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**Figuring Liturgically
A Ricoeurian Analysis of the Byzantine-Rite "Great Blessing of Water"**

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Figuring Liturgically

A Ricoeurian Analysis of the Byzantine-Rite "Great Blessing of Water"

by

Brian A. Butcher

A dissertation submitted to the
Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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INTRODUCTION

Guardini's Challenge

American liturgist David Stosur, in an article entitled "Liturgy and (Post)Modernity: A Narrative Response to Guardini's Challenge"¹ has touched upon both the starting point and envisioned end of the present work. On the one hand, he brings to the fore the crisis of meaning that according to twentieth-century "Liturgical Movement" pioneer Romano Guardini plagues modern engagement in liturgy. This is expressed in the latter's famous question: "Would it not be better to admit that man in this industrial and scientific age, with its new sociological structure, is no longer capable of a liturgical act?" On the other hand, Stosur suggests that the thought of the late Paul Ricoeur may offer resources for responding to this crisis of meaning—that it may serve as a philosophical "handmaiden" to postmodern liturgical theology. Guardini's concern devolves around a perception that radical changes in the twentieth century have compromised the intelligibility and viability of traditional liturgical praxis, eviscerating its meaningfulness for his contemporaries. According to Stosur, this is a *postmodern* challenge inasmuch as it recognizes the problem at hand as less one of ritual revision, or of fostering a more active participation by the laity in the celebration of the liturgy, than one of confronting a *Zeitgeist* whose epistemological and ontological critiques challenge the very coherence of the liturgical enterprise as such. Stosur candidly voices this challenge (as

1. David A. Stosur, "Liturgy and (Post)Modernity: A Narrative Response to Guardini's Challenge," *Worship* 77, no. 1 (January 2003): 22–41.

a gloss on the dominical saying, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath”) as follows: “The liturgy was made ostensibly for humanity but really by humans, probably to deceive or control other humans, most of whom for centuries were expected or forced to take it. Now individuals can take it or leave it, submit to it completely or remain indifferent to it, critique it or remake it in any or all of its aspects. In any event, the liturgy means different things to different persons, and its power to signify is an illusion if our notion of signification assumes any stability in the reality signified.”²In this comment, we see an indication of the kinds of questions to which Ricoeur’s labours enable a productive response: *inter alia*, the nature and importance of authorial intent, the conflict engendered by interpretive pluralism, the machinations of ideology, the relationship between authority and freedom, or tradition and innovation, and the reference of religious language. Ultimately, the underlying problem concerns *veracity* and *verification*—can one arbitrate definitively in regard to the meaning of what is transacted in liturgy, and if so, how?

While only rarely reflecting on liturgy, Ricoeur maintained a particular interest in biblical hermeneutics throughout his career, which has in turn rendered it a salient theme in the works of his interlocutors. Our own *quod est demonstrandum* is whether, and how, Ricoeur may be analogously exploited in the interpretation of the ritual phenomenon that is Christian liturgy, as this is embodied in a characteristic service of the Byzantine tradition. Hence the two questions which will accompany the course of this study: what are the implications of the *oeuvre* of Paul Ricoeur for liturgical theology in general? and how does the adoption of a Ricoeurian hermeneutic shape the study of a given rite, namely, the “Great Blessing of Water” (GBW)? These questions express our adherence to Nicholas Lash’s prescription for contemporary theologizing, namely that “each theology must genuinely be a ‘particular’ theology, expressive of some particular context and circumstance, seeking to mediate between

2. Ibid., 30.

that context and some other particular ‘place’ or places of experience, meaning and value.”³

What follows, therefore, is intended as a theological mediation between the context of the Byzantine tradition, and the “place” represented by the manifold of Ricoeur’s thought.

Because of its structure and content, the GBW, celebrated annually on the eve and day of the feast of Theophany/Epiphany (January 6) is paradigmatic of the liturgical tradition as a whole. While not formally regarded as a sacrament, it is explicitly imitative of the two central sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist; although only one of a myriad of blessing rites, its significance in the calendar, as well as its role as the sacramental prerequisite for almost all other liturgical blessings (inasmuch they routinely employ holy water), give it both a theological as well as a practical preeminence among them.⁴ Before proceeding any further, it will be worthwhile to outline the shape of the service as reflected in the *textus receptus*.⁵

3. Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 32–33.

4. The most comprehensive historical-theological study of the GBW has recently been conducted by Nicholas Denysenko. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Denysenko for kind permission to consult and cite his doctoral dissertation, a copy of which was readily provided to me upon request.

As he ably contends in the introduction to his work: “The rich theological language of the sanctification of waters and its striking similarity to Baptism warrants [sic] its characterization as a sacramental event. Its uniquely Christological orientation and precise expressions of Trinitarian operation offer a framework for ecumenical discourse. The consistent elaboration of events and ideas expressed by prayers and hymns constitutes a model for interpreting heortology. Altogether, a systematic explication of the history and theology of the sanctification of waters in the Byzantine rite has the potential to advance comprehension of Byzantine sacramental theology” (“The Blessing of Waters on the Feast of Theophany in the Byzantine Rite: Historical Formation and Theological Implications” [PhD diss.: Catholic University of America, 2008], 16).

It is important to remember that in the Christian East the Feast of Theophany is considered, alongside Pentecost, as the feast of the Trinity *par excellence*, the occasion when the Church commemorates the revelation of the true nature of God to the world. Along with Pentecost, it was the primary occasion, other than the Easter Vigil, when baptism was administered, viz. when catechumens were sacramentally initiated into a life of communion with the Trinitarian God. We see that this is so already in the late fourth-century homily *On Baptism* of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who reproaches his flock for delaying reception of the sacrament with such excuses as, “I am waiting for Epiphany; I prefer Easter; I will wait for Pentecost” (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. VII, XXIV). The custom of administering baptism on the feast of Theophany was forbidden, however, in the West, by Pope St. Leo the Great, who insisted upon the Easter and Pentecost seasons as the only fitting times for celebrating the sacrament. See Thomas Carroll and Thomas Halton, *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), 186–7.

5. Given that there are, in point of fact, several recensions of the GBW, proper to specific Churches (e.g., the Vatican-issued *Recensio Ruthena* for Ukrainian, Ruthenian, Slovak and Hungarian Greco-Catholics), I am using this term in the broad sense. As Denysenko observes, the only significant differences between the majority Greek and Slavic traditions concern the prescription to repeat the blessing on the day of the feast, and the recitation of the prologue to the “Great Are You” prayer, both omitted in the ritual books of the latter (Denysenko, op. cit., 2). One must qualify Denysenko’s distinction, however, by mentioning that the Churches adhering to the *Recensio Ruthena*—

The rite begins in the church, at the end of Vespers on the eve of the feast of Theophany, or of Matins or Divine Liturgy on the day, with the clergy and servers processing out from the altar (with cross, bells, incense and torches) into the nave itself (when the blessing is celebrated indoors); alternatively, exiting the church proper, and followed by the congregation, they continue on to a nearby body of water, to the singing of the opening hymns.⁶ When the blessing is celebrated in the church, the community gathers rather around the font or vessel containing the water to be blessed.⁷ After the font/body of water (the church) and the people have been censed, the readings begin. There are three from Isaiah,⁸ followed by a brief Psalm response⁹ and an Epistle, from First Corinthians.¹⁰ Next the Alleluia is sung,¹¹ and the Markan baptismal Gospel¹² proclaimed with the usual solemnity. Thereafter come the general intercessions, followed by the great prayers over the water. These concluded, the theme-songs of the feast are sung, while a cross is immersed three times into the water. Finally, everyone is sprinkled with the holy water and approaches to partake of it, also taking some into their own containers for domestic use throughout the rest of the year. Such use includes consumption and the blessing of family members, in keeping with the identity of the Christian

as well as the Russian Old Believers—actually follow Greek usage in both respects, with the addition of a significant ritual element not treated by Denysenko, and generally unknown to both modern Greek and Russian practice, namely, the immersion of three triple-branched candlesticks during the respective recitations of the first line of “Great Are You.” Because the present dissertation does not address the historical-critical concerns of Denysenko, but rather appropriates his research in the service of a hermeneutical inquiry, we have chosen to refer to the English translations of Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, generally well-respected for their literalness, theological accuracy and sensitivity to patristic allusions. His rendering of the GBW, provided in full in the Appendix below, is available online: <http://anastasis.org.uk/megagiasm.htm> (accessed Dec. 31, 2009).

