demarcations of human beings in 18th-century thought. Silva writes in summary of Hegel, "'Negro' consciousness, he postulates, is underdeveloped, and the very notion of self-consciousness is completely foreign to members of that race. They 'have not yet,' he notes, 'attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence... in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being.'" Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 119. Hegel recognizes in the "Negro" something of humanity, but he clearly refuses to understand them as fully human in the way he is.

want to start by focusing on how Silva demonstrates the internal contradiction, and thus ultimate untenability, of the modern Self. She writes, "the great accomplishment, the culmination of the victorious trajectory of reason that instituted man, the Subject, also foreshadowed his eventual demise… Because that which falls prey to Reason by becoming its object has no place in the realm of Freedom."[1] This quotation requires some unpacking. The Self/modern man is characterized by being a perfectly free, autonomous, self-determined Subject (and remember, it is *man* here, because white women and people of color could be none of these things according to Locke, Hegel, and so on). He knows he is such because he is ruled by "reason," and *not*, as opposed (he imagines) to white women or people of color, instinct or passions. This formulation, however, makes the grounds of man's freedom—that is, reason—also his greatest threat. If he is a Subject only insofar as he is *subject to* the rule of reason, is he really free, much less autonomous? Silva goes on to track a series of mental gymnastics by which philosophers sought to maintain the freedom and autonomy of the figure of modern Western man, but the internal contradiction always haunts his Selfhood.

This, Silva ultimately argues, is why it was *necessary* for the figure of modern Western man, the Self, to have his "others"—i.e., supposedly lesser white women, and even lesser men and women of color. One way, perhaps, to get a handle on this argument is to say that Silva's work pushes Michel Foucault's argument further. Foucault writes, "what troubles me… is that there is always presupposed a human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy [our modern Self or Silva's Subject], endowed with a consciousness which power then thought to seize on."[2] In other words, in a by-now familiar assertion, Foucault is saying that there is no "objective" or fully

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[1] Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, xvii.
[2] Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 58.

autonomous human Self which *then* acts or is acted upon. Silva agrees, but goes further in arguing this is true of the entire *modern West*. The modern West—and thus modern Western ideas of Selfhood—did not exist in a vacuum, then go on to commit the atrocities of colonialism. It is *through* the West's violent encounter with the non-Western world that modernity and its intellectual traditions came to be. In short, the violence of colonization and its inherent sexism and racialization *is* the womb in which the modern Self—that is, our ideas of what it means to be a full human being, and which has dominated our imaginations ever since—was formed. To vastly over-simplify Silva's complex argument: despite the internal contradiction that the Self is free only insofar as he is subject (to reason), the Self confirms or establishes his freedom by way of comparison to his racial/gendered/cultural "others." In short, the Self can know he *is*, despite internal contradiction, because his others *are not*. Both through theory and through violent domination of the globe, the Self/Western man actively and violently constructs the world such that the integrity of his constructed Selfhood (and thus, necessarily, *not* the integrity white women's or peoples' of color selfhood) is preserved.

Silva's work draws out the inherent violence of the Self on a global, intellectual, and historical scale, but it is important to realize that the dominance of the Self over our imagination inflicts violence in much more personal and mundane ways too. Here I shift to psychological, theological, and philosophical observations, but it is important to note that they are observations *by* Western thinkers *about* Western individuals. That is to say, what follows is *not* intended as universal reflections on "human nature" (itself a fraught notion), but it is intended to show how the historical intellectual constructions of the Self summarized above often operate interpersonally in the West today. I focus on two legacies of the Self in particular: (1) our continued tendency reflexively to *imagine* our identity construction as a free, self-determined, and autonomous practice; and (2) our continued tendency *actually* to

construct our identities only ever over and against, or in comparison to, other people or groups of people.

The latter means of identity formation is readily recognizable in the narrative figures of the hero and the victim. As theologian Chris Huebner writes, "The self is nothing but the ability to seize hold of one's own voice. Identity is constituted by narrative."[1] People who identify with the hero constitute themselves as ones who triumph over others—who dominate in one way or another. The victim, on the other hand, is dominated, yet ironically still finds control by embracing this negation (whether imagined or real). James Alison, a Christian theologian who once embraced a self-narration of victimhood, explains it well: "My sense of who I was was very much dependent on being rejected, since I knew, or thought I knew, that that was what the Gospel demanded, and I had managed to fool myself that my search for being marginalized was of God."[2] Alison refers to this thinking as the "self-canonization of the victim."[3] Notably, both the hero and the victim strive after Selfhood through acts of violence. Both require either continual violence *over* others or continual violence against *oneself* (which has destructive ramifications for others as well). As Alison narrates regarding the latter, "Yet again I managed to inspire others to find it necessary to get rid of me, and yet again I set myself up to become holy by being rejected."[4] One legacy of the modern Self, then, is that in order to *be* someone we violently squeeze ourselves into a false binary. Either we are the hero, or we are the "other" (the victim), but either way, we are in control—autonomous.

All of this concerns us as we think through a right theology of confession because both narrative constructions of this Self are implicitly identified in two popular ways of imagining sin: sin as "pride"—i.e., self-assertion, self-love, self-regard, self-centeredness[1]—and sin as *not enough* self-assertion, self-love, etc. The latter way of thinking about sin became widely recognized only after the rise of feminist theology in the 1960s, though "widely recognized" is a relative term, of course. Given that the confession is probably imagined in many if not most churches as that which generates humility, it is probably safe to say that most people still imagine sin primarily as pride. Yet, even if Christians widely recognized *both* manifestations of sin, it would not tell us what the confession is for. That is, the confession cannot simply be for generating humility, and it does not help us to say that the confession is simply for generating humility *and* generating self-regard (per the second, feminist understanding of sin). Kierkegaard elucidates exactly why such a simplistic answer will not work.

Kierkegaard, though temporally distant from a feminist or liberation theologian himself, was far ahead of his time. In the midst of his phenomenology of despair in *Sickness Unto Death*, he names two forms of despair that anticipate our modern (and largely gendered/racialized) categories of sin: the despair of weakness, which wills *not* to be oneself (the victim), and of defiance, which wills to be oneself without the help of God or anything else (the hero). Then comes a really helpful move. Kierkegaard writes, "No despair is entirely free of defiance. On the other hand, even despair's most extreme defiance is never really free of some weakness."[2] These two categories relate dialectically. To will not to be oneself, to be a victim in our terminology, is to define oneself according to the wills and whims of the world. Yet the construction even of an inauthentic self remains a desperate attempt to grab at some being for oneself.

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[1] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 199.
[2] James Alison, *On Being Liked* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), 66.
[3] Alison, *On Being Liked*, 67.
[4] Alison, *On Being Liked*, 67.

[1] William J. Cahoy, "One Species or Two? Kierkegaard's Anthropology and the Feminist Critique of the Concept of Sin," *Modern Theology* 11.4 (1995): 430.
[2] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* (no trans.; New York: Start Publishing, 2013), 49.

On the other hand, Kierkegaard captures the paradox of the hero in the example of the man who is "Caesar or nothing." If he fails to become Caesar, he imagines he is nothing. Yet, he still *is,* and so he must confront the fact that "the self that he despairingly want[ed] to be is a self that he is not."[1]

So all weakness is defiance and all defiance is weakness, and the important thing to take away from Kierkegaard and the whole discussion up to this point is this: that the Self never rests, and never *can* rest. Correcting one kind of despair only leads to another kind. If we think otherwise, then Kierkegaard says we are simply in the despair of ignorance, the terminally ill person who does not yet feel symptoms. We are all of us, Kierkegaard says, sick unto death. When we bring this sickness of despair before God it becomes sin. As Louis Mackey puts it, "To be human is to be sick. To sin is to insist on being sick."[2] Sin is, in other words, what Paul describes in Romans 7: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."[3] In naming this "sickness" (what we might call original sin, human depravity, etc.) neither Kierkegaard nor I am overly interested in a debate over the depths of depravity or the exact measure of sinfulness in "sinful human nature." The answer at the end of the debate is always the same: grace. If our terminal diagnosis has any usefulness at all for our purposes, it is to remind us that whatever the confession of our sin is for, it cannot be to instill virtue, either the virtue of humility or self-regard. Our terminal diagnosis cannot in any way function as a program for self-improvement. If virtue were the opposite of sin then we would not need Jesus. We would only need Socrates. That is to

say, we would not need a savior. We would only need a good teacher.[1]

The question posed by the complex problem of the Self, then, is twofold: First, if we both reject the modern autonomous Self yet recognize the need (especially for oppressed and marginalized people) to exercise one's own agency—i.e., to be not a modern Self but still a self—then how can we imagine nonviolent selfhood? That this question exists so urgently is why any cries against church as a place for self-legitimation miss the point. Selfhood—the general fact of being individuals conscious of our identities, including consciousness of the strength and beauty of our identities—is not the problem. Kierkegaard puts it beautifully: "It is Christian heroism—a rarity, to be sure—to venture wholly to become oneself, an individual human being, this specific individual human being, alone before God."[2] The problem is the *modern Self*—the individual and the group/nation/culture constituted in and by violence. We must imagine *right* self-legitimation in our churches—nonviolent ways of being ourselves and of being with others. The second question raised by the problem of the Self is the particular concern of this essay: How do corporate confession and forgiveness function liturgically toward that end of imagining right self-legitimation?

Toward an Answer to the Problem

As we have said, for Kierkegaard, the opposite of sin is not virtue. Instead, the opposite of sin is faith. Faith, he clarifies, is that "[t]he self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God."[3] Rest, of course, is supposed to be impossible for the self. Kierkegaard does not neglect the absurd in this work. Hope in the impossible—hope that we might be freed

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[1] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 20.

[2] Louis H. Mackey, "Deconstructing the Self: Kierkegaard's Sickness Unto Death," *ATR* 71.2 (1989): 161.

[3] Romans 7:14–15.

[1] I owe this wonderfully incisive way of putting the matter to Amy Laura Hall.

[2] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 2.

[3] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 82. In this we should hear an echo of Romans 14:23, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

of our terminal diagnosis—can only be apprehended by faith. And Kierkegaard does not let us sneak virtue back into faith. The "work" of faith is rest. It is laying down the arms by which we once fiercely defended our identities. It is ceasing all of our projects to save the world and ourselves, because that job has already been taken.[1] This will sound absurd to those who have been taught in church that being Christian is about bringing down the kingdom of God in one way or another. Even more absurd in our long Christian tradition of sin-as-pride is the idea that the "work" of resting in faith hinges on our ability to rest in ourselves. We rest even in *wanting* to be ourselves—our actual selves, not the selves we wish we could be, or the selves we pretend to be when we are in the role of Caesar. This may require a surrender—what Jesus means when he tells us to deny our self.[2] All the projections either cast onto our bodies by others, or constructed by ourselves for ourselves, must pass away. For Kierkegaard, the diagnosis does not stop being terminal. We are not "cured." We are a new creation, for those who lose their lives will gain them.[3]

As an aside, but an important aside, I want to add that we cannot simply receive this idea of death as salvific in an uncomplicated or unreflective way. Theologians like Delores Williams have gifted us with the reminder that suffering and death are, in themselves, never salvific. God, who is life, is salvific. As she puts it so brilliantly and succinctly, "The resurrection does not depend upon the cross for life."[4] God does not partner with evil. God does not need evil, suffering, or death in order to bring forth new life. When we pretend as if it is otherwise, we not only find ourselves worshipping a very different God from the one who raised Jesus, we find ourselves legitimating what Williams names

as the surrogacy of black women[1]—a womanist theological critique that parallels Silva's black feminist critique earlier in the paper, the phenomenon of some people being violently constructed as less (above all, women of color) so that others may construct themselves as more (namely, Western whiteness and masculinity). In short, if we are not careful about how and where we imagine salvation, we make God complicit in our own violence. For this reason I prefer the language of rest to that of death. *Rest* includes connotations both of ceasing our striving and of "laying to rest" those things which we must surrender. Some will experience such rest as immediately liberating. Others will have to mourn the loss of the Self that they desired to be. Still, whatever the metaphor and the emotional experience that accompany it, a fundamental receptivity to grace and whatever it might bring stands at the core of this understanding of selfhood.

This receptivity is why faith's rest in one's self is only another way of resting in God. God is the giver. We rest only in the self that God daily creates and gives us to be. It is never up to us to make something of ourselves. Kierkegaard—importantly, writing at the same time as (and often against) Hegel and his modern autonomous Self—presses hard on this point of dependence. Not only our selves, but even our recognition of the sin that distorts our true selves depends on a revelation from God.[2] How else do we narrate something in which we are so deeply inside? For Christians, the revelation of sin takes place in the forgiveness extended in the body of Jesus—for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.[3] We may define this revelatory forgiveness as God's eternal, free "yes" to God's creatures. As Alison puts it so well, "the forgiveness was not a change of

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[1] Amy Laura Hall, "His Eye Is on the Sparrow: Why We Matter," Profligate Grace. www.profligategrace.com/?p=1654 (accessed 9/7/16).

[2] Luke 9:23.

[3] Mark 8:35.

[4] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 146.

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[1] For more on this concept, see especially Delores S. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (ed. Marit Trelstad; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 19-32.

[2] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 65.

[3] Romans 5:8.

attitude on the part of Jesus…. If there had been nothing to forgive, it would still have been possible to perceive the gratuity of [Jesus' resurrection presence] as simply loving. Because there was something to forgive, this gratuitous loving is experienced as forgiveness."[1] It is this gratuitous love with which God first loves us, often experienced by us as forgiveness, that grounds our relationship to God and to other people. And this is the really crucial point: the always prior action of this gratuitous love means that forgiveness, theologically and existentially speaking, *precedes* confession. God is always acting first. Thus Kierkegaard has no patience for the kind of grief over sin that laments, "I can never forgive myself." He might respond, "Why do you imagine that forgiveness is your work?"

Liturgically speaking, all of this means that the confession fails the moment we imagine that it has any meaning apart from forgiveness. If our being a self at all depends on our rest in God, and if God's forgiveness is the fundamental ground of the relation between sinful humanity and God, then to make forgiveness anything but the focus of the confession is to do violence to the self. For those who are already prone to self-destruction, confession without forgiveness is what Kierkegaard would call "an effort to survive by sinking even deeper."[2] It is despairing over despair. For those prone to willing an autonomous Self, which is to say, a self apart from God, confession without forgiveness is an attempt to counter sin with the virtue of one's own humility. In all cases, confession understood apart from forgiveness is at best superficially cathartic and at worst contributes to violent identity formation.

I am not saying that we are not confronted with our sin; nor am I trying to erase the reality of the pain that often comes in the moment of that revelation of sin. What I am saying is that the confession is rarely that moment in which we are first or most

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[1] James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 75–76.
[2] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 110.

powerfully confronted with our sin. The moment of confession is the moment in which we approach God to *come clean*—to come clean and so to be freed of all the ways that we have tried to be our own Creator, or of the ways that we have let finite things be our Creator. The confession is the moment through which God initiates liberation and new creation through grace. There can be pain in confession, just as therapies for some illnesses can be painful, but above all there is hope, and rest, and the beginning of our ability to see and to legitimate ourselves *rightly*. Kierkegaard writes that in faith we not only rest in God, but we rest transparently in God. Confession is the moment of transparency.[1] It is the moment we lay bare all of our false selves in the absurd hope that we will receive our true selves back again.

The Question that Remains

Such a theology of confession hints at an alternative to the modern Self, but it remains to think through exactly what that alternative selfhood looks like. What does it even mean to receive one's "true self" from God? What does a "self" look like if it is not defined in comparison to other "selves"—which is to say, if it is not constructed violently? In *Works of Love,* Kierkegaard offers one helpful image in the idea of God as the "middle-term:" "Worldly wisdom is of the opinion that love is a relationship between persons; Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: a person—God—a person."[2] This applies to one's relationship to oneself as well: when *I* consider *myself*, God stands between "I" and "myself." Seeing oneself and others through or by way of God does several things. Most basically, it trains us to perceive others not as this-or-that-in-comparison-to-me, but to see simply a creature beloved of God. We can always find flaws in people, and Kierkegaard encourages no naïveté with regard to those flaws. Nevertheless, to see the beauty in each person is the

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[1] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 82.
[2] Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 1962), 107.

miracle. The reverse is true for ourselves. We learn to see ourselves not as succeeding or lacking in comparison to others, but as infinitely beloved. God as middle-term also reminds us that it is not up to us to save anyone, including ourselves. God's presence is there between us and in us, doing that work. Our relationships change drastically—including our relationships with ourselves—when we stop viewing human beings as projects.[1] Of course, seeing in this way is not a virtue that we can cultivate. The moments when we truly see in this way are miracles—a pure gift—and they too are from God.

