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The Spiritual Practice of Ritually Enacted Narrative:  
Expanding Pilgram Marpeck's Understanding of Action in the Lord's Supper

A DISSERTATION

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By

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The Spiritual Practice of Ritually Enacted Narrative:  
Expanding Pilgram Marpeck's Understanding of Action in the Lord's Supper

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Anabaptists have argued for the importance of community expressed in the social dimensions of the Eucharist while neglecting its liturgical and sacramental rooting. Thus, a jump from text to social action ensues.

This study expands upon the early Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck's (c. 1495-1556) understanding of action in the Lord's Supper. His theology finds expression in *mitzeugnus*, God's action of co-witness with the church in which an inseparable whole is formed with the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. For Marpeck, the Eucharist "makes" the church. It is an action in which no separation exists between the inner and outer reality represented. His work provides a solid place to begin a deeper engagement with the Eucharist, and also helps Anabaptists reconsider the notion of action, which they hold so dear in their ethical emphasis.

To assist in this reconsideration of action, this interdisciplinary study will attend to significant sections of Paul Ricoeur's work, which provide further development of the intricacies of action. His philosophical hermeneutic of meaningful human action shows

how action can be considered as text. Thus the Eucharist is seen as an “hyper-ethical” act” which re-orientes human action. This understanding leads to a consideration of ritually enacted narrative, an innovative window into what helps change us. Talal Asad’s work with ritual, along with other scholars, will help further amplify some of the insights drawn from Marpeck and Ricoeur.

This study shows how the overarching narrative of God coming among us in the birth, life, death, and rising of Jesus Christ is encountered in the Eucharist and can serve as an awakening critique for the church. The expansion of action in the Eucharist continues with a “turn towards the body,” leading to a hermeneutic of gesture, performative embodiment, a spiritual deepening of ritual practices, and an appreciation of the Eucharist as God’s gesture.

In sum, this study commends the centrality of the Eucharist as the gesture of God that we are to enact. Here we discover the potential of transformation within ritually enacted narrative. We become the gesture of God to the world.

This dissertation by Heidi Miller Yoder fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Spirituality approved by Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B, Ph.D., as Director, and by William Loewe, Ph.D., and Rev. Michael Witczak, S.L.D. as Readers

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CHAPTER 1

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND PILGRIM MARPECK'S  
THEOLOGY OF ACTION IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

**Voices in the Church**

Over the years, numerous people within the Mennonite church have shared with me that their pastor begins the Lord's Supper saying, "Just so we are aware, nothing is really happening."<sup>1</sup> While this is a reaction to Catholic understandings of transubstantiation, it is striking that this practice, instituted by Jesus, begins with a leader's statement of God's inactivity.

Other persons, when describing their experience of the Lord's Supper, tell of painful memories of having to "Go through a divine carwash before coming to the table,"<sup>2</sup> making sure we complete the checklist of "right" and "wrong" correctly in order to approach the table "without spot or wrinkle."

Church members of all ages are also asking, "What difference does this practice make to the needs of a world suffering from global climate change, economic turmoil, violence, abuse, war, genocide and poverty?"

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to John Rempel for sharing his experience with me, to several students from the Christian Tradition II classes at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, and to other persons who have voiced their experience of the Lord's Supper.

<sup>2</sup> I appreciate this metaphor shared with me by a woman attending a Mennonite Women of Virginia conference in which I spoke about the Lord's Supper.

As I listen to these voices within the Mennonite church, I hear us asking: Why practice the Lord's Supper if the way to the table is riddled with hurdles of purity checks, and once you get there nothing is happening anyway? If we do finally make it to the table, what difference does it make to a needy world?

Is there a way forward for Anabaptists in relation to Eucharistic practice? Instead of deficient understandings and encounters within the spiritual practice of the Lord's Supper, might there be a fuller way of understanding its spirituality and practice, a way that is congruent with biblical and early Anabaptist teaching?

### **Voices of Scholars**

A recent book of essays by scholars who have a great affinity and indebtedness to Anabaptism indicates what is lacking in the tradition and speaks of a hunger for a sustaining spiritual practice of the Lord's Supper.<sup>3</sup> Their critique centers on the Anabaptist adoption of a Zwinglian, rationalistic understanding and practice of the Supper. The Supper is in danger of becoming a mental exercise, emphasizing what we as humans know, comprehend and initiate. Thus, while Anabaptists advocate for the importance of the communal and the social dimensions of the Eucharist, the practice of the Supper tends to reinforce an individualistic, self-centered spirituality that rests on a cognitive digestion of Jesus' meal narratives but fails to acknowledge the true presence of Christ and of our need to receive sustenance from God for the community of faith.

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<sup>3</sup> John D. Roth, ed., *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2001).

Some scholars within the Anabaptist tradition also find the current practice of the Supper problematic. Theologian John Rempel writes, “At its best, Anabaptism conceived of a sacrament not as an object infused with grace but as a relationship in which grace is given and received. In my view, Anabaptism subverted the consistency of its insight by focusing so much on the human response to grace.”<sup>4</sup> John Howard Yoder also spoke of the lack of liturgical and sacramental expression in evangelical theology and church life,<sup>5</sup> but he himself is critiqued among Anabaptist scholars for reducing the meaning of Jesus’ words of memorial to the “ordinary partaking together of food for the body” that is to be lived out in its social dimension.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Finger notices this tendency when he states,

. . . most current Anabaptists approach the church in sociological, political and ethical terms largely omitting practices that make it church. This reflects a welcome transition from Anabaptist isolation into serious

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<sup>4</sup> John D. Rempel, “Toward an Anabaptist Theology of the Lord’s Supper,” in *The Lord’s Supper in the Believers Church*, ed. Dale R. Stoffer (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1997), 245. Rempel also states that early Anabaptist “views concerning the Lord’s Supper cannot be adequately grasped as essentially positive or negative deductions from some point within the polarity occupied by Luther on one side and Karlstadt and Zwingli on the other. Anabaptist borrowings came as much from the margins of the Reformation as from its centers.” This serves as a reminder that the critique against Anabaptist teachings is not fully based on what the tradition itself holds as part of its history. However, it does indicate the presence of common perceptions held by those who have an affinity for the tradition, as well as the lack of teaching and practice that many contemporary Anabaptists hold that gives rise to these perceptions. In his seminal work on the Lord’s Supper that came out of his own dissertation, Rempel stated “there were original solutions at work in Anabaptist (early) Eucharistic theories to the controversies of the day.” *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 33, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1993), 61.

<sup>5</sup> John Howard Yoder stated “what evangelical theology and church life lack is liturgical and sacramental expression,” quoted in John Rempel, “Toward an Anabaptist Theology of the Lord’s Supper,” 243.

<sup>6</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1992), 16.

cultural engagement. Yet it tends to reduce not only theology but even the church to social-ethical dimensions.<sup>7</sup>

Yoder did not intend to deny the connection between forming and sustaining the way of Jesus in communal worship and living the way of Jesus in life. Yet, his jump from text to social ethics creates a gap. While Yoder's notion of "sacrament as social process" began to offer a way out of the theological conundrums surrounding the Eucharist, his writings did not take us far toward the realization of his affirmation that our celebrations of the Eucharist "are actions of God, in and with, through and under what men and women do."<sup>8</sup>

### **A Starting Point within Early Anabaptism**

Recent scholarship among Anabaptists is thus naming this gap within the practice of the Lord's Supper, looking both within the tradition itself and within rich ecumenical traditions that have given greater prominence to Eucharistic practice. In particular, the work of Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck (c.1495-1556) provides some foundation for a deeper understanding and practice of the Supper. As a leader and writer in the early Anabaptist movement, his understandings of the Eucharist are developed in response to spiritualism in the Reformation. Rather than doing away with the sacraments, as did the spiritualists, or focusing his primary attention on how Christ's presence is/is not located in the elements themselves, Marpeck regards the Supper primarily as an action in which no separation exists between the inner and outer reality represented. For the purpose of

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 159.

<sup>8</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 72-73.

this dissertation, I suggest that his focus on action can become a starting point towards an enhanced appreciation of the spiritual practice of the Supper among Anabaptists. Pilgram Marpeck's theology for how both the physical and spiritual understandings of the Lord's Supper come together in action serves as an invitation for Anabaptists to look again at this practice.

Prior to turning towards Marpeck's theological understanding of action in the Supper, an introduction to the notion of spiritual practices is necessary. Hence, the rest of this chapter offers first, a deeper exploration of the term spiritual, and second, of the term action as used within Marpeck's theology.

### **Exploration of Terms**

#### **Spirituality: A Word Seeking and Defying Definition**

In our contemporary culture the word spirituality is used in divergent ways and is riddled with competing understandings.<sup>9</sup> Jack Finnegan, in his recent work on spirituality, likens the varied voices surrounding the topic to the Tower of Babel: "A clutter of clammering possibilities, rendered rootless and disconnected from the spiritual, philosophical, religious and creational tradition that gave them birth."<sup>10</sup> A sample of the "clutter of clammering possibilities" is offered by William Stringfellow:

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<sup>9</sup> Ralph Wood aptly argues that the term is "perilously vague. It is an abstract noun that has become so devoid of theological content that it can be attached to almost any modifying phrase." In *Contending for the Faith: The Church's Engagement with Culture* (Waco: Baylor, 2003), 165.

<sup>10</sup> Jack Finnegan, *The Audacity of Spirit* (Dublin: Veritas, 2008), 265.

Spirituality may indicate stoic attitudes, occult phenomena, the practice of so-called mind control, yoga discipline, escapist fantasies, interior journeys, an appreciation of Eastern religions, multifarious pious exercises, superstitious imaginations, intensive journals, dynamic muscle tension, assorted dietary regimens, meditation, jogging cults, monastic rigours, mortification of the flesh, wilderness sojourns, political resistance, contemplation, abstinence, hospitality, a vocation of poverty, non-violence, silence, the efforts of prayer, obedience, generosity, exhibiting stigmata, entering solitude, or, I suppose among these and many others, squatting on top of a pillar.<sup>11</sup>

The myriad of meanings that can be applied to the word spirituality points toward a fragmented culture of divergent ideas and allegiances, only to have it serve as “a pervasive postmodern consumer label” as persons pick and choose what seems to work best for them.<sup>12</sup> In light of such skepticism, baggage, vagueness and pliability, what does such a word offer?<sup>13</sup>

While a definition is helpful in providing parameters and boundaries for the word spirituality, it does not fully do justice since the very root of the word *spirituality* calls for an awareness of that which enlivens people.<sup>14</sup> The English word spirit comes from the Latin word *spiritus*. It has two meanings: the first, “breath,” more prominent than the second, coming from “inspiration,” meaning “breathing in.” Breath, something that is

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<sup>11</sup> William Stringfellow, *The Politics of Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Finnegan, *Audacity*, 265.

<sup>13</sup> Wood argues that the historical and theological distinctions regarding spirituality should lead us towards the term “piety” rather “spirituality.” While Wood offers invaluable insight to the need for historical and theological grounding of spirituality, using the word piety (especially without his depth description of the word) has the danger of reducing its use to inward devotion. Furthermore, as I argue below, there are reasons the word spirituality also defies definition.

<sup>14</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 2.

physical and invisible, points toward life. The word also denotes “those invisible but real qualities which shape the life of a person or community . . . and a person’s or community’s own ‘spirit’ is their inner identity, or soul, the sum of those invisible but real forces which make them who they are.”<sup>15</sup> N.T. Wright appreciates this inherent enlivening understanding of spirituality when he describes it with a metaphor of an untamable spring that rises forth in unplanned places.<sup>16</sup>

### Spirituality: A Need for a Discernible Source

What or who is the source of this enlivening? From where does this gift of visible and invisible breath come? Why does the untamable spring continue to rise up?

Eugene Peterson notes that if a source is not discerned, then a person makes up a definition of spirituality in order to suit one’s own purposes; this simply leaves each person to choose from a “grab bag of celebrity anecdotes, media gurus, fragments of ecstasy, and personal fantasies . . . .”<sup>17</sup> The problematic identities this leads to, writes Eugene Peterson, are, “spiritual identities and ways of life that are conspicuously prone to addictions, broken relationships, isolation, and violence.”<sup>18</sup> Linda Woodhead argues that there is a ‘New Spirituality’ which is emerging as a default religion.<sup>19</sup> Authority is given

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<sup>15</sup> Gordon Mursell, ed., *The Story of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>16</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 17.

<sup>17</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Linda Woodhead, “Sophia or Gnosis? Christianity and New Age Spirituality,” in *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?*, ed. Stephen C. Barten (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 263.

to oneself in New Spirituality. In addition, humans and nature are divine, everything is One, an organic, harmonious whole, and as a result, heaven is brought to earth.<sup>20</sup> The source ends up being me or at an elusive best, everything with which I am One.

Woodhead goes on to articulate the dangers that can result from this world-view: God is left indistinguishable from the world and self and the abandonment of any authority can easily lead to powerful personalities quickly becoming tyrannous.<sup>21</sup> Without a discernment of source, a vagueness ensues that promotes a “grab bag” approach, a default New Spirituality, or at best a psychological or health-based method that is seemingly divorced from any sacred or religious origins. Within the myriad of meanings and usages of the word, I suggest that the continued interest in spirituality points towards a hunger for something beyond empirical knowing, towards a longing for meaning and even ultimate meaning.

It is here, in the struggle for a discernible source of spirituality, that a paradox is encountered. Finnegan begins to get at this as he says, “Spiritual and religious meaning is an invitation to an encounter with something that demands a move away from self, that demands a move towards something less easy to manipulate, towards what McIntosh calls ‘a beyond-without-limits’.”<sup>22</sup> However, this Source, this ‘beyond-without-limits’, defies full definition and requires us to be seekers. In his letter to the Philippians Paul says, “. . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at

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<sup>20</sup> For further exposition on each of the characteristics, see Woodhead’s essay.

<sup>21</sup> Woodhead names more dangers, especially ones that are infiltrating the church.

<sup>22</sup> Finnegan, *Audacity*, 282.



work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”<sup>23</sup> It is in the seeking that one discovers the true Source, God. Paradoxically, one needs the Source in order to discern that the Source is God.

### Spirituality: A Confessional Approach

I am cognizant that this paradox does not occur in a vacuum. When persons use the term spiritual, they confess, implicitly or explicitly, its historical and theological implications.<sup>24</sup> Paul, in his letter to the church in Philippi, has both historical and theological grounding. Historically, the grounding is Jesus Christ who was “born in human likeness.”<sup>25</sup> Theologically, Jesus is “in the form of God” and becomes “obedient to the point of death.”<sup>26</sup> All are invited to confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord.”<sup>27</sup>

This study confesses Christian spirituality. The use of the word “Christian” acknowledges that the coming of God incarnate is central. The source of life is God coming in Jesus Christ and the continued indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

From its first beginnings Christian spirituality has sought its summit and its source, its vision of human wholeness, wholeness, integrity and compassionate being in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, and his simple but utterly deep call to a spirituality of passionate, creation-embracing love. To follow the Christian spiritual path is to choose to live to the full in

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<sup>23</sup> Phillipians 2:12b-13. *NRSV*. All references are from the *NRSV* unless otherwise stated.

<sup>24</sup> Problematics in the relationship between theology and spirituality are seen in the title of a 1986 article by Sandra Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” *Horizons* 13 (Fall, 1986): 253-274.

<sup>25</sup> Phil. 2:7b.

<sup>26</sup> Phil. 2:6, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Phil. 2:11a.

Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:21), not just a compassionate symbol of human perfection, but as an historical person who actually lived what he taught.<sup>28</sup>

This confession of *living to the full in Christ Jesus* stands in direct contrast to New Spirituality which

has no time for the most important of all Christian paradoxes, the paradox of a Christ who is truly God and truly human. The New Spirituality rightly reminds us that we are called to be gods. But it does not tell us that this must be in fulfillment and not in abandonment of our humanity. It too easily encourages a dangerous and deceiving quest of a false divinity, a quest in which we may end by cutting ourselves off from God, from others, and from our own true humanity.<sup>29</sup>

Whom do we confess? What does a confessional Christian spirituality call forth?

#### *Christian Spirituality: Performative Practice*

Christian spirituality points toward something beyond-without-limits and at the same time focuses on the Source, God. An historical and theological rooting is made explicit in the confession of Jesus Christ, the One who comes incarnate and dwells among us and continues to empower us through the Holy Spirit. Yet, there is more.

Christian spirituality is incarnational. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we incarnate Christ in our being and our doing. We not only confess with our mouths, we confess with all our being. Thus, Christ becomes incarnate in our life and action in the church and in the world.

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<sup>28</sup> Finnegan, *Audacity*, 291.

<sup>29</sup> Woodhead, 275.

Christian spiritual practices attend to such actions. Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, in their work on Christian practices, define them as “things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”<sup>30</sup> There is an explicit claim that God is actively present, and that this living reality calls for us to respond to God’s presence. Furthermore, in public worship, “the Christian community takes all these gestures and does them on a grand scale. . . . Worship distills the Christian meaning of the practices and holds them up for the whole community to see.”<sup>31</sup> This shows that the gathering of worship distills our understanding of God’s activity in such a way that we are invited to hear, see, taste, and touch in order to confess with our whole beings what the heart of Christian spirituality is really about. Through these practices we are trained by God, with God, through God, and for God; there is a coalescing of what we know, who we become, and what we do. Spirituality, and especially one that is incarnated in Jesus Christ, must reveal a performative testimony. This is about “what we actually do as believers and disciples of Christ.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, doing is always engaged in the knowing and being rooted in God.

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<sup>30</sup> Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, “Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith,” in, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Finnegan, *Audacity*, 293.

## **Sixteenth Century Debates in Context**

### **Spiritual and Spiritualists**

Not only does the term spiritual pose problems in our times, but also in the sixteenth century. Because the historical context for the use of this term in the sixteenth century differs from our contemporary context, it is necessary to explore some of the issues and debates in order to clarify meaning and to understand the profoundness of Pilgram Marpeck's spiritual theology.

During the sixteenth century, an explicit teaching separating the physical from the spiritual, or pure inward way of God, found its way into the practice and debate surrounding the Eucharist. A Swiss reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, held strongly to this view, separating what he referred to as Spirit, that which was of God, and matter, that which was corrupt. This was especially evident in the Marburg Colloquy in which he insisted on the literal meaning of the words "do this in remembrance of me," while rejecting the literal meaning of the words "this is my body." According to Zwingli, Spirit and matter must be kept separate because matter corrupts. Spirit here refers to the way God continues to work internally, in a pure form. While Zwingli did not do away with outward forms of the Supper, his memorialization of the Supper required a kind of dissonance in the person taking the Supper as his/her role was to think it through correctly and act on it in a kind of cause and effect mode which jumped over the fact that we are still embodied people. For Zwingli, our bodies were treacherous matter, matter which only led us astray.

A group, who became known as the Spiritualists, led by Caspar Schwenckfeld, took Zwingli's thought a step further. The Spiritualists held that there was no need for external sacraments, an inward partaking was enough. Furthermore, for those who were superior or true Spiritualists, a true partaking of the Eucharist was entirely inward. Matter was corrupted. Thus a form of Gnosticism was taking hold within the Spiritualist attempt to reform the corrupt practices of the Roman Catholic Church in which grace was dispensed to the masses.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the visibility of the church in Spiritualism was reduced. Its external construct no longer mattered. The spirituality of Spiritualism was interior, with a disdain for the physical. The select, superior few transcended the need for the material world. The root of the Spiritualist movement was based on an understanding of a spiritual realm entirely removed from the physical realm. God does not dwell in the physical realm, but was only active in the immaterial, ephemeral, interior realm.

Hence, for Zwingli this separation meant that any celebration of the Supper was a memorial recalling of what God has done in Jesus Christ. For the Spiritualists this separation was taken to the next logical step, a total cessation from practicing outward forms.

Marpeck rejected these claims and offered a new point of clarity. Without the Spirit and without ordinances of Christ, there would be no church. Spiritual reality would be both inwardness and outwardness brought together by the inter-action of God, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus coming in the flesh has restored matter for the purposes of God.

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<sup>33</sup> Rempel, *Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 25.

## Pilgram Marpeck

As we move toward exploring Marpeck's understanding of action, particularly in the Lord's Supper, it will be valuable to understand who is this reformation figure and his context. Pilgram Marpeck, born around 1495 to a faithful Catholic family in Rattenberg of Tirol or modern day Western Austria, was not schooled as a theologian. However, his education did prepare him to follow in the footsteps of his father, a civic leader. Marpeck was eventually appointed mayor of Rattenburg for a brief term in 1522 and finally served as a mining superintendent.<sup>34</sup> In this unique leadership position he connected with Archduke Ferdinand, the town council, and oversaw life and death needs for the miners in that region. Because mining provided great wealth for the area, this was a prominent position. However, the miners themselves, while working a unique job that required specialized skills, were an itinerant population, relegated to a separate space within Rattenberg as well as confined to a specific section within the gathered place of worship in the church of the town. Marpeck played a unique and complex role as he mediated negotiations among church leaders, the town council, the miners, and Archduke Ferdinand.

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<sup>34</sup> Mining provided a main source of funding for the emperor who was heavily indebted due to borrowing money for bribing electors and payment for the suppression of peasant uprisings. Rattenberg, Marpeck's home, was the second largest mining center in the Inn Valley. Schwaz, the first largest center, had 142 mine shafts and employed almost five thousand miners in 1526. Thirty years later, there were 68 miles of tunnels in Schwaz, with more than seven thousand miners. Thus, the role of a mining supervisor was of utmost importance to the economic and social stability of the region. Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 44 (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2008), 44-45.

Maepck's role played out in the midst of a time of social and religious unrest. The wider backdrop of reform had been brewing across central and Western Europe. The social framework of the feudal system disintegrated as peasants "demanded social and religious rights and the easing of feudal payments and service."<sup>35</sup> Such change allowed for a "growing class of highly skilled, highly paid professionals," of which Marpeck was a part as a civil engineer.<sup>36</sup> Religious unrest accompanied these social changes as:

Reformers of all varieties sought to bound over the period now called the Middle Ages, back to the beginnings of Christianity. With the Bible, Christianity's written source, they challenged much of the papal church: the papacy itself, the teaching about the intercession of the saints, and the whole penitential system of confession, indulgences, and the like.<sup>37</sup>

Marpeck's public role also brought him into contact with the teachings of reformers in the church. In time he no longer could continue in this complex role of intermediary as a mining superintendent. As he read Martin Luther's writings and the writings of other church leaders, Marpeck was drawn into a deeper understanding and love of the Scriptures.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 31. Klaassen's and Klassen's use of the phrase "bound over" may be too strong. Anabaptist theologian and historian Neal Blough writes, "Presupposing a clear and neat divide between the medieval and Reformation periods runs the risk of not seeing how deeply the Reformers and the Anabaptists drank from the well of medieval assumptions, practices and theology. Reform was not a new theological or ecclesiastical concept at the beginning of the sixteenth century. When Martin Luther (supposedly) posted 95 Theses on indulgences on the door of one Wittenberg's churches in 1517 he was responding to issues that had been gestating for centuries." *Christ In Our Midst: Incarnation, Church and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2007), 12.

While many Spiritualist reformers “mutilated the principle of the incarnation by internalizing sacramental reality,” Anabaptists were “distinguished by their belief in a visible church of believers as the literal body of Christ in the world.”<sup>38</sup> Both spiritualist and sacramentalist impulses were at work in Anabaptist thought. Marpeck, more than any other Anabaptist provided a synthesis of both impulses. In this way, Marpeck became a theological intermediary.

### Marpeck’s Theology of Action

I will frame my analysis of Marpeck’s thought in this study through the lens of action. This allows for Marpeck’s primary understanding of the Lord’s Supper as action to remain at the forefront. It also singles out the threads of what Marpeck weaves into a common whole or a single common action in the Lord’s Supper. As such, each of the components is brought forth for purposes of clarifying Marpeck’s teaching with the recognition that they are to form an inseparable whole in true communion. The lens of action also attends to a spirituality of the Supper, giving a key role to the dynamism of God’s initiative. In addition, the methodology provides a natural connection with the performative aspects of worship. And finally, framing Marpeck’s thought through the lens of action provides a direct response to those who see the Supper as primarily social action.

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<sup>38</sup> John Rempel, “Pilgram Marpeck: An Introduction to his Theology and Place in the Reformation,” in *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle, Volume 1: “The Expose, A Dialogue” and Marpeck’s “Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld,”* trans. Walter Klaassen, Werner Packull, and John Rempel (Kitchener: Pandora Press), 29.



*Action of God Coming Incarnate: Menschheit Christi*

In his early writings Pilgram Marpeck gives primacy to the action of God becoming incarnate, a term he entitles the humanity of Christ (*die menschheit Christi*).<sup>39</sup> When examining Marpeck's understanding of action, his concept of *menschheit Christi* is a helpful place to begin since this concept is Marpeck's primary defense and his argument for the use of ceremonies and particularly the Lord's Supper. This defense is formed dialogically in Marpeck, heard in his ongoing conversation with the spiritualists who argue that there was no need for the sacraments because the Supper was an interior act for those who assented to faith in God. While Marpeck's primary dialogical partner is Casper Schwenckfeld and his supporters, it will become evident he was also developing a defense of the sacraments in light of the great debate among Protestants and Catholics over Christ's presence in the elements themselves.