6. According to the Greek rubrics: “During the singing of the sticheron, *The Voice of the Lord upon the Waters*, the clergy and people proceed in procession to a nearby river or spring, or to the sea shore, and the Blessing is held there in the open air” (Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, trans., *The Festal Menaion* [London: Faber & Faber, 1977], 387).

7. Kallistos Ware notes: “If there is a permanent font in the church, the Blessing takes place there. In normal practice today, a large vessel of water is prepared on a special table in the centre of the church” (Mother Mary and Ware, op. cit., 348n1).

8. Isaiah 35:1-10; 53:1-13; and 12:3-6.

9. Psalm 26:1.

10. I Corinthians 10:1-14.

11. Intercalated with Psalm 28:3.

12. Mark 1:9-11.

home as a “domestic church” (*ecclesiola*). This identity is reinforced when, in the weeks following Theophany, the priest of the parish conducts a visitation of all his parishioners, at which time he solemnly blesses their homes with Theophany water. As mentioned above, “Theophany water” is conserved in the precincts of the church as well, for use in the manifold blessings of persons, objects and places.

The present analysis of the GBW does not pretend to an exhaustive appropriation of Ricoeur, but rather an evaluation and application of select works, chosen for their pertinence to liturgical theology. In keeping with the dialectical *élan* of his hermeneutics, I have, on the one hand, based my choice of Ricoeurian sources on the ambit of said theology as delineated by such Orthodox luminaries as Alexander Schmemmann; on the other hand, those very sources have served to enlarge this ambit in the measure they probe its terminological and thematic contours. Hopefully, the reader familiar with Ricoeur will discover, in the course of our inquiry, new detours for which he may act as guide; the reader familiar with liturgical theology, new criteria by which to reflect on the meaning of the Orthodox *lex orandi*—and its corollary *lex credendi*.

CHAPTER 1

Why Ricoeur?

A Contemporary *Ancilla Theologiae*?

The question may well arise: why is it at all necessary to employ the frame of reference and method of *any* particular philosophy in order to do liturgical theology?¹ Any response must in turn countenance the perennial, intractable question of the rapport between theology *per se* and philosophy. Max Charlesworth schematizes the history of this relationship in five phases, only one of which, the medieval Thomistic tradition, actually thematizes it in the complementary terms suggested by the analogy of a “handmaiden.” In classical antiquity, he argues, philosophy was rather considered as comprehending religion itself; in the wake of the Enlightenment, it has been seen consecutively as “making room for faith,” serving the “analysis of religious discourse” and fostering the “postmodernist critique of the religious domain.”² Ricoeur’s *oeuvre*, however, is in this respect difficult to locate; all three of these post-Enlightenment enterprises feature in its panorama and, as the course of our study will demonstrate, one would be hard pressed to deny that his approach ultimately, if unsystematically and perhaps even unwittingly, fulfills the threefold task assigned to

— — — — —

1. Certainly, it is not evident from the history of the discipline as such that philosophy has explicitly or consistently been considered a *sine qua non*. Whether in the domain of patristic mystagogy or of the *Liturgiewissenschaft* of the past century and a half, one does not find an explicit delineation of the role that philosophy might play. Yet it would seem that today the liturgical theologian, no more than any other, may ignore the challenge of articulating his or her philosophical frame of reference.

2. Max Charlesworth, *Philosophy and Religion: From Plato to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 6–9.

philosophy by St. Thomas, according to Charlesworth, in respect of religious faith: “First, philosophy helps faith to express and systematise its truths; second, philosophy justifies the preambles or presuppositions of faith; and, third, philosophy defends the truths of faith from sceptical objections.”³

In this regard, Dominican Aidan Nichols is most appreciative of Ricoeur’s thought, regarding it as well-suited to the contemporary service of theology: “Concern with the manner in which Christian truth descends through time has [recently] been enlivened by the stimulus of hermeneutical philosophy—the philosophical investigation of the process of interpretation—as represented by, most notably, Paul Ricoeur [*inter alia*]... [Such thought is] clearly pertinent to Christian theology, since that theology can be thought of as the continuous interpretative reappropriation of a religious tradition, a tradition which sees itself as the carrier of a divine revelation, for which our primary metaphor is the Word, precisely, of God.”⁴

Nichols proceeds to praise the contribution of Emmanuel Lévinas as a “highly original philosophy [being] worked out in our lifetime,” whose significance for theology has yet to be fully determined. Ricoeur, however, is surely peer to the latter: as a Christian who was always careful to distinguish his primary philosophical work from his avocation to biblical exegesis (and his occasional forays into theology), it is similarly true of him that “revelation directs the philosopher’s interests but not the methods or ideas.”⁵ Indeed, there is a growing consensus that Ricoeur’s interests, as well as his methods and ideas, are in fact germane to the theological task, not least because of Ricoeur’s constant endeavour to occupy a “mediating position”—Nichols’ term for the role played by the great philosophical systems upon which Christian theologians have drawn over the centuries.

While the Ricoeurian corpus does not form a unified system or contain a definitive *magnum opus*, consisting rather of a diffuse collection of texts composed over almost three

3. Ibid., 68.

4. Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 51.

5. Ibid., 49.

quarters of a century, its variegated strands have been woven into a tapestry by several interpreters.⁶ What is displayed therein, alternatively termed “hermeneutical phenomenology” and “philosophical anthropology” does not perhaps aspire to the status of a *philosophia perennis*, in the vein of Aquinas; Ricoeur, indeed, would likely have regarded such an achievement as chimerical. Nonetheless, oriented as it is to comprehending both epistemology and ontology, the realms of both thought and life, the work of Ricoeur does appear to hold out the promise of serving, to quote Nichols once again, as “a fundamental way of reading the structure of the universe ...[into which] we can then go on to insert extra elements drawn from alternative philosophies.”⁷

Thus Joyce Ann Zimmerman, the principal liturgist to have interpreted Ricoeur, can assert that an advantage of his hermeneutical theory is the provision it makes for the inclusion of different methods within the “explanatory moment” of the interpretive process.⁸ Zimmerman finds in Ricoeur a comprehensive heuristic for the contemporary study of liturgy, one informed by a spectrum of disciplines, contending that he has enabled her to provide “the most complete philosophical framework for a viable liturgical hermeneutics that can capitalize on both critical and post-critical methods.” She explains: “Drawing heavily on his textual hermeneutics, I have also profited hermeneutically from his works on symbolism, metaphor, narrative, imagination, action theory and return to the subject, to name a few. In each case, nevertheless, I have always been careful to place the particular aspect of his theory with which I might be working within his larger philosophical framework.”⁹ A goal of the present study will thus be to evaluate and extend Zimmerman’s accomplishment, discerning where it admits

6. For example: John van den Hengel, *The Home of Meaning* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982); Mario Valdés, ed., *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); David M. Kaplan, ed., *Reading Ricoeur* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

7. Aidan Nichols, op. cit., 54.

8. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 38–39.

9. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 99.

of further development in the light of the later writings of Ricoeur not treated in her publications.