Kierkegaard has another, far less helpful image for how we stand in relation to God. He writes, "as far as he [any Christian] is concerned God exists and is the only sovereign, whereas he [the Christian] is an unconditionally obedient subject."[2] Kierkegaard, like many other thinkers before and after him, imagine that as Creator, God is the Cosmic King who lords over life and death. A number of problems plague this imagery, both from a theological and an ethical/social standpoint. Those problems fall outside of the scope of this essay, so for now I will simply note that such images of sovereignty—images that merely transfer the notion of sovereignty from human to divine without subverting the notion itself—hardly offer a liberating image to people who are made by the world to submit and obey in every other respect. Thus in place of Kierkegaard's Creator-King, I offer one possible alternative that I find helpful for thinking about selfhood outside of the modern Self: God as creator-womb.

When a subject belongs to a king, however benevolent or just the king is, the subject's life must ultimately be about the preservation of the state. In this analogy, the "state" could be the church, the kingdom of God, the common good, or any other movement that encourages a person to erase her- or himself in and for the sake of a cause—another kind of violent identity formation, or at the very least, a kind of meaning-making through

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[1] I owe this insight also to Amy Laura Hall.
[2] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 117.

violence. A womb, on the other hand, is about the creation and preservation of the life within it. The life within the womb is "self-possessed" in that no other entity *is* that life or has control over that life in the same way that a king can make his subjects obey him. Yet the womb's life is self-possessed only insofar as it is "possessed" in return by the life-sustaining womb that carries it. Moreover, this life does not possess itself with the security and certainty of the modern Self, but its very being is characterized by potentiality—by what the womb is empowering it to become without controlling or "governing" what it becomes. The womb makes all of this possible second-by-second, is at every moment creating life, and yet somehow, it does not *lord over* life.

It is easy to imagine an identity characterized by potentiality in the case of the unborn child or even the very young, fast-growing child. The trick is for us to remember that this potentiality—this unresolvedness—characterizes all of our selves, precisely because we can never secure ourselves. We are not self-determined, autonomous, or "free" in the classical philosophical sense. We depend on our creator-womb, our God, second by second for the gift of who we are. The confession is the moment in which we are reminded that our efforts to create ourselves are despairing at best, and violently destructive to ourselves and others at worst. Our dependency is not a shameful thing, as modern European thinkers imagined. One does not disapprove of the life in the womb for not supporting itself. In God we are suspended in gratuitous love, just like the life in the womb. If there is something to forgive, this love will be experienced as forgiveness. This gift is what the confession and the forgiveness prompts us to receive.

Practical Implications: Two Case Studies

Practically speaking, what does this kind of confession look like in our liturgies? I want to look at two examples: that of my own Free Methodist (FMC) tradition, and that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Again, I do not

here intend to be prescriptive, but merely to concretize the foregoing ideas by demonstrating what it looks like to read the confession with this lens in place. I have chosen these two traditions in particular because I have at different points said both of their confessions in the context of a corporate liturgy on a weekly basis, and because their stark differences make them helpful points of contrast.

I will start with the FMC's traditional confession:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all people, we confess that we have sinned, and we are deeply grieved as we remember the wickedness of our past lives. We have sinned against You, Your holiness and Your love, and we deserve only Your indignation and anger. We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the things we should. Our hearts are grieved, and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without Your grace. Have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, for the sake of your son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who died for us. Forgive us. Cleanse us. Give us strength to serve and please You in newness of life and to honor and praise Your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.[1]

The first thing to notice is that there is no explicit forgiveness. There is a *request* for forgiveness, but even later in the liturgy when something like a forgiveness is *extended*, it remains ambiguous as to whether it is actually *given*. Instead, the focus is on strongly self-deprecating language: we are deeply grieved (multiple times); we remember our wickedness; we deserve only God's indignation and anger. These statements are efforts to survive by sinking even deeper—either deeper into one's own self-hatred, or deeper into one's belief in the salvific power of one's own feelings of inferiority. To quote Kierkegaard on such self-deprecation, "it is a subterfuge."[2] It gives both sin and

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[1] Free Methodist Church of North America, *2007 Book of Discipline* (Indianapolis: Free Methodist Publishing House, 2007).

[2] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 111.

one's capacity to grieve over it too much power in a liturgical moment that ought to be about God's power to create new life, regardless of the presence of sin. That being said, it is significant that the FMC's confession is said as part of the liturgy immediately preceding the Eucharist. For all the FMC's lack of verbalized forgiveness, juxtaposing confession with the reception of Jesus' body is a powerful gesture toward that forgiveness.

Now I shift to the ELCA:

We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.[1]

The first thing to name is the understanding of sin offered here: "We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves." Acknowledging sin is not primarily an occasion for self-deprecation, but an occasion for recognizing our dependence on God. Moreover, the stated ends of forgiveness include that we may take *delight* in God, as well as walking in God's ways, which itself represents a much more intimate (and less sovereign) image of what we might otherwise call obedience. The FMC, by contrast, only names the ends of serving, pleasing, honoring, and praising God. These are, of course, good and wonderful things—and even

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[1] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

things that bring delight—but they are also oriented around self-improvement and practices that are supposed to make us better Christians. To delight, on the other hand, is simply to receive joy from God's love. Best of all, the ELCA confession has a clear and emphatic forgiveness. With authority—as a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ—the presider proclaims Christ's "*entire* forgiveness for *all* our sins."

The language, "we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves" could be seen as troubling, however. It is biblical of course, but in our liturgies we cannot assume that most people love themselves or know that they *ought* to love themselves. Remembering myself even as a fairly strong-willed girl, I recall being confused by that language; I thought I had been taught *not* to love myself. Finally, at least in my ELCA church, we say the confession kneeling. Catherine Bell notes, "required kneeling does not merely *communicate* subordination… For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself."[1] In our own discernments of confession, it is worth at least posing the question: Would most people in this congregation benefit from that bodily production? The answer may absolutely be yes, but the question is worth asking.

Conclusion

Addressing questions about *how* we are to confess is important exactly because there is no one right way to enter into confession, even though we can have a clear sense of what confession is and what it is supposed to do. In that spirit, I want to borrow Amy Laura Hall's definition of Lent. She writes, "Lent is a time during the Christian year when many Christians note daily how God repetitively saves us."[2] This applies to the confession as

well. It is a time during the weekly liturgy when many Christians note how God repetitively saves us. The confession itself (like the liturgy as a whole) is not productive. It is not a mechanism for progressing in virtue. Over time it does not make us more humble. It also does not make us more capable of self-love. Instead, it is our expression of our need for grace. We all know what it is to have such continual need. No matter how much we eat or drink, we will never become "virtuous" enough to need food or water any less in the future. Part of being human is being dependent on our daily bread. Our identities are no less dependent than our stomachs. The confession and forgiveness, along with the rest of the liturgy, is our daily bread. It is the invitation to remember ourselves inside God's sustaining womb.

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[1] Catherine Bell, "Feminist Ritual Strategies," *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (ed. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza and Fernando F. Segovia; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 509.

[2] Amy Laura Hall, "Giving up for Lent: No One Size Fits All," *Herald Sun*, February 24, 2015. www.heraldsun.com/opinion/columnists/amy_laura_hall

/giving-up-for-lent-no-one-size-fits-all/article_a9c28d81-9e87-5976-a4ad-83d58 ce54568.html (accessed 9/7/16).

Worship as Compatible with Both Proper Human Autonomy and Relational Autonomy
Joyce Ann Konigsburg

Although proper human autonomy and relational autonomy appear to be a philosophical dichotomy, both are vital to human flourishing and to worship of the divine. An individual autonomy is necessary in establishing and developing healthy relationships with God and with others, which in turn provide life with meaning and enrich religious worship practices. Due to the communal nature of worship, relational autonomy influences decisions regarding content, symbols, and practices. Worship consequently is a graced and joyful shared response by people who collectively celebrate "what God has done, is doing, and promises to do."[1] Worship of the divine also consists of three interconnected components: community (inward), theology (upward), and mission (outward).[2] Unlike individual prayer, which "is personal, intimate dialogue or interaction with God," worship involves people who gather to glorify, praise, and thank God for God's gratuitous grace through mutually agreed upon religious rituals, liturgy, and rites.[3] Christian worship, for example, is a multidirectional interaction that concurrently promotes

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[1] John E. Burkhart, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1982), 17.

[2] Michael Charles Perry, *The Paradox of Worship* (London: SPCK, 1977), 41.

[3] Peter Ochs, "Do We Worship the Same God?" *Do We Worship the Same God? Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (ed. Miroslav Volf; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 149.

relationships between humans and the divine and between other humans. Both associations are essential and must remain in balance for worship to be meaningful.[1] The practice of worship additionally invites individuals into community and teaches participants how to relate to God and to each other, even as it defines, reveals, and influences the community's beliefs and moral values. This paper argues that the reciprocity between the individual and the community during worship subsequently necessitates the exercise of both proper human autonomy and relational autonomy.

Members of a faith community differ from groups of like-minded individuals sharing common interests such as football, the arts, or political views. The latter groups are not worshiping, but rather cohering, since they control the object of their interest; however, when "a community is called forth and created by the transcendent Object" of their common interest, then mutual worship occurs.[2] One example of this kind of worship comes from the Wesleyan traditions. For John Wesley, God is indeed the center and focus of genuine worship in a community of faith. Wesley develops his theology of worship primarily from his understandings of Scripture and the practices of the early Church, which are two aspects of his quadrilateral theological framework; the other two being reason and experience.[3] During a properly designed worship service, the congregation receives strength and the means of grace by glorifying and honoring God, who is dynamically present to them.[4] Celebrating at the Lord's Table is essential to Wesley because it identifies and connects the gathered congregation with early Christian communities.

Although social activities, including the act of worship, seem to constrain individual free choice, relationality and

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[1] Perry, *The Paradox of Worship*, 40.
[2] Perry, *The Paradox of Worship*, 42.
[3] Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 288, n6.
[4] Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 118ff.

interconnectedness actually contribute and enhance proper human autonomy. Worship practices involving prayer, liturgy, and fellowship consist of both individual and communal components and benefits. Each person, as well as the collective community, is an active subject; individuals choose to participate and engage in worship of the divine while the group determines and defines which rites and rituals constitute shared worship. As a result, the practice of worship is compatible with both personal autonomy and relational autonomy.

By way of illustration, the painting "The Power of DANCE" by Kathleen McKenna portrays these key concepts of worship and autonomy.[1] The painting depicts a room in an art gallery—a painting of a painting, if you will. Visitors to the exhibit freely decide to enter the art gallery and then choose which paintings to view, thus exercising their personal autonomy. One painting that several people are contemplating is entitled "The Dance" (1909–10), by Henri Matisse, and consists of five intertwined figures dancing, which represents the joy and interconnectedness of worship. The focal point is a little boy who is dancing in the lower right-hand corner of McKenna's painting while viewing the Matisse. He personally chooses *and* actively participates in the relationality of the worship dance.

Proper Human Autonomy

Rather than focus on debates about autonomy and the existence of God or whether a God who demands worship though divine command is indeed worthy of worship, a different starting point considers worship as an autonomous moral choice resulting from an affirmative faith response to a God's gratuitous love and grace. Each individual agent exercises personal and moral autonomy regarding how to respond to God and whether to participate in worship. A person's initial decision to partake in

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communal worship practices, however, does not negate subsequent personal decision-making and ethics nor does it provide excuses or panaceas for one's poor moral choices and actions. Individuals retain their autonomy and responsibility instead of abdicating decisions to the community.

Proper human autonomy holds diverse meanings and interpretations in different cultures. Western societies generally understand autonomy as defined by influential philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant and John Rawls, as well as perspectives and implications introduced by the worldviews of the Enlightenment and Modernity.[1] Current worldviews continue the Enlightenment notion that each rational human being is capable of choosing his or her destiny and functioning within society based on individual autonomy. Conceptions of autonomy that relate to the self's nature and its constitution also vary depending on whether one holds a socially constructed view of the self or if some sort of "core" or "true" self prevails.

Personal autonomy commonly refers to an individual's capability for self-determination, self-reliance, and self-realization in obtaining desired goals and personal gains without regard to morality in the decision-making process. Hence the focus is on an individual's ability to freely make decisions and manage one's actions rather than on the ethics of a decision. Kantian moral autonomy specifically involves self-governing thought in determining moral laws and codes, since a person's

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[1] For more information on Kant's and Rawls' views on autonomy, refer to Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2005); *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: Immanuel Kant* (ed. Allen W. Wood; Binghamton: Vail-Ballou Press, 2002); and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 513–20. For more information about the Enlightenment and Modernity, refer to Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Ulrich Beck, *What Is Globalization?* (trans. Patrick Camiller; Maiden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 19ff; Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003), 75–114; and Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

"independence is under constant threat from other equally self-serving individuals."[1] As a result, any discourse related to rational, moral, social, and political topics emphasizes one's rights, self-interest, and well-being, and the achievement of desired results. The goals of political autonomy are to maintain stability and equilibrium while respecting and supporting each individual's moral and personal choices.

In addition to political freedoms and subsequent legislation upholding them, religious freedom is necessary to exercise autonomous decisions regarding an individual's response to God's grace and call to faith. The Vatican document *Dignitatis Humanae* promotes freedom from religious coercion for individuals and groups, particularly religious communities, who claim autonomous freedom from the state in order to publicly worship and witness, educate their members, and self-govern their institutions.[2] In turn, religious communities are to refrain from coercing others, especially the poor and vulnerable in society. The act of faith is a free act and although God calls each person to love and service, people choose their response to God and actualize it through ethical behavior, individual prayer, and communal worship. The choices of when to participate and with whom to worship are ultimately acts of free will and personal autonomy. These freely-made decisions are to a large extent based on independent choices influenced by one's own motives, reasons, and values regarding worship.

Philosophers differentiate between *being* an autonomous moral agent and *acting* as an autonomous moral agent because "morally autonomous agents do not always act as they should."[3] In other words, a difference exists between making

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[1] Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 67.

[2] Paul VI, Dignitatis Humanae. Declaration on Religious Freedom, Vatican Web Site, December 7, 1965. www.vatican.va/archive/ hist_counclis/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

[3] Joseph L. Lombardi, "Worship and Moral Autonomy," *RES* 24.2 (1988): 102.

individual moral choices and living a morally autonomous life by owning one's decisions, actions, and any associated consequences. An "Ethic of Autonomy" serves as a guide for moral concepts that satisfy or fulfill the rights, interests, and well-being of individuals.[1] Such an ethic supports an autonomous person's freely-made choices as long as those decisions do not harm, impede, or infringe upon another's rights, interests, and well-being.

Critics of contemporary personal autonomy claim that this kind of freedom leads to "procedural individualism" because the action and decision-making processes are internal and particular to each unique agent—and so moral choices and judgments reflect personal opinions and values.[2] Individualism leads to separation and compartmentalization of public and private activities as well as dividing the secular and the sacred to a point where piety is marginalized and "gatherings for worship are dispensable options" rather than integrated components of a human life.[3] This model presents a weak and distorted conception of autonomy since it describes a minimalist, isolated individual and "abstracts the person from all of his or her 'contingent' and 'external' relations with other people and nature."[4] Kirk Wegter-McNelly supports an alternative paradigm of "community as the source of individuality" since he thinks the Enlightenment notion of a rational, "autonomous, self-constituting person [is] an illusion born of privilege" and that a person is "nothing, apart from the relationships he [sic] relies upon but fails to see" or acknowledge.[5]

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[1] Lene Arnett Jensen, "The Cultural Development of Three Fundamental Moral Ethics: Autonomy, Community, and Divinity," *Zygon* 46.1 (2011): 153.

[2] Jane Dryden, "Autonomy: Overview," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2010). www.iep.utm.edu/autonomy/.

[3] Burkhart, *Worship*, 44.

[4] Bhikhu Parekh, "The Cultural Particularity of Liberal Democracy," *Political Studies* 40.1 (1992): 161.

[5] Kirk Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God: Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 22.

Nevertheless, in present society individualism is assumed, esteemed, and associated with independence; from a Christian point of view, this radical individualism reflects almost cultic proportions bordering on biblical definitions of idolatry.[1] In the Christian Bible, individualism and separation are not desired states. Metaphors reject notions of separate, private, and personal; instead emphasize the ideas of public and political relations through the use of covenant language, gathering, and creating then saving people as a group instead of as individuals. Punishment for disobedience (sin) results in the curse of expulsion from the worship assembly, exile, or dispersion of the community. The early Christian church and the letters of St. Paul to the people of Corinth vehemently oppose individualistic, autonomous, and gluttonous selfishness as detrimental to mealtime communion and worship.