God's great initiative of becoming incarnate in *menschheit Christi* is a physical coming for physical people. For Marpeck, Christ came in a physical manner because we learn and know through the physical or natural world. For the Spiritualists, this made an idol out of external things. In Marpeck's teaching, these external things, i.e., the Lord's Supper, baptism, serve us, just as Christ the man came to serve.<sup>40</sup> Within Marpeck's anthropology, there is a deep sense in which this is the way we come to know God, through the natural or physical.

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<sup>39</sup> Throughout this paper I will write the word *menschheit* in lower case so as to write it in the same way that Pilgram Marpeck used it.

<sup>40</sup> Pilgram Marpeck, *A Clear Refutation*, in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and eds. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 59.

His humanity has only spoken, worked, and testified concerning the outward and, without the outward testimony, no concealed or inward testimony can be made known or revealed to us as men. Nor can an inward testimony be recognized, except when it is preceded by such outward teaching, deeds, commands, and ceremonies of Christ, which belong to the revelation of the Son of God in the flesh, and which are like a new creation of Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). These things must be received and employed in a physical manner before the inner testimony can be felt and recognized.<sup>41</sup>

Marpeck argues that our awareness of God coming in the flesh in Jesus is first a physical understanding that precedes any spiritual understanding.

For Marpeck, we cannot bypass the physical; matter matters. God understands this. God sees how we come to understand and know. God became, as Marpeck says, “a natural man for natural man.”<sup>42</sup> Later in his more nuanced writings, he states,

. . . Without the revelation of the Son no creature in heaven or on earth can recognize the Father’s work (Matt. 11: Jn. 5) . . . For that reason the Son assumed human nature, to do human, bodily works—speaking words and doing deeds. Thus, physical eyes could see him, physical ears hear him, the physical body grasp and perceive him.<sup>43</sup>

Marpeck warns the spiritualists and those around him against missing the truth that matter does matter. There is a gap in our knowing when we miss the physicality of Christ.

We are blind when we ignore our natural world. As Marpeck said to the Spiritualists,

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<sup>41</sup> Pilgram Marpeck, *A Clear and Useful Instruction*, in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and eds. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 78-79.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>43</sup> Pilgram Marpeck, *Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld*, in *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, trans. Walter Klaassen, Werner Packull, and John Rempel (Kitchner: Pandora Press, 1999), 82.

Oh, you leaders of the blind, before you pour out such lofty things concerning Christ and how He sits in heaven, I wish you would truly open your eyes with respect to Christ's humanity, and permit the Lord to rub the prepared clay (which means the outward work, teaching, and deeds of Christ done for the world's benefit) over your eyes.<sup>44</sup>

Even his use of metaphor and story calls forth a care for the physical. The humanity of Christ provided us with an outward awareness so that we are enabled to recognize the Father's work. The Son of God coming in human form to do human, bodily works—speaking and doing deeds—is a full joining of our humanity, showing us how to be as followers of God and passionately suffering with us and for us. However, this is only one key aspect of Marpeck's notion of *menscheit Christi*.

The other key aspect is the awareness that when Christ comes in the flesh, he redeems our human condition in order that we, too, might become aware on a physical and spiritual level. "The natural realities must precede in order that the supernatural and natural may exist together, for man is here in physical life until the translation out of the natural life into the supernatural is consummated."<sup>45</sup> The external work of Christ comes in the flesh, not only to redeem us, but also to draw us, through the physical, towards salvation. This does not mean that the physical can be done away with once one is drawn into salvation as a believer. The ceremonies have been given by Christ as a medicine and as a means to our salvation in order that we be strengthened in our human weakness.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Marpeck, *A Clear and Useful Instruction*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

The humanity of Christ is linked to the redemption of humanity. “Since the Adamic nature and fall has imprisoned the spirit and inward life under the darkness and obscurity of the flesh (Rom. 7:17-20), the flesh cannot with assurance be set free and redeemed in anyone without the external key (which is the humanity of Christ).”<sup>47</sup> Only if Christ takes on our full humanity can it be redeemed. This is in direct contrast to the spiritualists who reject Christ’s human nature in favor of his divinity. For Marpeck, there is no way that we can be redeemed and set free without the revelation of the Son of God in the flesh. Only that which is taken on and entered is redeemed.

The action of God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ is a two-fold event that happens. First, Christ comes in the flesh in the natural world for natural man. We learn and know through the physical world. Our sensibilities are physical, so Christ’s humanity joins us. Second, Christ redeems our flesh by coming and living, dying and resurrecting. Christ redeems our natural awareness in order that we, too, might become aware on a spiritual or supernatural level. This external work of Christ is for our salvation. Thus, there is a true joining of the physical with divine. The Lord’s Supper is a parable of this very thing.

Marpeck’s understanding of *menschheit Christi* shows us God’s action of coming incarnate and redeeming. This entering into the physical world, identifying with us, in every regard, recognizing the importance of physical reality, and redeeming us, is all God’s initiative. However, Marpeck’s understanding of action in the humanity of Christ

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 76.

does not end there. God's initiating action in Christ calls for us to act in response. Here we see a profound, dynamic quality of God's action in calling us and our action of responding. This theology, when rooted in the Lord's Supper, has at its core a sense of antiphonal worship of call and response.

God's action of incarnation in Jesus Christ is to continue in the church. For Marpeck, the church is the continuation of Christ's humanity. The great response of action is embodied in the church. Marpeck wrote, "The Son is present in his human nature externally, that is, historically, in the life of the church."<sup>48</sup> Being the church is an action, an antiphonal response to Christ coming among us and redeeming us.

For Marpeck, responding to Christ's action finds its prototype in the Lord's Supper and comes to fruition in the church. His model of how to be the body of Christ is rooted in Scriptures in which he gives primacy to the Lord's Supper. Although the Lord's Supper is not overtly named and instituted in John 13, Marpeck argues, "John justly and adequately describes talk of the Last Supper when he says that Christ has loved His own in this world to the end."<sup>49</sup> Marpeck sees Christ initiating, in the flesh, an example of love. Thus, this passage from John's gospel shows that when Christians assemble, they too are to be girded with love for one another in the same way that Christ loved them.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rempel, *Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 148.

<sup>49</sup> Pilgram Marpeck. *The Admonition of 1542*, in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and eds. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 264.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Through this act of presence in the Lord's Supper we remember love, give thanks for love, receive love, and participate in love, and are called to give the love of God.<sup>51</sup>

Responding to Christ's action also has a memorial function for Marpeck as is evident in Paul's writings. When we gather to eat of the bread and drink of the cup in fellowship one with the other to show and acknowledge thereby the death of the Lord, Marpeck declares, "Show that Christ died for you, giving His body and spilling His blood for you, and show that in the death of Christ, all your solace and life is directed."<sup>52</sup> Marpeck writes, in this act, too, are seen the works of Christ, which are love, patience, humility. Each true believer is called upon to continue them.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Action of the Holy Spirit*

In Marpeck's thought, an awareness of the *menscheit Christi* cannot come to fruition without attending to the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>54</sup> For Marpeck, Jesus comes in the flesh and works outwardly, freeing the flesh. The Holy Spirit works inwardly, confirming what is happening externally. A true witness does not occur without such external witnesses like baptism. Marpeck's understanding of the Spirit comes in response to the Spiritualists who argue that there is no need for sacraments or ordinances, but rather that a spiritual, inward way of knowing happens that excludes the externals.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> No one person of Trinity exists or functions without the other in Marpeck's thought. See Rempel, *Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 107.

Marpeck argues that there is no way of us knowing inwardly without the work of Christ who frees our spirits so that the Holy Spirit may work.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, there is no way of confirming what is happening externally without the work of the Holy Spirit. In the process of acting internally, the Holy Spirit provides comfort and power and confirms what is happening externally.<sup>56</sup>

A challenge that one encounters when articulating Marpeck's understanding of the Holy Spirit is his conflation of the Holy Spirit with Christ. Because of his dependency on the gospel of John, the binitarian tendency that we see in this gospel is also the tendency in Marpeck's work. The same binitarian challenge occurs in the early church. While some may argue that this binitarian tendency renders a section on the action of the Holy Spirit unnecessary, I argue the opposite. It is in Marpeck's muddled conflation that we find seeds of his more mature work being cultivated. Rempel writes,

Marpeck had a distinctive argument for holding together inner and outer . . . That the gospel comes to us externally does not lessen the need for it to be appropriated internally. This comes about only through God's Spirit. When the Spirit is present in the heart, ceremonies become external witnesses of the Spirit's work. This notion is the embryo of Marpeck's later idea of *mitzeugnus* or co-witness.<sup>57</sup>

Finger addresses this conflation further, stating that Marpeck's understanding of Christ's presence as Holy Spirit in the Supper was a way of affirming that Jesus was present in power, though not substantially. The Spirit is not really Christ's divine nature, but the

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<sup>55</sup> Marpeck, *A Clear and Useful Instruction*, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Marpeck, *A Clear Refutation*.

<sup>57</sup> Rempel, *Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 99.

active, divine medium through which he is with us; or the co-witness flowing from Christ and back to him who draws us into the divinizing Trinitarian dynamic.<sup>58</sup>

In his later work Marpeck develops his notion of *mitzeugnus* (co-witness), delineating the role of the Holy Spirit even further while at the same time showing how God works as one essence. Such a development was found in his naming of the sacraments:

Just as the Holy Spirit, through faith and with faith, assures and sanctifies us, brings us to obedience, and leads us according to God's pleasure, so also our spirit (which has peace and oneness with Christ's Spirit) brings flesh and blood into obedience, with all the bodily (*leiblichen*) works of faith in Christ. They are baptism, Lord's Supper, footwashing, laying on of hands, teaching, discipline, prayer, almsgiving, and clothing ourselves in love for our neighbour.<sup>59</sup>

Evidence of this was also found in his writing on the spiritual action of a sacrament,

. . . The essence in the heart of believers compensates for and replaces everything which is attested by faith. It testifies to the truth that the external is together with the internal and the internal with the external. It's as if two parts of a person make up a whole person. Under the Holy Spirit, inward and outward obedience flow together. First we need a birth into purity. Then the inward obedience of our spirit belongs to the Spirit of Christ, who assures our spirit that outward obedience is possible for the outwards person.<sup>60</sup>

The Holy Spirit is our assurer, sanctifier, and the one drawing us into obedience and leading us according to "God's good pleasure." The very flow of the inward and outward

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<sup>58</sup> Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 192-193.

<sup>59</sup> Marpeck, *Pilgram Marpeck's Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld's Judgement*, 76.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 81.



obedience working together comes from the Holy Spirit. Rather than reducing the need for external practices, Marpeck argues that this calls us more deeply towards them.

In sum, Marpeck argues that there is a “birth into purity,” as Christ comes in the flesh and works outwardly.<sup>61</sup> However, the awakening of our spirit and response of faith is the work of the Holy Spirit who assures, sanctifies, comforts, empowers, and confirms what is happening. Furthermore this inward and outward obedience flowing together is a marker of how the Spirit assures us that outward obedience is possible.<sup>62</sup> The Spirit enables us to partake faithfully. The Spirit provides the life-giving flow of the joining of spirit and matter.

#### *Action of the Trinity*

Up to this point, we have focused on the action of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and of the Father. To be true to the development of Marpeck, this action is rooted in his understanding of the Trinity and *mitzeugnus* (co-witness). While Marpeck does not always have an inner consistency to his thought or attend correctly to his explanation of the Trinity, he does see the interrelationship of the Trinity and how God is made known as the centerpiece for action in the Lord’s Supper.

Marpeck’s understanding of the Trinity is no less than an inseparability or a joining of that which is happening inwardly and outwardly. Through this joining of the inner and outer, Marpeck provides an alternative to Spiritualism and to the established

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

versions of reform. That the gospel comes to us externally does not lessen the need for it to be appropriated internally. For Marpeck, the external is the order through which the invisible is seen and becomes operative for us.

Synthesizing Marpeck's theology, Rempel states that the defense of ceremonies is based on claims grounded in Christ's human nature, set within a Trinitarian framework, "The Father's drawing of people to himself is revealed through the Son; belief in the Son is possible only when one is drawn by the Father. The Spirit of God becomes known through the humanity of Christ."<sup>63</sup> Through Christ, there is an external key and awareness. Through the Spirit there is an inward key and awareness. This is an interaction of Christ and the Spirit. This is even more pronounced in Marpeck's more mature work:

For that which the Father does, the Son of Man does simultaneously: the Father as Spirit, internally: the Son, as Man externally. Therefore, the external baptism and the Lord's Supper in Christ are not signs; rather they are the external work and the essence of the Son. For whatever the Son sees the Father doing, the Son also does immediately.<sup>64</sup>

Here we see that co-witness takes on a form of one essence.

The action of God in the Supper is that of unity. It is constituted by concomitant acting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a joining of the inward and the outward. This interrelationship of God and how God is made known is the core action of the Supper.

However, the Supper is not complete in the interrelationship of the Trinity. Rather, our obedient response to God in faithful breaking of bread and drinking of the cup is part

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<sup>63</sup> Rempel, *Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 99.

<sup>64</sup> Marpeck, *The Admonition of 1542*, 195.

of Marpeck's understanding of co-witness. *Mitzeugnus* is used to describe a single, common action. This action is initiated by God, incarnated in the Son, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and calls for our response of faith which is embodied in the Church.

The very practice of the Supper for Marpeck is an action that makes the Church. Marpeck traced the etymology of the word sacrament, and saw within sacrament both a commitment and a holy covenant or oath which vouched for the fact that the Supper represents what it signifies. Hence, for Marpeck, sacrament was never static. The action is *signa* (signs) united with Christ, the *res* (reality). The sign cannot be separated from the reality. The elements of the Supper belong to the realm of the natural world and are used to participate in the supernatural essence and spiritual activity of God. There is a meeting within the world of senses between the divine and the human.

In sum, Marpeck's proposal of co-witness or *mitzeugnus* is one of his greatest contributions to a full understanding of the Lord's Supper, particularly among Anabaptists. The notion of action for Marpeck is central to his theology. The Lord's Supper is primarily an action. It is an action of God becoming incarnate in the flesh of Jesus Christ. It is an action of the Holy Spirit awakening and enlivening our faith. It is an action of us, as the Church, responding to God's actions. It is an action of the sign, the bread and the cup, becoming what it signifies, the thing itself. It is the action of forming one essence and a uniting of inner in outer. This linking together, through the Holy Spirit, is alive, active, and dynamic. The elements in the supper become what they signify. The

believers in the Supper become what they are called to be as they take, bless, break, and eat and drink of the Supper in co-witness.

### **Making a Case for Ritual Action**

So why is ritual action necessary? Because matter is not inconsequential to this action, it is of central importance. Furthermore, we are enacting not just any actions, but those of God coming in Jesus Christ, taking, blessing, breaking, and eating and drinking. If we listen closely to Pilgram Marpeck, he makes a case for ritual action because the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is an action itself. It is an action of God coming in Jesus Christ. It is an action of the Holy Spirit at work inwardly so that we are enlivened in faith and empowered to serve. It is God within Trinity and God within creation, God's co-witnessing together. It is the action of joining in with God through the material world as embodied beings.

We cannot do away with matter because matter matters. We are material, embodied beings and we need a material, embodied way of entering into and participating in God.

The Supper is no mere reminder. The Supper is the very interaction between the spirit and matter. The Supper is the marker of the central reality of how God interacts with us.

Whoever has been inwardly baptized, with belief and the Spirit of Christ in his heart, will not despise the external baptism and the Lord's Supper which are performed according to Christian, apostolic order; nor will he dissuade anyone from participating in them. Rather, he should willingly accept them and practice them, not merely imitating them externally in an

apish manner, but in truth and in the spirit with which the true worshipers use external means, such as the mouth, hands, and knees . . . Whenever the heart laughs, is compassionate, rejoices, or gets angry, then the mouth, eyes, head, hands, and feet laugh, are compassionate, rejoice, get angry, move, and grasp without delay the external things which correspond to anger, joy, mercy, or laughter. The opposite is also true. So it is with baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>65</sup>

The use of externals is made to parallel with what is happening inwardly for Marpeck.

This is worshipping God with our whole being. This is living in congruence with our inward and outward being and having it be interconnected with God. This is the intent of any actions . . . creating a mirror with what really is in God. The most precise or enlivening mirror that we are commanded to enter into is that of the Eucharist. This has us entering into and mirroring God. This has us connecting to how God chose to connect to our suffering in an intimate way in Jesus Christ.

Entering into the Lord's Supper requires reason to surrender to faith, faith that is beyond our reason. As Marpeck writes, "Become like Mary Magdalene, select the better part at the feet of Christ. Surrender reason and skill to the true faith of Christ. If reason is surrendered, they would better recognize the words of our Lord Christ, Paul and other apostles. Christ commanded performing and practicing the work of faith such as instruction, baptism, the Lord's Supper . . ."<sup>66</sup>

The performative aspect of the Supper takes on fresh significance as we examine Marpeck more closely. The inter-action is essential to what is happening. Marpeck, an

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<sup>65</sup> Marpeck, *A Clear Refutation*, 65.

<sup>66</sup> Marpeck, *A Clear and Useful Instruction*, 72.

early Anabaptist did not see the Supper as a peripheral practice, but instead a central, sustaining practice of the church.

In making a case for the centrality and importance of ritually-enacted narrative, Marpeck argues that the ceremonies are parables of the kingdom of God. “The ceremonies of the church are like the parables of the kingdom: by means of them we grasp the workings of God.”<sup>67</sup> Parables defy our reason and ask us to wait with and in a story. They are a window that God invites us into in order to get inside of what God is about so that we can share this room with others. Eucharist is at the apex of these ceremonies. The most intimate, passionate, earthly, painful, gift of God coming incarnate is evoked in the Eucharist. Not to enter into this profound “parable of the kingdom” is to stand on the sidelines of the greatest gift of God entering into history in Jesus Christ and continuing his presence and being made known in the Holy Spirit. It is fascinating that this is a parable for Marpeck, a way of making meaning when so much seems meaningless. The parable is a way of framing reality within a larger reality or story. It is a story that defies reason. It is a story that calls for change on behalf of the listener. It is a story that requires our active participation. A parable is a story in motion. We grasp the working of God through enacting the story. We enter into the working of God through enacting the story.

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<sup>67</sup> Rempel, *Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 100.

## CHAPTER 2

### PAUL RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICAL THEORY: BEYOND TEXT TO THE INTRICACIES OF MEANINGFUL ACTION

*Then the disciples came and asked him (Jesus), "Why do you speak in parables?" He answered,*

*"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:*

*'You will indeed listen, but never understand,  
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.  
For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes;  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I will heal them.'*

*But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.  
Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and hear what you hear, but did not hear it."*<sup>1</sup>

In the previous chapter we discovered that Pilgram Marpeck named the Eucharist, and other sacraments, as a parable of the kingdom. His work helps us uncover some of the "secrets of the kingdom" in his theological explication of God's action, or interaction, to which we are continually invited and in the spiritual practice of the sacraments.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 13:10-17.

Rather than do away with a sacrament like the Eucharist, as did his spiritualist contemporaries, Marpeck argued that in the action of the Eucharist our seeing, our hearing, and our tasting could be drawn into the very seeing, hearing and tasting of God, through the incarnation and the ongoing enlivening of the Holy Spirit. In this way he provided a window into the transformative action of God which is at work as we engage in the Eucharist. Thus Marpeck offered a prophetic voice not only to his contemporaries, but also to the contemporary situation of Anabaptists.<sup>2</sup>

While Marpeck provided theological and confessional foundations for a Eucharistic spirituality rooted in action, further understanding of action is needed. Twentieth-century French philosopher Paul Ricoeur provided such an expansion as he extended his hermeneutical theory beyond the text to meaningful action. His understanding of meaningful action will help this study move forward, particularly in exploring the transformative potential of ritually-enacted narrative as it pertains to the Eucharist and its life-shaping potential. As will become evident in this chapter and in chapter four, such a nuanced understanding of the intrinsic features of meaningful action fosters a deeper congruence between worship and life.

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<sup>2</sup> Because of Marpeck's desire to hold the inner and outer together as well as invite people into the very inter-action or co-witness of God, his work has implications beyond Anabaptists. He provides a way into ecumenical conversations about the ritual action of the Eucharist. John Rempel articulates some of this in a paper he presented entitled, "Critically Appropriating Tradition: Pilgram Marpeck's Experiments in Corrective Theologizing." Some of the ecumenical implications of Marpeck's approach will be discussed in chapter four. (Paper presented at the "Anabaptist Convictions after Marpeck" conference, Bluffton, Ohio, Bluffton University June, 26 2009).



### Introduction to Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory

Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory coalesced around what he saw as intrinsic to understanding itself. For Ricoeur, understanding included explanation (*verstehen*) and interpretation (*erklären*).<sup>3</sup> We exist in a lived time in which we can know and understand and at the same time are given a cosmic horizon which we cannot know and understand. Ricoeur explored the mediation between lived time and the cosmic horizon by means of historical and fictive narrative.<sup>4</sup> As David Klemm and William Schweiker contend, "Ricoeur's hermeneutics shows how time is the horizon of meaning and how narrative gives time a specific human form."<sup>5</sup> The Word or Christian message comes to us from beyond the cosmic horizon and continues to be spoken to us. We know and understand ourselves through the dynamic interaction between what we can know and that which is given to us. For Ricoeur, the goal of hermeneutics was to assist or lift readers above their life and suffering (transcendence) in order to receive the 'world' from beyond presented by the text. For Ricoeur, the same emplotment, configuration, and way-of-being in the world potential of the text was also offered in meaningful action. In order to encounter this transformative Word, which continues to be given to us, we need movement, gestures, and symbols.

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<sup>3</sup> Much of the introductory material in this paragraph comes from an overview of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics provided in the introduction by David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1993), 1-10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Ricoeur provided a way of understanding the intricacies of action.<sup>6</sup> It is not just any actions on which I will be focusing, but those that Ricoeur named as “hyper-ethical acts that flow from the Gospel”<sup>7</sup> and “reorient human action in response to the excess disproportion or extravagance of the Naming of God, such as proclamation, liturgy, praise.”<sup>8</sup> Engaging the Eucharist is such a hyper-ethical action. A heightened awareness of this hyper-ethical ritual action or “parable of the kingdom” can help us shift, from “nothing happening” in the Eucharist or a cognitive digestion of remembering, towards eyes that see and ears that hear.

### **Meaningful Action Considered as Text: Making Known the Intrinsic Features of Action**

Since much of the church gives primacy to the written Word, especially traditions that emerged during the Reformation, what role can a ritual action like the Eucharist play in gathered worship? Just as there is a potency within the Scriptures of the church, can there also be a potency within ritual actions? Is there such a thing as meaningful action which we enact *and* which also ‘reads’ us or acts upon us? Ricoeur provided an

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<sup>6</sup> John Thompson argues that Ricoeur provided a ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’ in how he approached the relationship of hermeneutics with the social sciences. Such a lens is helpful as it gives greater precision to how Ricoeur comes at the intricacies of action and “demonstrates that it has a great deal to offer to many disciplines of thought.” Such an approach in and of itself has something to offer an interdisciplinary field like spirituality. See *Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*. Ed., trans., and intro. John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 19.

<sup>7</sup> John van den Hengel, “From Text to Action in Theology” in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God: The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricoeur*, Religion, Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Band 17, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny and Peter Kenny, Band 17 (Munster: LIT, 2004), 133.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

innovative and resounding yes to these questions. In his seminal essay, “The Model of Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text,” he argued that his hermeneutical theory could be extended to the field of social sciences whose primary object was meaningful action.<sup>9</sup> If an action shares the constitutive features of a text, then that action also has ontological and teleological potential to offer understanding and knowing.

Ricoeur offered four traits or ways in which the constitutive features of meaningful action conform to the paradigm of a text. His insight heightened the role of action in the social sciences and legitimized the study and interpretation of action. In order to further an understanding of these abstract traits, I will provide an initial application to the liturgical action of the Eucharist.

#### Fixation in Speaking, Fixation in Writing, Fixation in Action

First, just as there is a fixation that happens in writing, so too is there an objectification or fixation in meaningful action.<sup>10</sup> Writing fixes or objectifies not the event of speaking but the “said” of speaking. Writing inscribes the “noema” or meaning of the speech event. It is the fixation of discourse through means of language, alphabet, and grammatical form. What is spoken becomes objectified and exteriorized in the text. The noema is carried within the text. While something is fixed or objectified onto a page, so too is something fixed or objectified in meaningful action.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “The Model of Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text,” in, *Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* ed., trans., and intro. John B. Thompson.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 205.