Outside of liturgical studies, the theologian who has arguably done the most to mine the riches of Ricoeur's thought is Dan Stiver, whose *Theology after Ricoeur* makes for an invaluable *vademecum*. His appraisal is that Ricoeur furnishes "as comprehensive a philosophy as any in the twentieth century."¹⁰ This philosophy, moreover, is one that is particularly respectful of the irreducibility of the discourses of faith, seeking as it does to illuminate, by its own lights, the phenomena elucidated otherwise by theology. Hence, "Ricoeur's notion of philosophy as at best being able to 'approximate' affirmations of theology is a promising model. It allows for a relationship that is one of neither absolute domination nor absolute distinction."¹¹ It forms, therefore, what could perhaps be regarded as a sixth category in the taxonomy of Charlesworth adduced above, for in it we find a dialectical relationship between the philosophical and the religious domains, in which each contributes to exploiting the full potential of the other.

Eastern Theology and Western Philosophy

While several Western scholars have made exploratory endeavours regarding the relevance of Ricoeur for theology in general and liturgy in particular, Eastern Christians, whether Catholic or Orthodox, have yet to really join in the conversation. As the latter become ever more rooted in a Western context, however, it would seem imperative that they adapt to its intellectual ecology, as it were, if indeed the transplantation of their tradition is to succeed. This process impels a coming to terms with the full spectrum of postmodern thought, including hermeneutics.

Rowan Williams applauds, for instance, the efforts of certain Orthodox to engage in dialogue with twentieth-century philosophy, especially contemporary Greek theologians

¹⁰ Dan R Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville, KY Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 248

¹¹ Ibid , 238

Christos Yannaras¹² and Metropolitan John Zizioulas:¹³

“On the philosophical front, Zizioulas’ recent work suggests the possibility of useful interaction between this kind of ecclesiology [i.e., one involving ‘new possibilities for interchange’] and various Western attempts at ‘postmodern’ or ‘postliberal’ schemes, in its critique of a metaphysic of unrelated substances and an epistemology based on the myth of a detached or neutral subjectivity. Orthodox theologians have shown willingness to engage with Heidegger, but it is perhaps time for a comparable engagement with Gadamer¹⁴ on the one hand and Wittgenstein on the other.”¹⁵

While he does not explicitly mention Ricoeur, the latter certainly fits in the cohort of thinkers commended. Yannaras and Zizioulas follow in the wake of several generations of Russian theologians committed to the enterprise of religious philosophy. Williams singles out Ivan Vasilievich Kireevsky (1806-56) and his canvassing of Pascal and Schleiermacher as well as Eastern monastic writers, “for a perspective neither intellectualist nor voluntarist, for a doctrine of the formation of historical persons in action and relation, an integral view of the human.” One almost hears a description of Ricoeur in Williams’ observations that reasoning, for Kireevsky, “is concrete and committed, not ahistorical,” and that the latter presents a figure “something like Kierkegaard and something like Heidegger.”¹⁶

12 See, for example, Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 2005), *Postmodern Metaphysics* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 2004) and *Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984).

13 See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

14 For a contemporary Orthodox engagement with Hans Georg Gadamer, see Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

15 Rowan Williams, “Eastern Orthodox Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David Ford and Rachel Muers (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 587.

16 More significant than Kireevsky is the figure of Vladimir Soloviev, since the story of twentieth-century Orthodox theology, according to the author, is that of the ambivalent reactions to Soloviev’s legacy: on the one hand, of those who felt comfortable with his philosophical idealism, such as Sergei Bulgakov, on the other, of those committed rather to a patristic retrieval of the particularity of historic Orthodoxy, such as George Florovsky (Williams, op. cit., 573).

The upshot of Williams' survey is that the mavericks like Yannaras and Zizioulas point to the kind of work that can, and remains to be, done. He ends, however, with a caveat: "For this sort of development to go forward, Orthodox theology at large has to overcome a certain suspicion of (at worst, contempt for) the world of Western philosophy, a suspicion that is part of the inheritance of the debates in the Russian emigration earlier this century."¹⁷ That such a suspicion continues to cloud the dialogue between theology and philosophy within Orthodox precincts is vividly illustrated in the lively debate generated by the work of theologian David Bentley Hart. John McGuckin, in a generally appreciative review of the former's magisterial *The Beauty of the Infinite*,¹⁸ advances the startlingly brusque, even captious, accusation that "though the book is written by an Orthodox theologian, it is not Orthodox theology; rather one of the best examples to date of Euro-American neo-orthodoxy *redivivus*."¹⁹ To this cavil, Hart responds with customary pertness and perspicacity:

I do, I confess, take exception to the claim that the book "is not Orthodox theology." Of course it is. Admittedly it does not much resemble the sort of "neo-Palamite," "neo-patristic" books which have dominated Eastern theology since the middle of the last century, when the great *ressourcements* movement that has done so much to define modern Orthodoxy was inaugurated. But Orthodox theology has taken many forms over the centuries – mystical, scholastic, mystagogical, idealist, neo-patristic, even "Sophiological" – all of which have been perfectly legitimate expressions of the Eastern Church's mind. And frankly, I think that the theological idiom to which Orthodox theology has been confined for the last fifty years or so has largely exhausted itself and has become tediously repetitive. It has also, to a very great extent, done much to distort

17. Williams, op. cit., 587.

18. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003).

19. John A. McGuckin, "(Article Review) David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1 (2007): 93.

the Orthodox understanding of the traditions of both East and West.²⁰

In the spirit of Hart's *apologia*, the present work seeks to be a genuine exercise of Orthodox theology, if perhaps in a novel idiom.

"An Orthodox Hermeneutic in the West"

One who has, like Hart, taken up Williams' summons for an irenic engagement with Western philosophy, and whose work discloses an awareness of Ricoeur, is literary theorist cum theologian Anthony Ugolnik. For him, the question of hermeneutics serves as a foil for methodological reflection upon the inculturation of Orthodox theology:

Largely because our historical development has caused us to perceive time somewhat differently, Eastern Christians have not dealt with the problem on the same terms.

Hermeneutics in general, and especially the "new hermeneutic" since Karl Barth, has not engaged the Eastern Orthodox mind. The hermeneutical issue, perhaps more than any other, brings the question of differences in methodology into sharp focus.

Contemporary Orthodox writers tend to assert or imply that they differ in methodology from those in the West, even from our Roman Catholic counterparts. As many of us become, geographically speaking, westerners ourselves, we will be challenged to view this hermeneutical question from an Orthodox perspective.²¹

In what respect then, does an Orthodox *Weltanschauung* imply differences in methodology; in what consists an "Orthodox hermeneutic in the West"?

To begin with, the author argues that such is characterized by a sense of continuity with the past. Not perceiving its own history to be punctuated by the caesurae axiomatic to Western historiography, such as the Renaissance or the Reformation, it has not felt, in turn, the corollary

20 David Bentley Hart, "(Article Review) Response from David Bentley Hart to McGuckin and Murphy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1 (2007) 96–97

21. Anton Ugolnik, "An Orthodox Hermeneutic in the West," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1983) 93–94

burden of retrieving something lost. The past has rather been seen as flowering in the on-going life of the Church. The process by which this occurs is not passive, however, as each generation must assume afresh responsibility for the transmission of tradition; nonetheless, it does not result in an atavistic struggle such as that to which the West seems susceptible: "Its own history has given the West a dynamic and particularly 'anxious' relationship to its own past....[I]n contemplating the classic text it seeks to restore or revive, or even in seeking to recover the oral, communal emphasis on gospel proclamation that had been lost, Western inquiry loops back upon a record of its own identity, confronts a 'text' and proceeds forward through the encounter. In this 'figurative knot' of critical encounter, we find a crisis of identity hidden in the quest for meaning."²² The hermeneutical enterprise, then, is for Ugolnik fundamentally bound up with the questions of identity and the nature of our being in time—with this Ricoeur would surely agree. And the locus of hermeneutics? Here we apprehend more precisely the crux of the alleged difference between East and West.