Relational Autonomy

Contemporary notions of autonomy that emphasize individuality connote the perfect model of personhood as a completely self-sufficient, reason-based, decision maker "operating in a vacuum unaffected by social relationships."[2] This ideal ignores reality's connectedness and any societal or interpersonal influences on decision-making, otherwise known as relational autonomy. And yet, an apparent tension exists between a desire for independence and a longing for association within the human person. This paradox of human nature compels post-modern theorists and theologians to reconsider the importance of social and personal relationships and their effects on human autonomy over and against the current, predominant, and privileged individualist paradigm.

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[1] Burkhart, *Worship*, 43–44.

[2] Natalie Stoljar, "Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy," first published May 2, 2013, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-autonomy/.

Relational effects on personal autonomy typically originate from either causal or constructive influences.[1] On the one hand, causally relational autonomy posits that certain relationships and social environments are background conditions affecting or contributing to a more individual notion of autonomy in a causal manner. Proper human autonomy plays a causal role, since one's decisions influence another's choices. Christians, for instance, believe that God is the primary cause and "governs in such a way as to empower creatures to be causes toward others," otherwise, "the capacity to be causes would be missing from creatures."[2] On the other hand, proponents of constructive relational autonomy insist that one's social environment at least partially constitutes and develops a person's decision-making ability, and so relationships are required conditions for defining personal autonomy. The question is whether relational and social effects actually constitute autonomy or merely contribute to its development. Thus a distinction between causally relational and constitutively relational concepts is crucial but also problematic. All too often relational autonomy theorists have difficulty separating the two notions since important and meaningful associations as well as incidental, insignificant, or undesirable relationships influence a person's identity and decisions. In essence, no one is completely immune to humanity's connectedness or specific interpersonal effects.

With relational autonomy, the focus shifts from an individual's independence to one's associations with others. Eventually, interconnected relations and their accumulated positive and negative histories combine to create a "psychological fingerprint" and identity for each person; in fact, relationality refers to "the living presence of others in the self and the self in others."[1] While the term "relational" is somewhat ambiguous, it involves "existential and transactional connections, dynamic and functional interactions, or logical, overlapping [references to] interconnecting concepts, meanings, or things."[2] Personal, social, religious, familial, or sexual relationships that exhibit interconnectivity and deep attachment are both relational and autonomous. As a result, "persons are socially embedded and their identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity."[3]

Philosophers, sociologists, and theologians often use the terms "social" and "relational" interchangeably. While both words stress connection, subtle differences exist: "relational" connotes interpersonal dynamics and intimacy while "social" implies a broader sense of association that occurs through societal institutions, cultural conditions, and political factors.[4] Nevertheless, many scholars agree that social conditions affect an individual's self-determination, though they disagree about what the conditions are and how they influence relational autonomy.

In positing that "agents are socially and historically embedded" and thus influenced by others, critics perceive relational autonomy as denying self-sufficiency and "the metaphysical notion of atomistic personhood."[5] The fact remains that no human being is absolutely self-made, self-sufficient, or isolated from the influences of others. Furthermore, removing content-neutrality from the decision-making process concerns some scholars, such as Paul Benson and Susan Wolf, who support

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[1] Holger Baumann, "Reconsidering Relational Autonomy. Personal Autonomy for Socially Embedded and Temporally Extended Selves," *A&K* 30.2 (2008): 445.

[2] Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance," *Theological Studies* 57.1 (1996): 14.

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[1] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 99.

[2] Barbara Thayer-Bacon, "A Pragmatist and Feminist Relational (E)Pistemology" (paper presented at the Symposia on the Individual, Ann Arbor, 2009), 16.

[3] Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 61.

[4] Baumann, "Reconsidering Relational Autonomy," 447.

[5] Stoljar, "Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy."

strong substantive accounts, because "it is one thing to say that models of autonomy must acknowledge how we are all deeply related; it is another to say that we are autonomous only if related in certain idealized ways."[1] Other relational theorists, such as John Christman, Marilyn Friedman, and Jennifer Nedelsky, counter that it is not autonomy *per se*, but individualism that is problematic; so rejecting the idea of autonomy as the substantive, independent, "Cartesian self" leads to conceiving and expanding a person's capability to make informed choices in new and varied relational and social ways.[2] A more realistic view of autonomy consists of individual and relational aspects as well as internal accountability for external decisions and commitments derived from critical reflection. This "answerability" thus grounds autonomy and provides a relational way of understanding self-governance and self-responsibility.[3]

The concepts of human and divine relationality exist in philosophy and theology as exemplified in the shift from an Aristotelian metaphysical category of "substance" to process-relational alternatives that suggest "all 'things,' including God, to be themselves primarily by virtue of their relations to other 'things.'"[4] God is in right relationship with the world; therefore, God grants creation significant freedom to make decisions and to form associations and mutual connections that promote development, provide meaning, and foster human flourishing. As a consequence of God's involvement with creation, the divine "Spirit brings wholeness to human beings without violating their

freedom or responsibility, as paradigms for the Godworld [sic] relationship."[1]

Shared worship practices illustrate human freedom and autonomy. Collective decision-making involving worship not only reveals a community's beliefs and values, but influences them and reflects a group's ethics in daily life. Hence an "Ethic of Community" describes a person's moral duty to others within and between groups, but it specifically details "community-oriented virtues such as self-moderation and loyalty toward social groups and their members."[2] Such a community ethic establishes solidarity as a new social moral attitude or virtue with "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."[3]

Christian worship gathers people together to praise God and act ethically as one body, which negates individualist concerns about "what do I get out of it?" or "what's in it for me?" and instead generates outward attention toward community issues. Karl Barth employs the term "informed intuitionism" through which "one responds to the contingencies of the moment on the basis of discernment formed by conscientious immersion in the ethos of the Christian community... one then acts on one's own responsibility (though not without consultation with others) in fear and trembling."[4] So while decisions and acts have individual natures, they are influenced, developed, and considered within the Christian community. Additionally,

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[1] John Christman, "Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves," *Phil. Stud.* 117.1 (2004): 151. See also Stoljar, "Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy." Content-neutrality refers to either lack of bias in decision-making or that laws are equally applicable regardless of the content or situation.

[2] Marilyn A. Friedman, "Self-Rule in Social Context," *Social Philosophy Today* 2 (1989): 158 and Baumann, "Reconsidering Relational Autonomy,"446.

[3] Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy," *Hypatia* 24.4 (2009): 18.

[4] Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God*, 25.

[1] Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?" 13.

[2] Jensen, "The Cultural Development of Three Fundamental Moral Ethics," 153.

[3] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Encyclical Letter for the Twentieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio, Vatican Web Site, December 30, 1987, w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ip-ii_enc_ 30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.

[4] John Witte and Frank S. Alexander, eds., *The Teachings of Modern Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 175.

Reverend Robert Hovda wonders if individualists are even capable of worship, since the act "assumes, requires, and demands a celebrating assembly of believing persons who have not lost the sense of being part of humanity, the sense of relation to, interdependence with, even identification with every other human being."[1]

From his experiences in Latin America, Leonardo Boff believes human choice, focus, and direction are contextual and thus influenced by a person's social setting. At the same time, he thinks Catholic moral theology "is excessively individualistic" and fails to recognize the ontological basis of human sociality—that "either a person is social or is not a person at all."[2] Humanity indeed is socialized, with individuals interconnected globally through a "crisscrossing of complex lines of economic, scientific-technological, communications, and cultural structures."[3] For Christians, their individual lives are bound together in Christ, so "separation of the individual and social aspects is not possible; the personal union with Christ also involves incorporation into the collective Christian society."[4] The individual remains a crucial component, yet "individuality is possible only because we are first of all social beings."[5]

Gathering and participating in worship educates the community about how to be in relationship with God and with one another as a local and universal Body of Christ in the world. Each worshiper's connectedness strengthens Christ's mystical

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[1] Keith F. Pecklers, *Worship: A Primer in Christian Ritual* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 175. See also Robert Hovda, "Individualists are Incapable of Worship," *Worship* 65.1 (1991): 69.

[2] Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin? Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 141–42.

[3] Jose Miguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), 16.

[4] Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York: Burns & Oates, 1968), 67.

[5] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 97.

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body which in turn maintains, develops, and enhances each member's spiritual health and inner life. Therefore, corporate worship celebrates and respects the individual's and the community's unique connections to God so that both relationships "complete, reinforce, and check each other" as each person encounters and worships God with others.[1] Christians celebrate by assembling as part of the "People of God" because "in him [Christ] all things hold together" (Col 1:17). In gathering and worshiping, communities recognize "their graced activity of coming together," which furthermore reflects the social reality of God.[2] Similarly, the act of worship in Judaism is an event of assembling or gathering as a congregation that manifests a lived social reality. In fact, the word for assembly in the Hebrew Scriptures is *qahal*; its translation to Greek is *ekklesia*, which the New Testament employs more than one hundred times in referring to a Christian assembly or community.[3] The act of gathering in worship for both Christians and Jews "is an ontological event, it is a metaphysical activity, it is a statement about the very design of reality."[4] Shared worship reflects reality and becomes an important means of expressing humanity's communion with God, with each other, and with God's creation.

The nature of the Christian Trinitarian God as divine relationality within God's self and as present in the world has additional theological and anthropological implications. The Holy Spirit is "the very principle of relationality within the relational triune God" calling humanity "into intimate fellowship with God in Christ."[5] Since humanity is made in God's relational image, theological anthropology imperfectly parallels the inter-relationality of the triune God through human encounters and relationships. Christian neo-Trinitarian theologians employ the

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[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 84.

[2] Burkhart, *Worship*, 49.

[3] Burkhart, *Worship*, 40.

[4] Burkhart, *Worship*, 40.

[5] Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God*, 34.

Trinity as an interpersonal form of communion and relation. Kathryn Tanner cautions colleagues against inflated claims of utilizing the Trinity as a contemporary social analogy for current social institutions and constructs and of ignoring divine-human differences in the process. These theologies "overestimate the progressive political potential of the Trinity," are simplistic contrasts, and ignore the history in which early Christians actually applied Trinitarianism to support centralized Roman rule under Constantine, which promotes hierarchy, subordination, and gender representation issues.[1]

For Hans Urs von Balthasar, the experience of love grounds the fundamental relations of otherness. The Christian understanding of God as love and as Trinity "presupposes the one, the other, and their unity," so otherness, and not one's individual, personal identity, is "the condition of possibility for love as the authentic meaning of Being" as well as being-in-relation or communion with God and others.[2] Christian theology describes relationality as a "threefold *perichoresis*" of Trinity (God in God's self), of Incarnation (God in the other), and of Church (God in the others).[3] Worshipers praise God not individually but in community, since it is through positive relationships with God and others that people find love, meaning, and purpose.

To be a relational self is "a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community" and committing to common values, practices, and beliefs through engagement and worship with others.[4] The relational self does not diminish the essential importance of

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[1] Kathryn Tanner, "Social Trinitarianism and Its Critics," *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (ed. Robert J. Wozniak and Giulio Maspero; London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 371.

[2] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 115.

[3] Robert Kress, *The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 94.

[4] Hopkins, *Being Human*, 100.

oneself or other persons during worship; it does, however, emphasize that the worship community is primary because "only through healthy collectivity can creative individuality arrive at singular being, productive knowledge, and self-consciousness."[1] Constructive communal solidarity highlights reciprocity as the key in realizing each person's full maturity, along with cooperation and generosity, which promote complementarity and interdependence rather than selfishness, friction, and competition.[2] Community also contributes to identity through the rituals and processes of naming, specifying plans and goals, and living with a vision toward the future. Remembering departed ancestors and including natural and sacred symbols in worship establishes long-lasting values and wholeness that is "realized primarily by means of a relational network that is equally anthropocentric, cosmic, and theocentric."[3]

Individual selves establish right relations with God, others, and nature through mutual interactions that build shared values, interests, and life experiences during religious worship and other types of beneficial communal activities. While the unique self establishes relationships with others, it is also spiritual and intrinsically valuable because each person is a child of God, created in God's image, with a transcendent soul. Each community member's individuality manifests as a desire to create and to establish the self's distinctive identity through choices that imply intentionality and responsibility, and by self-reliance, which builds trust in oneself.[4] This is the role personal autonomy performs within an authentic worshiping community.

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[1] Hopkins, *Being Human*, 82.

[2] Hopkins, *Being Human*, 88.

[3] Hopkins, *Being Human*, 91. See also Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmothe-andric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (ed. Scott Eastham; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998).

[4] Hopkins, *Being Human*, 110.

Conclusion

Proper human autonomy involves essentially choosing to join and then to participate within a worship community. The decision to participate has significant implications regarding personal and relational agency because "God's act giving creatures their very nature is what makes the creaturely act possible at all in its own created autonomy."[1] At the heart of St. Thomas Aquinas' nature of created reality is the evocative idea of participation and its implications for human autonomy and agency. For Aquinas, created existence and subsequent human autonomy exist through participation in the divine being. In fact, "nearness to God and genuine creaturely autonomy grow in direct rather than inverse proportion" so "all that exists participates in its own way in divine being through the very gift of creaturely existence" while maintaining its unique identity and integrity.[2]

Participating in a worship community requires other participants and thus is a collective, relational action. Each individual has a purpose and contribution for the community, yet as a function of personal human autonomy each must choose to enter into a relationship with the other members. Deciding to participate in worship is an active, outward-focused event rather than a passive, introspective, solitary meditation on life. Relational autonomy and ethics also factor into participation by requiring mutual interaction, sharing, and *appropriate* involvement; a person must avoid doing nothing or doing everything, otherwise one excludes oneself or others from contributing. And while one may choose which of one's many gifts and talents to share, relational and moral autonomy limit an individual's selection to contributions that enhance rather than detract from worship.

Freedom of choice is a critical element in worship. Some decisions are individual ones, while social and relational factors influence others. Thus proper human autonomy and relational autonomy are complementary and compatible in worship. Relational autonomy attempts to preserve personal autonomy's strengths while shifting focus from individualism and independence to relationality within a social context such as a worshiping community. Worship therefore unites two opposing poles: the first is personal autonomy or self-possession, and the second relational autonomy whereby relationships constitute, or at least influence, one's choices. Each person must decide whether to participate and to what extent he or she engages in worship. Because worship is social, it entails interaction and influences others. One may choose to enter the dance of worship, but in doing so, a person individually must commit and then follow the relational timing, rhythm, and intricate movements that constitute the worship dance.

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[1] Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?" 12.
[2] Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?" 11–12.

Four on the Floor
Phenomenological Reflections on Liturgy and Music

John Thomas Brittingham

It begins with a synth pad. A few layers of square-wave mixed with strings, using ambience to create a mood. Then comes the repetitive guitar or piano line, providing a bit of rhythm. Perhaps a few breathy words to demonstrate the sincerity and intensity of the emotions about to be expressed. And then the bass drops, pounding along with the kick drum; four on the floor keeping time like a heartbeat. Is this U2? Is it M83? Is it Hillsongs? Maybe it is Taylor Swift. Whatever it is, contemporary evangelical communities are quite familiar with it. There is a joke that SNL did some time ago concerning the production of a new drug that would alleviate the stresses that come from the inescapable presence of Taylor Swift and her music in our lives. These stresses were referred to as the "Taylor Swift effect." The Taylor Swift effect is basically this: Your brain says, "I don't like Taylor Swift," but your ears say, "This is a perfect song."

I would like to suggest that such cognitive dissonance exists amongst the intelligentsia of Christian worshipers. While we might bob our heads along to the music, we find ourselves disturbed by the theological vapidity and self-centeredness of contemporary worship environments. Thus, even though we might like songs that sound like U2 with anemic content, the theologically informed find such expressions contemptible. Worship and liturgy are more than hip-sounding music with trite

lyrics. While this cognitive dissonance is something I will explore, before I begin I have a few caveats: 1) My focus is on phenomenology and not philosophical theology; I am not trying to craft doctrine but make an observation. 2) My focus is on specifically *Christian* liturgical practices. That is, following Heidegger's suggestions in his "Introduction to thePhenomenology of Religious Life"[1] and *Phenomenology and Theology*,[2] the present work is a regional study and not aiming at some universal claim about liturgy in general. Rather, the present study is an assortment of reflections on a particular kind of liturgical practice, within a particular monotheistic tradition and, more than likely, specific to Protestantism.[3]

I, then, will make the case that liturgy and music, while culturally informed, tend to be thought of as much more static practices than phenomenological investigation reveals them to be. I will establish this claim by starting with a phenomenology of liturgical practice before moving on to music, and then making some concluding remarks.