Action also carries a noema which is not the event in and of itself, but the meaning of the event. An action has *locutionary traits* in which the propositional content and “matter” is the same. This matter or structure of action can be both fixed and detached. Fixation or propositional content can be identified and reidentified as the same. A meaningful action, like a text, also has *illocutionary traits*; what is done is inscribed and can leave its mark in time. For Ricoeur,

an action, like a speech-act, may be identified not only according to its propositional content, but also according to its illocutionary force. Both constitute its ‘sense-content’. Like the speech-act, the action-event (if we may coin this analogical expression) develops a similar dialectic between its temporal status as an appearing and disappearing event, and its logical status as having such-and-such identifiable meaning or ‘sense-content.’<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the fixation of action is being able to objectify the action while holding to the meaning of the action as well as what is done in the action.

According to Ricoeur’s theory, the very actions of the Eucharist could also carry the trait of fixation. For example, it is not only the act *of* breaking the bread, but what we do, or more precisely what God does, *in* the breaking bread. The noema or meaning of breaking bread during the Eucharist is carried within the action itself. What God has done throughout history, how God came incarnate in Jesus Christ, and God’s ongoing advocacy through the presence of the Holy Spirit are all carried within the very actions of the Eucharist.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## Autonomisation of Text, Autonomisation of Action

The second way the constitutive features of meaningful action conform to the paradigm of a text is in its autonomisation.<sup>13</sup> Through the very inscribing of the text, there is a dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention. In written discourse the author's intention and the meaning of the text no longer coincide. As Ricoeur stated, the "text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say."<sup>14</sup>

The notion of "inscription" as a distance between the intention of the author's meaning of the text also occurs between an agent and its action.<sup>15</sup> An action can be detached from its agent and develop consequences of its own. When this occurs, "An action leaves a 'trace,' it makes its mark when it contributes to the emergence of such patterns which become the *documents* of human action."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the action itself carries a 'life' and consequences of its own. As such, "This autonomisation of human action constitutes the *social* dimension of action."<sup>17</sup>

This is especially true in the Eucharist. Jesus took a loaf of bread, gave thanks, and said, "This is my body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."<sup>18</sup> The act of taking, thanking, breaking, eating, and sharing left its finite horizon of what was

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> I Cor. 11:24.

done with the disciples in the upper room and now develops consequences of its own that reverberate through history. These actions leave a trace and carry a life that has consequences of its own.

### Text Opens Up a “World,” Meaningful Action Opens up a “World”

Third, just as a text opens up a world, so too does meaningful action open up a world. For Ricoeur, the text moved beyond its initial relevance and thus “‘decontextualises’ itself from its social and historical conditions of production, opening itself to an unlimited series of readings.”<sup>19</sup> This was a detaching from the *Umwelt*, cosmological dimension, of the ostensive or contextual references of the original situation and an opening up of the *Welt*, or ontological dimension, “projected by the non-ostensive references of every text that we have read, understood and loved.”<sup>20</sup> These references open up the world and new dimensions of being-in-the-world.

A meaningful action develops meanings of “importance” which can be actualized or fulfilled in situations other than the one in which this action occurred.<sup>21</sup> Ricoeur wrote, “As a result of this emancipation from the situational context, discourse can develop non-ostensive references which we call a ‘world,’” as an ontological dimension, not cosmological.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, “The meaning of an important event exceeds, overcomes,

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<sup>19</sup> Thompson, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ricoeur, “Meaningful Action Considered as Text,” 202.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 207. See also: Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domain*, trans. Riender Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 144.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

transcends the social conditions of its production and may be re-enacted in new social contexts. . . A work does not only mirror its time, but it opens up a world which it bears within itself.”<sup>23</sup>

Such a *Welt* can be opened up in the liturgy. Rodney Clapp argues that the liturgy, “far from being an escape from the real world, is the real world.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore,

In worship we vigorously en flesh a restored and re-created world--a world returned to its genuine normality through holy abnormality--in a civic and cultural form, a public, powerful, visible, political form that challenges and stands in contrast to all other cultures. Worship is not simply world-changing. It is, indeed, world-making.<sup>25</sup>

This world-making, new way of being-in-the-world is envisioned in the actions of Jesus with his disciples in the upper room. As there is an emancipation beyond the upper room, the world opened up by the very Passion of Jesus develops meanings which can be actualized or fulfilled in situations other than the upper room. Paul called the church in Corinth toward this kind of invitation when he wrote, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, a new world is opened up again and again as we enact what Jesus enacted with his disciples in our contexts of worship gatherings. So, we both transcend our context as we partake and enter into this ‘world’ and enter more fully into our contemporary context with a new way of being in the world as a result of this ritual action.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>24</sup> Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: the Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 112.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>26</sup> I Cor. 11:26.

Text as Open Work Addressed to Indefinite Range of Possible “Readers,”  
Indefinite Range of Possible Actors in Action

Fourth, like a text, human action is an “open work” which is addressed to an indefinite range of possible “readers.” Ricoeur stated that “what is written is addressed to the audience that it creates itself.”<sup>27</sup> For Ricoeur, this marks the “spirituality of writing.”<sup>28</sup> The wide-open, indefinite, uncontrolled audience for a text was its spirituality. So too, was there also a spirituality of meaningful action. The meanings of a particular action are ‘in suspense’ as a new reference and fresh relevance can occur each time it was engaged.<sup>29</sup> All significant events and deeds are opened to this kind of practical interpretation through present praxis.

The meaningful actions of the Eucharist are addressed to an indefinite range of possible “readers” or “actors.” The audience that the Eucharist creates is the church. In other words, the very practice of meaningful action in the Eucharist sustains and makes the church be church, the body of Christ. However, the “open work” of the meaningful action of the Eucharist is addressed to an indefinite range of people, it is addressed to the world through the church. This is no less than a spirituality of action that is wide-open and indefinite.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ricoeur, “Meaningful Action Considered as Text,” 202.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>30</sup> When Ricoeur uses the word spirituality, he is referring to what is non-material, what cannot be written down. I have chosen to emphasize the dynamic way in which he is using the word spirituality in this work. However, as I articulated in chapter one and will continue to do so in chapter three, my use of the word spirituality includes the material world since we are embodied people.



In order to go further with Ricoeur's understanding of action, I turn now to narrative, to what he considered central in making action meaningful and tangible.

### **Narrative: Rendering Action as Meaningful**

Ricoeur argued that humans were narratively constituted. Narrative understanding was a primordial category in which history and historical knowledge found its grounding.<sup>31</sup> Narrative was that work which rendered experience significant and humanly meaningful, giving it structure and form. Yet, the structure was not static. It was a movement that transformed its elements into a unity or whole.

Narrative was “a *mimesis praxeos*, a productive imitation of action.”<sup>32</sup> It was a discourse that allowed for a narrative event to “‘stand in for’ and bear correspondence to the ‘real event.’”<sup>33</sup> This “standing in for,” according to Ricoeur, was no less than seeing-as, an epistemological reality, revealing a being-as, an ontological reality.<sup>34</sup> What narrative organized and made intelligible was action and passion in a human temporality. While our understanding was mediated by human action, Ricoeur recognized that this mediation was housed in narrative. The very way we are constituted in our identities is narrative in form. In other words, narrative helps us come together as humans, with humans, and helps us understand and know our actions as meaningful.

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<sup>31</sup> Ward, Graham. *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, 2nd ed., Studies in Literature and Religion (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>32</sup> John van den Hengel, 130.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>34</sup> Ward., 56.

### Structure of Narrative

In order to understand Ricoeur's innovative structure of narrative, *mimesis praxeos*, I look briefly at how he related time and narrative. Ricoeur sought to bring together two seemingly disparate understandings of time and narrative, illustrated by Augustine's *Confessions* and Aristotle's analysis of plot in *Poetics* respectively. He argued that time finds its full meaning for humans in narrative while narrative comes to its fulfillment in a specific time. This "circular thesis" was articulated in his book, *Time and Narrative*, in which he stated, "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience."<sup>35</sup>

Ricoeur saw *mimesis* as a three stage process (*mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, and *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>) in which the dynamic of emplotment (*muthos*) happened in the middle stage. The construction of this mediation between time and narrative was intended to be the task of hermeneutics, by a specific author, to lift people above life and suffering in order to be change agents through the way they act. As we have already begun to see, Ricoeur applied this same emplotment and hermeneutic to meaningful action itself.

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago, 1984), 3.

*Pre-understanding*

*Mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, or pre-understanding, formed the first stage in what Ricoeur called the “composition of a narrative.”<sup>36</sup> For Ricoeur, the “composition of the plot is grounded in a pre-understanding of the world of action.”<sup>37</sup> The richness of the meaning of *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> as an imitation or representation of action “is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its symbolic system, its temporality.”<sup>38</sup> In a narrow sense, action was understood as what someone does. Yet, even within this narrow sense of action, goals and motives were implied, committing the one on whom the action depended and explaining why someone does or did something. So the infinite opening of the “Why?” of the action was connected to the finite “Who?” of the action.<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur did not stop here, for action also implied interaction with others which raised interrelated questions of “what,” “why,” “who,” “how,” “with whom,” or “against whom” in regard to any action.<sup>40</sup> Thus, to understand a story was to get at both the practical, interrelated understandings of actions and the cultural tradition from which proceeds the “typology of plots.”<sup>41</sup>

In *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, symbolic features of a culture govern those aspects of acting. This notion of symbol is that which accentuates the public character of any meaningful articulation. In agreement with Clifford Geertz, Ricoeur wrote that “culture is public

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

because meaning is. . . . It is not in the mind, not a psychological operation destined to guide action, but a meaning incorporated into action and decipherable from it by other actors in social interplay.”<sup>42</sup> It is not just the action itself, but the meaning that makes up or is in the action.

A symbolic system thus furnishes a descriptive context for particular actions. In other words, it is “as a function of” such a symbolic convention that we can interpret this gesture as meaning this or that. The same gesture of raising one’s arm, depending on the context, may be understood as a way of greeting someone, of hailing a taxi, or of voting. Before being submitted to interpretation, symbols are interpretants internally related to some action.<sup>43</sup>

A symbolic system also provides a rule or norm. Out of this, actions can be evaluated. In fact, Ricoeur claimed that an inherent feature of action is that “it can never be ethically neutral.”<sup>44</sup>

Another name Ricoeur gave to this stage was participation. He used Aristotle’s notion of *mutatis mutandi*, in which we participate in common reality that already provided us with preliminary preunderstanding and a fundamental belonging. Thus, for Ricoeur, interpretation was always undertaken within certain parameters of a tradition. David Power, in his book, *The Eucharistic Mystery*, notes this very thing when he writes, “The suffering of Christ and love of Christ do not transform the world by mere fact of having occurred. They are salvific in being brought to expression within an already

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 59.

existing narrative tradition.”<sup>45</sup> The existing, common tradition in which Christians share, for Ricoeur, was the Paschal Mystery.

### *Configuration*

*Mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, also known as configuration or emplotment, formed the crux, or as Ricoeur stated, “pivot,” of his dynamic structure of narrative. Ricoeur wrote,

... the very meaning of configuring operation constitutive of emplotment is a result of its intermediary position between *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> and *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>, which constitute the two sides [*l’amont et l’aval*] of *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>. By saying this, I propose to show that *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> draws its intelligibility from its faculty of mediation, which is to conduct us from the one side of the text to the other, transfiguring the one side into the other through its power of configuration.<sup>46</sup>

This mediating role required a synthesis of multiple elements into a dynamic unity.

Gerard Loughlin provides an articulate summation of Ricoeur’s synthesis in this narrative stage. First, Loughlin writes “it works to make one story out of many incidents or events”<sup>47</sup> or “mediation between ‘multiple incidents and unified story.’”<sup>48</sup> Second, “it synthesises character, action and circumstance”<sup>49</sup> or “the ‘primacy of concordance over

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<sup>45</sup> David N. Power. *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 308. Power goes on to write about how the notion of the salvation of Christ required a changing of the tradition from within. This leads directly into Ricoeur’s next narrative stage.

<sup>46</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 53.

<sup>47</sup> Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 140.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

discordance.”<sup>50</sup> Third, “narrative works to produce a sense of time” or “the ‘competition between succession and configuration.’”<sup>51</sup> All of this forms a crucial whole in order that there can be a “recasting” of the original narrative offered by the tradition.<sup>52</sup> More will be said about this pivotal stage below as well as how this “recasting” applies to the Eucharist.

### *Appropriation*

Ricoeur’s *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> was an assimilation or appropriation of the learnings gleaned through the power of configuration into one’s existence or world.<sup>53</sup> It was a “making it my own” as a world it opens up. Without this stage, the circle was not complete because the configuration was not truly made manifest. There was not a new way of being in the world brought forth.

True interpretation, as Joyce Ann Zimmerman writes in her application of Ricoeur to the liturgy, “always leads to a change in self” and “makes a difference in the world.”<sup>54</sup> It leads to deeper meaningful human action. This is where narrative can be seen and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> I am indebted to David Power for the language of “recasting of the narrative”. While he does not refer to Paul Ricoeur in his book, Power is describing some of the narrative processes which help us understand what is happening in the Eucharistic narratives of the Bible, 308.

<sup>53</sup> Joyce Anne Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, American Essays in Liturgy, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 38. See also: Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 70-71.

<sup>54</sup> Joyce Anne Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith: A Liturgical Spirituality* (Scranton: University of Scranton, 1993), 44.

expressed as a verb instead of a noun. The narrative is in process—changing us—towards a wider way of seeing, understanding and experiencing.

Appropriation is a moment of self-understanding and choosing from among possible meanings that comprise the world of text or actions and making a particular meaning our own. Such an example of this appropriation is found in Power's understanding of the Eucharist,

Christ events again in the community, within the aspirations of its ritual expression, transforming them into a new being. The community itself events within its time and society, as a proclamation and witness of this way of God's being among humans and on the earth. . . . The Christian community finds the presence of Christ in suffering. It reflects his love, appearing as varyingly as are the sufferings to which word is addressed.<sup>55</sup>

The appropriation of the narrative action of the Eucharist is also an appropriation of the entire salvation story which includes what went awry over a meal in the garden to a

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<sup>55</sup> Power, 311. He goes on to say that the Eucharistic narrative does not “presume to offer a reason for suffering. It says in simplicity, in celebration, and in action that God is there present, both revealed and concealed, and that those who suffer belong in the body of Christ, at the table of his body and blood.” If Power is referring to a simplistic one-to-one cause and effect relationship, I agree with his statement that no presumption of the reason for suffering is offered. However, to say that the Eucharist does not offer a reason for suffering is not fully acknowledging the overarching narrative of God. Aidan Kavanagh, in his work *On Liturgical Theology*, wrote “Genesis says that we began in a swamp teeming with life, but that something went vastly wrong one evening at dinner.” Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1981 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 34. When writing about sacraments, Alexander Schmemmann, in *For the Life of the World*, gets at what went vastly wrong: “It is not accidental, therefore, that the biblical story of the Fall is centered again on food. Man ate the forbidden fruit. The fruit of that one tree, whatever else it may signify, was unlike every other fruit in the Garden: it was not offered as a gift to man. Not given, not blessed by God, it was food whose eating was condemned to be communion with itself alone, and not with God. It is the image of the world loved for itself, and eating it is the image of life understood as an end in itself.” Alexander Schmemmann, *For The Life of the World* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 16. Christ, who suffers, does so because of the warped reality that occurs over a meal in Eden. We too, as followers of Christ, suffer because of this warped reality.

teleology of redemption that is realized in Jesus Christ, and anticipated fully in a feast with a Lamb, looking as if it has been slain.

### Hermeneutical Circle in the Liturgy

We come to know and understand in new ways in the movement through pre-understanding, configuration, and appropriation or the hermeneutic arc in which “understanding precedes, accompanies, closes, and thus envelops explanation. In return, explanation develops understanding analytically.”<sup>56</sup> “In this tripartite method,” Zimmerman writes, “participation and appropriation are ontological moments, and distanciation is an epistemological moment. Thus the ‘guess’ of the ontological moment of participation stands in dialectical relationship with the analytic, critical moment of distanciation.”<sup>57</sup> What does this mean for the liturgy? What is the role of the liturgy? As we apply Ricoeur’s hermeneutical awareness to the liturgy, we discover the potential power of the liturgy to re-shape our understandings.

While we will examine the important role that liturgy plays in offering a configuration role in the life of the church, it is helpful to rethink our assumptions about the relationship between liturgy and life. Such a dialectical unity requires a recasting of the original narrative offered by the tradition. The emplotment offered by narrative provides a new way of being in the world.

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<sup>56</sup> Ricoeur, “Explanation and Understanding,” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, ed. Charles E. Regan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 165.

<sup>57</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, 38.



Zimmerman looks at the methodological understandings of the Paschal Mystery, showing the “ontological underpinnings that constitute relationship” of liturgy and life. Using Ricoeur, Zimmerman articulates a response to the question, what constitutes or undergirds the relationship between liturgy and life? The study of hermeneutics helps us look at this constitutive undergirding relationship. Hermeneutics is “the art of making known meanings heretofore hidden or unavailable.”<sup>58</sup> It is a discourse that allows us to imagine the unimaginable, the activity of creation and a process of self coming into new being. Both liturgy and life share the Paschal Mystery ontologically. Zimmerman, in her application of Ricoeur’s theory, challenges us to rethink the chronological or cause/effect assumption of liturgy extending or not extending into our lives. She says that the dichotomy between liturgy and life is false. Instead, she says that life and liturgy are intertwined. The goal is for the Paschal Mystery to be revealed in all. Liturgy is not separate from life, it is life as well.<sup>59</sup>

The insights Zimmerman gleaned from Ricoeur expose a further assumption. We usually think that the liturgy is lacking and to blame for what we do not “get” out of it. We don’t think about our lives lacking. We bring our lives to the liturgy. If the liturgy is truly the work of the people, our lives are always brought to the liturgy. It is here that Zimmerman applies the work of Ricoeur and his three part movement of understanding, particularly action.

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<sup>58</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, xi, 37.

## Hermeneutical Circle and Ritually Enacted Narrative

As I began to articulate above, at the crux of Ricoeur's hermeneutics was *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, emplotment, or configuration. Emplotment was both a standing back or distancing from where we are and participation in the new narrative held before us. In worship this kind of space can be offered. We learn what actions to truly mimic. We learn what actions have the deepest meaning. We learn where we are home in the paschal mystery. We learn to rethink. We learn to reincorporate God's living, sacramental presence in our lives. We encounter another way of seeing. We step back and reflect on our lives, the life of the body, and the life of the world in relation to God's overarching story and life, depicted most fully in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The practice of the Eucharist "holds up" this reality for us to be oriented anew around blessing, breaking, eating, and sharing. At the same time that there is a stepping back and looking at all of this again, there is also an immersion in the actions of taking, blessing, breaking, eating, and sharing. Each time this pivotal story within Christianity is held up, we are asked to partake of and enter into the story.

This stepping back and entering into the story at the same time is dynamic. It is moving. It is active. It is a process. It is fluid. Yet, if we are honest, this does not always occur. God's story is not fully enacted. The distancing and emplotment offered by the liturgy does not take root and become appropriated. Zimmerman helps remind us not to simply blame the liturgy for its lack.

People in our current context, if they even cross the threshold into a worship gathering, are preconditioned or mimicking the fragmentation, alienation, individualization, compartmentalization, and bifurcated realities of our world. Our ability to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell God's way is limited at best. The separation from God has taken up residence in such a way that our senses are rendered blind, deaf, touchless, tasteless, and smellless. The very way of encountering and understanding through *mimesis*, through our senses as Aristotle argues, is rendered flat, apathetic, and numb. How can we enter God's story anew? How can we encounter God's way?

We are lacking in truly meaningful action. Society, at its worst, seems to reduce things to such an extent that meaning is diluted to the point at which it feels as though there is no meaning. Or, at best, fleeting meaning. Apathy seems to rule. There is a lack of bearings, moorings, and an overarching narrative. There is seemingly a non-hunger for meaning in our current context. Yet, this apathy and non-hunger is really masking a true hunger.

Does this mean we do away with ritually enacted narrative? I argue a wholehearted, resounding, emphatic "no." The presence of apathy and non-hunger for meaning necessitate our being even more attuned to what is going on ritually. Ritually enacted narrative can open us to God's Word in profound, new, and transforming ways. How can we truthfully, creatively, articulately, movingly attend to the Eucharist so that we can be immersed afresh in the new "world" or way of being-in-the-world according to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ? This "raises the bar" in new ways for us to

attend to ways in which we can evoke, enact, and embody this ‘new way of being’ in the world.

The truth is that we continue to be infiltrated by the reality of another system or world. So, the need is for us to become listeners, responders, and noticers who are aware of the practices that tend to the deepening of the Paschal Mystery. This is essential for making us a church, a people, a living document of Christ in the world.

Gerard Loughlin, in his book *Telling God's Story*, argues that theology is a discipline of a practice which is the following of a story: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>60</sup> Yet there is a problematic of doing theology in the context of postmodernism. The West thinks itself at the end of history. The once hoped for future of the human race has arrived.<sup>61</sup> Loughlin says there are two forms of theological responses to such a culture. The first is a nihilist textualism. In this, religion is a product of narrative, but it is “only a story.”<sup>62</sup> The problem, writes Loughlin, is that it is nihilist: “outside our stories there is still nothing but formlessness”.<sup>63</sup> In other words, “we tell stories *against the Void*.”<sup>64</sup> We each have our own story, but there is no overarching story. The master narrative is nothing, it is a void. The result of such thinking and teaching is apathy and finally a lack of meaning. The second theological response is orthodox

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<sup>60</sup> Loughlin, x.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>63</sup> Don Cupitt, *What is a Story?* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 80; quoted in Loughlin, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Loughlin, 17.

narrativism. What matters in story-telling, Loughlin writes, “is not telling itself, but the stories told, particular narratives unfolded.”<sup>65</sup> “The biblically formed narratives of Christ and his church become the story which literally makes the world; it goes all the way down.”<sup>66</sup>

So how does this happen in the Eucharist? Laughlin states that,

The Eucharist enfolds all the themes of narrativist theology. It is itself a narrative that enfolds participants within the biblical story . . . The biblical story is present in the very language of the liturgy which through penitence and acclamation, comes to focus on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, participants’ “absorption in the story is made possible through their absorption of the story in and through its ritual enactment.”<sup>68</sup> This is exactly why a deliberate attentiveness is to be given to the who, why, what, where and how of ritually enacted narrative; we are not simply witnesses of story, but characters within it.”<sup>69</sup> We do not “simply recall the forgiveness of sins but ask and receive forgiveness.” We “do not repeat the praise of others, but give praise” ourselves. We “do not merely remember the night on which Jesus was betrayed but, mindful of our “own daily betrayal,” we “gather with the apostles” and are called by the one who in that darkness called disciples to eat

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 224.

with him. We “do not merely remember giving bread and passing of cup, but receive the bread and passing the cup” amongst ourselves.<sup>70</sup>

### **Complexities of Ricoeur’s Notion of Meaningful Human Action: Awakening Our Sensibilities**

What did Ricoeur mean when he referred to meaningful human action? What distinguishes meaningful action from other actions? More specifically, how does Ricoeur’s understanding of meaningful action contribute to the importance of ritually enacted narrative, particularly in the Eucharist? It is to these questions that I now turn.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout this section, I use the metaphor of “awakening our sensibilities” to describe the broader awareness and complexities of meaningful action that Ricoeur explicated. This metaphor points towards the intent of this examination for the purposes of this study, to lift us from our slumber so that we may hear and see, not just any hearing and seeing, but finally a kingdom-based hearing and seeing to which Jesus referred with the disciples.

#### Awakened in an Ethical-Political Sphere

Ricoeur argued that meaningful human action was prompted by circumstances in a particular ethical-political sphere. We are not solitary beings. We are social beings. Our

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. The quotes in this paragraph all come from Laughlin. I deliberately shifted his language of “they” or “them” to we in order to help us, as readers, also be a part of the ritual action of this text.

<sup>71</sup> Some of the content for this section comes from Joyce Ann Zimmerman’s paraphrasing or translation of Ricoeur, *Sémantique de l’action* (Louvain: Université Catholique de Louvain--Cercle de Philosophie, 1979); in Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith: A Liturgical Spirituality* (Scranton: University of Scranton, 1993).

existence is dependent on others.<sup>72</sup> For example, we are dependent upon one another for the learning of language. Meaning-making in language depends upon an ethical-political sphere in which to transmit, learn, understand, and exchange it with one another.

As we are awakened to being in a particular ethical-political sphere, we become aware of our dependence on one another or our inter-subjectivity. This awareness gives rise to a tension and confrontation between our individual will and collective will. A deeper understanding of meaningful action requires deciding, choosing, and reflecting on this relation of the wills. Zimmerman articulates her understanding of Ricoeur's relation of the wills as,

Never isolated, the arbitrary will (that of the subject) makes decisions from within a tradition of norms. Isolation is overcome in a discourse of action in terms of the reflection that assures taking responsibility for our own actions, but only when we are situated within historical communities where we recognize the meaning of our own existence.<sup>73</sup>

Attending to our responsibility, with the awareness of our inter-subjectivity, asks us to both recognize the norms from which we come as well as be intentional about the actions in which we engage.