The *Sitz im Leben* of the Orthodox tradition, according to Ugolnik, is constituted by the liturgy. That is to say, it is the worshipping assembly that provides the normative context for an encounter with Scripture.²³ There the "icon" of the bejewelled Gospel book manifests the

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22. Ibid., 96.

23. Regarding the role of Bible study, the author writes: "Private reading of the Bible is analogous to private devotion; it is profoundly important, yet supplementary to the proper arena, the communal and liturgical environment which we understand as the central context for our encounter with the Word. It is here that we forge meaning. Thus, however much we stress the Bible as a common bond among Christians, we approach the interpretative act with a different set of axioms. The axioms are threefold: that our act of interpretation is not private but social in nature, that our response to the gospel is a collective act of assent, and that the environment for its dissemination is oral and public rather than private and written" ("An Orthodox Hermeneutic," 109).

Part of what makes this contention problematic is that the Byzantine liturgical tradition does not provide for a communal encounter with a great many texts of the Bible, as they are not prescribed in the lectionary. Only a small portion of the Old Testament, for example, is read throughout the course of the liturgical cycle. Robert Taft has argued that one of the distinctive features of the Byzantine Rite is precisely its historical tendency to supplement liturgical hymnography for the reading of Scripture—even where the original purpose of the latter was to serve as a gloss upon the former. Not only at the Eucharist—which no longer has any reading whatsoever from the Old Testament, save for the select use of psalmody (itself greatly pared back in respect of former practice)—but in the other offices as well, the liturgical reading of Scripture has suffered attrition, and this not only in practice, but also in the prescriptions of the *Typicon*, the manual that prescribes the order for Orthodox worship. See Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1997), 175–76.

Word of God, as it is carried in procession, offered homage in the form of kisses, candles and incense, and welcomed by the prostrations and sung acclamations of the faithful:

“Thus, our engagement with the gospel is *dialogic*, realized in the context of *pravoslavie*, the ‘right praise’ which is the liturgical heart of our communally realized faith....Our Orthodox hermeneutic is thus not a private quest constituted in critical response, but a communal search for meaning, expressed anthropologically in socially organized prayer. The text loses all autonomy. The self-sufficient ‘reader’ is no more. Our vision of the gospel centers it literally and figuratively amidst the people to whom the Word is addressed and among whom, in their common assent, the Word is reconstituted.”²⁴

In this connection, Ugolnik’s reference to the Slavonic word for orthodoxy, *pravoslavie*, warrants elucidation. Jaroslav Pelikan explains that the Greek term lying behind *pravoslavie* was itself ambivalent, its suggestive polysemy being only intensified in the Slavic calque created by Ss. Cyril and Methodios in the ninth century:

The noun *doxa* means “opinion,” and the noun *orthotēs* means “correctness.” Therefore Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, without actually using the relatively rare term *orthodoxia*, can propound the definition: “Correctness of opinion is truth [*doxēs orthotēs alētheia*].” But when the opinion of others about someone is favourable, *doxa* already in classical Greek has the meaning of “good reputation” or “honor,” and therefore of “glory”....In Church Slavonic, and then in the other Slavic languages, *doxa*...is translated with *slava*, and *Orthodoxia* becomes *Pravoslavie*. It means simultaneously the right way of believing or teaching and the right way of rendering glory to God, for ultimately the

24. Anton Ugolnik, op. cit., 107.

two are seen as identical.²⁵

“Ultimately the two are seen as identical.” It is because of this perception that Ugolnik can freight the liturgical experience with such theological import. The imperative for his apologia on behalf of a liturgical hermeneutics, if not yet of a hermeneutics of the liturgy, results from a putative unity between the content of faith and the form of its expression.

Perhaps the anecdote which illustrates this claim most dramatically—to the point of having become a *topos* in Orthodox theology—is that remarkable episode in the founding narrative of East-Slavic Christianity, namely the tenth century visit of the emissaries of Prince Vladimir of Kiev to the Church of Holy Wisdom, *Hagia Sophia*, in Constantinople. The object of their hitherto unfulfilled quest was evidently to determine which of the great religions espoused by the rival powers of the day was true, in order that Vladimir and his people might in turn become its converts. Having been disappointed successively by their experience of Judaism, Islam and Latin Catholicism, the emissaries are overwhelmed by the beauty of the worship they witness in *Hagia Sophia*, this liturgical epiphany serving in turn as the catalyst for the conversion to Orthodoxy.²⁶

Ugolnik is rehearsing a venerable pattern, then, in his apology for the truth disclosed by the symbols of the liturgy, wherein the “communal search for meaning” unfolds. This pattern is to be contrasted with the dominant motif of the Western tradition, in which a “self-sufficient reader” engages a text in solitude; for Ugolnik, this latter is captured by the image of St.

Augustine being mysteriously beckoned to “take and read” (*tolle, lege*).²⁷ The author considers

25. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 407–8.

26. Kallistos Ware provides a lively discussion of this event in *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1964). A précis of the meaning and role of liturgy in Orthodox theology is offered by Hilarion Alfeyev in “Orthodox Worship as a School of Theology,” accessed July 7, 2009, <http://orthodoxeurope.org/print/12/1.aspx>.

27. “[A]ugustine’s dramatic setting creates a powerful hermeneutical paradigm. This confessional model underlies the encounter with the text. Certain axioms of interpretation emerge through the model: the encounter is with a written text (*lege*); its motivation is personal, private need (Augustine’s tears); it occurs in isolation (Augustine’s withdrawal into solitude); and the encounter’s subject is a ‘theological persona,’ a first person singular respondent who constitutes the ‘interpreting self’” (Anton Ugolnik, op. cit., 97).

that this model remains regnant, being espoused by Ricoeur himself, who is seen to stand in an auspicious line of thinkers following upon Augustine—Luther, Kirkegaard, Bultmann, Barth—for whom the text engenders an individual, not to say solipsistic, striving after meaning, in which community as such plays a tangential, even detrimental role; such a striving is manifest, according to Ugolnik, in Ricoeur’s famous claim that “the right of the reader and the right of the Text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamic of interpretation.”²⁸

If Ugolnik does concede that Orthodox might profitably take account of the Western hermeneutical tradition, he remains apprehensive nonetheless, lest the “psychological” character of Western interpretation eclipse the “anthropological” contours of its Eastern counterpart. Hence he warns: “To take up scripture on terms born in the West, defined by Schleiermacher and Hegel, is to adopt as normative a particular model of human being. We share with other Christians a common text. What we as Orthodox must differentiate first is our radically different notion of *audience*. Ours is a dynamic, dramatically defined relationship between a community of interrelated ‘selves’ and a text. It is anthropologically rather than psychologically centered.”²⁹

The author would seem to paint with too wide a brush, however, in describing a monolithic ontology amidst the “terms born in the West.” To his caveat one must respond that the model of human being which Ricoeur, for example, has elaborated over the course of his philosophical itinerary has actually been marked precisely by an anthropological rather than psychological orientation; it is something of a straw man to construe the Western model simply as defined by Schleiermacher and Hegel, when their contributions have been, and continue to be, subject to thorough critique, not least by Ricoeur himself. In fairness, Ugolnik, at the time of writing, did not have our current advantage of being able to take the entirety of Ricoeur’s work

28. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 32. Cited in Anton Ugolnik, *op. cit.*, 115.