What, Then, is Liturgy? Lacoste on Liturgy

When we talk about liturgy, we tend to mean the words that we say in a particular order when we are at church. Perhaps as a definition of liturgical experience that is true, but any scholar of liturgy will tell you that such a definition misses the nuance of liturgy. So let us ask a philosophical question: What *is* liturgy?

In its ancient usage, liturgy literally means the performance of a public duty.[4] Such a public duty appears to be what is mentioned in at least two passages from the New

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[1] Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei; Indiana University Press, 2010).

[2] See Martin Heidegger, "Phenomenology and Theology," *The Religious* (ed. John D. Caputo; New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001).

[3] While I use a few Roman Catholic thinkers, my primary object of examination is not the Mass.

[4] Adrian Fortescue, "Liturgy," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

Testament: Luke 1:23, where Zachary goes home when the "days of liturgy" are over; and Hebrews 8:6, where the high priest of the new law "has obtained a better liturgy," that is, a better kind of public religious service than that of the Temple. The two common contemporary uses of liturgy focus on the performance of particular acts, in particular, the Eucharist. Thus, liturgy means, in these two senses, either the whole complex of official services (rites, ceremonies, prayers, sacraments, etc.) or, as is the case with the Eastern Orthodox Church, only the Eucharistic service. These definitions can fall prey to the same dilemma as Meno in his conversation with Socrates, where a kind of liturgy is described and not the *being* or *form* of liturgy.

Following the lead of French phenomenologist Jean-Yves Lacoste, my main claim in this paper is that liturgy is the experience of deliberately ordered time, space, and otherness. Briefly stated, we experience liturgy as *ordered time* insofar as time is given a meaning in a manner otherwise than that of chronological time. We experience liturgy as *ordered space* insofar as spatial relationships and corporeal movements are given particular meanings that differ from those of ordinary everyday experiences. Finally, we experience liturgy as *ordered otherness* insofar as our encounters with others are mediated through the meaning provided by the liturgical environment and not by our encounter with others in the world.

In his book *Experience and Absolute,*[1] Lacoste portrays liturgy as a tripartite practice. According to Joeri Schrijvers, Lacoste defines liturgy as exodus, as gift, and as mission.[2] For Lacoste, liturgy is first an explicit choice for God wherein believers practice positioning themselves in a space of disruption from the normal economy of desire and history. Liturgy is a "violent transgression of, and rupture with, the Heideggerian being-in-the-

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[1] Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

[2] Joeri Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste: A Phenomenology of Liturgy," *Heythrop Journal* 46.3 (2005): 314–33.

world."[1] Liturgy is not to be thought of in the same manner as everyday experiences precisely because it is a deliberate response to the reception of the Word of God. Being-in-the-world results, for Lacoste, in a kind of Augustinian restlessness—a desire for that which is "other than being."[2] As this restlessness is a desire that does not know what it wants, liturgy takes the form of an explicit choice for God which shapes and orders this desire. It answers the restlessness with practice and prayer.[3] Yet, it should be noted that liturgical disruption is not synonymous with chaos. Rather, liturgy disrupts our familiarity with chronological time by deliberately reordering experience in accordance with the meaning aimed at by liturgical practices. Liturgy is not a disordering disruption but a reordering disruption.[4]

Secondly, liturgy acts as "gift" and takes on materiality. Liturgy as gift is found within the relationship between God and believer, in the very material of the Eucharist, for example. The believer does not initially understand the bread and wine to be the presence of God, but habituates her- or himself to believe this.[5] As Schrijvers says:

> The liturgy dismantles and disorients the transcendental constitution of subjectivity and suggests that both for intersubjective relations as for the relation *coram Deo*, the carnal dimension of existence serves as a more

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[1] Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste," 318.
[2] Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste," 318.
[3] Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste," 318.
[4] However, it might be claimed that, unless one is familiar with the structures and practices of liturgy, the experience is one of disorder in the first place. Phenomenologically speaking, this appears to be true. The alternative ordering of time, space, and intersubjectivity can make the novice disoriented. That being said, the novice's disorder is part of a larger reordering that takes place within the repetitions of liturgical practice.
[5] Thus, it is difficult to conclude as James K. A. Smith does, that there are such things as secular liturgies, without providing a significant number of conditions and caveats. Liturgy is much more involved than simply talking about repeated activities in spaces that have an apparent telos. See James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

appropriate paradigm (*EA* 156). We are exposed to God and the other in or corporeality and not primarily as a "thinking thing."[1]

In our embodiment as well as through the materiality of such things as the Eucharist, we find ourselves practicing a liturgy of putting oneself at the disposal of God. The practice of liturgy—specifically in praying and celebrating—"*incarnates* a passivity that precedes every conscious act."[2] That is, the physical practices of prayer and celebration manifest the passivity of the God-human relationship, of the liturgical disposition of the self before God, and the manner in which embodiment is, itself, both passive and active.[3]

The passivity of liturgy as gift can also be seen in the manner in which God is not required to act as a result of liturgical practices.[4] As Schrijvers puts it: "The liturgical person restlessly anticipates the coming of God. But when s/he realizes that this liturgical project does not oblige God to respond either visibly or experientially, the liturgical person might become bored with prayer. It is precisely this boredom that Lacoste indicates as the 'experience' of the gift."[5] Thus, according to Lacoste, this passivity and materiality, combined with the third moment of liturgy as mission or ethics, brings the believer to a place of living out the openness before God that one finds in the passive acquisition of the practice of liturgy. We act in such a way that we practice being open or disposed to God, all the while recognizing that such disposal does not guarantee the presence of God. Liturgy is not magic, after all.

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[1] Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste," 320.
[2] Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste," 321, emphasis original.
[3] For more on the passivity and activity of the body, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Donald A. Landes; Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2013) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, et al., *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the Collège De France (1954–1955)* (trans. Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).
[4] Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste," 321.
[5] Schrijvers, "Jean-Yves Lacoste," 321.

Phenomenology of Liturgy

Lacoste's tripartite structure resonates with my claim that liturgy is deliberately ordered experience and aligns nicely with the three kinds of order liturgy manifests. First, Lacoste's point that liturgy is "exodus" supports the idea that liturgy is experienced as ordered time. Liturgical practice is a deliberate exodus from the structures of worldly chronological time and into meaningfully ordered time. In order to grasp what makes liturgical time distinctive, we have to view it through the lens of the phenomenological understanding of time.

For Husserl, time must be understood as it is experienced. Thus, rather than seeing the human experience of time as one of temporally distinct moments miraculously strung together or an assortment of memories and anticipations, Husserl observes three distinct experiences of time.[1] First, there is worldly or objective time. This is the time we experience as measured time—the time of clocks and calendars and schedules. This is the time of carbon dating and cosmological temporality. However, objective time is dependent upon the second experience of time: our subjective experience of time as meaningful for our selves. Subjective time is the experience of time as recognizable and approvable. The time on my watch has meaning only because I experience it as meaningful *for me*. It makes sense not only in general but *for my life*. It is at this level of experience that liturgical time begins to make sense. Yet subjective time is dependent upon the third experience of time, what Husserl calls consciousness of internal time. Any temporal experience must be organized together as relatively distinct moments that are experienced as a unity along a succession of mental states. Without this experience

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[1] For the most important discussions of Husserl's conception of time, see J. B. Brough, "Husserl and the Deconstruction of Time," *Review of Metaphysics* 46 (March 1993): 503-36 and "Time and the One and the Many (In Husserl's Bernaur Manuscripts on Time Consciousness)," *Philosophy Today* 46:5 (2002): 14-153.

of unity within temporal duration, very little would make sense, especially music.[1]

Liturgy as Ordered Time

Therefore, liturgical time takes on at least two key features: First, liturgical time explicitly orders time by providing pivotal moments for religious practices. In the Protestant Christian liturgy I am examining, one can see four distinct moments that order time. Liturgical practice gathers people together, places them under the authority of the proclaimed Word,[2] places them under the authority of the Eucharistic table, and sends them out into the world with a benediction. These four precise moments are accompanied by the embodied practices of corporate verbal responses, singing, kneeling, genuflection, eating, and moving about the liturgical site.

Liturgy is not merely a cognitive activity but takes place as material and embodied temporality. Time is ordered and experienced as meaningful subjective time but only because the movements of embodied liturgical subjects embody the unique experience of time. As Merleau-Ponty rightly notes, the body bears the marks of time and its passing in both an objective and a subjective sense.[3] We are, after all, our bodies, and therefore experience time not only as something that happens but as something that happens *to us*. Liturgical time organizes and orients practitioners temporally as a response to the disorganized and disordered experience of temporality one has when one is restless.

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[1] Husserl's primary example of unity within a duration is that of a musical melody which consists of distinct temporal moments and nonetheless is experienced as a single identifiable object.

[2] I use "proclaimed" rather than "preached" so as to include musical proclamation as well as spoken proclamation in this movement. For many Protestant services, the invitation and the invocation of the authority of the Word are performed musically before they are performed as a homily or spoken call and response.

[3] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 87, 89–90.

Second, liturgical time takes place within a larger ordered experience of time. The Christian year takes the experience of an ordered hour-and-a-half service and orients it in light of an entire year's worth of meaningful moments. Thus, the practices of Christian liturgy are altered in accordance with what season of the Church it happens to be in.[1] The meaningful experience of the liturgical worship service is itself couched within larger structures of ordered time. Liturgical practices reflect the effects of seasonal change, both naturally and ritualistically. The Christian year attempts to provide another way of organizing time by punctuating the mundane experience of a year with meaningful "seasons," which operate differently from the objective "seasons" of spring, summer, fall, and winter. Each liturgical practice is ordered within the liturgical service, which is itself ordered within the seasons of Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time. Such ordering of seasons corresponds with particular holidays, feast days, commemorations of religiously significant events, and devotional practices. Individual liturgical practices do not make sense except within the context of the liturgical service. Likewise, the particularity of the liturgical service does not make sense except within the ordering of the Christian year. For example, we can think of the absurdity of ashes on one's forehead generally, but within the context of the beginning of the Lenten season it is a gesture that makes sense.

The Russian-doll-like structure of liturgical time is indicative of the relationship between experience and history. Liturgical practices, services, and the structure of the Christian year itself are all historical occurrences in a phenomenological

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[1] There is a third kind of ordered time here: the location of liturgical practice within the eschatological history of the Christian Church. That is, within the biblical and Christian understandings of history, liturgical practices have a particular placement. Those who worship currently are not the first nor is it likely that they will be the last. This experience of time has more to do with the historicity of Christian experience and liturgical practice and less to do with the lived experience of the liturgy as ordered time.

sense. The particular practices, as well as the meaningful structures that contextualize them, develop over time. The practices are not atemporal or ahistorical occurrences but beliefs, practices, rituals, objects, and interpretations that come about over time. Each temporal event makes sense only with reference to a horizon of understanding that precedes each of the events and that allows the individual events to make sense. However, such a structure is dynamic, allowing for changes to occur over time, changes that alter the internal ordering of the horizon and establish a new temporal normal. As Anthony J. Steinbock says of this development:

> In the institution of a new order through what was previously an anomaly or an abnormality, it is possible to institute a new normality "*in spite of the reference back to the earlier norm.*" In other words, the transcendence of old norms and old orders does not necessitate a monolithic replacement of a previous normality with a new one. Different normal orders may exist *simultaneously*, both pointing to their own telos and being implicated in another. In the case of the lived-body, but especially in the constellation of the social world there may be more than one norm functioning at the same time for the same act, event, form of life, etc.[1]

Here, normality and abnormality are not understood in their common psychological understanding. Rather, what Steinbock is trying to point out is the way in which the development of the horizons that establish meaning in experience are themselves historical developments that, in turn, operate in a dynamic manner. One can experience temporal events as meaningful within the horizon of Christian history *and* as meaningful within the horizon of local or national history. Within these meaningful horizons, the act of sharing Communion elements within a community recently subjected to racial violence

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[1] Anthony J. Steinbock, "Generativity and the Scope of Generative Phenomenology," *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader* (ed. Donn Welton; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 294, emphasis original.

becomes overwhelmingly meaningful. Yet, as is the case with liturgy understood as gift, these multiple horizons are not obligated to work in concert. They might just as well create conflict within the understanding of meaningfully ordered time.

The historical experience of liturgical time also points out the need to account for habit formation. Meaningful orders are not always fully understood immediately. One must participate in these meaningful orders with regularity in order for them to become the norm by which one measures time. In other words, we must familiarize ourselves with the rhythms and meaningful moments of liturgical practices in order for them to be meaningful at all. To expect a practitioner to understand the necessity of the confession of sin within a liturgical service right away is to assume that such an order is less historical than it actually is. Only through continued practice does the liturgical horizon make liturgical practice first intelligible and then meaningful.

Liturgy as Ordered Space

Lacoste's claim that liturgy is a gift that takes on materiality aligns well with the idea of liturgy as ordered space. The materiality that Lacoste discusses is not just the physical materiality of something like everyday objects imbued with meaning—with the bread and wine of Communion being the most prominent example. No, Lacoste also holds that liturgical experience is fundamentally an embodied experience. One cannot cognitively practice the Christian liturgy; one must *do* it. To back up this claim, Lacoste appeals to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as an absolute here and the zero-point of orientation. That is to say, the body is the *place* from which I am oriented and from which I cannot escape.[1] Place furnishes me with directionality, with my general orientation in space.[2] Thus, place and flesh are found together—always. Place is different from space in that place refers to my particular "situatedness,"

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[1] Lacoste, *Absolute*, 8.
[2] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 262–65.

whereas space is the general environment in which movement occurs.

The spatiality of liturgy, then, not only refers to ordered locations and rooms but also to ordered movements. Thinking of the liturgy regarding location in the worship service, one finds that particular spaces are given more meaning than others. The baptismal font, the pulpit and the lectern, the table and the elements; the spacing of all of these has significant meaning. The placement of the pews or seats orients the practitioner spatially toward that which is meaningful. And the same can be said of the placement of musicians. Whether on a stage in front of everyone or off to the side, or even tucked away behind the choir lofts, where the sounds come from are not neutral decisions—they reflect the values inherent in the liturgical space. All of which is to say that the liturgical context is a historical one and reflects the histories one is drawing from, whether intentionally or not.

Moreover, the spatiality of movement is also ordered. The timings and meanings of kneeling, standing, singing, and lining up for bread and wine are ordered in a meaningful way.[1] To participate in these practices is to be an actor within an ordered world of meaning. And all of these practices, yet again, presuppose the embodiment of the practitioners. They are not movements that are cognitive exercises, but are embodied practices that embrace the materiality of the practitioners and the objects that populate their milieu. It is the body that gives sense to cultural objects and fields as well as natural ones.[2] This is not to say that in liturgical movement all of the signification is made by the subject. Meaningful movements, including those within liturgical practices, are not only interactions between the

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[1] One thinks here of the oft quoted line by Max Scheler, "Whoever prays kneeling experiences God in a different way or has a differently nuanced idea of God than those who pray standing." See Anthony J. Steinbock, "Incarnate Experience," *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality* (ed. Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch; New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 111.
[2] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 244.

embodied subject and their milieu or environment, but rather are also reckonings with the possibilities that spring forth for other movements and other possible meanings within the context of a given space.[1] Liturgical spaces, then, orient the practitioner toward particular possible movements—those that make sense within a given liturgical context—and provide an order and degree of appropriateness for the movements without closing down new possibilities for movement and meaning.

Liturgy as Ordered Otherness

In liturgical experience, we encounter other persons in a manner otherwise than how they are encountered in everyday being-in-the-world. One does not encounter the other in the disruptive immediacy of their asymmetrical debasement, as a phenomenologist such as Emmanuel Lévinas might claim.[2] That is to say, the other is not encountered as destitute and in need of justice through my aid nor beyond me as a kind of transcendent being that escapes my ability to categorize or totalize them. Rather, in Christian liturgical experience, the encounter with the other is mediated through particular practices, such as that of the "passing of the peace." Others are not just anonymous others but brothers and sisters and fellow parishioners. They are *co-singers*, *co-congregants*, and *friends*. Even if these others are strangers to us in other places, within the world of liturgical practice, they are mediated by a particularly determined set of meanings. Within liturgical experience, then, there is a purposeful leveling of sedimented social status in the passing of the peace, phenomenologically speaking. The call issued forth is one of equality with all rather than one that reinforces the social constructs that exist outside of the world of liturgical experience.