An awareness of our inter-subjectivity is heightened within the Anabaptist tradition which places primary emphasis on the community of faith.<sup>74</sup> This was

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<sup>72</sup> Joyce Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 44-45.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Finger, while examining historic Anabaptism under the categories of personal, communal, and missional dimensions, argues that Christians often separate them. Finger does this, paradoxically, to “stress that historic Anabaptists did not separate them” and “show how they break down when applied to Anabaptism.” *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 106.

poignantly shown in the only existing early Anabaptist liturgical text on the Lord's Supper entitled *A Form for Christ's Supper* by Balthasar Hubmaier.<sup>75</sup> Prior to the partaking of the bread and cup, each believer was required to "repeat with heart and mouth" the "pledge of love."<sup>76</sup> This pledge included a willingness to not only "love your neighbor and serve him with deeds of brotherly love," but also "lay down and shed for him (your neighbor) your life and blood" as Christ also did.<sup>77</sup> In a time when persecution of Anabaptists was the norm in certain areas, such a pledge showed the deeper norm to which these believers held, that of Christ crucified. The inter-subjectivity of the individual and the collective came into view as explicit instructions were given to "let each say individually: I will."<sup>78</sup> This was a deliberate acknowledgement that one's individual will would first be subservient to the collective will of the gathered body.

In early Anabaptism there was a tacit understanding in the spiritual practice of the Lord's Supper that bears notice. The pledge of love was voluntary. Such a practice was a distinguishing characteristic of Anabaptists who created an alternate ethical-political sphere than that of churches who were in alignment with the state and as such were required to partake of the Eucharist at least twice a year. This voluntary norm among early Anabaptists bears deeper discussion than this study allows; however, it moves us

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<sup>75</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, *A Form for Christ's Supper*, in *Balthasar Hubmaier*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, *Classics of the Reformation*, Scottdale: Herald Press, 1989, 393-408.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



toward Ricoeur's next area of focus in the complexity of meaningful human action which Zimmerman tells us is "expressed in freedom."<sup>79</sup>

### Awakened and Expressed in Freedom

In Ricoeur's thought, meaningful action is expressed in freedom. Through our nature, our existence, we exercise freedom. This does not mean that we truly manifest our freedom. We can fail to notice why we do what we do because we are asleep to our ethical-political context and our nature. Reflection and dynamic inter-action in our ethical-political sphere allows for our freedom to emerge more fully. Ricoeur argued that, "Freedom is not manifested by the act *of* experiencing, but freedom is manifested by acting *in* experience."<sup>80</sup> This referred to acting, not being acted upon.

Ricoeur argued that responsible freedom acts within the norms of tradition because participation disallows standing totally outside of our mode of existence. Appropriation then is an expression of self-understanding or self in relation to an ethical-political sphere as an actor. Thus, for Ricoeur, "Freedom conquers nature when freedom is no longer a question of cosmology but of subjectivity."<sup>81</sup> As freedom comes to its fullest, so too does nature. Our true nature is recovered within freedom by a fundamental affirmation of the *act* of existing.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 44.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 46. Zimmerman references Ricoeur's *Sémantique de l'action*, IX-8, and his "Phenomenology of Freedom" in *Phenomenology and Philosophical Understanding*, ed. E. Pivcevic (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 183.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Emphasis mine.

How is freedom made manifest in the church? Are there any assumptions from which Ricoeur was operating that need further explication? More specifically, what does this mean in the spiritual practice of the Lord's Supper?

I hear persons who are part of the church talk about "the church" as if they are not a part: "The church doesn't care about outsiders." "No one in the church really wants to look at these issues." "The church is out of sync with the culture." While there is much to be gleaned from such critique and a stepping back to examine "the church," especially the practices with which one does not want to be associated, I hear a hidden narrative that Ricoeur's work helps us uncover. Such statements about the church reveal a deep lack in one's sense of belonging. When the narrative that a believer shares continues to refer exclusively to the church in the third person, there is not a full expression of freedom being made manifest. A fuller expression of freedom involves acting *in*, not only being acted upon.

Ricoeur's notion of freedom bears further discussion than what this study allows. However, an aspect that is crucial to this dissertation is the "who" of action. In other words, who is/are the primary actor(s) in his notion of freedom? Ricoeur asked the subject, the person, to deepen her responsibility as an actor. Yet, in a theological hermeneutic, what is God's role in relation to this freedom? Such a question is paramount in light of the Paschal Mystery. God comes among us in Jesus Christ and freely empties himself, taking the form of a slave, even to the point of death on a cross.<sup>83</sup> Jesus allows

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<sup>83</sup> Phil. 2:5-8.

himself to be acted upon. Paradoxically, I argue, it is in this act that Jesus most fully manifests his freedom. God is the giver and manifestation of true freedom. This is a gift. John van den Hengel, in his theological reflections on Ricoeur's writings, argues that this "self who emerges is not a Cartesian self-constituting subject. It is a self constituted in the gift of the Other."<sup>84</sup> Van den Hengel goes on to write,

This self is at core a relational self, a self in response to the words and acts of God, the self as "Here am I" or "May it be done to me according to your word." In this relation the Other, the Name of God, God is love, is perceived as a call or a summons. It is not a relation of which I am at the origin. I am a response.<sup>85</sup>

Ricoeur called this a self of radical passivity. This was "not in the sense of Emmanuel Levinas, where in the words of Ricoeur, interiority is made sterile, but a radical passivity that is at the same time a new capability: an injunction, an activation out of new power."<sup>86</sup>

The dialectic of radical passivity and activation out of new power is a dynamic way of seeing and hearing that needs to be fostered in Eucharistic practice. Greater attention as to how this can be tended is offered in the final chapter of this dissertation. Further awakening of our sensibilities is needed as it is clear that we, as the church, fall short of such a practice.

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<sup>84</sup> John van den Hengel, "From Text to Action in Theology," in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny and Peter Kenny (Munster: LIT, 2004), 131.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 132.

## Awakening our Sensibilities Through a Critique of Ideology

Ricoeur's understanding of meaningful human action "involves a critique of ideology."<sup>87</sup> Such a statement may seem to imply that Ricoeur saw ideology as negative. This was not the case. Ricoeur defined ideology as social integration.<sup>88</sup> It was what knit a society together, integrating our social actions, that which was "meaningful for individuals and oriented towards others" and our social relations, that which provided "stability and predictability of a system of meanings within society."<sup>89</sup> Ricoeur named four stages of ideology: social integration, legitimation, illusion, and critique. While it will become evident that these are happening at the same time in multi-faceted ways, it is important to look at each of these stages.

The first stage in the development of Ricoeur's definition of ideology was social integration. This was a positive stage of ideology in which both the function and content of what knits a group together are joined.<sup>90</sup> There was an inaugural event that helps knit a society together. Thus, ideology served a linking role and "is a function of the distance that separates the social memory from an inaugural event which must nevertheless be repeated."<sup>91</sup> In the first stage, this originary event continued to shape a society or group

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<sup>87</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 44.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Can There Be a Scientific Concept of Ideology?" in *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences: A Dialogue*, ed. J. Bien (the Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1978); cited by Zimmerman, 47.

<sup>89</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 44.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>91</sup> Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed., trans. Intro. J. B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 223. Quoted in Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 48 (note 33).

of people through an offering of a worldview or schema as well as generative symbolic markers, such as ritual, which brought the inaugural event to the forefront and was re-encountered.<sup>92</sup> In the Eucharist, the Paschal Mystery is marked by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of God coming in Jesus. The central event of Jesus's way of be-ing and saving the world is marked in actions of taking, blessing, breaking, eating, and sharing his body and blood. This re-knits us, re-members us, or "puts us together" again as the church, as the body of Christ.

The second stage in the development of ideology was legitimation.<sup>93</sup> Authority and authority structures were fashioned in order to organize a society. There was a giving and exercise of power in which authority laid claim to legitimacy. "Paul claimed to be an apostle on the basis of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ."<sup>94</sup> Even in his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Paul claimed a legitimacy in what he had received, "For I received from the Lord what I am also handing down to you."<sup>95</sup> While the Catholic Church claims authoritative magisterium because of apostolic succession, Anabaptists have not made this as a claim for authority. Rather, for Anabaptists, a legitimization of authority comes through the community of faith who calls people into discipleship of

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<sup>92</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 48.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> I Cor. 11:23.

Jesus Christ. Yet, even with clear signals of legitimation, as Zimmerman points out, “the exercise of authority always calls for an interpretation (or should).”<sup>96</sup>

The third stage of ideology was illusion. This was “the point where ideology encounters domination.”<sup>97</sup> Ricoeur argued that illusion takes us more deeply into a warped reality. Illusion inverts the reality brought forth in the inaugural event and turns it into something very different. This was a negative force in the process of social integration, because the reality of the inaugural event was split apart and distorted. Such a distortion has occurred in the Paschal Mystery. When the name of Jesus is used as a tool for conquering and for war, there is an inversion and warp that occurs. A stark example and confrontation of this is examined in William Cavanaugh’s book, *Torture and Eucharist*.<sup>98</sup> General Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile perpetrated torture, which Cavanaugh argues “is a kind of perverted liturgy, a ritual act which organizes bodies in the society into a collective performance, not of true community, but of an atomized aggregate of mutually suspicious individuals.”<sup>99</sup> Such a warped societal reality pervaded the Catholic Church in Chile in the form of silence at such atrocities and reception/participation of the Eucharist on the part of torturers.

Many forms of illusion are taking place in our society that are more subtle but insidious, causing a fragmentation to occur over time. This is a warped understanding of

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<sup>96</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 44.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>98</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 12.

authority in which an inversion of the first stage in ideology occurs. This is a warped understanding of the intent of the inaugural event.

The fourth stage that Ricoeur highlighted was critique. It was a return—as much as possible—to the originary event in order for it to re-influence the ideology or social integration of the society. This critique counters the inversion of reality as we go back and ask, “What is this event? How ought we to be in light of this event?” Zimmerman argues that the liturgy is the prime critique or highest “place” where this can occur for the church:

Liturgy is a paradigm critique of Christian ideology at the same time that it celebrates it. Christian tradition is the objectification of Christian ideology but at no one period of church history is there a totalization of its originary events except during authentic liturgical celebration. Christian ideology may suffer illusion at certain times in the history of the church, but liturgy guarantees that the ideology will never be totally lost and can always be restored to authentic expression.<sup>100</sup>

The practice of worship, and in particular the Eucharist, emplots or “holds up” the inaugural event for all to see and enter into again. Entering into the paschal mystery in ritual action serves as a critique of our church and of the way of the world that occurs within and outside of the church.

The ultimate goal of an ideology, an ideology as social integration, is authentic ideology. For Ricoeur this was no less than a “going back” to the originary event(s) that shaped the ideology or social integration in the first place. Cavanaugh poignantly shares about “parts of the church that were able to break out of this ecclesiological bind and

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<sup>100</sup> Zimmerman, 49.

draw on the resources of the Eucharist to resist the regime. I present these practices as embedded in Christian sacramental theology, especially the theology of the body of Christ.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, this is a true re-integration or re-membering of the church that can happen in the liturgy or as Schmemmann wrote in his articulation of the original *leitourgia*, “It meant an action by which a group of people became something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals.”<sup>102</sup>

### Awakening Culminates in Imperative of Praxis

Ricoeur’s understanding of meaningful human action culminated in an imperative of praxis. In Zimmerman’s summation of Ricoeur, she states,

The imperative of praxis is to preserve freedom as the origin of human action linked to the actual history of modes of being. This can only be achieved in a society founded on an ideology as a positive social integration rather than as domination or illusion. Human action (works), then, can be interpreted vis-à-vis the originary events that ground the society rather than in terms of duty or obligation or binding norms and laws. The imperative of praxis is the ultimate culmination of a hermeneutic of action and, indeed of the whole historical sphere of human “be-ing”<sup>103</sup>

However, as humans, Ricoeur argued that we live between several dialectics. It is to these dialectics that I now turn.

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<sup>101</sup> Cavanaugh, 2.

<sup>102</sup> Schmemmann, 25. I am indebted to Cavanaugh for helping me look again at Schmemmann’s articulation of this.

<sup>103</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 50.



First, we live between the historical situation of “this-here” and of the enduring “essential structure.”<sup>104</sup> For example, “this-here” was what we are doing now. The enduring “essential structure” was the inaugural event. This is Jesus’s birth, life, death, and resurrection that is pointed to in the Lord’s Supper.

Second, we live between the limits of individual and society. The individual was limited, but the limits are exploded by the mediating role of society. The explosion was that not only are the limits dismantled, but from a social-ethical perspective the limits are different.<sup>105</sup> The society produced by the individual was severely limited. It was the new order and the new community of the ecclesia that offers a corrective or resolution, but not a complete resolution until the return of Christ. The restructuring that occurs says, while society is like this, I don’t have to live like this. Within the ecclesia, we are called out of the world and its structures. This is the new tension in which we live.

Third, we live between the dialectic value and norm.<sup>106</sup> The norm in Ricoeur’s understanding was not necessarily the kingdom. However, we are given a new norm by Christ in the kingdom, and this norm awakens us to critique our values. There is an interesting multileveled conversation here. What we value may not be what the world values. Or, what we value in the practice of the Eucharist, this particular congregation may not be living out. There is a tension here between arbitrary and normative wills.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

For Ricoeur, reflective action resided at the heart of praxis. He saw praxis beginning with the subject because all action was reducible to a specific agent who acts. Finally, we come back to the individual and not the book. Yet, for Ricoeur, praxis included the entire sphere of human reality. Our doing, our reflecting, and how we operate as a result of our doing and reflecting as individuals, were all within the sphere of human reality.<sup>107</sup> Our action as humans is the sphere in which we live. Everyone is acting in some way. In Ricoeur's understanding thought is an action. Speech is an action. Ritual is an action. It is the entire sphere of our human reality. Thus, actions matter.

I propose that as the ecclesia we can begin to envision a new kind of action. With the help and revelation of the Holy Spirit we can see, compare and contrast what is going on with the world and what is going on in the kingdom. Then we can envision a new kind of response. The Paschal Mystery is the primal event of the Christian tradition, and is God's response to our fractured world. The Paschal Mystery has its own ethical-political sphere within Christ and what Christ is about. This is the originary event that knits the church together and calls the church to interact with the larger society. Hence, Jesus's directive, "Go and preach the gospel to all the world." God is about bringing the world back to Godself and redeeming people from the world's system that holds us captive. In Christ we are set free to co-labor with God, the God who initiates this freedom-making event centered in the paschal mystery.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 49.

Anabaptists tend to jump from the biblical text to ethical action, but in the process leap over this ritual action. However, the ritual creates a space in which we can step back as well as participate, a space in which we are awakened toward transformation. It is in this awakening that the congregation becomes transformed so that on Monday morning its members are the same persons who took communion the day before. Thus, as Zimmerman states,

Liturgy is a critique of Christian ideology that sets parameters for Christian Freedom and critiques society at large. The reality lying in front of the celebration of liturgy is brought to the fore by the imperative of praxis inherent in the completion of the ritual action in Christian living.<sup>108</sup>

Here we need to reflect on the meaning behind ritual action. Ricoeur said there is also something in front of it as something new is emerging in the context. Not only is it an event from the past, the past is being made present . . . in front of all of us. There is something new and dynamic occurring. It takes on a life of its own. These actions are coming into the fore. And we look at them in front of us.

The Lord's Supper involved an intersection of narratives and ritual action. There was what was happening with Judas which was leading him toward betrayal. There was what was happening with the disciples who, because of their illusions of who the Messiah was and what they expected him to do, were having a fight. They were bickering about power and authority. None of them had washed each other's feet. They were not being hospitable to one another, because it would mean stooping to the level of a servant. There was all this mix of behaviors going on as Jesus said, "This is the new covenant in my

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<sup>108</sup> Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 51.

blood.” They were missing it. They were living in an illusion. In the midst of this present but absent behavior Jesus stopped what he was doing and did the amazing thing of becoming a servant who showed them what leadership was about. He gave them a ritually enacted narrative, one of self-giving, which culminated in calling them towards the same imperative of praxis.

Van den Hengel, in his application of Ricoeur, offers some helpful response to the Anabaptist notion that jumps from text to doing. According to Ricoeur, the duty of religion, or I would say the church, is “to act according to generosity.”<sup>109</sup>

It is found in “the commandment which antedates any law . . . which the lover addresses to the beloved: “Love me!” or even more strongly, “Love your enemies!” It is here that the excess of the Name converts the self into the vast economy of the gift. “I give because you have already given to me.” It is a life lived out of the generosity of God. It is no longer based on a relation of equivalence but on the basis of the gift. <sup>110</sup>

Van den Hengel goes on to write, “Theology’s task is to let the superabundance of the gift--the excess that is articulated in ‘God is love’--the hyperbole of the language and its forms, find its release in human action. What sort of action?”<sup>111</sup> This can be proclamation, liturgy, and praise.<sup>112</sup> “For theology this has far-reaching repercussions. It would mean giving priority in our theological enterprise to the praxis of faith-life rather

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<sup>109</sup> Ricoeur extends Kant’s understanding in his work, *Interpréter: Hommage amical à Claude Geffré*, ed. Jean-Pierre Jossua and Nicolas-Jean Sed (Paris: Cerf, 1992, 25-47); quoted by Van den Hengel, 132.

<sup>110</sup> Ricoeur, *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit. Amour et justice* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Sieback), 1990), 18; quoted by Van den Hengel, 132.

<sup>111</sup> Van den Hengel, 132.

<sup>112</sup> Ricoeur, “Toward a Narrative Theology,” 245-246, cited by Van den Hengel, 132.

than to the theoretical disclosure of meaning.”<sup>113</sup> It also gives priority to the centrality of worship and ritually enacted narrative within worship that brings together all of the disparate pieces and bursts forth afresh the recitation and praise of what God has done and is doing.

We are reminded, as Jack Finnegan writes,

that practice becomes an essential component of critical praxis, especially when related inner states give rise to contextual results. The concept of praxis engages with practices precisely because embodied, spatial practice informs the critical reflection that defines praxis at its best. A praxis approach does not oppose theory to practice. By linking truth and action praxis allows them to interact dynamically in service of a goal. Praxis is dialogical.<sup>114</sup>

Components of Finnegan’s statement echo the sentiments of Ricoeur that culminate in his imperative of praxis. However, Finnegan articulates the coming together of dialectics through embodiment. Such reflection is essential to this study and is the topic which the next chapter explores.

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<sup>113</sup> Van den Hengel, 132.

<sup>114</sup> Finnegan, 307.

## CHAPTER 3

### DEEPENING RITUAL PRACTICE: HEALING THE GAP BETWEEN TEXT AND SOCIAL ACTION

Prior chapters of this study have addressed the gap that tends to emerge between text and social action using a theological turn, a hermeneutic turn and a narrative turn. All of these “turns” call for an emergence of a synergetic holding together of realities that are too often held apart. Contemporary Anabaptist theologian Scott Holland speaks to this when he writes, “In most contemporary hermeneutic or narrative theologies, whether pure or impure, anti-correlational or correlational, there is the assumption that one can move from text to ethical action, from story to morality, without much conscious attention to ritual, liturgy, sacrament or spirituality.”<sup>1</sup>

Conscious attention to the synergetic holding together of sacrament and liturgy has already begun in this study. Thus far we have examined the particular sacramental approach of Pilgram Marpeck to the Eucharist. Marpeck gives a fresh starting point for Anabaptists to move beyond the tendency of jumping from text to social action. Marpeck provides an understanding of the Eucharist as action: a dynamic action of God, in which there is no separation between the inner and the outer realities of “material” and

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Holland, “Even the Postmodern Has a Body: Narrative, Poetry, and Ritual,” in *The Presence of Transcendence: Thinking ‘Sacrament’ in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Lieven Boeve and John C. Ries (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 239-253. Holland moves towards a hermeneutics of gesture in his essay and draws from Talal Asad, as I do in this chapter.

“spiritual,” but rather a joining in which we are redeemed, awakened, empowered, and enlivened by God’s very self. As co-witnesses with God, we join in this action, or more accurately, interaction with God in the Eucharist.

This study has also outlined the insights offered by Paul Ricoeur. His hermeneutics of action draws us towards a deeper understanding of and insight into meaningful action: action considered as a text, our narrative constitution, the potency of configuration and refiguration, and the complexities of meaningful action in which the liturgy can serve as a prime critique of warped ideologies. The gap between text and social action has been refined to include meaningful action, especially that of the Eucharist, as a hyper-ethical act. The dynamic potency of action in humanity’s narrative way of emplotment comes alive when we interact with the Triune God in the Eucharist. As we participate in the Lord’s Supper, we are mimetically being drawn towards the originary event of Jesus Christ living, dying, and rising among us. This action is not confined to words on a page or a text, but the Word comes among us afresh in the action of the Eucharist.

Conscious attention to the synergistic holding together of ritual and spirituality is still needed. This chapter offers such attention. Talal Asad’s re-examination of the way theorists have approached ritual and the body provides new understandings and fresh ways of approaching ritual which are essential to addressing the assumptions behind the leap from text to ethical action or story to morality. Theologian Sarah Coakley’s essay,

“Deepening Practices: Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology”<sup>2</sup> frames the study of ritual and Talal Asad’s insights, and provides a nuanced, interdisciplinary lens through which to view ritual and spirituality together. She offers a “three-stage heuristic schema” in order to begin to reveal the complex interrelationship of belief and spiritual practices. Finally, a healing of the divide or leap from text to social action will be proposed through an introduction to a hermeneutic of gesture, offering performative embodiment.

### **A Deeper Understanding of Spiritual Practices through the Lens of Christian Spiritual Development**

Sarah Coakley provides a theological nuancing to the interrelationship of beliefs and spiritual practices in order

to show that the richly coded term “practice” may be used with a number of discernibly different evocations in the religious sphere; and also that the logical relation of beliefs and practices may shift in different stages of a Christian person’s growth to spiritual maturity. Thus it is a vital part of this argument that the “deepening” of practices, so described, allows forms of belief to emerge that could not otherwise be accessed.<sup>3</sup>

Through the three stages of purgative, illuminative, and unitive, Coakley’s work suggests

a spectrum of interactive forms of beliefs and practices through which, over a lifetime of faithful observation of both public acts of worship and charity . . . one might hope ultimately come to “know” God in God’s intimate life--to breathe his very Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Coakley, “Deepening Practices: Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 78-93.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 92



Her correlative work prevents what she calls an “undiscriminating” use of the term “practice” which may threaten to “flatten distinctions that frankly need to be made theologically.”<sup>5</sup>

Coakley articulates the complexities in the functional correlation between practices and beliefs. Extending her three-stage heuristic structure to ritual highlights how the understanding of the definition, function, and notion of ritual has played an important role in the very spiritual growth to which she refers. The notion of ritual is changing. It includes deliberate attentiveness to practices. Talal Asad articulates this in his reflections on ritual scholar Clifford’s Geertz’s work: “Religious ritual is indeed, as Geertz suggests, a type of cultural performance, but it is one where claims to truth and meaning are *literally* played out in *practice*.” Asad goes on to quote Geertz to elaborate:

[I]f we are to understand how this happens, we must examine not only the ritual itself, but the entire range of available disciplinary activities, of institutional forms of knowledge and practice, within which selves are formed, and the possibilities of “attaining to faith” are marked out. In other words, for the anthropologist to explain “faith” must be primarily a matter of describing a dependence on authoritative practices and discourses, and not of intuiting a mental state laying beyond them said to be caused by ritual.<sup>6</sup>

Seeing such correlations would be instructive to Anabaptists who have not yet recognized the profound depth that such a ritual practice offers. Attending to, or describing a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Talal Asad. 1983. “Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz,” *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* NS 18:, 249.

progression of, spiritual development is found in many ancient writings. Richard Woods points to biblical metaphors that reflect various progressions of faith:

the Christian's life of faith resembles the natural progression from childhood, through youth and adulthood, to the maturity of old age. The basic formula is found, for instance, in Heb. 5:12b-14: "You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child." . . . A similar and important Pauline formula is found in 1 Cor. 3:1: "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual men-- *pneumatikoi*--but as men of the flesh--*sarkikoi*--, as babes--*nepioi*-- in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food. For you were not ready for it; and even yet you are already, for you are still of the flesh".<sup>7</sup>

Early spiritual guides and writers drew on this approach and proposed various stages.

Woods argues that "typical" stages of development emerged, the "Three Ages" or "Three Ways." These three "Ages" or "Ways" seem to have evolved naturally and gradually from the three-stage paradigm of childhood, youth, and adulthood.<sup>8</sup>

The danger of using any approach that looks at these three different stages is a tendency to look at spiritual growth as a gradation of good, better, and best which we keep trying to achieve. Alan Jones articulates this same thing as he says that we are in trouble when we take any model and use it as a yardstick by which to measure ourselves. He goes on to say that "following Christ then becomes a work that is never finished, rather than a life that is never ending. The Christian life becomes burdensome and exhausting . . . overlaid with degrees, gradations, and steps. The way to God degenerates into a struggle up a ladder or progress by degrees. At each stage we stop to take our

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Woods, "Stages of Spiritual Development: Retrieving Ancient Christian Wisdom," *Journal of Spiritual Formation* 15, no. 3 (November 1994): 304.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

spiritual temperature.”<sup>9</sup> In this way spirituality becomes the enemy of grace, and loses sight of the freedom within love. These categories are not as tidy as they seem. Life is messy and much more complex in how spiritual formation and progression functions.