29. Anton Ugolnik, *op. cit.*, 110.

into consideration. The former would perhaps be gratified to find that the two modern Western exegetes who do receive his explicit approbation (as akin in spirit to the Orthodox), namely, Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs, both figure prominently in Ricoeur's own biblical hermeneutics. This latter will, in fact, come out strongly in favour of a communitarian perspective, as the introduction to *Thinking Biblically* categorically declares: "The text exists, in the final analysis, thanks to the community, for the use of the community, with a view to giving shape to the community."³⁰

Indeed, in this same volume's discussion of the Song of Songs, Ricoeur demonstrates a remarkable sensitivity to the "dynamic, dramatically defined relationship between a community of interrelated 'selves' and a text" promoted by liturgical celebration:

The liturgy makes use of a dialogical structure, where the participation of the worshippers is constitutive of the working of the liturgical action under the imprint of a convocation that generates a new "us." The practice of language within the liturgical framework has one specific intention, that of drawing near to a 'mystery' that is as much enacted as said. Consequently, when the liturgy cites the texts of Scripture, the participants reassume the movement of involvement and commitment through the words and in the dialogue of the protagonists of the originary dialogue. In this way, the liturgy becomes a privileged place for the reproduction of the text.³¹

This is not to say that Ricoeur's hermeneutics does not also stress a *critical* stance toward tradition, as Ugolnik rightly alleges, but simply that such a stance must not inescapably end in a "fundamentally private struggle."³² Ricoeur's mature thinking on this matter emerges in the series of interviews published in 1998; clearly, although his fundamental paradigm remains the

30 André LaCoque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, David Pelllauer (Chicago The University of Chicago Press, 1998), xiii

31 Ibid , 279

32. Anton Ugolnik, op cit., 114

act of *reading*, he intends thereby a much more holistic activity than ordinary use of the term might imply: “I know [the biblical] word because it is written, this writing because it is received and read, and this reading is accepted by a community, which, as a result, accepts to be deciphered by its founding texts; and it is this community which reads them.”³³ He thus indicates in this connection the priority of the communal frame of reference—has he not often designated himself as a “listener” of the Word?—which abides even at the heart of the practice of *lectio divina*.

In sum, the wager of the present study is that the Orthodox “theological persona” is not perforce to be seen in contradistinction to the “interpreting self” of the Western tradition, *pace* Ugolnik’s criticism, Ricoeur’s later works articulate a form of selfhood that can be attained only in a peregrination through *social* landscapes such as liturgy, *inter alia*, may compel. Indeed, the full extent of the otherness of the Orthodox “theological persona” may prove to be discoverable only along the course of the “interpreting self.” We shall see whether it is not a matter of choosing between an Orthodox persona and a Western self, but rather of finding a mediation between them—of discerning their mutual dependence.³⁴

33 Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, (originally published as *La critique et la conviction: Entretien avec François Azouvi et Marc de Launay* Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 145

34 In this article, Ugolnik is ostensibly addressing Orthodox who have experienced a rupture with Tradition, namely the moment of doubt or even criticism. To invite such to adopt a liturgical hermeneutic surely cannot mean to renege on the insights that he himself has gained in his interpretive detour through Western philosophy. He calls for a distinctive Orthodox vision vis-à-vis the West, one *not* based on the experience of private reading, and yet he requires the medium of private reading to issue this hermeneutical challenge. In fact, it is not a simple matter of Eastern *sobornost* versus Western individualism.

Ugolnik’s endeavour at providing an *apologia* for an Orthodox hermeneutics fails to acknowledge the important role played therein by the kind of individual reading of whose axiomatic status in the West he is critical. To pretend that the Orthodox hermeneutical enterprise obtains apart from a dialectical engagement with texts, that individual reading is not, in principle, necessary on account of the performative scenario of the liturgical encounter with the biblical text, is to undermine the very medium through which this scenario remains accessible from generation to generation, the liturgy is not simply a function of oral memory, as the history of the *Typicon*, the regulative manual for Byzantine services, makes evident. After all, if one is to take the patristic example as normative, as Orthodoxy insists, one must confront the fact that the Fathers were first and foremost exegetes, that theology was principally, if not exclusively, *sacra pagina*, carried out through the individual contemplation of Scripture.

A Hermeneutics of Liturgy

If the liturgical hearth makes a home for the Orthodox “theological persona,” it is a foyer known from within by the existential act of belonging to it; it is known from without, however, by the schematics according to which it is set in motion. The *mise-en-scène* of the liturgy follows the indices of a script which both transcribes the tradition, and *prescribes* it. While Ugolnik refreshingly contrasts the individualism of a reader-text paradigm with the communitarianism of an aural/oral liturgical celebration, therefore, he obscures the fact that this very celebration still proceeds on the basis of a text which must be interpreted: a rite enacts a *text*, albeit one displaying the sedimentation of past ritual *action*. The liturgy, that is, is itself in need of a hermeneutical interrogation; it does not simply obtain as a context for the “reading” of Scripture but also must be taken as an interpretive datum in its own right. An Orthodox hermeneutic must therefore attempt to incorporate an appraisal of its very frame of reference, namely the liturgical tradition, and not merely presume it as an immutable structure within which the dynamics of biblical interpretation unfold.³⁵

Pelikan clarifies this distinction in his discussion of the “symbolical books” of Orthodox Christianity. He asserts that the text of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the usual eucharistic formulary of the Byzantine Rite, despite its distinctive genre, finds itself included in collections of these “books” (the creeds and canons of church councils as well as the

35. One must remember that the Byzantine Rite, while fairly uniform today, was only finally standardized as a result of the publication of printed editions of Byzantine liturgical books in Venice in the sixteenth century (for a succinct history, see Robert F. Taft, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History*, American Essays in Liturgy Series [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992]). This standardization marked the nadir of local Orthodox traditions; the whole Byzantine East which had erstwhile proudly had a variety of usages came to be almost entirely dominated by a single ritual recension—arguably a veritable triumph of the written word. To be sure, this uniformity has come to be cherished by Orthodoxy as an expression of its unity, although it has not gone unchallenged, as the notorious schism of the Old Believers bears witness. On a practical level, deacons must interpret the rubrics of the *Typicon*, cantors, the books of chant. Alexander Schmemmann indicates something of the diversity of interpretation that can occur even with a uniform *textus receptus* in his dual indictment of “liturgical ‘rigorists,’ i.e., those who stress long services, compliance with rubrics and the Typicon, and liturgical ‘liberals,’ always ready and anxious to shorten, adapt, and adjust” (*For the Life of the World* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002], 133). If one keeps in mind Ricoeur’s explanation of the polyphonicity of Scripture, that each distinct genre in the Bible is nonetheless affected by the intertextuality of being juxtaposed to others, one can see how the omission or shortening of a given liturgical text certainly has an effect upon the interpretation given to those to which it is otherwise juxtaposed.

“confessions” of Orthodox hierarchs) because it is regarded as a theological source.³⁶ He goes so far as to quote Paul Meyendorff to the effect that Orthodox revere the Divine Liturgy as a veritable source of revelation, a datum in a certain sense equivalent to the Scriptures themselves.³⁷ This is not to say that the unique character of a liturgical text as such is without import. To the contrary, while properly regarded as a “compendium of doctrine,” Pelikan insists that it irreducibly signifies an event: “[T]he liturgy is intended not primarily to be read or even sung but to be celebrated in action as *leitourgia*. Therefore its constant point of reference is the setting provided by the sacred space in which the celebration is being carried on, as defined by the iconostasis and the icons.”³⁸

In the Orthodox tradition, therefore, the text and context of liturgy exist in symbiosis. This generates in turn the notion of *liturgical* theology, the elaboration of which was the goal of Alexander Schmemmann’s life work. For him, the liturgy itself, rather than Scripture, is the fundamental object of interpretation; since the *Gestalt* of the liturgy enables the very perception of Scripture as the Word of God, one must give a certain methodological, if not theological, primacy to the interpretation of the liturgical action as given in its texts. The liturgy, for Schmemmann, is at once the existential site of all authentic theology, as well as an inscribed phenomenon in need of interpretation. Indeed, it has proven historically to be the theatre of a

36. Pelikan, *Credo*, 405.

37. *Ibid.*, 406.