This is not to say that such social constructs are obliterated simply because one is found within a liturgical space

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[1] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 111.
[2] See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (New York: Springer, 2012).

during the practice of passing the peace. Instead, it is to claim that these social constructs are challenged by the practices themselves. Recall that liturgical experience is not merely disordering and disorienting but reordering and reorienting as well. Such reordering takes time and frequency of practice. Liturgical practices make inclusive statements that concern *all* hearers and doers of their words, not just a few of them. Such inclusion overturns extra-liturgical social statuses not by dismissing their historical development and sedimentation but by actively overturning them.[1]

What is Music?

Now that we have a grasp on how liturgy functions, it is necessary to turn to how music functions from a phenomenological standpoint. We could certainly appeal to musicology, or audiology, or the physics of sound, but such disciplines would not provide us with an adequate account of how we experience music and how it operates within liturgical experience. Instead, a phenomenology of music is more helpful for these purposes.

Music exists as what Husserl would call a spiritual entity. That is, a spiritual entity has an *ideal* rather than real existence. While the score or lead sheet for the music might be a real object in that it is a fixed, spatially experienced object, the music itself is ideal, lacking the same kind of extension that the paper score does. Spiritual entities, therefore, are part of the cultural world, created by human activity, and do not exist in space and time. As ideal objects, they have the ability to be endlessly repeated and still retain the identity that marks them as unique.[2] In other

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[1] This alteration of the social order is phenomenologically understood as a generative phenomenon wherein the contexts of homeworld/alienworld and normal/abnormal experience an encounter. For more on what this means, see Steinbock, "Generativity and the Scope of Generative Phenomenology," 294.
[2] Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

words, music is a cultural creation that has an ideal identity that allows it to be performed repeatedly while maintaining its identity.

As Bruce Benson notes in his book *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, we tend to think of music-making in terms of the development of a score and then the performance of that score. The performance is, in this schema, merely the repetition or voice of the composers' ideas realized in sound.[1] However, the musical function of improvisation does not fit neatly into this schema. Improvisation exists as the contamination of both the ideal script or score and the repetitive performance. This means that improvisation exists as a practice that disrupts the purity of the score and also the repetition of the performance. As such, it provides a unique place to reexamine the schema of composition-repetition or score-performance that is commonly associated with music.

First, the score itself is not as fixed as one might think. On the one hand, as a text, the score is certainly a kind of stable entity with finite possibilities. On the other hand, the score is an invitation to interpretation. Just as a book is pointless without a reader, a score without a performance is rather pointless. The text of the score makes sense only within a kind of reader/performer relationship, thus breaking down its ideality.[2] Second, no performance is a perfect repetition or reproduction of the score. Every performance is, in some way, an interpretation and, insofar as every interpretation calls for the interpreter to make decisions, every interpretation is a kind of improvisation.[3] Moreover, anyone who has ever composed music understands that it does not spew forth onto the page as a completed work. Composition is itself improvisational, oftentimes improvising upon a simple idea or leitmotif that references or plays with a preexisting work.

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[1] Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 9.
[2] Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 42.
[3] Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 25.

Thus, musical composition and musical performance are improvisational and interpretive all the way down.

Playing with preexisting work is another way of talking about participation in a tradition. Ways of playing and composing are like sediment over time, establishing the conventions of a genre or the parameters of a tradition. Benson, discussing Husserl, puts it this way:

> "Tradition" is partly a composite of idealities that place an original insight on deposit in such a way that we can always return to it. However, this permanence has a cost: the writing that makes possible performance variations also entails the possibility of a loss of contact with original intention.[1]

Musical traditions only live on if they are played with and improvised upon. To fully embrace permanence for the sake of some kind of fidelity to authorial intention or historical authenticity is to miss the "essential insight" that gave birth to the tradition in the first place. Traditions are identities without being permanent atomistic unities. They change as people perform with them, in them, and through them.

What Can We Conclude?

Benson makes the following claim about traditions, "Rather than being uniform and orderly, one can always find within any tradition archaic forms that are gradually falling into disuse, new forms that are just beginning to emerge, transitional forms that never really take root, and everything in the middle that makes up what we consider to be the norm."[2] To improvise, then, is not to destroy a tradition so much as it is to enliven that which lies as a dormant possibility within it. The performers who improvise within a tradition do so in the spirit of a tradition and out of faithfulness to that tradition, even though it might appear as though they are ruining that tradition. However, as Benson

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[1] Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 100.
[2] Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 110.

notes, a loss of self-confidence for performers and composers leads them to a rigid conformity to the letter of the score or the tradition and not to the spirit.[1] The same can be said of liturgy.

Both musical performance and liturgical practices are oriented around a tradition that conditions their possibilities. Both music and liturgy operate historically, drawing from the past to construct the present. Moreover, both involve the very embodied experience of disposing oneself towards particular movements, practices, habits, and cultural contexts. Therefore, might we claim that, as is the case with music, liturgy is fundamentally improvisational? Might it be the case that the historical traditions of liturgical practice are themselves texts in need of interpretation?

It makes sense that liturgical practices are interpretive, which is why there are so many kinds of liturgy. However, this is not the kind of improvisation I am referring to. Instead, I am more interested in improvisation and interpretation at a much more fundamental level. To improvise at the level both Benson and I are describing is to improvise the structure of liturgical practice itself. It is to embrace latent meanings within past and current cultural forms and bring them into contact with the movements and spaces of liturgy. It is also to adapt and adopt the cultural practices of people in the present and weave them into ancient traditions or ways of doing things. Thus, the question is not, "Is contemporary liturgical practice unfaithful to the Christian tradition?" In its place, Benson raises the following question:

> So the question is not *whether* the church adapts and adopts particular cultural practices but how *appropriate* that adoption is. Since interpretation always takes place within a given context, that context will always have some effect on an interpretation. We could rue that as a kind of

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[1] Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 107.

"infection" to avoid, or else recognize with Gadamer that, without context, there would be no understanding at all.[1]

The Taylor Swift effect that contemporary worship forms have on the more theologically astute members of a congregation might be less a humorous form of cognitive dissonance and more a misunderstanding of the role that improvisation, interpretation, and innovation have in the development and sustenance of any given liturgical tradition. Moreover, this is not merely a question of style. It is not the case that simply adding drums to a service or recruiting an electric guitarist with a penchant for U2 is an issue of conflicting tastes in the aesthetic experience of Christian worship. Phenomenologically, such stylistic differences point more to the richness of a tradition being improvised upon and therefore enlivened than they do to the wholesale adoption of pop culture musical values to the detriment of truly "Christian worship." Rigid adherence to so-called "historical authenticity," or to differences in taste, misses the fundamental structures that get revealed in liturgical practice and musical performance. If Christian practices of worship remain faithful to the kind of experience one calls liturgical and remain reflective upon the kinds of persons formed by liturgical experience, then Christian worship will not merely be the adoption of contemporary popular music forms without discernment nor will it be the strict adherence to traditional exercises and musical forms simply because they are traditional. Instead, fidelity to how liturgy is experienced and how it forms people results in the best kind of improvisation: that which is thoughtful, respectful, innovative, and local.

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[1] Bruce Ellis Benson, "Improvising Texts, Improvising Communities: Jazz, Interpretation, Heterophony, and the Ekklesia," *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology* (ed. Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 306.

Beyond Syncretism
On the Competing Liturgies of US Civil Religion and the Church

Rustin E. Brian

"The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."[1]

"And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you, as what you can do for your country."[2]

As created beings, humans possess an intrinsic propensity to love. The question is not will we love, but *what* will we love. Moreover, with the tendency to love a large and varied number of things, our loves must be ordered. Properly understood, a liturgy is an ordering of one's love toward a particular subject or end. As loving beings, or *Homo liturgicus*, as James K. A. Smith has argued, we are in need of liturgy.[3] The question then becomes, "What sort of liturgy?" This chapter seeks to explore the sorts of liturgies that are practiced by and available to Christians, particularly as related to the liturgies of United

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[1] Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World?* (London: Cassell, 1910), 39.

[2] John F. Kennedy, "Presidential Inauguration Address," January 20, 1961. www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/JFK-Quotations/Inaugural-Address.aspx

[3] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies): Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 40.

States Civil Religion. It is my hope that in the end, this paper will help expose some of the logical difficulties and biblical heresies that are foundational for US Civil Religion. Most importantly, in doing so, we will be forced to ask whether US Civil Religion is in fact a form of syncretism, or if it is something far worse: an intentionally deceptive co-opting of Christian language to serve another "God."

What is Liturgy?

Historically speaking, liturgy, or *leitourgia*, was a Greek and then Roman term for the public or performed work of the people. *Leitourgia* was duty, public, and a bodily practice performed by persons, along with other persons, in front of still others. *Leitourgia,* was, then, an active civic duty, and as such it identified one as a faithful citizen. *Leitourgia* identified the performer as a lover of the state/empire.

As was often the case, early Christians co-opted the language of liturgy to refer not to the empire, but to the work of the fledgling Church. Thus, *lietourgia* became the work of the people, i.e., the work of the Church. Such work can also properly be called worship. In the same way that Greek and Roman liturgies identified persons as lovers of the state and formed them into good citizens, Christian liturgy served as formation into the love of the Triune God revealed in Christ Jesus of Nazareth, and identified performers as lovers of Christ Jesus. Liturgy teaches whom and how to love. If we are, as Smith claims, "loving beings," then liturgy is unavoidable, for it merely identifies and further shapes our loves. The question, again, is not whether or not we are liturgical, but what our liturgies are.

Jesus taught that one cannot serve two masters. More particularly, he says, "you will hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other."[1] The issue of competing liturgies gets at the very heart of this most difficult claim. If we are to take Jesus seriously, then we are to embrace the liturgies of one master, and turn away from the liturgies of all others.[1] There are many masters, but the argument of this paper is that the "master" competing the most for the allegiance of Christians in the US is the nation-state. It is helpful, then, to explore the various liturgies of both the Church and the United States of America.

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[1] Matthew 6:24.

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[1] Early Christians following after Augustine, who himself inherited much of this from Greek philosophy, talked about "ordering one's desires." Thus, while one can ultimately only love one thing and serve it as a servant serves a master, the reality is that as loving beings we will love many things. How we love, and the intensity of our love, is what seems most important. Thus it might be the case that while we cannot love both God and _____ (anything else) alongside of each other, we can, through discipline, learn to love other things in proper proportion to our highest love. This would seem to allow for a healthy form of patriotism or love of one's nation, but in such a way that the nation is clearly subservient to God. It is also important to note the shift in this note from language of nation-state to nation, as it is much easier to ground the love of one's nation in Scripture, whereas the state is a much more slippery entity. What is a state? Does it even exist? If so, it seems to comprise a complex and fluid interchange of currency, markets, and vacuous international economic/political interests. If it is going to be argued that one can properly and proportionally love one's home and surrounding geographical area of residence along with one's neighbors and customs, I believe that doing so on the grounds of "nation" is much more effective and defensible than on the grounds of the state, nation-state, or empire. Yoder, Hauerwas, and O'Donovan's exchange on the role of the Church with regard to the nations, for example, is very helpful in this regard. Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

Competing Liturgies?

Liturgies of the Church[1]	Liturgies of the US Nation-State
Regular worship gatherings	Pledge of Allegiance
Passing of the peace	National anthem
Singing/music	Sports events
Preaching	Constitution reading &
Tithing	memorization
Eucharist	Idolizing/worship of saints
Benediction	(Founding Fathers, military
Baptism	heroes, and even fictional
Confessing creeds	characters like Superman)
Baby dedication	National monuments:
Marriage	battlefields, national parks,
Catechism	historic buildings
Sunday School	National holidays
Vacation Bible school	Voting
Scripture reading &	Political parties
memorization (responsive	War
readings)	Shopping/consumerism
Service/outreach (soup	Defense of borders
kitchens, food pantry,	Funerals (military honors)
homeless shelters)	Fireworks
Idolizing/worship of saints	Taxes
(early Christians)	Public school
Holidays from the Christian	Support the Troops
calendar	"competition"
Funerals	Emphasis on freedom (freedom
Building campaigns	= consumer choice
Confession	Entertainment: TV & movies
Freedom from sin based in	
the cross	

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[1] Of course while both categories are generalized, any discussion of the Church as one body in the US is difficult at best. Such confessed generalization is unavoidable for this discussion of generalized liturgies.

As stated earlier, liturgies order our loves toward a particular end. Christian liturgies, then, order the loves of participants toward the Triune God as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, liturgy is worship. The point is obvious in reference to regular aspects of Christian formation and worship such as the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. The sacraments, of which baptism and the Eucharist typically play elevated and universally agreed-upon roles, are clearly high liturgies. They are incredibly formative and meaningful. Like the original Latin concept of the *sacramentum*, sacraments declare and solidify allegiance. In Rome, soldiers swore sacred oaths of allegiance, or *sacramenti*, to the emperor. Christian sacraments, similarly, identify and declare a person to be a follower of the Triune God and even serve as promises of fidelity or allegiance.

Christian liturgies, though, extend far beyond those practices that have been deemed sacraments and beyond the "liturgical" traditions. We must not mistake the lack of structure for the lack of liturgy. A lack of a rigid, structured service is itself a liturgy, after all. Moreover, it is the case that liturgy is not confined merely to organized worship services. Though such times are instrumental in fostering worship and formulating disciples, many other elements can be viewed as liturgical. Examples of liturgical acts beyond the walls of church buildings and worship services include works of personal piety such as scripture reading, memorization, and prayer; as well as acts of compassionate service, which might include serving the poor, cooking, sewing, cleaning, medical and legal aid, and so on. All of these and more, when done in service of God—and especially when done alongside, or in conjunction with, others—help to form people into lovers of God and members of the Church.

It is fairly easy to describe the liturgies of the Church. What about liturgies of the nation-state, and the US in particular? Might these practices be said to be actively and intentionally forming and shaping the love of practitioners with the ultimate

goal of allegiance and even worship? Abstractly considered, these questions might be dismissed. By simply placing some of the various liturgies of the US nation-state alongside of the liturgies of the Church, though, the very similar and competing aspects of the Church and state become clearer. The goal of the liturgies of the US nation-state is to produce faithful and obedient citizens, citizens who will vote, pay taxes, obey the laws, fight in wars, and teach their children to do the same. Consider, for example, the emphasis on the "Founding Fathers" and the intense desire to remain in fidelity to their perceived founding impulses and documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, and especially, the Constitution. Moreover, as with Christianity, there is much debate about what the most faithful reading of the Constitutions is, as well as what is the most faithful understanding of the intentionality behind this all-important document. Then there is the ordering and structuring of the lives of citizens through a calendar full of civic holidays and the paying of taxes, and of course the emphasis upon the free market and consumption as the highest good (pursuit of happiness). All along the way there are a whole host of sacred songs, statements, slogans, artifacts, and symbols that practitioners are bombarded with in hopes of fostering love and allegiance *vis-à-vis* patriotism. And of course there is the need to populate a large standing army, defend borders, patrol seas, explore and conquer new territories, provide police for world issues, and even patrol space.

The liturgies of the nation-state are very effective. Each new and successful empire incorporates the best practices of their predecessors in such a way as to render more particular results. These liturgies begin at a very young age, are pervasive, and equally persuasive. Within the context of this chapter, the overall reach of such liturgies produces a totalizing vision known as "America." This totalizing vision claims ultimate spiritual and ontological superiority, even over and above other grand

metanarratives, the Church in particular.[1] Thus as a citizen of the US, one can be an Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or none of the above, but one is always an American. Interestingly, this reality goes unnoticed and is unchallenged by the overwhelming majority of Christians in the US. Perhaps America's spiritual and ontological location should not be such an issue, for the same can be said of any successful empire. Successful empires achieve fundamental status in the hearts and minds of their citizens, more fundamental, even, than the role of religion. Much of this is accomplished through liturgy.

It would be one thing if the issue were merely the competition between two opposing metanarratives. In reality, though, the two major metanarratives in the US, the Church and the state, have been blended together, supposedly allowing for the best of both worlds. This blending is the real concern, as the assumption of a mingled, or perhaps symbiotic identity, prevents both the Church and the state from knowing and living into their true identities.[2] This melting pot is called US Civil Religion, and it allows one to employ one's faith—the Christian faith in particular—toward the end of being a better citizen.[3] Civil Religion is the worship of God and the nation-state as noncompetitive objects of adoration. It might even be argued, moreover, that in holding up the co-equal status of God and the nation-state, Civil Religion actually achieves something far more insidious: the

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[1] For ease of argument I will hereafter use the term "metanarrative" to refer to any totalizing vision, or distinct claim for the reality of all things, such as a religion.