Yet, examining purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages helps to nuance our understandings of practices in a way that a listing of practices cannot. There will be more complexity added into each of these stages as we look at the development of ritual and its relationship to spiritual practices. The largest part of my attention is given to the illuminative stage in this chapter as that is where Talal Asad’s insights come forth. A turn towards the body in ritual studies, while crucial in any stage, is heightened even more so in the illuminative stage.

### Purgative Spiritual Practices

Alan Jones states that in the purgative stage “The first crisis is one of meaning. ‘What shall I do with my life? To whom should I surrender my obedience?’”<sup>10</sup> In order to surrender one’s obedience in this stage, spiritual practices are entered into in opposition to pagan ways. This is an awakening of practices to be rejected and practices to be embraced.

An illustration of this very approach can be found in *The Didache*, also known as *The Teaching of the Apostles* or *The Lord’s Teaching to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles*. This early Christian writing described two ways: “the way of life” and “the way

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Jones, *Soul Making: The Desert Way of Spirituality* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985), 168.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 166.

of death.” The way of life included practices such as: loving God and neighbor as yourself, blessing those who curse you, etc. The ten commandments and the beatitudes were a part of this instruction. The “way of life” instructions in the *Didache* extended to more explicit instructions regarding ritual practices such as baptism and the Eucharist. The way of death included spiritual practices such as murder, lying, judging, etc.<sup>11</sup> Such an approach clearly delineated a pathway of obedience and a pathway of destruction.

In the early church, certain practices trained persons in the ways of being a Christian. Historian Alan Kreider notes that the catechesis for new converts in the early church extended up to three years. Catechesis, he writes, “was to re-form pagan people, to resocialize them, to deconstruct their old world, and reconstruct a new one, so that they would emerge as Christian people who would be at home in communities of freedom.”<sup>12</sup> The early part of this catechetical process was indeed purgative as catechumens learned new practices.

Additional illustrations of purgative stages come from third and fourth century figures Origen and Gregory of Nyssa respectively. Origen wrote that the “ascent of the soul to God begins with her ‘coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea’, that is, with her conversion and baptism.”<sup>13</sup> In this, the believer was “formed and guided by divine

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<sup>11</sup> See chapters 1-6 in the *Didache*, in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth, revised trans. Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 191-194.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1995), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 56.

laws and imbued with heavenly thoughts.” The Exodus for the believer was a “figure” of the soul leaving the darkness of the world.<sup>14</sup> The Cappadocian bishop and theologian Gregory of Nyssa made it clear that those who heard the Word and were baptized took off the old humanity and put on Jesus: “And when He (Jesus) enters, the soul makes Him her garment, as the Apostle teaches us when he tells us to strip off the fleshly covering of *the old man* and put on the tunic *created according to God in holiness and justice* (Eph. 4:24).”<sup>15</sup> Gregory named this an entrance into the way of Light. As Louth summarizes it, “the way in which the soul turns from false reality to God, the only true reality.”<sup>16</sup>

Origen and Gregory were aware of the struggle between pagan ways and the way of God: “When the Word of God comes into your soul, the battle of virtue against vice is necessarily joined within you . . . and a ruthless war begins.”<sup>17</sup> Gregory spoke of friendly and hostile parts within us, making the soul a territory for battle. Both writers saw the interior of the person as a continent where Christ comes to possess the cities--the inner soul--and works to destroy the “law which is at war in my members with the law of my mind, and making me captive to the laws of sin.”<sup>18</sup> (Rom.7:23).

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<sup>14</sup> Wendy Miller, “Progress in Spiritual Formation: An Overview of Growth in Spiritual Formation, Drawing on the Writings of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa,” (Paper written for General Theological Seminary, New York, 1996), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, “The Garment of the Flesh,” *Commentary on the Canticle*, sermon II, 1004C-1005C, with an introduction by Jean Daniélou (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s, 1995), 251.

<sup>16</sup> Louth, 84.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, “Progress in Spiritual Formation,” 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 12.

These illustrations all involve turning away from one way of living and turning towards another way. It is a “yes” to God and “no” to the ways of the world. The initial influx of purpose and meaning helps sustain the believer in his endeavor not to follow pagan ways as he submits to God, to Scriptures, and to the church in the waters of baptism.

*Purgative Spiritual Practices: A Ritual Connection in the “Classical Consensus”*

In its early development, ritual theory saw ritual as a means to conformity versus nonconformity or orthodoxy in the social context.<sup>19</sup> Nathan Mitchell examines the anthropological roots of ritual and the emergence of a prevailing consensus among liturgists in the early years after the Second Vatican Council who “use anthropological data or categories to interpret Christian ritual,”<sup>20</sup> and names this consensus “classical.” He argues, “In a word, ritual is essentially a way to regulate social life; to shape personal and corporate identity; to review and renew values; to express and transmit meaning in symbolic word and act; to preserve tradition; and to insure cultural cohesion and continuity.”<sup>21</sup> The characteristics of ritual in this classical consensus are similar to those of the purgative practices, to “regulate,” “preserve,” and “insure” adherence to one way as opposed to another.

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<sup>19</sup> Nathan D. Mitchell describes this as an “orthodox consensus” about ritual. *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*, American Essays in Liturgy, series ed. Edward Foley (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 25.

Mitchell argues that in the early stages of their work, Aidan Kavanagh, Mark Searle, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas “assume that ritual’s primary purpose is the social production of meaning through a culturally conditioned system of symbols.”<sup>22</sup> The meanings of ritual in this stage “are authoritatively encoded in the invariable, repeatable patterns of liturgy.”<sup>23</sup> Such an approach to ritual during this time provided legitimacy as Catholics sought to implement *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and bring the field of ritual studies into prominence through a connection with modern sciences, particularly social sciences.<sup>24</sup> Such a borrowing from social sciences proved fruitful as Kavanagh built on Erik Erikson, seeking “to rehabilitate ritual by removing it, once and for all, from the sphere of ‘obsessional behaviour consisting of repetitive solitary acts with highly idiosyncratic meanings.’”<sup>25</sup> This innovative approach to ritual brought forth a new discipline in which there was “a systematic study of how human societies insured their cohesion and survival through the ritual appropriation of meanings and values, regularly reviewed and renewed.”<sup>26</sup> Ritual, Kavanagh shows, played a critical role in showing that

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The turn was towards the “human character” of Christianity. This was not intended to separate out from the divine, rather, Louis Bouyer argued, “the human character of Christianity should emerge with a clarity that would otherwise be hardly suspected. . . . Indeed, the more perfectly we know the human aspects of Christianity, the more perfectly we shall understand that part of it which is the result of divine intervention. This is not to say that the human and divine should be found in it separated from one another. It is rather that the divine reveals itself in the transformation it effects in what is human.” *Rite and Man*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1963), 2; quoted in Mitchell, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Erik Erikson, “Ontogeny of Ritualization in Man,” in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, series B, 251 (1966), 337; quoted in Mitchell, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Mitchell, 16.

“the patterns of ritual repetitive behavior correspond to and, therefore, may be said to carry, the inchoate and largely incommunicable human experience of reality,” thus, inextricably linking culture and cult.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, he showed the interrelationship of the conception of the myth of a group or culture to the enactment of ritual. “Both myth and ritual thus appear to me as strictly correlative and inseparable functions: their reciprocal union is what I mean by cult. *The outcome of cult, so understood, is what I understand as culture.*”<sup>28</sup> Such a contribution to ritual heightens our awareness not only to ritual and its enactment, but also its link to the narrative of a community.

Further examples in the early developments of ritual studies are found in Mary Douglas and Victor Turner. Both provided insight and legitimacy to develop a field that was looked askance at by the modernist scientific method. Douglas argued for a return to ritualism:

I shall take ritualism to signify heightened appreciation of symbolic action. This will be manifested in two ways: belief in the efficacy of instituted signs, sensitivity to condensed symbols. . . .

Ritualism is most highly developed where symbolic action is held to be most certainly efficacious. . . . Where symbols are highly valued and ritualism strong, then the idea of sin involves specific, formal acts of wrong-doing; where ritualism is weak, the idea of sin does not focus on specific external actions, but on internal states of mind: rituals of purification will not be so much in evidence. . . .<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Kavanagh, “The Role of Ritual in Personal Development,” in *The Roots of Ritual*, ed. James Shaughnessy (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), 158; quoted in Mitchell, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Kavanagh, 148; quoted in Mitchell, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Douglas, “Away from Ritual,” in *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, new ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 8-9; quoted in Mitchell, 22.



Victor Turner's definition of ritual provided an equally stark notion of the specific, formal acts that provided a clear demarcation of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. He wrote that ritual is

formal behavior prescribed for occasions not given over to technological routine that have reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers. . . . Observation of the rubrics of the ritual is deemed essential, for only by staying within the channels, marked out by custom, through which the collective action should flow . . . will the peace and harmony typically promised to ritual participants finally be achieved. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Such understandings of ritual, while intending to provide a legitimacy to a neglected area of study that was characterized by non-utilitarian, symbolic, inefficient ways of acting, also solidified characteristics of ritual as formalized, traditional, authoritative, invariable, and regulative.<sup>31</sup>

Thus far I have likened the classical consensus in the field of ritual studies as articulated by Mitchell to purgative spiritual practices that frequently characterize the early stages of faith. Such an approach to ritual was the approach that many Anabaptists remember as part of their tradition of the Lord's Supper. Prior to a biannual reception of the Supper, usually two weeks before, each congregant was required to appear before the bishops or elders in order to share whether she was "right before God" and "at peace with brothers and sisters." In addition, he was to answer correctly on a checklist of right behaviors to which he was adhering, thus assuring that he was ready to approach the

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<sup>30</sup> Victor Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 244; quoted in Mitchell 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell uses all of these terms to describe ritual under his category of "Classical Consensus," 25-26.

Lord's table two weeks hence. While some of the roots of this came from the Reformation time period in which Anabaptists were wanting to reflect a way of life that truly echoed that of Jesus, the pendulum swung too far towards dependency upon a human response to God. Thus, this clouded the awareness that coming to the table provided something sustaining for the body of Christ that we cannot manufacture on our own. Instead, the Supper stayed in the realm of a purgative spiritual practice.

Could it be that this "classical" approach to ritual, which has been connected to purgative spiritual practices in this study, helps us see some of the roots of the gap between text and social action? Have Anabaptists, in their reliance on a purgative approach to the Lord's Supper in our fairly recent history, limited our desire or willingness to see the importance, significance, and centrality of the Eucharist and worship? Could it be that some of the resistance to the Supper among Anabaptists is due to a more "purgative" interpretation and practice?

Talal Asad, along with a few other voices, can help us move forward. His historical insight into ritual and the anthropology of the body alongside his proposal for getting at the best of what ritual does will prove invaluable.

### Illuminative Spiritual Practices

The practices of the illuminative stage link us to a deeper connection with Christ and his suffering. Coakley writes "The second level practices start inversely to shape or reshape belief, as a form of identification with Christ begins to flower and to unsettle the

extrinsicism of the first stage.”<sup>32</sup> Jones helps us into understanding this “unsettling” as the disciples journeyed with Christ,

Their first encounter with Christ is marked by joy and enthusiasm. Jesus is the one for whom they longed, the fulfillment of their hopes, prophecies, and dreams. They were lost and they met Jesus and their lives were changed. They followed Jesus and listened to him preach and tell stories to the people. They saw him heal the sick and feed the hungry. Everything was wonderful. The new life with Jesus couldn’t go wrong. But then he “set his face towards Jerusalem.” Thus the coming passion of Jesus was the crisis that occasioned the second conversion of the apostles. The first crisis was one of meaning. The second was one of meaning betrayed.<sup>33</sup>

This betrayal runs deep as the question became,

The one whom I am following is making his way to meaninglessness and destruction. “Does he know what he’s doing? Where is a way of escape?” It is easy to follow Jesus while all is going well; but when he sets his face steadfastly towards Jerusalem, the disciples are gripped by fear and they all abandon him.<sup>34</sup>

The disciples believed that the Messiah would restore the kingdom to Israel and that they would be appointed to places of power alongside the triumphal Jesus. Jesus’s talk of suffering and death threatened their belief system; his arrest, trial, condemnation, and crucifixion stripped them of their Messianic hopes. A suffering Messiah they did not want to follow. Jesus prepared his followers for this difficult “dark night” passage. He assured them of his resurrection, and that he would meet with them after the resurrection. Jesus met with them and revealed to them that the Messiah would suffer. After the resurrection, the followers of Jesus began to read the scriptures in a new light—seeing suffering as part

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<sup>32</sup> Coakley, “Deepening Practices,” 84.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, 174.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 166.

of the picture. Jesus suffered and died, then rose again—and so brings us into the kingdom of God.

Miller articulates that both Origen and Gregory understood this stripping away of false structures and assumptions and describe this experience as a wilderness: “A certain stripping may occur as the believer discovers that on this soul journey ‘the Lord himself is leading them’ (Psalm 78:14, 114). It is the desert of faith being tested by temptation”<sup>35</sup> that resulted in growth in virtue. “Gregory sees the wilderness as the cause of transformation . . . Here the believer lives into the death and burial of baptism. It is in this work of self-control and diligence that thirst arises, for the wilderness is a desolate place. And so, even as she grows in virtue through struggle, she also grew in desire for something deeper.”<sup>36</sup>

It is in the unsettling places of wilderness that something new emerges. Using the Benedictine Rule to illustrate her point, Sarah Coakley states that, “there is the distinct suggestion that practices will re-modulate beliefs, that they will cause us to find Christ, for instance, in new and unexpected places--in the beggar at the door, in our own spiritual endurance, in the ministrations of the abbot.”<sup>37</sup> Such practices, as we will discover, are not always “felt,” but rather show the essential role that a ‘turn towards the body’ has as we identify with the One who came incarnate and enter into the gestures of God with our bodies as part of the body of Christ.

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<sup>35</sup> Miller, “Progress in Spiritual Formation,” 21

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Coakley, “Deepening Practices,” 86.

*Illuminative Spiritual Practices:  
A Ritual Connection to New Directions in Ritual Research*

Such a ‘turn towards the body’ is illustrated both in Sarah Coakley’s explanation of illuminative spiritual practices and Nathan Mitchell’s description of “emerging ritual” and “new directions in ritual research”. While I will touch on the work of some of the “emerging ritual” theorists, my main attention will be focused on the work of Talal Asad whose innovative and sophisticated work Coakley and Mitchell use to highlight illuminative spiritual practices and “New Directions in Ritual Research” respectively. Coakley and Mitchell glean their primary insights about Asad from his work, “Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual.” I have found it equally important to glean insights from his essay entitled, “Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body.”<sup>38</sup> In order to enter into the nuances that Asad offers, it is important to look, in brief, at his historical tracing of the way ritual has been defined. Both of his essays parallel one another in their methodologies, insights, and offerings in our “turn towards the body.” Prior to focusing on Asad’s work, it is important to look briefly at work in ritual studies that also helps us in shifting to a “turn towards the body.”

Ritual theorist and anthropologist Ronald Grimes contributes to the shift from the “classical consensus” in ritual studies towards what he calls “emerging ritual” that attends to the body. He writes, “Tradition must be understood not merely as cultural inertia but

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<sup>38</sup> Talal Asad, “Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body,” in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), 42-52.

also as a mode of active construction.”<sup>39</sup> Instead of a ritual being characterized as fixed, invariable, and regulative, Grimes argues that there is a dynamic between ritual and social tradition,

Body and culture, self and society, are not merely opposites; they are dialectical pairs. Taking seriously one term in each pair always leads to the other term. For this reason I reject much that is assumed about ritual and the individual, for example, that ritual is by definition collective. It is necessarily collective only in the sense that anything human is: nothing, not the body, not the self escapes culture. And culture has its most persistent root in the human body itself.<sup>40</sup>

It is here that we can see an approach to ritual that is characterized by interaction, change, and embodiment. Mitchell goes on to articulate Grimes’s notion of embodiment in ritual as a way of knowing:

As a ritual agent, however, the body is not a mindless hulk; it is a personal subject with its own unique ways of probing, questioning, arguing, asserting, thinking. Skin has a mind of its own, a mind always at work in ritual. Thus, researchers who adopt the “high church consensus” may sometimes fail to appreciate “the creative, cognitive, critical functions of the ritualizing body. . . . The body is cognitive, not stupid; and conversely, the mind is embodied.”<sup>41</sup>

More of the contributions of the area known as “emerging ritual” will come forth in this chapter. We look to Asad to help us more fully understand the “turn towards the body” in his detailed look at how ritual has been examined in connection with how anthropologists have viewed the body.

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<sup>39</sup> Ronald Grimes, “Reinventing Ritual,” *Soundings* 75:, no. 1 (1992): 25, quoted in Mitchell, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Grimes, “Emerging Ritual,” *Proceeding of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (1990) 25; quoted in Mitchell, 46-47.

<sup>41</sup> Mitchell, 48, quoting Grimes, “Reinventing Ritual,” 32.

## Tracing the Genealogy of Ritual and How Anthropologists Have Viewed the Body

In his essays “Towards a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual” and “Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body,” Talal Asad traces the history of how ritual has been defined and looks at the central ways in which the body has been viewed by anthropologists. Both show how ritual and an anthropological view of the body have largely focused on the promotion of stability in the social sphere. Asad’s look back in ritual studies and anthropological studies reveals splits or dualisms in how humans are viewed that have become normative. He both questions and challenges the very premises upon which these dualisms are based.

Asad traces the origins or genealogy of the word “ritual” as used by anthropologists in order to “try and discover what historical shifts might have made particular concepts of ritual plausible.”<sup>42</sup> He goes on to write that his “general conclusion will be that something has happened to institutional structures and organizations of the self to make possible the concept of ritual as a special category of behaviour.”<sup>43</sup> Early definitions of the word “ritual” overlapped with the definition of the term “rite” in both the seventeenth century publication of *The Oxford English Dictionary* and the 1st edition of *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (c.1768). The definitions connected ritual and rite to a manner in which religions ceremonies in the church were celebrated.<sup>44</sup> These definitions

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<sup>42</sup> Talal Asad, “Towards a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual,” in *Vernacular Christianity: Essays in the Social Anthropology of Religion Presented to Godfrey Lienhardt*, ed. Wendy James and Douglas H. Johnson (New York: Lilian Barber, 1988), 74.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 75.

stayed largely the same up to the seventh edition of *The Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1852.

The 8th through 10th editions omitted the terms entirely.

There was a shift in the definition and understanding of the term ritual in 1910.

The 11th edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* has five columns, with subsections, to define ritual. Asad states,

The length of the 1910 entry seems to indicate that far more was now known about ‘ritual’ as a cultural phenomenon than was the case in the eighteenth century, but in fact what we are given here is an account of something quite new, something that the first entries did not attempt to deal with. Although many of the exemplifications are related to concerns that flow from evolutionist assumptions, the central questions which were to occupy later anthropologists are already evident.

The conceptual reorganization of ritual was paralleled in the latter nineteenth century publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Ritual was now regarded as a type of routine behavior which symbolizes or expresses something and, as such, relates differentially to individual consciousness and social organization, i.e.,

Ritual is to religion what habit is to life, and its rationale is similar, namely that by bringing subordinate functions under an effortless rule it permits undivided attention in regard to vital issues. . . . Just as the main business of habit is to secure bodily equilibrium. . . . so the chief task of routine in religion is to organize the activities necessary to its stability and continuance as a social institution.

This approach to the function and purpose of ritual set the course for the kind of “classical consensus” to which Mitchell refers. No longer was ritual a script of some sort, providing instructions and actions in which to engage; it was now “symbolic behavior” that insured stability.



Shifts also occurred in the way anthropologists viewed the body. In the nineteenth century,

There appeared studies of the ‘symbolic’ aspects of the body in ‘primitive cultures’, separated from biology in method, and more directly related to the concept of culturally determined thought . . . These anthropological themes came to be regarded as ‘symbolic’ not because they concerned problems of human communication (kinesics was never a part of ‘symbolic anthropology’), but because it was assumed that the study of primitive representations would tell us something profound about the human mind.<sup>45</sup>

While a conversation flowered among “symbolic” anthropologists about “*representations of the body* and on the *body and its parts as representations*,”<sup>46</sup> another arena of anthropology was emerging in the 1950s called ‘kinesics’. Kinesics built on the notion in Charles Darwin’s book *The Expressions of Emotions in Man and Animals* “of the body as a medium of voluntary and involuntary communication.”<sup>47</sup>

It is at this juncture that Asad himself shows an interconnection in the trajectory taken by anthropologists as they examined ritual. He writes,

The concern with decoding body symbols has also been central to classical anthropological approaches to ritual. This concern follows naturally from the long-established definition of ritual as symbolic or expressive action, as opposed to action that is technical or instrumental. For many anthropologists this meant that a clear separation had to be made between the social meaning of rites and the psychological states of participating bodies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Asad, “Anthropology of Body,” 42-43.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 44.

The anthropological view of ritual focused on stability in the social sphere, thus seemingly requiring one thing of the social person and another of the psychological, private state of the person. The basis of these understandings of ritual became the norm among anthropologists who, while advocating for the legitimacy and importance of ritual, found themselves promoting a Cartesian dualism.

### Challenging the Dualism in Anthropological Understandings of Ritual and the Body

As we have already seen, the classical consensus in anthropology came to understand ritual as symbolic or expressive action as opposed to action that is technical or instrumental. The notion that the mind and body are doing two different things, or, even more alarming, that the mind is disembodied, divides the body against itself. The preoccupation with ritual, as understood in the classical consensus, was its symbolic character, the meanings to be attached to it, and the fact that it was a universal phenomenon.

In both of Asad's aforementioned essays, he offers a way beyond the dualism in anthropological understandings of ritual and the body. The method he uses to overcome this is to go back in history in order to uncover early definitional understandings of ritual, in religious writings, and in anthropological writings which defy this dualism and are formative for the whole self.

Asad shows that early definitional understandings of ritual and rite challenge the dualism that emerges in later definitions. The shift back to pre-modern understandings

asks us to view rites as “proper ways of doing certain things”<sup>49</sup> instead of representational behavior or symbolic activity that is “identifiable by the ethnographer prior to its meaning and effect being determined.”<sup>50</sup> While a “proper ways of doing things” may seem limited or reductionistic to modern ears, Asad states that,

Rites were . . . activities which partly defined Christian roles and which were central to conceptions of a Christian life. How a Christian was to perform his or her role included the appropriate performance of rites, not only as things to be done aptly at pre-defined times and places, but in relation to the idea of a total life in which the self develops in a distinctive way. The proper learning of how to do something, rather than the symbolic meaning of what is done, is central to the older notion of rite.<sup>51</sup>

The notion of apt performance “involves abilities to be acquired, not symbols to be interpreted: it presupposes not special meanings or rules, nor even particular kinds of experience, but the formation of bodily and linguistic abilities.”<sup>52</sup> He, Asad, is not so much drawing attention “to the experiential priority of bodily movements in relation to words and symbols . . . but to the teleological character of *learning to be capable*.”<sup>53</sup>

This notion of “learning to be capable” in the older notion of rite and ritual was illustrated in the *Benedictine Rule (Rule)*, one of the central Christian writings on which Asad focuses. He argues that all prescribed practices of the *Rule* are aimed at development of Christian virtues: “In this conception, there could be no radical break

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<sup>49</sup> Asad, “Genealogy of Ritual,” 79.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., note 15, 80.

between ‘outer behaviour’ and ‘inner motive’, between ‘social rituals’ and ‘individual sentiments’, between activities that are ‘expressive’ and those that are ‘technical’.”<sup>54</sup> All of life was viewed as an opportunity for habituating into a life imbued with God. When virtue was lacking, Asad writes, this

did not mean that they regarded ‘external’ behaviour as detachable from an ‘essential’ self. On the contrary, the presence of hypocrisy, like self-deception, indicated that the learning process was incomplete--or, more drastically, that it had failed. However, the converse, that of not displaying signs of virtue even when one possessed it, was itself recommended as a means of acquiring the highest virtue of all: humility.<sup>55</sup>

Each virtue moves a person towards acquiring a self (unified self) that is more and more like Christ. The very anthropology, or technology of the self, is understood as unified. If this did not happen, it was not the sense that one way of functioning is superior to the other (i.e. reason and feeling), but that the learning process had failed. This would call for more or deeper discipline or practice of the virtues. The lack of moving teleologically towards Christ and his likeness was not due to the division of internal and external of a person, but rather to the learning process as a whole. This is not something that is detached and analyzed. For example: rather than take apart Mother Theresa’s actions one by one, Asad would say that she was known by her virtues. Her aptitudes were inwardly and outwardly joined. To separate them would result in power games where her true self was masked.

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<sup>54</sup> Asad, “Genealogy of Ritual,” 80.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 81.