38. Pelikan, *Credo*, 412. Apposite to this connection is the challenge of a hermeneutics of the *sung* word. Given that classical liturgy in both East and West was sung in its entirety, and remains so in the Eastern Churches today, how is it possible to interpret the words of a rite apart from their embodiment in song. Naomi Cummings has begun to broach this inquiry in her remarkable book, *The Sonic Self*, but it is not at all evident how the semiotics of music she undertakes there, on the basis of the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce, can in turn be extended to a liturgical hermeneutics, given the myriad musical traditions represented even within the Byzantine tradition, and the distinct fusion of text and melody that constitutes *sacred* song. Hermeneutics needs must return to the interpretation of texts, even where it is recognized, as it is in liturgical studies, that the phenomenon under consideration is only ever grasped in a fragmentary way by the liturgical text.

A similar challenge faces the interpretation of dramatic works, of course, inasmuch as both liturgy and such works presume an enactment of their respective “scripts.” It is beyond the scope of the present study both to explore the musical dimensions of the liturgical rite under consideration and to entertain an inquiry into the potential of Ricoeur’s thought in regard to the relationship between hermeneutics and music. Nonetheless, it would seem to be a fruitful avenue for further research, especially as Peirce is referenced occasionally in Ricoeur’s *oeuvre*.

Ricoeurian “conflict of interpretations.” Schmemmann himself, for instance, displays a specimen of the “anxiety” Ugolnik attributes to “Western inquiry” in his own quest to reify the correct interpretation of what he calls the *ordo* of the liturgy—out of a solicitude for a correct interpretation of Orthodox Christianity. *Pace* Ugolnik’s optimism then, it appears that the liturgical context postulated as a stable frame of reference is a *task*, and not simply a *given*. It does not simply abide but is constructed and contested, circumscribed by the conditions of history.

Thus Schmemmann can excoriate the manner in which a correct understanding of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy has historically been obfuscated by the idiosyncratic interpretations of patristic commentaries. He argues that such view the discrete actions, as well as the totality, of the Eucharistic rite, as “symbolic representations, i.e., acts ‘representing,’ ‘signifying,’ and thus ‘symbolizing,’ *something else*, be it an event of the past, an idea, or a theological affirmation.”³⁹ This is problematic for the author due to “the absence of virtually any reference to such symbols and symbolic meanings in the liturgy itself, and this means primarily in the prayers in which the different rites and liturgical actions are given their verbal expression and thus their meaning.”⁴⁰ There obtains, therefore, a “radical discrepancy between the *lex orandi* as expressed and embodied in the liturgy itself and its symbolic interpretation, which nevertheless is commonly held to be an organic part of the Orthodox tradition and which permeates the manuals of liturgics as well as the common piety of churchgoers.”⁴¹ Schmemmann admits that in certain instances the *lex orandi* does countenance an illustrative symbolism, but contends that this is so only in regard to “secondary rites and representations,” which should be set aside on account of their late reception into the liturgy and their thematic incongruence

39. Alexander Schmemmann, “Symbols and Symbolism in the Byzantine Liturgy: Liturgical Symbols and Their Theological Interpretation,” in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas J. Fisch (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 115–16.

40. *Ibid.*, 117.

41. *Ibid.*, 119.

with it.⁴²

The thesis of “Symbols” is that the Divine Liturgy has consistently been misunderstood throughout Orthodox history, not only by the common participants in the rite but also, more egregiously, by those charged with explicating it. Schmemmann considers, on the one hand, that the rite is transparent, affording an immediacy of understanding of its “essential symbolism,” even across the centuries; on the other hand, he opines that it has been habitually misconstrued by the majority of its adherents, for the majority of its history. He may thus be taken as an ambivalent exemplar of what Ricoeur calls the “hermeneutic of suspicion,” with respect to the claims made by Ugolnik on behalf of continuity in the Orthodox tradition, and the concomitant stability of its interpretative stance. In the latter’s estimation, Orthodox have been able to eschew, in regard to the Bible, the kind of hermeneutical conflict engendered in the West by its recalcitrant individualism. Yet Schmemmann shows that the liturgical context lauded by Ugolnik as the *sine qua non* of an authentic and distinctive Orthodox approach to Scripture has itself been subjected to the distortion of ideology, its “pristine meaning” rendered opaque. For there has been a “discontinuity in the comprehension, i.e., in the understanding and, deeper, in the experience of the liturgy by the ecclesial society at large.”⁴³ If the liturgical *lens* has been thus skewed, how can one not expect that the perspective on Scripture afforded by it would be similarly compromised?

42 In this connection, Schmemmann displays a kind of circular reasoning: the commentary tradition is not to be trusted because it does not respect the meaning of the liturgical text, where it does so, the liturgical text is in turn not to be trusted inasmuch as it reifies meanings already determined to be illicit. One could raise a question as to *how* the difference between *primary* and *secondary* “rites and representations” is to be determined. Schmemmann, for example, takes the Prayer of the Entrance to belong to the former category, i.e., to be an *authentic* part of the *lex orandi*, the same historical-critical method that distinguishes what Schmemmann calls the “eschatological” interpretation of the Entrance found therein from the illustrative interpretation given in the commentaries, however, can be applied, in a historical *reductio ad absurdum*, to the effect that the Prayer of the Entrance is *also* secondary, being a symbolic interpretation of what was originally the practical action of entering the church building to begin the service. Schmemmann also ignores the fact, in his apologia on behalf of this prayer, that its allegedly true meaning—“The liturgy, we may say, happens to us. The liturgical entrance is our, or rather, the Church’s entrance to heaven” (127)—is not borne out by the *lex orandi*, since today it is only the clergy who (re)enter the altar, and not the whole congregation that enters the church building together as in former times.

43 Schmemmann, “Symbols and Symbolism,” 121.

Schmemmann freely admits that the commentators—many of whom are canonized saints in the Orthodox Church—have “imposed” their own meaning upon the liturgy, and that the faithful have been taken in, such that “even to question it is, in the eyes of an overwhelming majority, tantamount to subversion and heresy.”⁴⁴ This ignorance is not to be further sanctioned, however, but rather overcome by the restoration of a putatively original, univocal interpretation. In this fundamentalism he would seem to mimic Ugolnik’s stereotypical Western inquiry, which “loops back upon a record of its own identity, confronts a ‘text’ and proceeds forward through the encounter,” in which we find a “crisis of identity hidden in the quest for meaning.”⁴⁵ Not coincidentally perhaps, the two sources upon which Schmemmann bases his challenge to the received wisdom of his own Orthodox tradition are of Western provenance.⁴⁶

If an *Orthodox* hermeneutic in the West will rightly privilege the role the liturgy can play as the matrix in which the interpretation of Scripture—and by extension, of life—can be conducted, it is nonetheless true that an Orthodox hermeneutic in the *West* will have to reckon with a critique of that matrix itself. Being what Ricoeur would call a “document of human life” it finds itself subject (like any text) to the crucible of interpretation. For while it is easy to sympathize with Ugolnik’s complaint that “it is the post-Enlightenment era in the West that finally isolates the “interpreting self” so completely that, to the Orthodox mind, the theological persona becomes an exile, cut off by its very methodology from the very community it once sought to address,” and his conclusion that “existential isolation can identify that exile from contemporary community with an acutely estranging ‘historical distance’”⁴⁷—for Ricoeur himself has acknowledged that there yawns before us a “desert of criticism, beyond which we

⁴⁴ Ibid , 119

⁴⁵ Anton Ugolnik, op cit , 96

⁴⁶ Robert Taft, *The Great Entrance A History of the Transfer of Gifts and Other Pre-Anaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* (Rome Orientalia Christiana Periodica, 1975), René Bornert, *Les Commentaires Byzantins de la Divine Liturgie Du VIIe au XVe Siecle* (Paris Archives de l’Orient Chrétien, 1966)

⁴⁷ Anton Ugolnik, op cit., 99

yearn to be called again”⁴⁸—it is facile to presume the Orthodox can remain immune to a similar challenge. As Schmemmann’s critique suggests, there has occurred even within the Orthodox mind a certain scission between the liturgy and those who pray it, a negative distancing between the originary tradition and its historical transmission. Even in Orthodoxy, it would seem, one cannot abide in a “first naïveté,” but must rather assume the arduous itinerary of the “interpreting self”—if not, to be sure, on one’s own.