[2] As Stanley Hauerwas has suggested, one of the most important things the Church can do is to be the Church. In so doing, it helps the world to understand itself as the world, and thus opens up the possibility for dialogue, and ultimately for the world's conversion. See Stanley Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," *The Hauerwas Reader* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Michael Cartwright, and John Berkman; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 374–78.

[3] Another name for US Civil Religion is "Moral therapeutic deism." See Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

worship of the nation-state as God. I would argue that nothing is more destructive for the Church than to understand itself to be wedded to, and especially in service of, the state. (See the chart below for examples of the various liturgies of US Civil Religion.) In many ways, the cornerstone or foundation that can be said to hold US Civil Religion together is the adoration of the so-called Founding Fathers, and the idolization of their purported intention to found a "Christian nation." This is, in my estimation, the primary idea that holds together US Civil Religion and allows it to continue to hold sway on so many. With this in mind, we will now turn to a brief examination of some of the Founding Fathers, their operative philosophies, and the documents they left for us. To do so, we will utilize the recent fascinating work of Matthew Stewart called *Nature's God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic*.[1]

Liturgies of US Civil Religion
- Cult of the Founders
- Claims of a "Christian nation"
- Inclusion of "under God" in Pledge of Allegiance in 1954
- Addition of "God Bless America" in 7th-inning stretch practices at many baseball stadiums post-9/11
- Patriotic worship services: singing of patriotic hymns, observing national patriotic holidays, American flag in sanctuaries and in front of churches, pledging allegiance in worship services
- Depoliticized Jesus (*a la* Depeche Mode's "Personal Jesus")
- Large state-sponsored and -led interfaith services after tragedies

- Secularization of Christian holidays (e.g., Christmas and Easter)
- Ultimate identity of a person (veterans in particular) at their funeral – who did they serve?
- Martyr language used for US troops who die in combat fighting terrorists (regardless of whether or not the troop was a Christian).
- "Freedom isn't free"—i.e., it comes through war, violence, and the military

Christian Nation?

Stewart's book is a fascinating and highly enlightening read. Written from the perspective of a popular historian and journalist, but with incredible erudition, *Nature's God* seems to suggest the possibility of a revival of freedom and optimism within the US, so long as it can rid itself of the shackles of the co-mingling of Christianity with nationalism. For Stewart, the US is not a "Christian nation." We should see this as a good thing, he would argue, because being more open and honest about its history will allow the US to have a more hopeful and bright future.

Stewart believes that Ethan Allen's book *Oracles of Reason* (1784), while not all that original by any means, deserves much more attention, as it spreads the philosophical seeds of the Founders. The *Oracles of Reason*, which became known as "Ethan Allen's Bible," conveys a very naturalistic, even atomistic philosophy, which holds at its apex Nature and "Nature's God." The fact that much of the *Oracles* is plagiarized is insignificant, as it only supports the idea that such ideas were circulating widely in the Western world, and in the US colonies in particular. Stewart shows Allen to be the rough and fiery pupil of Thomas Young, whom Stewart describes as his "forgotten founding father."[1] In fact, through careful argumentation, Stewart demonstrates the important role played by Young in purveying certain civic, [anti-]

[1] Matthew Stewart, *Nature's God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

[1] Stewart, *Nature's God*, 2.

religious, and philosophical ideas to many other important Founding Fathers. John Adams, relaying the words of a fellow unknown Bostonian, describes Young as, "the dirty little screw" that held all the fledgling revolutionary attempts together until they began working.[1] The argument goes that once the revolution happened and order was established, Young's open hostility towards Christianity was a public relations problem, and so he was all but forgotten in the annals of US history. Stewart's hope, clearly, is that Thomas Young will soon come to play the same role of "forgotten founding father" for his readers and thus be forgotten no more.

To understand the political and natural philosophy so vehemently espoused by Young we must turn the page all the way back to the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. Commonly—yet incorrectly—remembered for the philosophy of indulging in whatever makes one happy, Epicurus is not usually thought to be a philosophical heavyweight. Perhaps this is because one of his most important contributions, in terms of the system known as atomism, is so highly controversial, in particular with those who subscribe to certain religious systems that claim particular understandings of the creation of the universe. In short, Epicurus's atomism claims that all matter, everything that exists, must have verifiable natural origins. Stewart understands Epicurus to believe that matter comes from naturally observable origins and stays in the realm of nature, even upon death. Thus it is impossible to claim that a being who exists outside of time and the created order could be the foundation for creating anything. Thus there is either no God, or what is meant when one says "God" is something entirely different than, for our purposes, the Triune God of Christianity—revealed in Jesus of Nazareth—who is said to have created all things. I concur with Stewart, that Epicurus's thought leads toward either atheistic naturalism or pantheism; and in fact the two might easily be argued to be one

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[1] Stewart, *Nature's God*, 8.

and the same. With Epicurus's atomistic philosophy, then, the language of "God" might be used, but in a way that is in no way close to the way it is used in orthodox Christianity.

As time went on, Epicurus's thought proved to be incredibly helpful scientifically, though incredibly taboo religiously. The problem is that the religious implications of Epicurus's atomistic philosophy cannot be avoided. The issue, then, became how Epicurus's thought might endure despite its religious disfavor. In light of the totalizing vision of Christendom that held sway in much of the world for a very long time, this new look took some creativity. Stewart demonstrates that a revival of Epicurus's thought can be seen in the Enlightenment, and in particular in thinkers such as Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, and Giordanno Bruno, before ultimately finding its way into the thoughts and writings of the likes of Thomas Young, Ethan Allen, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, John Adams, etc. These thinkers, especially the key purveyors of Epicurean philosophy such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Locke incorporated Epicurus cautiously and by masking the direct influence that Epicurus's teachings had on their own. Thus "God" frequents their writings, and plays a necessary and instrumental role, but that "God" is not clearly and evidently identified as the Triune God of Christian dogma, particularly as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. This "God" became known by many as the "Clockmaker" or "Architect," who created the world and then left it to its own devices. While clearly not orthodox Christianity, bridges could be (and were) built between the two systems of thought, the result of which is the modern secular world.[1]

The philosophical/religious system of this absentee God is typically known as Deism. As stated, Deism is thought to require an all-powerful and yet aloof deity, who pushed the material world into motion, so to speak, and then stepped away. But did

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[1] John Milbank, who argues that the Secular is the illegitimate offspring of the Church, makes a similar point. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

this "God" really step away? Could this "God" step away? Curiously, Stewart demonstrates that Deism was actually thought of and called Atheism in its early days. Its "God" was Nature and "Nature's God," *a la* the Constitution.

> The defenders of orthodoxy were well aware of the theological drift of the Enlightenment long before it was called the Enlightenment. In Paris in 1623, François Garasse (1585–1631), a Jesuit priest seething with learned rage, fired off a thousand-page polemic at the liberal crowd that had gathered around [Lucilio] Vanini. The "new Epicureans," said Garasse, believe that "all things . . . are governed by Fate, which is irrevocable, infallible, immutable, necessary, eternal, and inevitable;" that "there is no other divinity or sovereign power in the world except NATURE"; and, in brief, that "God is Nature, and Nature is God." In Holland, the rigorously Calvinistic theologian Gisbertus Voetius, a sworn foe of all things Arminian, built a career out of defaming Descartes, whom he charged with emulating the example of Vanini in proving the existence of a universal deity who was no God at all. Half a century later in England, Richard Bentley, the first and most accomplished of the Boyle lecturers who inadvertently converted Franklin to deism, complained that "the modern disguised Deists . . . do cover the most arrant atheism under the mask and shadow of a deity, by which they understand no more than some eternal inanimate matter, some universal nature, and the soul of the world."[1]

It would seem, then, that in reality what we often think of as "Deism" is in fact "Atheism" in that there is no God other than Nature. As Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams,

> [Atheism] was a numerous school in the Catholic countries, while the infidelity of the Protestant took generally the form of Theism. The former always insisted that it was a mere question of definition between them,

the hypostasis of which on both sides was "Nature" or "the Universe."[1]

At the time, though, such talk was blatantly scandalous and would surely not have held sway with common religious folk for long. Thus, language of "God," intentionally deceptive as it was, continued for these Enlightenment thinkers and the Founding Fathers of the US in particular, because it allowed for general peace and tranquility in the new and unstable nation. Those like Thomas Young, who refused to play this deceptive game, were forgotten or written out of the annals of history for the self-same reason that the tactic was employed in the first place. As Constantine taught us all, state-sponsored religion is a powerful tool toward the creation of a peaceful and sustainable population. I take Stewart's argument to be compelling, that the "God" of the Enlightenment, the "God" of the Founding Fathers of the US, and the "God" of the Constitution was not the Triune God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth of orthodox Christianity, but instead Nature, or "Nature's God."

Finally, given this discussion of the "God" of the Constitution and the Founding Fathers, does it follow to call the US a "Christian nation?" Answering this question is obviously a larger task than possible within the constraints of this chapter, but Stewart's work has done volumes in arguing that the notion of the US being a "Christian nation" is not a safe conclusion. Stewart's argument comes from a secular, political, and historical vantage point. Helpful as it might be, it might first make sense to begin with Scripture in answering the question to whether any nation, and especially a nation-state, state, or empire can be called "Christian." It is one thing, after all, for civic founders to claim divine assistance, divine right, or divine support.[2] It is another

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[1] Stewart, *Nature's God*, 168.

[1] Quoted in Stewart, *Nature's God*, 196.

[2] Hannah Arendt illustrates the true desires of many of the Founding Fathers quite well, showing that it was not to take up the cross, but rather the political mantle of the ancient Greeks and Romans, in her work *On Revolution*. "When Saint-Just exclaimed, 'The world has been empty since the Romans and is filled only with their memory, which is now our only prophecy of freedom,' he was

thing altogether, though, for such a claim to actually be grounded in Scripture. Most arguments for the coupling of Christianity and the nation/state/empire harken back to Israel's status as a chosen people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, set apart for the sake of the world.[1] This notion is indeed biblical. Of course, though, the ethnic nation of Israel is surely not the same as the political nation-state of Israel—an argument beyond the scope of this paper. Regardless, even if they were one and the same, this is a status designated by God, and not claimed by the people. Certain leaders in Israel's history serve the purpose of reminding the people of their status as God's chosen people, and call them back to this, but in doing so they are not claiming divine favor but reminding of it. Moreover, such favor is not bestowed upon any other nations in Scripture.

Moving into the New Testament, we find that the thrust of God's redemptive work in the world is the creation of the Church as the New Israel: God's chosen, set-apart people, for the sake of the nations.[2] This new entity called the Church comprises people called out from all different nations and backgrounds, united in the sacrificial blood of the Lamb, Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this sense the Church is a highly political entity, with "political" understood historically as a way of navigating life in community. The Church is not, though, a nation/state/empire, but rather a reconciled and reconciling community that serves as an enticing and anticipatory foretaste of the Kingdom of God. The desire for "Christian nations" is never pronounced in the New Testament, nor is it implied. Rather, there is a clear desire for peoples from all nations to band together in the following of Jesus of Nazareth, be baptized, and form the body of Christ on earth,

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echoing John Adams, to whom, 'the greatest Roman constitution formed the noblest people and the greatest power that has ever existed,' just as Paine's remark was preceded by James Wilson's prediction that 'the glory of America will rival—it will outshine the glory of Greece.'" Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 188.

[1] Exodus 19:6.
[2] 1 Peter 2:9.

the Church. It is a stretch, then, if not downright unfaithful to Scripture, to claim that the New Testament has as its focus the creation of "Christian" nations/states/empires.

Therefore, with the understanding that the "God" of many of the Founding Fathers and the Constitution was not the Triune God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth as taught by orthodox Christianity, and that there is no real biblical warrant for the creation of a "Christian nation," it seems safe to conclude that such a distinction for the US (or any other nation-state) is unhelpful and indeed idolatrous. If these two points are taken seriously, Civil Religion's credibility is drastically reduced, and even shown to be self-destructive for Christians.

Conclusion: Beyond Syncretism

I used to see US Civil Religion as classical syncretism. Thus, in the same way that Israel constantly struggled to understand that they could serve no gods but YHWH, we too, as Christians in the US, must learn to worship God alone. In this way US Civil Religion was simply an understandable, but lamentable, manifestation of the blending together of the worship of various gods. Stewart's work, though, as well as the work of Hannah Arendt et al., seems to say something different. It now appears to me that many of the Founding Fathers, as well as the primary founding documents of the US, actually reveal an intentionally co-opted theology that is certainly not Christian, though it does use some of the same language as orthodox Christianity. Instead, it is an intentional version of Enlightenment Deism/Atheism, harkening all the way back to Epicurus's philosophy of atomism in particular. The "God" that results is merely the necessity known as "Nature's God," which is in fact synonymous with Nature itself. In the end, this Deism/Atheism is none other than a purely immanentized pantheism.

If this is the God of the US, then it is not the Triune God of orthodox Christianity, and not a foreign deity that we might attempt to syncretically worship alongside of the Triune God.

Instead it is an intentional perversion of the Triune God, made up for the sole purpose of wooing early Americans into the supposed parallel love of both Church and state. In fact, this was no parallel or symbiotic relationship, for in reality the goal was to produce good and faithful citizens. "God"—"Nature's God"—played little to no role, other than a formal component of the equation necessary to win the hearts and minds of citizens. Thus, US Civil Religion stands upon false premises: its "God" is not the Triune God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth as affirmed by orthodox Christianity, nor is there firm foundation for a biblical desire or even warrant for "Christian nations." US Civil Religion is nothing more than classic empire/emperor worship. Rather than proclaim the emperor or president to be God, though, the Founding Fathers brilliantly pointed to "Nature's God" and convinced people that this "God" was none other than the God of Christianity. Despite no similarity whatsoever, in many cases the mere choice of words was enough to win over the hearts and minds of early citizens of the US.

We must face the reality that orthodox Christianity and US Civil Religion are fundamentally incompatible, and cannot function syncretically, because the latter is an intentional corruption and perversion of the former. Ultimately, both demand allegiance. Practically speaking, a choice must be made.

Divine Retribution in Evolutionary Perspective
Isaac Wiegman

"Till on that cross, as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied…" [1]

Our understanding of Hell and divine wrath has profound implications for how we interact with God in worship. A central question on which these implications hinge concerns God's attitude toward us when we act in opposition to God or harm God's creations. Does God *literally* take on an attitude of wrath toward us? Is God *literally* motivated to seek vengeance for our transgressions? If so, then appeasement of divine wrath is a central constituent of worship. For instance, much of Christian liturgy is structured around the narrative arc of the crucifixion. But as suggested by the epigraph, if God is motivated to avenge, then Jesus work of atonement is most aptly understood as satisfying that motive and appeasing God's anger. It follows that much of the shape of Christian worship celebrates, participates, and perhaps even reenacts an act of appeasement. Moreover, on this picture, where our liturgies celebrate this work of salvation, they celebrate salvation from a Hell that is fueled by God's wrath.

While I find this view of worship troubling, it harmonizes with an intuitive view of punishment: that the value of punishment consists in giving wrongdoers what they deserve.

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[1] Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, "In Christ Alone" (Nashville: Kingsway Thankyou Music, 2001).

When we experience wrath, the objects of our experience are an offense that we feel deserves redress and an offender who we feel deserves hard treatment. When we contemplate the worst kinds of offenses, the punishments that satisfy us are not necessarily the ones that secure a good outcome (e.g., deterrence or rehabilitation). Rather, they are the punishments that adequately repay the offense. My purpose here is to explore the source of these intuitions about punishment. I argue that these intuitions have an evolutionary explanation, and that this explanation has important implications for our understanding of Hell and divine wrath.

As I will argue in the second section, the traditional doctrine of Hell presupposes the truth of a retributive principle: that punishment has value aside from its consequences. This retributive principle seems to be supported by many of the moral intuitions evoked by particular offenses. Nevertheless, in the third section, I will suggest that our moral judgments about punishment may be products of evolutionary forces, and I argue that if so, retributive inclinations do not actually provide evidence for the retributive principle. If my argument is correct, this calls into question whether punishment in Hell could possibly be justified (as traditionally conceived).