The turn towards the body in ritual is not new. Asad explores the insights provided by Marcel Mauss in his 1935 essay entitled “Techniques of the Body.”<sup>56</sup> Mauss’s primary aim “is to explore the dynamic constitution of embodied behaviour which he wanted to conceptualize as apt behaviour.”<sup>57</sup> Mauss wrote that “The body is man’s first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man’s first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, in his body.”<sup>58</sup> Bodily technique or competence was similar to “the way a professional pianist’s practised hands remember and play the music being performed, not about how the symbolizing mind ‘clothes a natural bodily tendency’ with cultural meaning.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the body knows. Even more, a practiced body knows. This “clothing” of ‘a natural bodily tendency’ was potently emphasized at the conclusion of Mauss’s essay when he stated, “I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into communion with God.”<sup>60</sup> Asad argues that this was Mauss’s most striking offering for an anthropology of the body as “the possibility is opened up of inquiring into the ways in which embodied practices (including language-in-use) form a precondition for varieties of religious experience. The inability to ‘enter into communion with God’ becomes a function of untaught bodies.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” in *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, trans. B. Brewster (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); referred to in Asad, “Anthropology of Body,” 46.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> Mauss, 104; quoted in Asad, 47.

<sup>59</sup> Asad, 47.

<sup>60</sup> Mauss, 122; quoted in Asad, “Genealogy of Religion,” 48.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Thus, such an experience forms a “mutually constituting relationship between body-sense and body-learning.”<sup>62</sup>

The introduction to Talal Asad’s work has provided a fresh anthropological perspective from which to affirm a turn towards the body. Asad’s work with ritual practices has been connected to the work of Sarah Coakley’s work that points to the synergy between practices and beliefs. Our bodies are the address of ritual. The essential role which this “turn towards the body” serves during this illuminative stage, however, moves us to identify with the One who came incarnate, thus to enter into the gestures of God with our bodies as part of the body of Christ. As will become clearer in the next section of this chapter, this notion of gesture moves us toward deeper unitive engagement in spiritual growth.

### Unitive Spiritual Practices

Over time, faithful engagement in practices, particularly those which help us encounter the suffering Christ, gives rise to much deeper theological insights which arise out of unity with God.<sup>63</sup> This joining is an offering of divine grace. As a result, Coakley argues that in this third unitive stage, the “bland term ‘practice’ must give way to an overt theology of grace.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>63</sup> Coakley names these insights as re-minted beliefs. “Deepening Practices,” 79.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 80.

For the disciples who journeyed with Jesus who was crucified and rose from the dead, unitive engagement with Jesus was marked by yet another absence as Jesus shared that he was going to leave them. “Jesus ascends into heaven. He is present to the disciples, yet he is beyond sense and feeling . . . (they are called to) a deepened faith that is not dependent on mood, emotion, sense, or feeling.”<sup>65</sup> “In mature faith, the believers have to do without the direct presence of Christ and learn to live in the stretching, demanding experience of Christ’s hidden yet pervasive presence through the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>66</sup> Or as the apostle Paul elucidated, “. . . anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”<sup>67</sup> This meant that these early followers of Jesus “are to enter even more deeply into the life of contemplation--the life uncluttered and free from preoccupations and preconceptions. . . . Contemplation is receptivity and availability in love to whatever life has to offer.”<sup>68</sup> The call of Jesus to Peter to “feed my sheep” three times echoed not only the painful stripping that happened to Peter as he was confronted with his denial, but also a deeper call for love that requires a full “receptivity and availability.”

Origen wrote about intense presence and abandonment or the “idea of the soul’s dereliction,” in his first *Homily on the Song*,

The Bride then beholds the Bridegroom; and he, as soon as she has seen him, goes away. He does this frequently throughout the Song; and that is something nobody

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<sup>65</sup> Jones, 181.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>67</sup> I Corinthians 6:17.

<sup>68</sup> Jones, 181.

can understand who has not suffered it himself. God is my witness that I have often perceived the Bridegroom drawing near me and being most intensely present with me; then suddenly he has withdrawn and I could not find him, though I sought to do so.<sup>69</sup>

Such intensive presence and abandonment was not something that the soul achieves by its own efforts.<sup>70</sup> For Origen, this level of engagement was God's gift of mercy.

Gregory of Nyssa saw the unitive way as "an awareness of grace."<sup>71</sup> This grace is a paradox as, in the unitive way, one's soul comes closer and closer to God while at the same time being thrust deeper into a cloud of darkness.<sup>72</sup> God is beyond our knowing and comprehension. In the unitive way there is an awareness, beyond our senses, of the divine essence, "the inhabitation of the Trinity within the soul," which nevertheless remains inaccessible. Daniélou wrote,

In this union between God and the soul, the closeness of the divine nature (designated by the darkness) causes the soul, as it were, to go out of itself, by reason of the attraction which God exercises upon it. This state is primarily characterized by a passivity; indeed, the influence exercised on the soul is from without, and the soul itself is completely overpowered. . . . The soul enters into a sphere which transcends its own limitations: thus it experiences a true withdrawal from the laws of its own nature and intelligence.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Origen, *Homily on the Song I:7*, *Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*, 39, in, R.P. Lawson trans., *Origen: The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, Ancient Christian Writers Series, Vol. 26, (London, 1957); quoted in Louth, 71.

<sup>70</sup> Louth, 70. Louth argues that "Origen was deeply indebted to Platonism" and "studied under the philosopher, Ammonius Saccas, who was also Plotinus' master . . . he studied *as a Christian*." Philosophy was, "simply a useful study for the Christian theologian as a training in dialectic." 53-54.

<sup>71</sup> Jean Daniélou, introduction to *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans. and ed. by Herbert Musurillo (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's, 1995), 25.

<sup>72</sup> Louth, 81.

<sup>73</sup> Daniélou, 33.



God transcends our human limitations in this unitive encounter and draws us to the beauty of the Godhead.

Paradoxically, this unitive engagement is “a peculiarly active form of passivity.” The believer begins to realize she is no longer in charge of her life. God is the one guiding her, infusing her with God’s very self. This is a “unitive (and Christlike) ‘handing over’ of the self.”<sup>74</sup> She is called towards a more demanding level of response to God’s joining, thrusting her into mundane life and the life of the world. Thus, as shown in the writings and example of W. H. Vanstone, “the most purified Christian practice is one of being ‘like God (in Christ) . . . *handed over* to the world to wait upon it, to receive its power of meaning.”<sup>75</sup>

This unitive reality of awareness and responsiveness was poignantly articulated in the writings of Teresa of Avila in the seventh dwelling of *The Interior Castle*. “Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have Him always present and not host Him badly by failing to give Him something to eat.”<sup>76</sup> The joining together of Martha and Mary addressed the false divide between being present with Jesus and serving Jesus. We do not heal this false divide, God does.

The brief introduction to unitive engagement using various voices from history has helped move towards a more constructive dialogue that exposes some of the

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<sup>74</sup> W. H. Vanstone, *The Stature of Waiting* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), 115; paraphrased in Coakley, “Deepening Practices,” 83.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, 448.

assumptions and categories we have as a result of the Enlightenment. A “turn towards the body” is crucial in this unitive movement. In particular, I will propose that a hermeneutics of gesture provides an ongoing way forward toward healing divides that were never meant to be.

### Hermeneutics of Gesture

Holland argues that “a well-integrated theology must move from a hermeneutics of the text to a hermeneutics of the gesture.”<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, “every good poet, priest and preacher already knows: all narratives must pass through the body--*the hermeneutics of gesture*--for ‘Even the Postmodern Story Has A Body.’”<sup>78</sup> A hermeneutics of gesture will help not only “pass through the body” but also echoes the very gestures of God.

Asad himself moves towards a “hermeneutics of gesture” when he refers to twelfth century Hugh of St. Victor’s work which contained “the first coherent theory of gesture since antiquity.”<sup>79</sup> Hugh of St. Victor introduced the word *gestus* in his treatise for the instruction of novices.

The novitiate is the road to beatitude: virtue leads to the latter, but it is discipline imposed on the body which forms virtue. Body and spirit are but one: disordered movements of the former betray outwardly (*foris*) the disarranged interior (*intus*) of the soul. But ‘discipline’ can act on the soul through the body--in ways of dressing (*in habitu*), in posture and movement (*in gestu*), in speech (*in locutione*), and in table manners (*in mensa*).

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<sup>77</sup> Holland, 239.

<sup>78</sup> Holland, 242.

<sup>79</sup> Talal Asad, “Genealogy of Ritual,” 84.

‘Gesture is the movement and configuration of the body appropriate to all action and attitude.’ *Gestus* designates not so much a unique gesture as the animation of the body in all its parts. It describes outwardly a figure presented to the gaze of others. . . even as the soul inside is under the gaze of God.<sup>80</sup>

Gesture in this sense has its own end, yet Hugh of St. Victor maintained that it should conform to the measure that discipline imposes on it.

Disciplined gesture is thus not merely a ‘technique of the body’ varying from one culture or historical period to another, as Mauss reminded anthropologists, it is also the proper organization of the soul--of understanding and feeling, desire and the will. Thus in addition to relating the outer self to the inner, this conception of *gestus* brings together what later centuries were to separate sharply: cognition and affect. For *gestus* is the disposition of an entire structure of thought, feeling and behaviour which must be properly learnt and controlled.<sup>81</sup>

This hermeneutics of gesture was located in our whole bodies, joining together what God never intended to be separated.

Debra Dean Murphy, in her essay “Worship as Catechesis” speaks to the centrality of worship in our formation. She challenges the notion that performance is separated out from the rest of us:

To admit the intimate connection between knowledge and action, between learning and bodily practice, is to recognize that, for Christians, worship is the site at which our formation and education are initiated and completed (insofar as they can ever be complete). What we do, how we act, in the liturgical assembly shapes us in particular powerful ways and is both formative of identity and catechetical in the most basic sense. Such a view rejects the categorical distinctions that create the false need for a bridge between “education” and “worship.” It also challenges modern (Cartesian) accounts of the self and knowledge and assumes instead that “human

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<sup>80</sup> J.C. Schmitt, ‘Le Geste, la cathédrale et le roi’, *L’Arc*, Vol. LXXII (1978), 9-10.

<sup>81</sup> Asad, “Genealogy,” 84.

subjectivity is not a self-contained 'given,' anterior to its performance, but that subsequent performances are just as much involved in the constitution of its identity."<sup>82</sup>

Bodily gestures in the worship gathering form beginning and ending points for ontological and epistemological ways in which we are formed in God. As worship begins and ends with God, so too does God's gesture take shape in us. Murphy goes on to write,

The 'knowledge' imparted in worship is not simply cognitive--not the grasping of data by the intellect--but is material and corporeal; it is a knowledge that can be known only in the doing of it. It is, at the heart, bodily and performative. . . . The ritual signs and gestures of corporate worship *produce* certain kinds of knowledge. One might say that bodies are produced that *know differently*.<sup>83</sup>

Our bodies are not an addendum to the rest of our being. Rather, Murphy is reiterating what Asad argues was shown long ago in the *Rule* and Hugh of St. Victor's writings. In fact, our bodies, as the address of ritual, provide us with a knowing that can only be discovered through gesture.

Such a hermeneutic of gesture, I am arguing, re-unites what God united long ago in creation and in Jesus Christ. This unitive engagement helps us know not with the senses on which we normally rely, as is expected in the Enlightenment, but on a deeper knowing and awareness. We echo not just any actions, but God's very gestures. God imprints our whole body afresh through gesture. God rejoins, in our incarnational bodies, our consciousness and unconscious, intuition and critical interpretation, reason and

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<sup>82</sup> Debra Dean Murphy, "Worship as Catechesis: Knowledge, Desire, and Christian Formation," *Theology Today* 58:03 (2004): 325.

<sup>83</sup> Murphy, 325-326.

language, reflection and imagination, narrative and body. There is a congruence and joining of the inner and outer gaze that takes place in the full notion of *gestus*.

*Eucharist: God's Gesture*

The great gesture of God is embodied in the Eucharist. Paul Jones, in his book entitled *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, argues that the overarching role of the spiritual director is, “to discern one’s rhythm of rhythms, one’s gesture of gestures, one’s experience of experiences, one’s story of stories, one’s theme of themes, in which one’s whole life is to be centered.”<sup>84</sup> For him, the Eucharist is the primal gesture which choreographs his living.<sup>85</sup> All of his life, he discerns, is oriented, interpreted, seen, identified and oriented around the gesture of the Eucharist.

For liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemmann, in his work *For the Life of the World*, all of life is eucharistic. God has given life to the world. Schmemmann wrote, “We know that real life is ‘eucharist,’ a movement of love and adoration toward God, the movement in which alone the meaning and value of all that exists can be revealed and fulfilled.”<sup>86</sup> Ricoeur argued that the Eucharist is a hyper-ethical act, rooted in the passion of Christ. If we go even further, as I do in this study, we become the gesture of God in and to the world.

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<sup>84</sup> W. Paul Jones, *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002), 190.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>86</sup> Schmemmann, 34.

Stanley Hauerwas observes that the performative testimony of gesture in the Eucharist makes the church. He writes, “Rightly seeing the Lord, or rightly reading the Scriptures, is not a given, but requires hard discipline of existing as a people constituted by practices of the risen Lord.”<sup>87</sup> Reading the Scriptures, entering into the Scriptures, is not an autonomous endeavor, but rather one that happens with a people who are knit together with the very practices or disciplines of the risen Lord Jesus. Ritual as embodied action provides a “place” for this kind of constituting practice.

The way we learn a story after all, is not just by hearing it. We must be taught the gestures that help position our bodies and our souls to be able to hear rightly and then retell the story. Through gestures we learn the nature of the story that is the very content and constitution of the kingdom of God.

For Hauerwas, the worship gathering is rightly placed as central to the formative and transformative work of the church as a social ethic. Hauerwas states that the liturgy is not a cause for social action, it *is* a social action in and of itself. “Through liturgy we are shaped to live rightly the story of God, to become part of that story, and are thus able to recognize and respond to the saints in our midst . . . Once we recognize that the church is a social ethic--an ethic that is, to be sure, but a gesture--then we can appreciate how every activity of the church is a means and an opportunity for faithful service to and for the

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<sup>87</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, “The Interpretation of Scripture: Why Discipleship is Required,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 255.

world.”<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the church--the body of Christ--is knit together and becomes God’s gesture to the world. The liturgy is a social ethic of the church, an ethic that requires shaping through gestures, gestures of baptism and eucharist, that assist us into God’s life as we become part of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Michael Cartwright writes,

Liturgical embodiments of scripture involve gestures and practices the moral significance of which is inextricably related to the ways Jews and Christians tell the story of God’s way with Israel and the Church . . . . Hauerwas advocates nothing less than a ‘return to the text’ of the Bible, which means ‘a commitment to displaying the richness and wisdom of traditions that are at once text-based, hermeneutical, and oriented to communal practice.’ . . . It is a mistake to discuss biblical texts as if they exist apart from tradition and practices.<sup>89</sup>

The church is but God’s gesture on behalf of the world to create a space and time in which we might have a foretaste of the kingdom. Through liturgy we are shaped to live rightly the story of God, to become part of that story, and are thus able to recognize and respond to the saints in our midst. The gestures of utmost importance to the church are baptism and eucharist. These gestures constitute the church in God’s image rather than making God some distant set of ideologies.

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<sup>88</sup> Stanley Hauerwas. “The Gesture of a Truthful Story,” In *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living In Between* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 107.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Cartwright, “Afterward: Stanley Hauerwas’s Essays in Theological Ethics: A Reader’s Guide,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 643.

## Performative Healing

This raises the thought, care, and consideration that can and needs to be given to the very gestures that we enact. As Debra Dean Murphy writes, “the act itself accomplishes this reality; the sharing of the peace and participating in the communion meal constitute the worshiping community as Christ’s body, whose members are called to live in peace with each other and in solidarity with those in need. In other words, there is no meaning of these acts separate from the acts themselves.”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the catechetical power of the Eucharist is in how it “creates an alternative ontology, a countercommunity, a different polis, another way of being.”<sup>91</sup> Embodying God’s very action, as the body, is the primal gesture that reverberates to the world. Yet, Murphy goes further as she asks, “How is it that authentic Christian worship offers a kind of privileged contrast, a counternarrative to the ubiquitous and deeply seductive myth of the unencumbered modern subject within the capitalist-driven, consumer-oriented, media-saturated cultures of the industrialized west?”<sup>92</sup> The Eucharist offers this kind of contrast. Citing John Zizioulas, Murphy argues that the Eucharist “enables the Church to be. The Eucharist constitutes the Church’s being.”<sup>93</sup> As such, the Eucharist is God’s great gesture, calling into being the church itself. This ritually-enacted narrative of the Eucharist is a shaping, “by a story of forgiveness, reconciliation, and communion; it is to refuse to

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<sup>90</sup> Murphy, 326.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 326-327.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>93</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 21; quoted in Murphy, 328.



participate in the forces of destruction . . . it is, in other words, strategic disaffiliation.”<sup>94</sup>

The first way of knowing this communion is bodily, for it is a hermeneutic turn towards the body. The true counternarrative is being called forth in the eucharist and we are invited to have this in us, through us, around us, and extended from us as the “body of Christ,” God’s primal gesture to the world.

The eucharistic performance itself is a bodily rooted gesture that provides healing for a broken and wounded people. It provides a place where what is separated can be joined together. When I was pastoring in a multi-ethnic congregation, a young woman who had been a part of the church for several years had an affair with a married man in the community who had been coming to the church for two years. Despite several confrontations of leadership with this couple regarding their relationship, they had a child together and stopped attending the church for a long period of time. One Sunday, about a year-and-a-half after the birth of their child they came to a worship gathering. This was a Sunday for Eucharist. The young woman came forward for Eucharist and stood in the line in which I was serving. For a moment, I wondered what I should do: “Should I serve her in light of all that has happened? If I refuse, how should I refuse?” With tears streaming down her face, she moved closer to me in line. When I looked into her face, into her eyes, I could see much more than could be expressed than any words. The only words and gesture that seemed appropriate were “The body of Christ, broken for you.” The invited response and meaning was expressed in the very performance of this woman’s broken

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<sup>94</sup> Murphy, 330.

life. Her weeping spoke volumes. Her body knew something and was expressing it. The body of Christ knew something and was offered to her, in her, with her, and under her.

This raises the topic of worthy reception of the Lord's Supper with many layers of history among Mennonites.<sup>95</sup> While I still teach and preach the necessity of congruence between what we do, what we believe, and how we worship, for this woman an aptitude of confession was being developed in the Eucharist. I could see it on her face. No words, just tears. I "saw her," just as Jesus saw the woman who used her tears to wipe his feet. I chose to be a part of making her family at the table, God's table, through the gesture of God.

Ritual as an aptitude, a virtue that is developed, is illustrated in this woman's story. Her story happened, as Holland states, "somewhere, sometime, in somebody." It happened in gathered worship, during the Eucharist, among the body. The Eucharist called and continues to call for a bodily knowing of God.

This is a joining together of what was never meant to be separated. The split, that is heightened in the Enlightenment, is really just another manifestation of the divide that occurred in Eden. Instead of helping the world hide, God asks Adam and Eve, "Where are

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<sup>95</sup> The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states, "All are invited to the Lord's table who have been baptized into the community of faith, are living at peace with God and with their brothers and sisters in the faith, and are willing to be accountable in their congregation." Article 12, "Lord's Supper" (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1995), 50-51. As Mennonites, we argue that there needs to be evidence in a person's life that he/she is following Jesus. Yet, this does not fully take into account that the very act of entering into the Lord's Supper can also help bring forth a deeper following of Jesus. Such realities are not new as the disciples were in great disarray when Jesus broke bread with them in the upper room.

you?” We too, are able to gesture with God and come with a sewing box to provide new clothes, a new covenant, and new life in the paschal mystery. “Christians bear witness to the fact that the body of Christ gathered together in Eucharistic fellowship is not the way of the world; it is a sign of the inbreaking reign of God. But here the sign and that which it signifies cannot be separated; the Eucharist not only points to the gospel story, but is itself its incarnated proclamation. To know this gospel story, to learn it, to be shaped by it, is to embody it.”<sup>96</sup> The performative gesture of the Eucharist is not something to be dismissed. Its enactment itself is a knitting together of the very ontology of the church with a teleology directed towards God and God’s kingdom. It is to such matters that the final chapter turns.

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<sup>96</sup> Murphy, 330.

## CHAPTER 4

### EMBODIED APPROPRIATION: BECOMING THE GESTURE OF GOD

This study has given conscious attention to ritual, liturgy, sacrament, and spirituality. It has worked towards holding these disciplines in a synergy with one another in order to examine the spiritual practice of ritually enacted narrative, particularly as it related to the Eucharist. New insights have emerged as we have discovered that the performance of ritually enacted narrative has the potential not only to form identity and sustain us, but also transform us. Through the ritually enacted narrative of the Eucharist, we are changed. We are converted afresh. We become aware of our being reframed in God's transforming reality.

Yet this study is not complete. An even deeper exploration and appropriation of the new and burgeoning insights of such an interdisciplinary work is needed. In this final chapter we will use a chiasmic structure to bring the synergy of these insights into greater focus. A chiasm is an ancient literary form. James Bailey and Lyle Vander Broek write that "Sometimes known by other names, such as 'introverted parallelism' or concentric pattern', 'chiasm'--taken from the design of the Greek *Chi* (X)--is normally the term used to designate this rhetorical pattern."<sup>1</sup> In the chiasmic structure, meaning is often found

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<sup>1</sup> James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook*, (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 178.

by denoting the interplay of the balanced elements (e.g., A and A') and the mechanism of inversion at work at the pivotal point of the chiasm. Often, though not always, the verse or passage at the center of the chiastic pattern receives the stress or offers a theme key to the whole.<sup>2</sup>

The chiastic structure used in this study, as is evident in the outline below, denotes interplays of: Misdirected *Mimesis*/God-Centered *Mimesis*, Untaught Bodies/Taught Bodies, Resistance to Eucharist/Extravagant Embrace of Eucharist, Social Action Superseding Worship/Worship as Social Action, and Ecclesiological Satiated Slumber/Ecclesiological Awakening.

### *Chiastic Structure*

- A Misdirected *Mimesis*
  - B Untaught Bodies: Reductionistic Approaches to Gathered Worship
    - C Resistance to Eucharist
      - D Social Action Superseding Worship
        - E Ecclesiological Satiated Slumber: Church Disaffiliation
          - X God's Action: An Appropriation of Ritually Enacted Narrative as a Way Forward
        - E' Ecclesiological Awakening: God's Gift of Incarnation and Dynamic Interrelationship
      - D' Worship as Social Action
    - C' Extravagant Embrace of Eucharist
  - B' Taught Bodies: Towards a Greater Fulness of Gathered Worship
- A' God-Centered *Mimesis*: Gestus

The structure is used to highlight that God and God's action stands at the heart of embodied appropriation. This is intentionally echoing Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical circle of mimetic emplotment. While we are restricted to the written page in this study, Bailey and Broek remind us that a chiasm was used antiphonally:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 182.

In a worship setting, separate groups in the choir or congregation could recite the contrasting parts. So, for the ancients the chiasm was not only aesthetically valued but also practically functional. In an increasingly “postliterary” environment, it might be critically important for us in the church to become more sensitive to the rhetorical dynamics of the chiasmic form and its implications for our actual practice in worship and scriptural transmission.<sup>3</sup>

In the Eucharist how we tell the story, how we enact the narrative, and how we provide spaces for transformation is vital

This formative and transformative potential will be explored in conversation with persons we have journeyed with thus far and others who will offer insight regarding the nature of embodied ritually enacted narrative. Together we will help each other see the burgeoning insights that can come forth. I appropriate these insights into not only a heightened awareness of the Eucharist, but also a new awareness about shaping a ritually enacted narrative of the Eucharist.

The more we argue about transubstantiation, reduce the Eucharist to a cognitive digestion, or skip over the need for worship as a body, the less we allow ourselves to enter into the realm of unknowing inherent within the transformative invitation of God. A reordering of ourselves and our communities is needed. We are hungry in spite of being inundated with consumption narratives. We long for more, even as we are continually offered the new and the different, but do not know what that “more” is. We reach the end of our ability to come up with the answer that will fit the situation. A sustaining, transformative encounter is called for.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

### Misdirected *Mimesis*

As we discovered in chapter two, John van den Hengel summarized Paul Ricoeur's definition of narrative as "a *mimesis praxeos*, a productive imitation of action."<sup>4</sup> Since we are narratively constituted, the "productive" nature of our imitation is not always for the better. Sometimes the narratives or myths are misdirected. Such misdirection is what Debra Dean Murphy refers to near the end of chapter three when she argues that in the west we reside in a "deeply seductive myth of the unencumbered modern subject within . . . [a]capitalist-driven, consumer-oriented, media-saturated" culture.<sup>5</sup> While this study has looked at pieces of these myths or narratives, it is important to lay out what we, as humans, have been entangled by.<sup>6</sup> Because we are narratively constituted, the multiple, fragmented narratives that are vying for our attention are entangling us in a misdirected, warped mimetic emplotment.