The Turn to Ricoeur in Liturgical Theology I - Joyce Ann Zimmerman

Only three major monographs have sounded the depths of Ricoeur’s thought in order to chart a passage for liturgical theology, namely Joyce Ann Zimmerman’s *Liturgy as a Language of Faith*,⁴⁹ and *Liturgy as Living Faith*,⁵⁰ and Bridget Nichols’ *Liturgical Hermeneutics*,⁵¹ none of which, published in 1988, 1993 and 1996, respectively, had opportunity to take into consideration the final works of the philosopher. Each of these volumes has, however, made a significant contribution to the task at hand, and warrants a close examination. It is principally from these three works that the *status quaestionis* emerges. A review of the other pertinent sources will follow forthwith.

Liturgy as a Language of Faith

Synopsis. Zimmerman’s *Liturgy as a Language of Faith*, her doctoral dissertation completed at Saint Paul University (Ottawa), sets out to develop a contemporary tool for the study of liturgy, fashioned from Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. To this primary goal is joined a second: the application of this tool in the analysis of a particular liturgical service, namely the Eucharist of the (Modern) Roman Rite, as enshrined in its canonical text, the Roman Missal.

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48. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, (originally published as *Philosophie de la volonté. Finitude et Culpabilité. II. La symbolique du mal* [Philosophie de l’esprit]. Paris: Aubier, 1960), trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 349.

49. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language of Faith: A Liturgical Methodology in the Mode of Paul Ricoeur’s Textual Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988).

50. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith: A Liturgical Spirituality* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1993).

51. Bridget Nichols, *Liturgical Hermeneutics: Interpreting Liturgical Rites in Performance* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986).

Zimmerman argues that while diachronic methods have hitherto prevailed among liturgical scholars—and rightly so, given the rich fruits they have yielded—there are, nonetheless, certain problematics to which diachronic methods cannot, by their very nature, respond. The findings of the social sciences favour a synchronic approach to texts, via the pathways of structuralism, semiotics and reader-response criticism, to name but a few.⁵²

Zimmerman makes a case for the relevance of Ricoeur in this connection, based on his ability to incorporate various “analytics” into the explanatory moment of the hermeneutical process, itself conceived in tripartite terms as *participation*, *distanciation* and *appropriation*. It is the *form* of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics that proves compelling to the author; recognizing texts as documents of life, as repositories of the sediment of human action, he is able to conceive of the movements leading up to, and away from, the engagement with a text as equally germane to the task of interpretation. In brief: *participation* refers to the phenomenon of pre-understanding, or belonging, that enables one to bring a certain prescience to the reading of a text; *distanciation* indicates, by contrast, the role played by analysis in attempting to explain the text *qua* text—to engage it objectively, using any number of analytical devices; *appropriation*, finally, is the act of incorporating the insights gained through *distanciation*, as a refinement of the antecedent pre-understanding, into one’s existential situation, i.e., to allow the import of a text to bear upon the redescription of one’s own experience of reality. Hence Zimmerman’s thesis: “Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is known as a textual or methodical hermeneutics whereby he is able to address the question of text and the relation of written texts to human cultural existence. Ricoeur’s textual hermeneutics suggests a framework in which a written text, in our case a liturgical text,

52. As she duly expounds elsewhere: “[T]oday, as never before we have methodological tools at hand that permit us to delve deeper and ask other questions. Until recently scholarship and pastoral approaches have consistently ‘asserted’ and ‘described’ the relationship of Jesus Christ’s redeeming actions and our participation in it....As soon as we ask the ‘why’ question, we have stretched the limits of the traditional historical-critical methods and push ourselves to take advantage of the methodological tools of the post-critical methods. Far from merely an academic endeavour, moving into this new methodological direction offers us fresh insight into how we might existentially grasp our own participation in the paschal mystery” (Joyce Ann Zimmerman, “Paschal Mystery—Whose Mystery? a Post-Critical Methodological Reinterpretation,” in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, ed. Dwight W. Vogel [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000], 303).

can be studied analytically without relinquishing ‘understanding’ which Ricoeur sees as a mode of human existence. Thus his hermeneutic allows the placing of a textual analytic within a framework of understanding.”⁵³ The use of the terms “explanation” and “understanding” have a technical meaning in the field of hermeneutics, referring to what have been construed as the different methodologies appropriate to the natural and human sciences, respectively. Ricoeur is not content with this dichotomy, however, which he rather sees as a constructive dialectic.

For Zimmerman, accordingly, liturgy is a structure fixed by tradition through a written text that shapes the worshipping community; this text is both descriptive, inasmuch as it is the trace of the liturgical action of the past, and prescriptive, as it constitutes the script according to which worshippers enact a rite that places them in continuity with the past. The emphasis on action is key—as we shall see below, it is an alleged lack of such an emphasis that impels Bridget Nichols to claim that Zimmerman “misappropriates Ricoeur’s theory of the text”—and results from the following conviction:

Shaped by tradition, the text itself also gives shape to the liturgical tradition: it molds the present historical community which, in turn, becomes part of the shaping tradition for subsequent generations. Liturgical texts are not isolated bodies of literature. They have an *arche* and *telos* derived from their relationship to Christian tradition which is normative liturgical action. This relationship originates from the fact that liturgical texts are a *fixation* of worshipping communities’ liturgical action. *Thus liturgical action is primary, but it gives rise through cumulative tradition to fixed texts which, in turn, shape a present liturgical action.* The dynamism is action – written text – action.⁵⁴

The liturgical text is thus an index of action since ultimately its word is not “the printed page

⁵³ Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, xiii

⁵⁴ Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language of Faith: A Liturgical Methodology in the Mode of Paul Ricoeur’s Textual Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), xi (emphasis mine)

but that which is proclaimed and lived.” While the fullness of liturgy is only evident in its celebration, the written liturgical text permits a certain access to the meaning of liturgical celebration.⁵⁵ In other words, while it is imperative to always remember that a liturgical text is meant to be enacted, one does not have access to the meaning of this action in any other way than through the text itself.⁵⁶ Zimmerman observes, moreover, that the text itself, by means of its rubrical instructions, perforce directs an interpreter toward the action-context of the text, leading *outside*, as it were.

Zimmerman explains that while Ricoeur invites the use of synchronic methods of analysis in the explanatory moment, he has not been wont to engage in them himself. Her response is to integrate one such method, the communication theory of Roman Jakobson, into her methodology, not least because it is a method approved by Ricoeur, if not exercised by him. The scope of her study, in turn, is limited and defined by this choice: its foci are *two* aspects of liturgical language, *action* and *communication*, and not any others (e.g., intention, poetics, etc.). Such exploration of other aspects she reserves to others, asserting that if indeed her methodology is sound, it will prove able to facilitate the application of *other* analytics to the explanatory moment of interpretation of *other* texts.

In the first chapter of the work, Zimmerman traces both the various contemporary debates concerning liturgical language: sacral vs. vernacular, exclusive vs. inclusive, the pertinence of linguistics (e.g., speech-act theory), the relationship between first-order liturgical speech and second-order theological discourse, and so on, and then provides a brief history of the twentieth-century “Liturgical Movement.” She concludes that the structure of the “language of faith,” i.e., the liturgical idiom, has not been sufficiently interrogated in terms of

55. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, 25.