In the fourth section, I will consider the possibility of drawing on Christian scripture to support or otherwise evaluate the retributive principle—specifically, the Bible presents God as a God of wrath who seeks punishment as an end in itself, and the plausibility of retributive justifications depend on how one understands these scriptures. One option is to understand them as *informative* (or perhaps propositional): scripture is supposed to provide information about God's attributes. While these interpretations tend to support the retributive principle, they come with hermeneutic and systematic costs. By contrast, another option is to understand these scriptures as *evocative*: they are intended to evoke certain responses in an audience, responses like worship, submission, awe, and respect. I think this

view can provide a foundation on which to build an alternative to the troublesome perspective above.

Hell as (Deserved) Punishment

What is the traditional view of Hell and why does it presuppose a retributive principle? Jonathan Kvanvig captures the traditional view of Hell with four propositions:

> 1) The Punishment Thesis: the purpose of hell is to punish those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it;
> 2) The No Escape Thesis: it is metaphysically impossible to get out of hell once one has been consigned there;
> 3) The Anti-Universalism Thesis: some people will be consigned to hell;
> 4) The Eternal Existence Thesis: hell is a place of conscious existence.[1]

It is also traditionally assumed that punishment produces suffering via harsh treatment, and this assumption is close to the heart of prominent views of Hell as "eternal conscious torment."[2] Thus, from these four theses it follows that some people will suffer consciously and endlessly in Hell, producing an infinite amount of suffering. As many philosophers have noted, it is ordinarily wrong to impose hard treatment or suffering on another person. Thus, we need an explanation of why these impositions are justified in the case of punishment.

I can see two ways of giving such an explanation. First, one could point to some valuable consequences of punishment that outweigh the disvalue of suffering. Here consequences are understood as the effects of punishment "as opposed to… the intrinsic nature of the act or anything that happens before the

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[1] Jonathan Kvanvig, "Heaven and Hell," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. Edward N. Zalta; Winter 2012 Edition): plato.stanford.edu /archives/win2012/entries/heaven-hell/.

[2] Some philosophers argue that suffering is not the primary aim of punishment. Even so, almost all agree that punishment will produce some amount of suffering in almost every case, whether or not that is its primary aim.

act."[1] Compare punitive suffering to the athletic suffering experienced as one trains for a marathon. The suffering of training increases the athlete's perseverance, and one might think that the moral value of the perseverance greatly exceeds the cost of suffering. There is a commonality between this justification of athletic suffering and some justifications of punishment: a valuable outcome is produced as a consequence of suffering that outweighs the disvalue of suffering. However, this justification is effective only insofar as suffering is necessary to bring about the valued outcome. For instance, there are many valuable goals for running a marathon that do not necessarily require suffering. One such goal is simply the achievement of finishing out a marathon. While this goal might outweigh all the suffering that went into one's training, it does not necessarily justify the suffering. We can imagine that analgesic medications could make it possible to avoid the suffering of training entirely, such that one could accomplish the same goal without suffering. In that case, suffering in training would not actually be justified by the consequence of finishing the marathon.[2]

In ordinary cases of punishment, this strategy is promising. Punishment can produce many good outcomes:

1. General deterrence – i.e., punishing in order to deter other would-be offenders from committing similar offences.

2. Incapacitation [or specific deterrence] – i.e., punishing in order to prevent the offender from committing similar crimes while he is being detained and/or treated [or thereafter].

3. Rehabilitation and moral education – i.e., punishing in order to rehabilitate or re-educate the offender…

5. Catharsis – i.e., punishing in order to give victims and society more generally a healthy emotional release.

6. Norm reinforcement – i.e., punishing in order to highlight and reassert the importance of social values and norms.

7. Quelling revenge – i.e., punishing in order to keep the original or third parties from starting a blood feud.[1]

We can also add "reconciliation" to this list, whereby punishment allows a restoration of relationship between offender and victim. It is not entirely implausible that in some cases punishment is necessary to bring about some of these ends.[2]

However, none of these ordinary goods can be achieved through punishment in Hell, at least not according to orthodox Christian theology. Those condemned to Hell are eternally separated from God and from the saints, and are thus without hope of reconciliation. Presumably, there is no need to quell revenge in the eschaton, or at least, it seems unnecessary to punish eternally in order to quell revenge. It is unclear why norm reinforcement or catharsis requires eternal punishment, as

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[1] Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Consequentialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. Edward N. Zalta; Winter 2015 Edition): plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/consequentialism/.

[2] Here, one must notice the difference between the goal of finishing a marathon and the goal of finishing a marathon by overcoming adversity. The former is the goal I claim could be accomplished without suffering. The latter could not, and actually resembles the justification for suffering that I consider below.

[1] See Thomas Nadelhoffer et al., "Folk Retributivism and the Communication Confound," *Economics and Philosophy* 29.2 (2013): 235-61. I leave off the list the following: "Communication—i.e., punishing in order to communicate or express disapproval of an action." Communication is not a consequence of punishment as I have defined "consequence." This is because punishment as communication is incoherent without some reference to the transgression, which came before the act of punishment. That is, when punishment expresses disapproval, it *constitutes* a message to the offender or an act of communication. If so, communication is *not* a consequence of punishment because it is inseparable from the act of punishment and the transgression that preceded it.

[2] However, some have argued that contemporary institutions of punishment do not ordinarily achieve these ends and thus are unjustified. See Hugo Adam Bedau and Erin Kelly, "Punishment," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (ed. Edward N. Zalta; Fall 2015 Edition): plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/punishment/.

opposed to a large but finite amount of suffering (e.g., 2 million years of suffering). Likewise, it is implausible to suppose that Hell will rehabilitate its denizens. On almost any theological framework, there are severe limits to the moral improvement that can occur there. Finally, eternal suffering in Hell is clearly not necessary to deter transgressions (either for general deterrence prior to the eschaton or for incapacitation after its initiation). A large but finite period of suffering would presumably be enough to deter almost any crime. Insofar as this list exhausts the valued consequences of punishment, the first strategy for justifying punishment in Hell fails.

Here is a second strategy: one could point to some feature of punishment that infuses the suffering with value (rather than disvalue). By analogy, one might claim that suffering while training for a marathon is its own reward. On this view there is something about the suffering *itself*, or in the act that leads to suffering, that changes suffering from bad to good. For instance, each moment of suffering that attends training might be valuable as a necessary constituent of certain actions: willfully overcoming adversity, exercising one's self-control, or asserting one's agency against countervailing hardships. Each of these valued ends requires suffering as a constituent. One cannot purposely enter into a process of overcoming adversity without actually encountering adversity as a part of that process. On this view, the suffering does not *cause* a valuable outcome but instead *constitutes* (in part) some valued end.

There are several justifications for punishment that follow this general strategy. Following Kant, many philosophers take it as a given that happiness should be proportionate to virtue. This is one way of supporting the claim that deserved suffering has value, since the suffering of the transgressor is somehow appropriate to her vice. Likewise, some would say that deserved suffering has intrinsic value or that deserved suffering is just and thus constitutes a moral good. Others point to the communicative function of punishment whereby punishment communicates

censure for transgression. On this latter view, the value of punishment is constituted by the relationship between the punishment and the crime that came before it (cf. note 6 above). The point I want to make is simply that all such justifications of punishment presuppose the following principle: R—The value of punishment is not (entirely) derived from its consequences.

As I argue above, eternal punishment in Hell is not necessary to secure any good consequences. Moreover, if good consequences can be brought about some other way, then Hell is not justified as a means of bringing about those good consequences. Thus, if Hell is justified, then punishment must have some unique value aside from its good consequences and a value that cannot be achieved by other means. That is, punishment (or perhaps suffering due to punishment) needs to be intrinsically good, or perhaps good in relation to what came before the act of punishment (i.e., the transgression). I believe that this kind of *nonderivative* value for punishment is exactly what people are trying to capture when they say that punishment is deserved. What they mean is that *in relation to the transgression*, punishment is somehow fitting or good or that punishment as a response to transgression is intrinsically good. If we define retributivism as the claim that punishment can be deserved (in a way that is not reducible to the consequences of punishment), then R is one way of capturing the essence of retributivism.

Explaining Retributive Inclinations

What I now want to show is that the primary evidence for R is undercut when we consider the evolution of punishment. To see this, we must first appreciate that our own inclinations to act and judge in accordance with R are the primary reasons to believe it. Consider Michael Moore's strategy for justifying retributivism:

> I take seriously the sorts of particular moral judgments that… thought experiments call forth in me and in most people I know.… For example, Dostoevsky's Russian

nobleman in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who turns loose his dogs to tear apart a young boy before the mother's eyes; imagine further that circumstances are such… that no [good consequence would be achieved] by punishing this offender.… Question: should… the offender be punished, even though no other social good will thereby be achieved? The retributivist's 'yes' runs deep for most people.[1]

Moore concludes that this is the best way to justify a principle like R:

As even the gentle Alyosha murmurs in Dostoevsky's novel, in answer to the question of what you do with the nobleman: you shoot him…. The only general principle that makes sense of the mass of particular judgments like that of Alyosha is the retributive principle that culpable wrongdoers must be punished. This, by my lights is enough to justify retributivism.[2]

I suspect that Moore is right and that the majority of evidence in support of R will be our inclinations to judge and act in accordance with it, as manifested in "the mass of particular judgments" that we are inclined to make.

So where do these inclinations come from? They are present not only in moral punishment, but are also observed in what I call "personal punishment," whereby a person retaliates in order to repay a personal offense (as opposed to a moral offense).[3] For instance, those who seek revenge often believe and act as if revenge has value, even if payback does not actually pay. This has been demonstrated in a variety of economic games in which *irruptive motivational states* like anger cause people to perform in less than optimal ways. For instance, in anonymous one-shot games, people forgo real monetary gains in order to repay perceived offenses (e.g., by diminishing the gains of a competitor who acted unfairly).[1] By all appearances, irruptive motivational states function to outweigh immediate gains or override practical reasoning in favor of a costly, punitive response. Either way, they appear to interrupt the ordinary functioning of self-interest and deliberate choice to produce vengeful but counterproductive behaviors. There is some evidence that these irruptive motivational states lead to the development of more cool-headed retributive inclinations that also seem to support principles like R.[2]

The nature of these phenomena makes them difficult to explain. Given that people forgo monetary gains (among other things) merely to avenge or "repay" offenses, it is difficult to explain why people view these as a worthwhile aims. That is, it is difficult to explain the desirability of revenge in terms of other benefits that people reasonably aim to achieve.[3] Similarly, it is difficult to see how revenge could be a product of learning. Children exhibit so-called reactive aggression at a very young age, and this kind of retaliatory behavior can persist even when it is actively discouraged and is socially detrimental. Finally, cultural explanations of personal and moral punishment are not likely to work out. Norms of revenge exist in a vast majority of the cultures that anthropologists have studied, making culture an unlikely source of these norms.[4] Moreover, as Robert Frank notes,

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[1] Michael S. Moore, *Placing Blame: A Theory of the Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 163.

[2] Moore, *Placing Blame*, 188.

[3] Leo Zaibert, "Punishment and Revenge," *Law and Philosophy* 25.1 (2006): 81–118. There, Zaibert argues that there is no in-principle distinction between revenge and retribution.

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[1] E.g., Francine Espinoza, Alexander Fedorikhin, and Joydeep Srivastava, "Anger in Ultimatum Bargaining: Emotional Outcomes Lead to Irrational Decisions," *NA—Advances in Consumer Research* 33.1 (2006): 264–266 and Joydeep Srivastava and Francine Espinoza, "Coupling and Decoupling of Unfairness and Anger in Ultimatum Bargaining," *Journal of Behaviorial Decision Making* 22.5 (2009): 475–89.

[2] Michael A. Milburn, Miho Niwa, and Marcus D. Patterson, "Authoritarianism, Anger, and Hostile Attribution Bias: A Test of Affect Displacement," *Political Psychology* 35.2 (2014): 225–43.

[3] Thanks to Curtis Holtzen for pressing me to clarify this point.

[4] Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Homicide* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

Most cultures not only do not encourage the pursuit of vengeance, they take positive steps to curtail it. Contrary to impressions, the biblical reference, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' is not an exhortation to seek revenge, but a plea to restrain it to the scale of the original provocation. We may safely presume that, where a cultural norm attempts to restrain a given behavior, people left to their own devices would tend to do more of it. Thus, it hardly makes sense to offer cultural conditioning as the explanation for why we see such behavior in the first place.[1]

In sum, the most obvious psychological explanations fail. Moreover, they fail in ways that suggest an evolutionary explanation. For instance, the universality of revenge makes it likely that it will be explained by common biological inheritance (from ancestral populations) rather than by common incentive structures (that might guide learning) or cultural inheritance.

Evolutionary models suggest that revenge and retribution are evolutionary adaptations.[2] Adaptations are traits that survive a given selection regime because of their favorable consequences. For instance, traits that cause an organism to leave a greater number of descendants (or rather, copies of its genes) in subsequent generations are more likely to persist in a population. If so, the trait exists because of its consequences (more descendants or gene copies) for the organisms that possess that trait. Retribution and revenge may have been selected in just this way, specifically because they deter certain forms of behavior in the future. For example, if someone has a reputation for punishing offenses even in the face of immediate costs, this can

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[1] Robert H. Frank, *Passions within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions* (New York: Norton, 1988), 39.

[2] See Frank, *Passions within Reason*, 39. See also Herbert Gintis, et al., "Strong Reciprocity and the Roots of Human Morality," *SJR* 21.2 (March 4, 2008): www.umass.edu/preferen/gintis/SocJusticeRes.pdf. See also Nicolas Baumard, Jean-Baptiste André, and Dan Sperber, "A Mutualistic Approach to Morality: The Evolution of Fairness by Partner Choice," *Behaviorial Brain Science* 36.1 (February 1, 2013): 59–78.

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have certain long term advantages. People are less likely to cross a person who is irascible in this way, thus irascibility can deter bad treatment and may enable those who possess it to leave more offspring in future generations.[1]

If as I have suggested, retribution and revenge are inclinations to judge and act in accordance with R and if they evolved because of their favorable consequences, it follows that they are not good evidence for R. Given that they evolved because of their consequences, they are not a good indicator that punishment has value aside from its consequences. Let me flesh out this inference more clearly. Consider Moore's argument above. His idea is that only a principle like R would "make sense" of the particular judgments that we make or are inclined to make. In other words, if someone is inclined to judge that a particular set of actions are morally right or wrong, then she should take the inclination as an indication of the truth (or accuracy) of some principle that is necessary to make sense of the particular judgments.

Nevertheless, the inclinations to judge in accordance with R can only be a good indication of the truth (or accuracy) of R if the principle is true and if there is a nonaccidental relationship between the inclinations and the principle. For instance, suppose that the principle is true, but then imagine that retributive inclinations were the outcome of a demiurge flipping a coin to decide whether humans would have retributive inclinations or not. In that case, it would only be by chance that retributive inclinations co-occurred with the truth of the principle.[2]

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[1] Indeed, vigilante revenge is most common in conditions in which deterrence has a high value, such as conditions in which there is no centralized law enforcement, in which wealth is portable, and in which there are few effective ways to monitor or prevent transgressions like robbery and adultery. E.g., Richard E. Nisbett and Dov. Cohen, *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

[2] Imagine: had the demiurge flipped heads rather than tails, humans would have instead had an inclination to "let bygones be bygones." Thus, in the imagined example, it would only be by chance that R is true *and* humans have

So what kind of nonaccidental relationship must exist to make the inclinations a good indicator of R? There are two possibilities. On the one hand, there could be some causal relationship that produces a correlation between the inclinations and the principle; or, on the other hand, there could be a constitutive relationship that produces the correlation. Both of these relationships are asymmetric dependencies that can produce nonaccidental co-occurrences and correlations. For example, there is a correlation between smoking and lung cancer precisely because smoking *causes* lung cancer. On the other hand, there is a correlation between the redness of the chimney and the redness of its bricks precisely because the bricks *constitute* the chimney.

There are three possible dependencies that could explain the correlation between retributive inclinations and the retributive principle R.[1] First, the truth of R could depend on the inclinations. Second, the inclinations could depend on the truth of R. Third, both could depend on some further state of affairs. Though there is not space to make the argument in detail here, I have argued elsewhere that the evolutionary etiology of the inclinations makes each of these possibilities highly implausible.[2]

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retributive inclinations, and we would not trust our retributive inclinations (or the resulting intuitions) as indicators of R if we knew about their determination via the coin toss. Thanks to Matthew Hill for pressing me to clarify this point.