Wendell Loewen, when writing about the reach, clout, and strategy of these narratives, writes,

Consumerism's capacity to tell a consuming story and shape desire is due, in part to creativity, but primarily to its enormity. Our exposure to its mediated messages and experiences is more voluminous, more continuous, and more pervasive than ever before.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John van den Hengel, 130.

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, 327.

<sup>6</sup> I intentionally use a passive voice here. While we would like to think that we are the ones in control, especially in our consumerist mindset, we are often deadened and unaware as to the depth and breadth of these influences to which Murphy is referring.

<sup>7</sup> Wendell J. Loewen, *Beyond Me: Grounding Youth Ministry in God's Story* (Scottsdale: Faith & Life Resources, 2008), 60.

In order to keep our capitalist-driven, free-market economy going, we are inundated with consumption narratives. The mimetic strategies used in consumption narratives, Loewen aptly entitles “identity branding” and “caricaturing.” Identity branding is a market strategy used in order to get us to fuse our identity, our selves, with a product. Caricaturing is used in order to personify a character that does not exist, but has been fabricated by the media in order to get us to be what advertisers want us to be.<sup>8</sup>

The concern that popular spirituality has been significantly shaped by postmodern culture’s consumerism and fragmented allegiances was introduced in chapter one, through Jack Finnegan’s work. Finnegan argues that global capitalist strategies are in “alliance with the shaping forces of secular modernity”.<sup>9</sup> He goes on to state,

The growth way of life characteristic of consumer societies impacts strongly on attitudes towards traditional religion and spirituality. The most obvious example comes from the advertising industry whose core task is to generate a volatile mix of desires and discontents: and the advertisers do their job well. Happiness is whatever product is positioned to assuage the latest discontents. Consumer society as a whole is complicit in the industrial-level production of consumer discontents precisely by encouraging us to define our aspirations in terms of the new and the different. In growth-oriented societies expectations are constantly being raised, and happiness becomes a postponed illusion of material contentment. Happiness has become a postmodern simulacrum, an empty sign, an ephemeral thing, a ghost.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, we are led into a warped, “volatile mix of desires and discontents” that are supposedly assuaged by fusing our identity with a product or with a caricature. Once we

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<sup>8</sup> Loewen, 63-66.

<sup>9</sup> Finnegan, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



possess the product that serves as a panacea, we are often far from an “unencumbered modern subject” as the original discontent is replaced by a new discontent.

In modern enlightened thinking, we assume that when someone is educated he will be free from that volatile mix. Such thinking is not out of the realm of the jump from the biblical text to social action. This fails to address the fact that far more complexities and competing tendencies are at work. Jack Finnegan provides a window into what formed the basis for the modern myth,

Modernity names a rationalist and historical ideology seeking something good: the liberation of the human subject. The problem is that it sought to do this by making religion its enemy and working for the spiritual disenchantment of the world. Faith is separated from reason. Grounded in a decision to live by human reason alone, rational science became the only basis for human certainty. Modernist approaches to things religious and spiritual disdained what could not be scientifically explained to the satisfaction of a secularist rationale.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Finnegan writes,

In this process science became the defining tenet, the controlling idiom, the prevailing dogma, and religion was shown the red card. In embracing these beliefs modernity not only turned away from religion, rejecting it and its many spiritual expressions as products of a presumed darkness grounded in a purportedly erroneous grasp of reality. It also saw religion and its spiritual expressions as foolishness, perhaps a comforting illusion or an escapist panacea, but most assuredly a block to the accomplishment of modernity’s socio-political and economic goals. In modernity’s worldview, beliefs and values are legitimate only to the extent that they are sanctioned by rationalist science in accordance with Enlightenment thought, their roots nourished by Cartesian philosophy and Newtonian physics. Such are the foundations of the myth by which Europe still seeks to live and order their lives.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 63.

The thought that there was something more or a “beyond-without-limits,” as Christian spirituality reminds us, was foreign. The response of religion was to either privatize itself all the more or use the scientific method in order to prove its validity. Such an example of this is shown in Asad’s analysis of ritual as symbolic or expressive. This very notion, he argues, implicitly assumes that there is a requirement of one thing of the social person in the public sphere and another of the psychological person in the private sphere.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the liberation of the human subject became the goal. The human was at the center of her own existence.

Thus, the splitting apart that occurred in modernity helped force the issue of spirituality becoming privatized in the first place. The self-turn temptation within spirituality is not surprising. Finnegan posits,

Modernity is a cold house for spirituality, especially when it seeks a public voice. What is at work is the empirical colonisation and subjugation of the spheres of human value and meaning. . . . There is another danger. The turn to the subjective and the individual exacerbates the risks of self-reference: self-absorption, self-inflation, and spiritual materialism where spirituality is narcissistically consumed for self-referred reasons. Spiritual narcissism has become a reality on the spiritual landscape precisely because of the embrace of modernist reductionism.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the rationalist science that was to liberate the human subject to be the center of his own existence fed some of dichotomies that relegate gathered worship to a separate category that exists apart from the rest of life. Finnegan also sheds light on the realities that have distanced Christian spirituality from the academy. While seeking to

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<sup>13</sup> Asad, “Anthropology of the Body,” 44.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 199.

bring ritual studies, theology, and ethics to the forefront, those who engage in those disciplines have taken part, often unknowingly, in bringing about a greater privatization of so-called spiritual narcissism or dismissiveness of worship.

There is a hidden power game in all of this: what cannot be explained is difficult to control and that made religion suspect to those seeking intellectual and political domination. What could not be controlled had to be marginalised in other ways, at the least by being dismissed, disparaged and parodied as mediaeval or superstitious nonsense.<sup>15</sup>

The presence of this kind of separation is not new; these are chronic symptoms we suffer this side of Eden. They reverberate throughout history and the life of the church. This reality gives us all the more reason why transformation needs to occur.

### **Untaught Bodies: Reductionistic Approaches to Gathered Worship:**

While there is no way to do justice, in such a study as this, to the nuanced effect of modernity on religion, it is worth noting that the oft-presumed superiority of scientific, rationalist understandings has played a role in the view that gathered worship is inconsequential. Within modernism, religion and spirituality are relegated to what Finnegan names a “subjective, individualistic world” which is a tertiary category within the domains of knowledge and reality. As such, the most gathered worship could hope to

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<sup>15</sup> Finnegan, 61-62.

provide is “sincerity.”<sup>16</sup> This notion reduces worship to an individualistic and privatized, albeit sincere, compartment in life. How can worship be “world-making” as Rodney Clapp suggests its role is, if it is seen as tertiary?<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these modernistic “domains of knowledge and reality,” the misdirected mimetic desire fostered in a consumeristic ideology has infiltrated into worship.

Consumer ideology changes the way in which people tend to relate to and understand religious and spiritual beliefs, rituals, practices, and traditions. Not surprisingly, they are all reclassified as products and commodities. They are taken for granted, seen as no more than means to satisfy individual needs or ends without much thought or concern for their religious or cultural origins. Little or no thought is given to the ethics of social appropriation that such usage involves, itself a form of plagiarism in a milieu that is heedless of where spiritual products come from, or the impact of the consumer mentality on religious and spiritual congruence and integrity. It is important to understand that in the consumer world *function* replaces *meaning*. Use and the satisfaction of individual desire predominate. As Vincent Miller notes, the problem is not about getting things right, or being open to different voices, but in how the contents of a tradition are engaged and used. Late modernity favours those aspects of a religious or spiritual tradition that have broad consumer appeal.<sup>18</sup>

An example of such an infiltration is in the numerous churches that have moved to two worship gatherings with one labeled as “traditional” and the other as “contemporary.”

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<sup>16</sup> Finnegan explicates that the “joined or unified religious-metaphysical world is broken down into three domains of knowledge and reality. The first is defined as the natural-objective world, which is the domain of science and instrumental reason, giving us objective truth. The second is the social and intersubjective world, which is the domain of politics and ethics understood through pragmatic reason, giving us normative rightness. The third is the subjective, individual world, which is the domain of art religion, and spirituality approached by aesthetic and expressive reason, giving us sincerity.” Ibid., 199.

<sup>17</sup> Clapp, 176.

<sup>18</sup> Finnegan, 76.

Both classifications are based on a functional, consumption model so that the consumer of worship can “shop” for whatever “brand” fits her best. Such a reductionistic view of worship misses God who is at the center.

Yet another factor serves to shape the prevalent reductionistic view of gathered worship. In the Mennonite Church USA Member Profile of 2006, written by Conrad L. Kanagy, pastors were asked to indicate which leadership tasks, out of thirteen, were most important to them. Preaching ranked at 48% while equipping others for ministry ranked at 41%. When members were asked to rank the same pastor priorities, 45% said preaching and 32% said pastoral care.<sup>19</sup> None of the leadership tasks included questions about preparing for gathered worship, even though 81% of Mennonites indicated that they attend worship services weekly. Furthermore, the worship resource which emerged as a response to the Member Profile provided Scriptures, song suggestions and sermon outlines as a *Resource for the Journey*. This resource limits the purview of worship to Scripture, song selections and sermon summaries. Such an approach will not move us forward.

In addition, the questions that were asked in the list of leadership tasks, serve to reduce gathered worship to the preaching event. While good preaching is vital, Russell Mitman points out that,

there still lingers in much of Protestantism the liturgical model left over from revivalism in which the sermon is considered to be the climax of the service. And the possibility still remains that the renewed interest in

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<sup>19</sup> Conrad L. Kanagy, *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2007), 74.

preaching today, because it is the fruit of work in the homiletical disciplines, will continue to foster this liturgical aberration. Ocean-liner sermons preceded by some liturgical tugboats have not been rendered obsolete by the space-age multimedia “messages” of the megachurch movement!<sup>20</sup>

“Ocean-liner” sermons and the notion of the “hymn sandwich” as articulated by James White,<sup>21</sup> represent a failure to see the whole worship gathering as a proclamatory event in which the whole sensorium is at the service of encountering God in the breaking open of the Word.

These complexities all factor into the pre-understandings which are brought into the conversation. These realities are not unique to Anabaptists. Other traditions have these dilemmas pressing in on them. Modernity, consumerism, and the dominance of preaching at the cost of a diminished view of worship all threaten to consume the church in their wake.

### **Resistance to Eucharist**

There are other factors at work, which also serve to limit our engagement in worship, especially the Eucharist. When discussing Asad’s insights in the previous chapter, I asked whether this “classical” approach to ritual, which I have connected to purgative spiritual practices, fosters the jump from text to social action. Furthermore, has

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<sup>20</sup> F. Russell Mitman, *Worship in the Shape of Scripture*, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>21</sup> In his chapter on frontier worship, James White describes the hymn sandwich as the phrase often used to describe how hymns formed the bookends for the the sermon and call to come to Christ. *Protestant Worship: Traditions and Transition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 178.

the history of legalistic approaches to the Supper compounded the issue? In other words, have we as Anabaptists, in our reliance on a purgative approach to the Lord's Supper in our fairly recent history, limited our desire or willingness to see the importance, significance, and centrality of the Eucharist and worship?

The history of early Anabaptist theology and practice of the Lord's Supper largely developed out of a reactionary stance to Catholicism. John Rempel notes that,

Both the formal theological arguments of leaders like Hubmaier and the informal defenses of believers preserved in court records focused straightforwardly on banishing Catholic habits of thought and practice. That development led to an unintended consequence. The emphasis was so strongly taken off God as the actor in the ceremonies and placed so completely on believers that the result came close to being a 'real absence' of Christ in Communion. [Phrase from Joel Schmidt, "The Challenge of Menno Simons' Symbolic View of the Supper" in *Conrad Grebel Review*, Fall 2006, 16-23.] The preoccupation with the corrective side, that of the human response, obscured the need to develop adequate theological claims about God's role in the ceremonies from a Believers Church point of view.<sup>22</sup>

Hence a limited theological understanding shaped the Believers church understanding and practice of communion. Rempel recounts a poignant memory he had:

Early in my seminary career came my first chance to help lead a chapel service in which I tried to bring together personal faith in Christ with liturgical form. Afterward, John Howard Yoder remarked to me, "You are the first person I've met, other than myself, who wants to bring together evangelical piety and liturgy." He went on to say that what evangelical theology and church life lack is liturgical and sacramental expression. It seemed bizarre to me that people for whom personal faith was so important did not know how to incarnate it. They were too often sloppy in worship and superficial in their celebration of the eucharist.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Rempel, "Critically Appropriating Tradition," 14.

<sup>23</sup> Rempel, "Toward an Anabaptist Theology of the Lord's Supper," 243.

The gift of God coming incarnate is encountered in the Eucharist. As stated above, not to enter into this profound “parable of the kingdom,” using Marpeck’s phrase, is to stand on the sidelines and to resist receiving the greatest gift of God entering into history in Jesus Christ and continuing his presence and being made known in the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

### **Social Action Superseding Worship**

When gathered worship is relegated to the lowest form of knowledge and reality as understood by modernist categories, the jump from text to social ethics can make sense. An environment is fostered in which the message of Anabaptism, and even of ritual studies, is only heard when lifted closer to the domain of science or at least the “intersubjective world . . . of politics and ethics.”<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann asks a crucial question that I find missing in the discussion among many Anabaptists. What is this *life* that we must regain for Christ and make Christian? What is, in other words, the ultimate end of all this doing and action?

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<sup>24</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Rodney Clapp, two persons who have a great affinity for Anabaptism, each critique the lack of Eucharistic practice. Hauerwas writes that “the Mennonite practice--or the absence of the practice--threatens to make Mennonites’ lives unintelligible. The Eucharist is not the sacrifice we make to an eternally angry God to try to buy ourselves some time; rather, the Eucharist is the good news that God would have us included in Christ’s sacrifice for the world so that the world may have an alternative to pointless and endless sacrifice.” Hauerwas, Stanley, “Confessions of a Mennonite Camp Follower,” in *Engaging Anabaptism*, ed. John D. Roth, 38.

Clapp writes “However indebted as I am to the Anabaptist tradition, and as much as I think the whole church catholic and evangelical has to learn from it, I remain an Episcopalian. At bottom, this has to do with the sacraments and sacramental theology. I fear that Zwinglian memorialistic understandings of baptism and the Lord’s Supper all too readily play into individualistic, subjectivistic spiritualities” “Anabaptism and the Obstacles,” in *Engaging Anabaptism*, 142.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



Suppose we have reached at least one of these practical goals, have “won”--then what? The question may seem a naive one, but one cannot really act without knowing the meaning not only of action, but of the life itself in the name of which one acts. One eats and drinks, one fights for freedom and justice in order to be *alive*, to have *fullness of life*. But what is it? What is the life of life itself? What is the content of life eternal? At some ultimate point, within some ultimate analysis, we inescapably discover that in and by itself action has no meaning. When all committees have fulfilled their task, all papers have been distributed and all practical goals achieved, there must come a perfect joy. About what? Unless we know, the same dichotomy between religion and life, which we have observed in the spiritual solution, remains. Whether we “spiritualize” our life or “secularize” our religion, whether we invite men to a spiritual banquet or simply join them at a secular one, the real life of the world, for which we are told God gave his only-begotten Son, remains hopelessly beyond our religious grasp.<sup>26</sup>

While Ricoeur does not attend to an ecclesiology, per se, he does articulate a hermeneutic of meaningful human action in which our sensibilities are awakened through a critique of ideology. He argues that social integration serves the function and content of what knits a society together and is joined to the inaugural event. What is our inaugural event in Christianity? What is it that we give our prime attentiveness towards? It is the church which is to enact, embody, and help link social memory to the inaugural event. How do we link social memory to the inaugural event? I propose that ritually enacted narrative provides such a link.

### **Ecclesiological Satiated Slumber: Church Disaffiliation**

In chapter two’s exploration of Ricoeur’s concept of meaningful action expressed in freedom, I touched on the significant lack of belonging that is happening in relation to

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<sup>26</sup> Schmemmann, 13.

being the church. I argued that when a believer's narrative refers to the church in the third person, a form of church disaffiliation occurs. A lack of freedom is being made manifest. A fuller expression of freedom involves acting *in*, not only being acted upon. I argue, with the help of others, that a renewed attention to biblical narrative, to enacting God's story, can be a unifying, identity-shaping, church-making practice.

Peter Sedgwick notes how Hauerwas argues that, "the story of God's new creation is not only told but enacted."<sup>27</sup> Hauerwas argues that,

the Church cannot tell the story without becoming part of the tale. Indeed, he suggests that the teller and the tale are one. The Church is created by God as the healing of our separation, and thus the narrative on which theological reflection may proceed both includes texts *qua* texts and the ecclesial context in which those texts are set.<sup>28</sup>

In a nutshell, the story is about the redemption of creation, of which we are a part. The narrative is the existence of a community who tells the story and embodies the story in a true or false way.

How the church narrates its identity and mission is addressed in Kanagy's reflections on the member profile of Mennonite Church USA cited above. He quotes Walter Brueggemann's work to illustrate that we, as a church, need to continue to press on towards imagining our lives interconnecting with the biblical narrative because,

what can happen from time to time to those children in Sunday school class yawning with boredom and twitching restlessly in their seat. If we

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<sup>27</sup> Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, quoted by Peter Sedgwick, "Worship and True or False Narrative," in *Worship and Ethics: Lutherans and Anglicans in Dialogue*, ed. Oswald Bayer and Alan Suggate. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 263.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "God's New Language," *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). 149.

keep telling those stories and challenging listeners to pay attention to them, the stories will from time to time ‘erupt into new usage . . . the words of the text seize someone in the community. . . . In that moment of re-utterance, the present is freshly illuminated, reality is irreversibly transformed. The community comes to know or see or receive or decide afresh. What has been tradition, hovering in dormancy, becomes available experience. In the moment of speaking and hearing, this is treasured tradition now become present experience.’<sup>29</sup>

While I am appreciative that Kanagy includes this “explosive description of transformation,” there is so much that is missing. Our twitching children have restless bodies. Our twitching children are leaving the body when they grow into young adulthood. We are restless as a body. The solution does not merely lie with speaking and hearing the text or with repeating the same thing so that the congregation is merely twitching in its sleep. We, as a body, have played a role in lulling people to sleep. Formation at the service of transformation calls for a deeper, wider turn towards the body on multiple levels. Ritually enacted narrative can provide such a turn. The gestures in which we engage shape us. The gesture of sitting and twitching in chairs being lulled into passivity has shaped us! All in all, we are getting what we have asked for ourselves and modeled for others. We are called to go back to the originary event of God coming in Jesus Christ with our whole beings.

For such a time as this, the practice of the Lord’s Supper is all the more important. The level of confusion, frustration, and attempts at grasping at power among the early disciples is so striking as Jesus sits with them at the table. This same confusion and

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<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann, *Texts that Linger, Words that Explode: Listening to Prophetic Voices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 1-2; quoted by Kanagy, 91.

frustration is brought forth in people who have a deep passion for the church. In what way are we then called to come alongside Jesus, kneel down and wash one another's feet? The issue is asking and discerning the question together, around broken bread, a cup of suffering, and a basin: how is God at work in the midst of this crisis in the church? What is God about? This work of stripping down is not for the faint of heart; it is not even for the wise by human standards, as the Scripture reminds us.<sup>30</sup>

Having moved through the first five elements of the chiastic pathway which narrate critical issues misshaping the witness of the church, we now arrive at the crux of our argument. The section below serves as the central idea in the chapter, followed by five elements which are inverted from their previous form and offer a transformative way forward.

### **God's Action: An Appropriation of Ritually Enacted Narrative as a Way Forward**

Pilgram Marpeck's understanding of action in the Lord's Supper served as a starting point for this study. The conversation deepened and expanded to include Paul Ricoeur's action theory and Talal Asad's notion of ritual. How have insights gleaned from these writers and various others helped move us forward in the study of ritually enacted narrative, especially as it relates to the Eucharist? How can such an appropriation of insights provide an alternate emplotment for misdirected *mimesis*, reductionistic worship,

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<sup>30</sup> I Cor. 2:4-5, 13.

resistance to the Eucharist, overemphasis on social action, and ecclesiological satiated slumber?<sup>31</sup>

From a human perspective, it may seem naive that we could re-weave our way out of this tangled morass with the spiritual practice of ritually enacted narrative, especially through the loom of the Eucharist. However, such an approach is precisely the choice Jesus made when he took a loaf of bread set before him and offered an alternate way of being that led him towards death on a cross.

### **Ecclesiological Awakening: God's Gift of Incarnation and Dynamic Interrelationship**

Marpeck's theological and ecclesiological insights gave primacy to *menschheit Christi* (humanity of Christ), and is what Rempel calls the "'golden thread' of Marpeck's thought."<sup>32</sup> These insights form the basis for a weaving a life-giving narrative out of the entanglements this study has addressed. God came incarnate in Jesus Christ, gifting us with a physical coming for physical people. "Christ's human nature made him present in the world; his outwardness made his inwardness tangible."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, "Christ's incarnation, Marpeck argued, was not an aberration in God's way of being present in the world but the prototype of how the Creator enters the creation. The 'Word becoming flesh' was God's act of condescension to meet the creation on its own terms."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> From this central part of the chiasmic structure on, an alternative emplotment is being offered.

<sup>32</sup> Rempel, "Critically Appropriating Tradition," 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Marpeck's theological insight saw that God continues to be incarnated in the body of Christ. Rempel writes,

The incarnation did not end with Christ's ascension but was prolonged in his 'humanity' in the church: "The Son of Man, in a physical way, should act and walk upon the earth by means of his members."<sup>35</sup> In this understanding, the term 'body of Christ' was not a metaphor but the description of a historical reality.<sup>36</sup>

Such a radical ecclesiology that joins the church with Christ is not possible without the gift of the Spirit of God.

Marpeck's mature thought speaks to this in his notion of *mitzeugnus* (co-witness): God moves in dynamic interrelationship. Such an inter-action or co-witness of God occurs as the Spirit of God works inwardly, confirming what is happening externally. This is a single, common movement or co-witness of God's Spirit and God's Son. In sum, this action is initiated by God, incarnated in the Son, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and calls us to join with God, forming one essence or co-witness.

Thus, the church is a primary manifestation of the ongoing outpouring of God's very self, co-witnessing to God's action. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon write, "The political task of Christians is to be the church rather than to transform the world. . . . Big words like 'peace' and 'justice,' slogans the church adopts under the presumption

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<sup>35</sup> Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings*, 73-88; quoted by Rempel, "Critically Appropriating Tradition," 11.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

that, even if people do not know what ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ means, they will know what peace and justice means, are words awaiting content.”<sup>37</sup>

This is why the church, as God’s incarnational prologation in the world, is called to attend to God’s movement. How does this happen? What helps the church to be the body? God and God’s triune interrelationship forms the primordial ground from which the church arises, but what then? What helps the church to continue to be the body? Such a radical ecclesiology calls forth radical engagement with God’s ongoing vivifying presence through the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> Reflection on these questions will guide the discussion in the rest of this chapter.

### **Worship as Social Action**

Worship is the “genesis” response to God’s gratuitous action.<sup>39</sup> In worship, we join with all of creation and give praise, glory, and thanks. Ricoeur and Hauerwas both

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<sup>37</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 38. I am indebted to Peter Dula, a former student of Stanley Hauerwas, for drawing my attention to this quote again in his essay “For and Against Hauerwas Against Mennonites,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84 (July 2010): 379.

<sup>38</sup> I am using and defining the term “radical” as “getting to the root.”

<sup>39</sup> My choice of the word “genesis” is to draw the reader towards what God intended in the creation. In Genesis all of creation is a good gift. Our natural response to this gift is to worship. Despite the twisted realities that have come forth over time and the warped way in which it has been manifested, this primal response still exists in humans.

argue that theological ethics rest upon divine gift. Thus, the wider purview of ethics is worship.<sup>40</sup>

Worship engages the body of Christ with God's vivifying presence. This animating presence calls for our allegiance to be in Christ.<sup>41</sup> As previously noted, Hauerwas reminds us that the liturgy is not a cause for social action, it is a social action in and of itself. Also, Ricoeur describes worship as a hyper-ethical act. Furthermore, in Zimmerman's application of Ricoeur's action theory, the liturgy is not an act separated from the rest of life, but both are grounded in the same source, the Paschal Mystery. Thus worship, a nonsensical act to the world, holds that our whole orientation and way of being is for the purposes of God.<sup>42</sup> Worship is a social action.

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<sup>40</sup> Boyd Blundell writes that both Hauerwas and Ricoeur converge in their stance of self as a gift. He goes further stating, "Despite the privileging of narrative and story in Hauerwas's account, he cannot escape casting the self in *idem* (Ricoeur) or phenomenal (Barth) terms. The story is not simply a mechanism to accept the gift, the gift *is* a history to be told. But though Hauerwas lacked the conceptual vocabulary to express the self as narrative--admitting that his claims 'obviously require a defense more elaborate than I can hope to develop here,' and further admitting, 'I am unsure I even know how to defend such a claim nor know what [a] defense would or should look like.'--he nonetheless follows Ricoeur's path that ethical concerns are inscribed into the very act of narrating." *Paul Ricoeur Between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2010), 166.