[1] Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

[2] See Isaac Wiegman, "Anger and Punishment: Natural History and Normative Significance" (PhD Diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2014) and Isaac Wiegman, "The Evolution of Retribution: Intuitions Undermined," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 96.2 (2015): 1–26. Here is the argument in brief. Suppose that the inclinations (I) evolved because of their deterrent effects (D). Once we know this, we know that the truth of principle R cannot be the cause of D, which is the direct cause of I (as in this graph, R → D → I). This is because Inclinations to punish could have deterrent effects regardless of whether punishment has nonderivative value. Likewise, it would appear that punishment could have nonderivative value regardless of whether retributive inclinations have deterrent effects. Thus, it is unclear how the deterrent effects of the inclinations could possibly be a common cause of (or constitutive base for) the truth of R and the

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If this argument is sound, then retributive inclinations are not good evidence for R. Given that the justification for punishment in Hell requires the truth of R, it becomes difficult to see how punishment in Hell (as traditionally conceived) could be justified. That is, unless there is some independent evidence for R.

Adding to the Evidence Base

Thus far, for simplicity I have been neglecting a significant part of the Christian evidence base. I can see at least two ways in which a Christian could draw on this evidence base to evaluate R. First, one could assess R *indirectly* by looking for additional evidence for whether retributive inclinations are a good indicator of the truth of R. For instance, human psychology is not merely a random product of evolution. Rather, human evolution has been guided in some way that is consistent with the biblical claim that humans were created. Perhaps God created us with retributive inclinations precisely because they are a reliable route to the formation of true beliefs about punishment, such as belief in R.

I do not believe the notion of creation by *itself* plays this role. This is because we are imperfect creations. Given our imperfection, there is no guarantee that all our inclinations to believe and act are epistemically reliable or virtuous (or practically or morally virtuous, for that matter). For instance, we have an ingrained tendency to infer hidden causes from observable patterns in the world.[1] This tendency is likely to be distinctively

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inclinations. R says that punishment has non-derivative value, but it seems impossible that this truth could be an effect (causal or constitutive) of the deterrent value of the inclinations. Finally, it is unclear how retributive inclinations themselves could cause (or constitute) the truth of R (as in this graph, D → I → R), since according to R, punishment has value even when it does not have deterrent effects.

[1] Alison Gopnik and Henry M. Wellman, "Reconstructing Construct-ivism: Causal Models, Bayesian Learning Mechanisms, and the Theory Theory," *Psychological Bulletin* 138.6 (2012): 1085–108.

human, and without it, a vast range of human knowledge, scientific or otherwise would surely not be possible. However, this tendency also leads some people to believe in ghosts and fairies and all sorts of hidden supernatural causes that do not actually explain observable patterns in the world. Likewise, retributive inclinations might be a beneficial product of design (e.g., as a defense against exploitation) while also leading to false beliefs about the value of punishment. Good design does not necessarily lead to reliable processes of belief formation across every domain.

The other way of vindicating R is more direct, by finding additional reasons in support of R itself.[1] One way to support R is just to point out (as I did above) that the traditional view of Hell requires its truth and that one has independent reason to accept the traditional view of Hell. If so, one need only provide scriptural support for the traditional view of Hell. Since I have independent doubts about the traditional view of Hell, and since doubts like these have been sufficiently discussed elsewhere,[2] I will leave this approach aside for the remainder of this essay.

Here is another direct approach to vindicating R. Christian scripture suggests that God is morally perfect and that God is also wrathful toward sin,[3] which if true, would directly support R (independently of retributive inclinations). Consider a particularly compelling example:

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[1] One might suspect that I am giving short shrift to the first possibility, since we are not only created by God but also in God's image. However, given the criticism above (that design does not imply epistemically virtuous processes of belief formation), creation in God's image can only vindicate R if God's image includes retributive inclinations that are themselves an indicator of the truth of R. Any demonstration of this would provide direct support for R anyway. Thus, one cannot vindicate R indirectly by appealing to creation in God's image.

[2] See e. g., William V. Crockett, *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Edward W. Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000); and Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[3] See e.g., Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 9:7; Ezekiel 25:17; Psalm 7:11; Psalm 75:8; Nahum 1:2–6; Mark 3:5; Luke 12:5; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Romans 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; and Revelation 19:11–21

For if we willfully persist in sin… [there only remains] a fearful prospect of judgment, and a *fury of fire* that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy.… How much worse *punishment* do you think will be *deserved* by those who have spurned the Son of God… and *outraged* the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay.*" (Hebrews 10:26–31, NRSV, emphasis mine).

Hebrews 10 portrays God as a God of vengeance, who punishes "those who go on sinning deliberately" merely because their sinning deserves a reaction of repayment or vengeance. In other words, God is presented as pursuing punishment as a reaction to sin and as an end in itself, suggesting that God would react in this way even if there were no other valuable outcomes for which punishment were necessary. Importantly, the punishment suggested here seems to refer to Hell.

Moreover, the pursuit of punishment is portrayed elsewhere in connection with God's wrath (cf. the "fury of fire" in Hebrews 10).

Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, they will also drink the wine *of God's wrath*, poured unmixed into the *cup of his anger*, and they will be *tormented with fire and sulfur*… (Revelation 14:9–10, NRSV, emphasis mine)

A naïve interpretation of these passages suggests the following divine psychology: in reaction to sin, God experiences an irruptive motivational state that motivates God to pursue punishment independently of its consequences.

If we take these passages at face value, R is doubly reinforced. First, if God is morally perfect and is also motivated to pursue punishment independently of its consequences, then it is conceptually necessary that punishment really does have some moral value that is not derived from its consequences. Otherwise, God simply would not pursue it in these ways. Importantly, if one accepts that God has irruptive motivations to punish, then one is actually forced to accept R (and probably also the traditional view of Hell) by conceptual necessity (when conjoined with God's

moral perfection). Second, if God is morally perfect and possesses retributive inclinations like ours, then it would appear that these inclinations (together with their epistemic role of supporting principles like R) are part of God's image and are not an unintended byproduct of God's design.

However, the attribution of irruptive motivational states to God is theologically problematic. This is because an important part of the Christian tradition presents God as *unchanging* (rather than being influenced by momentary passions), *active* (not the passive recipient of emotional disturbances), *invulnerable* to the influence of "external" emotional disturbances (like those humans experience when in the grip of anger or wrath), and *simple*, meaning that there is no division between divine will and divine passions (as suggested by the very nature of irruptive motivational states).[1] In any case, these are some of the reasons why many early and medieval theologians did not take these passages at face value. Moreover, I suspect that most contemporary theologians would accept one or more of these claims about the nature of God.

At the very least, we are not *obligated* to take these passages at face value, and vindicating R in this way carries with it significant costs. A more plausible way to vindicate R is to suppose that God persistently values punishment as an end in itself, or equivalently, that God's wrath is "bloodless."[2] Moreover, this motive for punishment is understood as 1) a persistent aspect of God's character (preserving God's immutability and simplicity); and 2) unmediated by irruptive motivational states (preserving God's activeness and invulnerability). According to this interpretation, descriptions of God's fury and wrath are like

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[1] For a detailed discussion of the history of these claims in relation to God's emotional states (or lack thereof), see Anastasia Philippa Scrutton, *Thinking Through Feeling: God, Emotion and Passibility* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011).

[2] Joel Potter raised this possibility at the annual meeting of the Wesleyan Philosophical Society and also suggested this label for the motive to punish.

exclamation marks on statements about God's persisting desire to punish sinfulness. If this interpretation is correct, then R is reinstated. Like the previous interpretation, God's moral perfection and his desire to punish (as an end in itself) suggest that God would not treat punishment as an end in itself were it not actually valuable as such.

The difficulty with this line of thought comes from a contestable supposition (shared with the naïve view): that the purpose of passages like these is to tell us something about God's nature and what God values. If we accept this *informative* view of passages like these together with the bloodless wrath interpretation (as opposed to the naïve reading), the language about God's wrath seems superfluous. On the naïve reading, the function of wrath is to explain or make intelligible (to us) God's pursuit of punishment as an end in itself. Why does God punish as an end in itself? Because God is angry. Why is God angry? Because of our sin. Anger, fury, and wrath are the causal intermediates between our sin and God's punishment. But if we then assume that God is not subject to irruptive motivational states (as the bloodless wrath interpretation suggests), then divine wrath and fury are stripped of their ostensible role in these texts. We are left with a God who values punishment as an end in itself, but inexplicably so (or at least, not for the reasons presented in these passages). The attribution of wrath seems entirely unnecessary to serve the communicative purpose of informing us of God's nature and values. We would be just as well off simply being told that sinners deserve punishment and that God will punish them in accordance with what they deserve (and perhaps, whether or not punishment is necessary to achieve some good consequence). Why the misleading attributions of wrath and fury?

I think we can better answer this question by changing the assumptions with which we approach this scripture. Instead of assuming that the role of wrath and pursuit of punishment in these scriptures is to *communicate* something about God's nature and what God's values, perhaps it is to *invoke certain responses in*

us, responses like awe, respect, submission, and perhaps even worship. By comparison with the informative views above (the naïve and bloodless wrath readings), this *evocative* view does a better job of explaining why it is that these passages mention both God's wrath toward and God's punishment of sin. We are confronted both by the nature of our actions and character (the serious nature of which is conveyed by our "deservingness of punishment") and brought to submission by images of God's disapproval and wrath. The intended effect of this confrontation is that we are compelled to take on certain attitudes toward our sins *and* toward God.

The idea is that God accommodates human understanding by evoking responses in ways that we can understand. Anger and punishment are pancultural phenomena that are ingrained in the human psyche by evolutionary forces as a response to weighty transgressions.[1] Thus, it makes sense to call on these powerful and primitive motives to instill respect for and awe toward God on the one hand and repentance for and aversion to sin on the other. We do not have to literally believe that our sins deserve punishment or that God is angry at our sins to be exhorted in this way (though these passages probably serve their function best if questions of literalness are not broached). We need only *imagine* God's attitude toward our sins and the *apparent (to us)* fittingness of punishment in response to them.

Of course, authenticity matters for evoking these responses. If a parent were to feign anger toward a misbehaving child, one suspects that this would not have desirable effects. Nevertheless, parental authenticity matters for reasons that do not apply to scripture or to divine wrath. First, scripture is presented through human intermediaries. That is, the language of wrath accommodates our concepts and gains authenticity

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[1] See Daly, *Homicide*; Aaron Sell, "Applying Adaptationism to Human Anger: The Recalibrational Theory," *Human Aggression and Violence* (ed. P. R. Shaver & M. Mikulincer; Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2011), 53–70.

through human conveyance. The reader of the passage can invoke their own sense of anger to convey (to herself or to others) the necessary emotional state, which is authentic insofar as the reader can truly deploy her own capacities to view sin as offensive and thus to "simulate" an angry reaction to it.[1] Due to human conveyance, the practical risks of God "faking" anger do not arise in this case.

Second, it is not possible for God to feign emotion in the same way that humans sometimes do. Feigning an emotion is usually set in opposition to an authentic manifestation or experience of emotion. Thus, if an organism is not capable of manifesting or experiencing a certain emotion, then the conditions for authenticity and disingenuousness shift slightly. To see this, suppose that there were a race of aliens without faces and without an analogs of human anger (perhaps their ancestors were subjected to different evolutionary pressures). Now, if these aliens ever made contact with humanity, they would eventually be confronted by the pervasiveness of human nonverbal communication via facial expressions. In their superior wisdom, they might decide to don dynamic masks that conveyed human facial expressions of anger under contextually appropriate circumstances (e.g., when making a threat or when responding to something to which they take offense). Moreover, we can imagine this aiding their attempts to communicate with us (by helping us to see more directly what an alien finds offensive or when an alien is making a threat). If this occurred, no one would say that the aliens were always feigning anger whenever angry expressions flickered across their masks. Even though they are incapable of

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[1] For a review of neurological evidence that perception of emotional expressions is mediated by simulation, see Alvin I. Goldman and Chandra Sekhar, "Simulationist Models of Face-Based Emotion Recognition," *Cognition* 94.3 (2005): 193–213.

manifesting the emotion with the full authenticity of a human, it would be incorrect to say that they were always faking it.[1]

I think the case may be similar for God. If, for instance, there is no division between God's will and passion, then God cannot truly be in the grip of an irruptive motivational state like anger. Thus, like the aliens, God's use of the language of anger (e.g., to exhort or to convey offense) cannot be disingenuous in the same way that human beings can fake anger. Thus, there is going to be a clear sense in which expressions of divine anger in scripture do not constitute faking.

A more grave concern is that scriptural expressions of God's anger are making empty threats of punishment. Nevertheless, the evocative interpretation does not carry any such implication. Consistent with this reading, God might still punish sin, but punish in order to secure some good outcome (e.g., deterrence). In effect, punishment could be justified by the value of enforcing a threat (or by the moral right to do so),[2] where the threat itself is intended to secure the deterrent effect. If so, then punishment in Hell is justified, but it is still implausible to suppose that eternal punishment is necessary to achieve this deterrent effect.[3]

Importantly, if we reconceive the intended effect of these passages (as evocative rather than informative), then these passages no longer support R. That is, we have no independent reason to suppose that punishment has nonderivative value.

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[1] I say they are not "always" faking because one could imagine that the aliens' masks were also under direct voluntary control and that the expressions could sometimes be manifest in order to manipulate and control an audience instead of conveying a response to human actions that are actually perceived as an offense to the aliens.

[2] See e.g., Warren Quinn, "The Right to Threaten and the Right to Punish," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14.4 (1985): 327–373.

[3] This raises the question of why, on this reading, there are scriptures that seem to claim that hell is eternal. Personally, I have doubts about whether this is the correct reading of any of these passages. For a discussion of these texts and the language therein, see the last section of Thomas Talbott, "Three Pictures of God in Western Theology," *Faith and Philosophy* 12.1 (1995): 79–94.

There is a clear sense in which God can make use of the language of anger and desert without actually being motivated to pursue punishment as an end in itself. Thus, on this interpretation, R remains without evidential support.

Ultimately, this is the view I favor: Scripture does not offer any independent reasons to believe R or to trust our retributive inclinations. Insofar as one accepts this view, it follows that one should not accept the traditional view of Hell. If one lacks reason to believe R, then, *ceteris paribus,* one lacks reason to believe that punishment in Hell is justified (as traditionally conceived). Thus, one has reason to doubt the Punishment Thesis (that Hell is a place of punishment); or to doubt the No Escape Thesis (that people in Hell cannot be redeemed); or to doubt the Anti-Universalism Thesis (that in the end, some will be consigned to a place of eternal torment); or the Eternal Existence Thesis. There are voices in the Christian tradition that take each of these doubts as a cause for revision. In denial of the Eternal Existence thesis, many have endorsed anihilationism. In denial of the No Escape Thesis or the Anti-Universalism Thesis, others have adopted universalist positions. Others have begun to envision the rejection of the Punishment Thesis, which is perhaps most central to the traditional conception of Hell. Those who reject this thesis usually understand Hell as the consequences of an individual's choice to be separated from God.[1] While the landscape is ever changing, these are minority viewpoints, and as I see it, this is the main drawback of this interpretation.

Concluding Remarks

My purpose here was to pose a new problem for the traditional view of Hell and to lay out a few of the most promising ways I see of evaluating to it. While my preferred approach is

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[1] E.g., C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Collier Books, 1946); Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and Love of God," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16.2 (1986): 181–198; and Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*.

among them, my intention is not to give that view a compelling or adequate defense. Instead, I argued that if punishment in Hell (as traditionally conceived) is justified, a retributive principle (R) must be true, and once we consider the evolution of retribution, the main reasons to believe R come from scriptures pertaining to divine wrath. This is because there are plausible evolutionary explanations for why human beings would find R compelling. If true, those explanations would undercut the main reasons for accepting it, leaving punishment in Hell without a plausible justification (outside of Christian scripture). The retributive principle may receive independent support from Christian scripture depending on how one interprets scriptures having to do with divine wrath and also Hell. I raised four different possibilities for evaluating R scripturally and briefly discussed the implications of three of these possibilities. On two of these interpretations the language of God's wrath is informative: it communicates information about God's nature. These interpretations either have implausible implications (on systematic grounds) or are unable to fully explain attributions of God's wrath. Finally, I suggested that the language of God's wrath may instead be evocative: it evokes certain responses in us. Among these responses are repentance, submission, awe, and worship.

If this is so, then we can begin to envision an alternative to the picture of worship with which we began. On that view, appeasement of God's wrath is a central aspect of worship. But if the purpose of wrathful expressions is to evoke responses in us, then there are many alternatives to appeasement that we might explore. For instance, we can respond with awe and respect for an almighty God who does not tolerate sin, who annihilates injustice, and who restores God's creation.

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