A fuller discussion of the convergence and divergence of Ricoeur's and Hauerwas's thought is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worth noting as I have argued, that a theology of gift is a necessity for helping the church embody Christ's presence for the sake of the world. Hauerwas articulates this profound notion of the community in a way that Ricoeur does not. However, Ricoeur's action theory helps awaken us to find our way toward how this happens in some of the intricacies of action.

<sup>41</sup> Worship is often defined as our response to the holy. I embrace that definition alongside of a broader definition of giving our allegiance. Furthermore, I argue that we are always worshipping something. A question before us therefore is, what or whom do we worship?

<sup>42</sup> Biblical scholar Marva Dawn gets at these seemingly nonsensical presuppositions in her book on worship, *A Royal Waste of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999).



In order for us to engage in this non-sensical act, to awaken and return to “genuine normality through holy abnormality,”<sup>43</sup> Lance Stone, with the help of Brueggeman, calls us to imagine an alternative way of being. Imagination, as Brueggeman articulates, is “the practice of the biblical memory in ways that transform our presumed world.”<sup>44</sup> Warped ideologies make the

imaginative articulation of an alternative both exceedingly difficult and exceedingly urgent. The task of the community of faith is to imagine and articulate such an alternative firstly among themselves and to one another, for if an alternative is not thus articulated, there is none. An imaginative leap may be required in positing a new world, which then throws into relief and rescripts the present one. It is above all in liturgy that imagination breaks free of the stranglehold of ‘managed reality,’ which is redescribed and rescripted and alternatives named publicly and brought to public expression. For Brueggemann it is liturgy that ‘battles’ for the imagination of the community, and because it is so crucial a part of the strategy of resistance to dominant and deathly definitions of reality, and so fundamental for the evoking of newness, he writes at length about the ‘rescriptive’ powers of worship with regard to <sup>45</sup>doxology, song, lament, dance and prayer.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, writes Stone,

part of liturgy’s world-constructing significance that we have noted above is that it brings to formal, public expression what may otherwise remain hidden, unexpressed or unimagined. We speak of an alternative community, but such a possibility and what it might entail becomes almost unimaginable. Thus the ‘alternative world’ which we are invited to imagine and in which we are called to live is frequently not self-evident,

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<sup>43</sup> Clapp, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona: St Mary’s Press, 1993), 40; quoted in Lance Stone, “Word and Sacrament as Paradigmatic for Pastoral Theology: In Search of a Definition Via Brueggemann, Hauerwas and Ricoeur,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol 56 (2003), 451, n. 30.

<sup>45</sup> Stone, 457.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

and the choices that lead to such an alternative are often not clearly presented. This is partly due to the hiddenness of God, but also to the hegemonic power of the status quo and of dominant definitions of reality which sap, tame and emasculate the imaginative capacity to construe an alternative, constituting immense resistance. As Brueggemann puts it, ‘the key pathology of our time, which seduces us all, is the reduction of imagination so that we are too numbed, satiated, and co-opted to do serious imaginative work.’<sup>47</sup>

As reflected in Stone’s articulation of Brueggeman, this is not merely an issue of belief or faith. Instead, it is an issue of imagination, articulation, resistance, awareness, and sustenance. Questions that may call us out of our numb and satiated slumber and restore this kind of biblical imagination could include: How are we fed? Who is the primary actor? To whom or what does our action respond? In the jump from text to social action, what allegiances have been lost? How do we know that the social action is rooted in an allegiance to God and not merely of our own making? Is there a sufficient understanding of ethics when it is limited to what we do? What if ethics is about who we are, encompassing what we do and how we do? What if infidelity to God in our worship, in our allegiance, reverberates in the rest of our lives? What if infidelity to God outside of gathered worship, a primary locale of orienting our allegiance, is a matter of untaught bodies in our gatherings as well as in life? How do we put together what was never meant to be torn apart in the first place? What does it mean to put our care of Scripture together with our worship and social action?

The barriers of public and private, spiritual and non-spiritual, scientific and unscientific, reasoned and unreasoned, are breaking down. Some of these divisions were

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 451.

addressed in Stephen Happel's essay as he examined the connection of worship and social sciences. Happel stated, "Worship is meant to be an emancipatory *praxis* through which a community not only confirms its already established Christian identity, but also challenges itself to enter further conversation."<sup>48</sup> Moreover,

Worship is not politically, economically, or aesthetically naive; it argues, persuades, and embodies various schemes of social recurrence. Through its visions of the future, it redirects common desire, not in such a way that the community feels guilty for not living up to an ideal but by transforming the communion of believers, however incrementally, in the present. Through the sacraments we are enabled to love and established to complete a common work.<sup>49</sup>

We are called to re-imagine our Christian identity and to restore worship as an emancipatory reality. This common work in gathered worship, and especially the Eucharist, can help discern when the ways of the world and its political, economic, and social powers have infiltrated the believing community's worship and life practices.

### **Extravagant Embrace of Eucharist**

An extravagant embrace of the Eucharist is a rather foreign concept to Anabaptists. It is here that Marpeck provides a richness in his understanding of action in the Lord's Supper to a tradition that holds deeply to the incarnation and its ecclesiological implications. Marpeck artfully helps re-weave, re-imagine, and re-encounter God's extravagant gift of coming incarnate, providing the Spirit, and calling the church into

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen Happel, "Speaking from Experience: Worship and the Social Sciences," In *Alternative Futures for Worship*, Vol. 2, *Baptism and Confirmation*, ed. Mark Searle (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1979), 179.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

being. We, as the body of Christ, are invited into God's very being, God very essence.

This is encountered afresh in the Eucharist.

Further richness and insights into an extravagant embrace of the Eucharist can be found in an unlikely conversation partner, the Orthodox tradition. In particular, John Zizioulas and Alexander Schmemmann provide a window into the Eucharist.

Zizioulas, in his seminal work *Being as Communion*, argues that the Eucharist was "an event constitutive of the being of the Church; enabling the Church to be. The eucharist constituted the Church's being."<sup>50</sup> The Eucharist is not an object in which it is "one sacrament among others,"<sup>51</sup> but rather, citing Zizioulas, Miroslov Volf writes:

the Eucharist is above all . . . a *liturgical act*, indeed, as the liturgical mode of life, of the congregation. It is not an isolated means of receiving grace, but rather "an assembly (*synaxis*), a community, a network of relations, in which a man 'subsists.'" [Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 60] The Eucharist and eucharistic communion are identical. Commensurately, what the eucharistic community receives at its celebrations is not simply holy things, nor even the words and deeds of Christ, but rather the *person of Christ in its totality*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 21.

<sup>51</sup> Miroslov Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 98.

<sup>52</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 98. The italicized phrase comes from Zizioulas, "L'eucharistie: quelques aspects bibliques," in *L'eucharistie*, by J. Zizioulas, J.M.R. Tillard, and J.J. von Allmen, 11-74. *Eglises en Dialogue* 12 (Paris: Mame, 1970), 55. Volf goes on to articulate what Zizioulas means by "the person of Christ in its totality." He writes, "The answer leads us to the heart of Zizioulas's ecclesiology. He conceives the eucharistic presence and appropriation of Christ in closest possible correspondence to his pneumatically understood Christology, Christology based, as already shown, on the notion of a 'corporate personality.' 'To eat the body of Christ and to drink his blood means to participate in him who took upon himself the "multitude". . . in order to make of them *a single body, his body*' In the eucharistic celebration, the many become one body of Christ, and do so in such a way that Christ takes them up 'into himself.'" 98; citing Zizioulas, "L'eucharistie," 55, 69.

Thus, God's gift, which is an ongoing gift, calls the church into being through the Eucharist, "by a story of forgiveness, reconciliation, and communion; it is to refuse to participate in the forces of destruction . . . it is, in other words, strategic disaffiliation."<sup>53</sup>

Schmemmann, whose thought has already been introduced in this study, sees the church as a sacrament of Christ's presence and action. He wrote,

The Western Christian is used to thinking of sacrament as opposed to the Word, and he links the mission with the Word and not the sacrament. He is, moreover, accustomed to consider the sacrament as perhaps an essential and clearly defined part or institution or act *of* the Church and *within* the Church, but not of the Church as being itself the sacrament of Christ's presence and action. And finally he is primarily interested in certain very "formal" questions concerning the sacraments: their number, their "validity," their institution, etc. Our purpose is to show that there exists and always existed a different perspective, a different approach to sacrament, and that this approach may be of crucial importance precisely for the whole burning issue of mission, of our witness to Christ in the world. For the basic question is: *of what are we witnesses?* what have we seen and touched with our hands? Of what have we partaken and been made communicants? Where do we call men? What can we offer them?<sup>54</sup>

A deep understanding of the church as the body, as the primal "sacrament of Christ's presence and action" is found in Schmemman's work. No longer are categories so tidily separated out for our rational minds. Schmemman articulates how the Eucharist helps weave together the very being of the church who witnesses, and is, the body of Christ.

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<sup>53</sup> Murphy, 330. Murphy articulates this in response to Zizioulas's understanding of the Eucharist.

<sup>54</sup> Schmemmann, 21.

In sum, Zizioulas and Schmemman argue that the Eucharist not only calls the church into being, but the church itself is the primal sacrament of Christ's presence. The invitation into an extravagant embrace of the Eucharist does not end here.

Paradoxically, Rosemary Haughton argues that the church as sacrament of Christ's presence means that "the church is called into the wilderness."<sup>55</sup> The church's prophetic vocation, writes Haughton, "is to ensure that the sacred is encountered and not avoided."<sup>56</sup> The Eucharist is the primal touchpoint of God's call into the wilderness. This primal story, this mythic story is encountered afresh when worshiper embrace the unknown. She says that the Eucharist can provide the creation of an "in wilderness" condition that withdraws people from the support and security of normal life. She states, "it is in this total darkness, and nowhere else, that we can acclaim the light of Christ."<sup>57</sup> This is a pattern of conversion, which "occurs in the wilderness where the certainties of the Law, the structures of formation, have broken down . . . The wilderness is framed by the ritual reminder of the vocation of the Church and the need for grace and repentance.

This leap into the wilderness, the "place" of transformation, is a bodily entry. The outside entry is through Christ's body, the body of the community, and the body of the person. This is an illuminating encounter, marked by a deeper awareness of who Christ really is. Christ has taken up residence. We become an embodiment of Christ. James

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<sup>55</sup> Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man* (Springfield: Templegate, 1980), 270.

<sup>56</sup> Haughton, 270.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Loder writes that this is why it is important that the central symbol of Christian transformation be a meal. It is perceived with the senses and understood for multiplicity of meaning. It is “taken in” and made a part of one’s physical being. Loder writes,

As participant in the sacrament, one is united not merely socially with the community, but now one’s own very being is united with others through the common ground of Christ as being-itself. One does not merely know about the body and blood of Christ, but his blood severs the priority of all other blood relationships, and his body becomes the family of God by which one’s inherited kinship can undergo transformation and renewal.<sup>58</sup>

In the Eucharist the human spirit itself is turned inside out. The Eucharist becomes the lens through which one’s own being and being itself is viewed. A whole world-view shift occurs as we are being drawn into an extravagant embrace of the Eucharist.

Strong strands of such an embrace are found especially in Marpeck’s spiritual theology of action in the Lord’s Supper, Zizoulas’s notion of the Eucharist calling the church into being, Schmemmann’s naming of the church as the prime sacrament of Christ, and Haughton’s call for the “prophetic vocation” of the church to be transformatively encountered in the wilderness of the Eucharist in order that the church might truly be the body of Christ.

Yet, the question of how such rich awareness can be tasted in the gathered community of faith still stands. This is especially true for Anabaptists who have not embraced the Eucharist as a central practice that makes the church. I argue that a ritually

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<sup>58</sup> James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, Helmers & Howard, 1989), 120.

enacted narrative approach can make it more likely that the gathered community has the ability to “taste and see.” The extravagance of the Eucharist is a gift from God.

### **Taught Bodies: Towards a Greater Fulness of Gathered Worship**

Engagement of the scriptures is key to learning to sense the fulness of God’s gift in the Eucharist. As Michael Cartwright notes, Stanley Hauerwas articulates this priority as he “advocates nothing less than a ‘return to the text’ of the Bible, which means ‘a commitment to displaying the richness and wisdom of traditions that are at once text-based, hermeneutical, and oriented to communal practice.’”<sup>59</sup> This engagement is not done in a vacuum. It is important to attend to the communal presuppositions and ecclesial practices that are still present in Catholic, Anabaptist, and Orthodox practices of interpreting the Bible. He calls each tradition to recognize the potential significance of their own worship practices for the interpretation of scripture.<sup>60</sup>

As John Rempel notes, Marpeck

was intimately familiar with Scripture. He grounded his convictions in it. But this was true also of his opponents. They could match each other text for text! What was needed was a convincing presentation of the cumulative meaning of all of the Bible’s writings on a subject. Schwenckfeld and those like him turned to a spiritual reading of these writings, that is, that the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit is the triumph of the ‘inner’ over the ‘outer’. The Marpeck Circle turned to a sacramental reading, concluding that in the ascension and Pentecost the ‘outer’ flesh and blood dimension of human existence becomes one with

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<sup>59</sup> Michael G. Cartwright, “Afterward: Stanley Hauerwas’s Essays in Theological Ethics: A Reader’s Guide,” *The Hauerwas Reader*, 643.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 642.



its ‘inner’ and spiritual reality. Both of these ways of reasoning have a long historical pedigree in the church. The novelty in Marpeck’s engagement with this debate was his insight into the consequences of severing the Spiritualist hermeneutic from the doctrinal one.<sup>61</sup>

My approach to the engagement of Scripture in ritually enacted narrative is sacramental in the Marpeckian sense as it brings to bear a joining of the inner and the outer and takes into account the previous insights that have led to this point in the chapter.

Interpretation of the scriptures has often been perceived as a solo endeavor on behalf of a pastor or a priest, tucked away and separated out from the people and then presented in the next worship gathering. Or, an even more challenging perception is that the interpretation of scripture is a private enterprise altogether, no longer in conversation with pastor, priest, or the believing community. A unique offering of Anabaptists, and particularly the group which was connected with Marpeck, is that the unfolding and interpretation of scripture is part of the “work of the people.”<sup>62</sup> Schmemann offered a more nuanced definition of *leiturgia* as “an action by which a group of people became something corporately which they had not been as a mere collective of individuals.”<sup>63</sup> On a deeper level, this implicitly joins the interpretation of the scriptures to the performing of the scriptures in the midst of corporate worship.

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<sup>61</sup> Rempel, “Critically Appropriating Tradition,” 5.

<sup>62</sup> Marpeck’s approach also shows a multi-layered, “high degree of self-consciousness and the capacity to think his own thoughts about the movements around him” as well as collaborative engagement with the Scriptures. “Most scholars,” Rempel writes, “have concluded that Marpeck thought and wrote collaboratively, especially the three major works that bear his stamp, the *Admonition*, the *Response*, and the *Explanation of the Testaments*. Such a combination of traits is unusual.” Ibid., 8.

<sup>63</sup> Schmemann, 25.

As the body gathers in worship, especially in a tradition that gives primacy to the Word, it is often preaching that gets the strongest emphasis. It is perceived that preaching is the central event in which the interpretation of the Scriptures is presented to the congregation. Mitman writes,

Contrary to the continuing tenacity of the nineteenth-century model, there is theological, historical, and practical evidence to demonstrate that a sermon is only one act within *a corporate liturgical action that in its entirety intends to become a proclamatory event in which the Word of God is enacted and experienced*. This approach, which may appear somewhat radical to some, is premised on the thesis that not only does preaching take place in a liturgical context, but also the *whole liturgical action itself becomes a proclamatory event*.<sup>64</sup>

The evidence to which Mitman points finds conversation partners in Marpeck, Zizioulas, Schmemman, Ricoeur, and Asad. We have often helped people enter into their “heads” through giving a primary emphasis on the sermon to interpret the Word. While there are preachers who recognize the need for preaching that helps people encounter “the bodily weight of truth,”<sup>65</sup> it is not enough to make a sermon the entire focus of the worship gathering. The whole worship gathering serves as an unfolding of the Word.

The narrative of the Word serves as a guide for the movement of gathered worship. There are certain shifts or movements that arise from within the narrative itself

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<sup>64</sup> Mitman, 15.

<sup>65</sup> This phrase comes from Thomas Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 53. He argues, “If I am a wise preacher, I will not simply report the final essence of my thought. I will employ language that helps the listeners to feel the bodily weight of the truth, to experience bowing and standing, leaning on God and being the self-responsible people they are called to be. . . I call this form of speaking ‘logosomatic’ language, because it proceeds from the creative ordering power of reality, the *logos*, as it works in and through our bodily (*somatic*) existence.” (Ibid., 55-56). Such a potent approach to preaching is needed. However, even Thomas Troeger would argue that this is not a stand-alone endeavor. Furthermore, hearing the word with our bodies needs to involve our bodies.

which need to be attended to within the flow of worship itself. If there is a call for a shift, movement, or transformation in the biblical narrative, then such a shift can be fostered in the entire action of worship.

In common ecclesiastic practice, the structure of worship dominates rather than serves the movement of the biblical narrative. Free-church traditions often critique liturgical church traditions for having a written, set format that is followed. However, although most free-church traditions may not have a written liturgy, they do have a specific, repeatable structure. The spiritual theology expressed in such “unwritten” liturgies may be truncated or at odds with the very Word which the community is to “hear.”<sup>66</sup> In both free-church tradition and liturgical traditions, there is a need for attention to how the “order of service” tends to dominate rather than serve the movement of the biblical narrative.

In worship the persons gathered are not only a collective of listeners, but are also enactors. We, as the church, are invited to move from reading and interpreting the Scriptures, to allowing the Scriptures to ‘read’ and interpret us. A life-giving reality of the Scriptures can be encountered in ritually enacted narrative. Social anthropologist Paul Connerton argues that transformative ritual practices,

. . . are not only about the telling of and reflecting on a master story but also about the enactment of that story in ritual performance. The persuasiveness of these commemorations, therefore, is not based on some

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<sup>66</sup> A myriad of remedies are pursued to prevent this. However, what often happens is that theologians, biblicists, and liturgists try to speak back to this while other persons in the church become turned off by such critique either because of the way that it is offered or the feeling of intimidation by the power imbalance. Attending to the unfolding of the movement in the biblical narrative is a way to recognize that we are embodied people.

level of cognitive competence (instruction for the liturgy), but on what he calls ‘habituation’ to the ritual performance. We are ‘persuaded’ by the liturgy to the extent that it enters into and becomes a part of who we are spiritually, cognitively, and, above all, physically in that liturgy.<sup>67</sup>

In this way the gathered community moves from an experience that has been largely auditory to enacting the story, and thus into transformative engagement.

As Rosemary Haughton boldly states: Transformation “is a total personal revolution. It begins with repentance--the rejection along with actual sins of the whole apparatus of natural virtue as irrelevant and misleading--and proceeds eventually to the desired dissolution of all that ordinary people ordinarily value in themselves or others. The result of this dissolution, this death of the natural man, is the birth of the whole human being, the perfection of man.”<sup>68</sup>

This kind of transformation, she argues, cannot be left to chance. The reductionistic view of gathered worship and lack of attention to Eucharist, I argue, does just this. For that which can move us from formation to transformation, sustaining and identifying, needs to have deliberate care to an encounter which is at least potentially transforming.<sup>69</sup> The Eucharist can teach our bodies about Christ in ways that help the church--as a transformed community--to see and engage the world as transformed. When

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<sup>67</sup> E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves*, ed. Don E. Saliers, Virgil Michel Series (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 77; referring to Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 71.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

we ignore the Lord's Supper, or place it as an afterthought, we miss engagement with a crucial way God gave us to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."<sup>70</sup>

Where Anabaptists, or more precisely those who have adopted a rationalistic, Zwinglian, Enlightenment-tainted approach, have missed the point is that the Lord's Supper is not in the mind alone. This sacrament is not an intellectual exercise. It is primarily an act of the body. The hermeneutic turn towards the body encounters the locus of transformation, which resides within the trinitarian reality of God being made manifest, incarnationally, as a ground-shift welcoming into Christ, into the *mitzeugnus* of God. Perhaps the common Anabaptist leap from text to social action is in part a critique of what the church fails to embody for the world. But this leap is also an avoidance of a bodily, transforming encounter in which we do not have full control as humans. When we surrender to its transformative potential, the Eucharist becomes an entry into where we end and God begins. It is a yielding of what we think we can know, understand and manipulate into that which we cannot fathom.

Here we encounter what Loder calls the void.<sup>71</sup> Our temptation is not only to avoid this emptying and do business as usual. We are tempted to see transformation as something which we can control. If we hold the "ritual" of the Eucharist at bay, at arms length, then we think we can somehow keep it within our categories of control. We may think that the bodily call towards this yielding is easier if it is a mental exercise. Yet the

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<sup>70</sup> I Cor. 11:26.

<sup>71</sup> Loder, 121.

body, with the help of the Holy Spirit, enters into the reality of this bodily experience in which we are being illuminated in Christ afresh.

For Loder, the center of this transformation is the Eucharist. The human spirit itself is turned inside out, and Eucharist becomes the lens through which one's own being and being itself is viewed. A whole world view shift. In addition, Loder argues that the Eucharist is communicated, as a transformationally structured narrative, in Jesus Christ, the "semantic mediator" who does for us humans what we attempt but cannot ever do for ourselves by obtaining salvation and bringing us in right relationship with God. Furthermore, "When the Eucharist stands at the center of transformation, it means that here the human spirit itself, not merely this or that in one's life, but the creative dynamic of human life that generates science, art, and all culture, is about to be turned inside out."<sup>72</sup>

Both Loder and Haughton have helped us see that transformation calls for a leap into the unknown. The performative importance of ritually enacted narrative becomes a deliberate formation at the service of transformation, in which it is more likely that a person will make the leap of faith into the unknown.

The leap into darkness is a leap into death with Christ whose death made no sense at all in terms of his mission on earth. For the ambiguity of the Eucharist is a presentation to the community, present in this time and place, of the basic ambiguity on which Christianity is based--that of Christ himself.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 276.

### **God-Centered *Mimesis*: *Gestus***

The chiastic structure has offered a pathway across the landscape of: Misdirected *Mimesis*/God-Centered *Mimesis*, Untaught Bodies/Taught Bodies, Resistance to Eucharist/Extravagant Embrace of Eucharist, Social Action Superseding Worship/Worship as Social Action, and Ecclesiological Satiated Slumber/Ecclesiological Awakening. Now this pathway brings us to its destination: embodied appropriation, becoming the gesture of God.

Throughout this study I have been inviting attention to an appropriation of ritually enacted narrative as a way of offering formative, embodied practice, so that as individuals and as the church we awaken to who we are: the body of Christ, the gesture of God in the world. We are embodied beings, hence we will embody the ways we are taught. When the church ritually enacts the Gospel narrative, dualistic thinking is countered by the narrative of God's coming to us in Jesus to bring us back into union with our selves, our bodies, and our God. Marpeck would argue that this congruence, this oneness, is the very essence of God. This is what we are invited to move toward.

A deepened practice of the Lord's Supper that acknowledges that we are embodied beings, rooted in God's action, can then serve as an instrument of God's movement in and through us as bodies, as the body of Christ. I argue that the how of ritually enacted narrative, the performative how, takes its script from the Word broken

open as we encounter the bodily weight of truth within ourselves and the gathered community. This is the Word-script that is to be read and performed in our bodies. It is time that our scholarship in Anabaptism link with our enactment in worship. On hidden and conscious levels we are longing for the Word to be broken open in ways that are deep enough, strong enough, hearty enough to encompass all of life in relation to God.

The unitive God-encounter which can occur within an embodied practice of the Eucharist gives rise to a deeper theological insight, one that emerges from ongoing spiritual practices and disciplines that attend to the suffering Christ. This gives way to a theology of grace. Thus, the ritually enacted narrative offered in our worship gatherings, the very gestures that we engage in again and again, can play a crucial role in the very beliefs we hold, including that of the suffering Christ. This is not dependent on feeling. Rather, there seems to be a hidden, yet pervasive presence of the Holy Spirit. The community's discernment is needed in order to remind persons that this is the movement of God, drawing one closer for God's sake. God's inhabitation and infusing forms within us a receptivity and availability in love within us to whatever life has to offer. Thus, just as Christ was handed over to the world, we hand ourselves over to God. The transformative interaction of God's indwelling and our surrender to God heals the false divide and brings us into union with God, in order that we may be handed over to the world as Christ's body.

An attentiveness to ritually enacted narrative in which the ecclesia enacts God's gestures, is a corrective gesture to the illusion that gathered worship is superfluous. The



inagural event offered in the Eucharist can interconnect with our current historical context on a deeper level when embodied in gesture. While there will not be a complete restoration until the return of Christ, there is a sense in which the already is evoked, enacted, and embodied. In this way the liturgy offers a new norm, over and over again, and awakens us to a critique of our values.

Here we are entering into the realm of transformation, of Spirit, a shifting from an agent who acts to Christ acting in me and through me, to Christ acting in us and through us. Within gathered worship, in the Eucharist, God is at work, God is the actor: “It is no longer me, but Christ in me,” Galatians 2:20. Thus, through the means of ritually enacted worship, we become gestures of God.

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