56. Obviously, Zimmerman is here placing implicit parentheses around the kind of qualitative research done by anthropologists and others who conduct empirical studies of given ritual events; such studies have the merit of assessing liturgical action in all its observable dimensions, and thereby attending to the fullness of a *particular* celebration, and the corresponding demerit of being defined by that very particularity. A focus on liturgical text is a methodological decision to privilege rather the *universal*, i.e., that which is ostensibly common to diverse celebrations within a given tradition, all things being equal.

the various language issues that have emerged in recent times; her odyssey will thus be to uncover the “intelligibility structure of a text without sacrificing access to textual features that point to extra-linguistic implications.”⁵⁷ Chapter 2, “The Recovery of Meaning” presents a review of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, specifically the manner in which he combines the objective focus on the code of language with a subjective concern for its use in discourse by persons; this is framed in terms of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s famous distinction between *langue* and *parole*. Where structural analysis is limited by its concentration on words as individual signs within an ahistorical system, Ricoeur points toward the creativity of words as composed into a *sentence* by a given person; as he insists, language is first and foremost to be understood as “someone saying something to someone about something.” Zimmerman explains: “The shift in focus from word to sentence is crucial for the process of the recovery of meaning. This shift implies that recovering meaning from a system of signs capitalizes on only one aspect of language. In actuality, language does not begin with signs. We do not begin saying words by consulting a dictionary. We begin to use language because we have something to say, something to communicate.”⁵⁸

The author continues with a presentation of some of the critical dialectics employed by Ricoeur, namely, *event* and *meaning*; *identification* and *predication*; the three levels of linguistic performativity (which Ricoeur derives from speech-act theorists such as J.L. Austin):⁵⁹ the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary; and *sense* and *reference*. Subsequently, she examines the way in which Ricoeur understands the difference between, on the one hand, a discourse and a text and, on the other hand, a text and a *written* text. Here the key point is that Ricoeur has clarified the distinct features of speech as it occurs spontaneously between two interlocutors; as a discourse configured according to an intended structure; and as a discourse

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57. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, 36.

58. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, 47.

59. The key work in this connection is J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

which, having been written, is separated from its originary context, author and audience, and hence subject, in a way that oral discourse is not, to the “conflict of interpretations.” The upshot of the chapter is that a liturgical text is an entity *sui generis*: as a written text destined for repeated performance—“the ‘reading’ of a liturgical text is, in actuality, its celebration”—it begs the question of the degree to which its meaning is *inherent*, as opposed to being brought to it by the particular community by which it comes to life.

Chapter 3 elaborates Ricoeur’s overarching method, adumbrated above according to the axial terms *participation*, *distanciation* and *appropriation*. For Ricoeur, one brings to a text a “guess” as to its meaning, based upon one’s experience of life, one’s sharing in the common lot of man from which any text originates. This guess has to be validated critically, however, in the moment of distanciation, by unpacking the composition, genre and style of a text and thereby coming to appreciate what it is in and of itself; the knowledge gained through this validation must then be reintegrated by a reader, in terms of a corresponding transformation of the antecedent self-understanding, with all the risks that this process entails. Thus Zimmerman asks, “Is not the purpose of a liturgical text in a worshipping community to present possibilities for self-understanding in the community? Further, is it not the challenge to let go of the ego that is brought to the celebration (one side of the text) in order that, through the text’s celebration, a new self might emerge (the other side of the text)?”⁶⁰

The fourth chapter is a highly technical elaboration of a “theoretical analytic” intended for application in the explanatory moment of the interpretative process. Zimmerman adduces Ricoeur’s semantics of action, and fuses them with the “factors” and “functions” of Roman Jakobson’s communication theory. This taxonomy allows for a text to be analyzed in terms of its addresser, addressee, context, message, contact and code. Zimmerman moulds Jakobson’s criteriology to suit the analysis of a liturgical text, by incorporating certain correctives suggested by Ricoeur’s semantics. What emerges is a pattern for schematizing a liturgical text

60. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, 90.

so as to assess the total act of communication engendered by it, all the while assuming an ideal performance.⁶¹ Chapter 5 in turn applies this model to the *Novus Ordo* Mass, i.e., the “Ordinary Form” of the Eucharist of the Roman Rite, enabling the author to observe the communication dynamics of the rite and critique them in regard to their coherence and consistency.

The sixth and final chapter of *Liturgy as a Language of Faith* summarizes the course of reflections in light of the role of liturgical practice in Christian existence: “The written text is an objectification of our normative tradition of lived Christian experience. Rooted deeply in life’s experiences, liturgy expresses the community’s accumulated, structured expression of their bonding with life.”⁶² While expressing this bonding, it also critiques it—the liturgical text is a “double-edged sword”—by calling the community to a greater actualization of its potential, to *become* what it claims to *be*. In conclusion, Zimmerman reflects upon the ontology that undergirds liturgical practice, the theology it professes, the transformation it envisions and the pastoral issues attendant upon it.

Evaluation. Zimmerman is to be commended for having broken the ice, as it were, as the first liturgist to have explored the reach of Ricoeur’s insights. Her work has the rare quality of actually demonstrating, rather than assuming, what it sets out to prove, namely that both the *form* of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and its *contents* are pertinent to the study of liturgy, offering the potential for new resources hitherto unexploited by liturgical scholars. She is also aware of the lacunae in her approach:

While the results of our specific analytic are promising, we admit that the method is

limited by the choice of analytic tools. Other aspects important for a fuller explication of

61. Zimmerman’s appropriation of Roman Jakobson results in a viable method for the explanatory moment of a Ricoeurian hermeneutic; no doubt, it could be productively applied to other liturgical rites. A useful comparison to this enterprise, and one pertinent to the liturgical datum that is our concern, may be found in Mark Searle’s structuralist treatment of the blessing of water in the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite: “*Fons Vitae*: A Case Study in the Use of Liturgy as a Theological Source,” in *Fountain of Life*, ed. Gerard Austin (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1991), 217–42.

62. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, 175.

the meaning of the eucharistic rite cannot be addressed without going outside our chosen analytic. Thus, our method does not take into account the full dynamic of an actual celebration nor does it evaluate what is done with a text in that celebration. It brackets the text's historical development with its inherent theological and pastoral weaknesses. It brackets the thematic content of the text and the sources for the content and it does not capitalize on the richness of the text's metaphoric prayer language.⁶³

In this list of omissions, Zimmerman has effectively offered a program for further research. It has already been suggested that the "full dynamic of an actual celebration" cannot be ascertained without field work of the kind practiced by anthropologists. Presumably, even findings of this sort would not tell the whole story, since this dynamic is uniquely constituted anew in every actual celebration, in respect of the irreducible particularity of the given community of worshippers. At the limit, their internal disposition remains a phenomenon opaque to any attempt at exhaustive examination, even if it can be described to some degree. Surely the adage, "One never steps into the same river twice," is here apropos: every liturgical celebration is, in point of fact, unique, and field work of even the most rigorous sort could only ever but comment upon the specific features of the celebration under consideration, and the manner in which a common text or tradition is concretized in a particular context.

Zimmerman notes above that her study does not treat the "thematic content" of the rite, nor the sources of this content, nor again the "metaphoric prayer language" in which this content is expressed. Unlike her concern with capturing the "full dynamic of an actual celebration," these issues would seem to lend themselves readily to further elaboration through recourse to Ricoeur. Metaphor has been a recurrent theme in his philosophical journey and will hence figure prominently in the present endeavour. Moreover, inasmuch as the thematic content of liturgical celebrations inevitably raises questions of the nature and

63. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, 187.

operation of symbols as well as questions concerning the relationship between history and fiction, between the originary events of a tradition and their ritual representation—matters to which Ricoeur has also devoted no small amount of attention—there would appear to be ample scope for further reflection.

Another major issue, which curiously does not emerge in Zimmerman's directives for further research, is the problem of selfhood. What is the nature of the liturgical subject, as conceived in the light of Ricoeur's hermeneutics? One reviewer of *Liturgy as a Language of Faith* suggests that "the major difficulty in the final analysis...as other critics of liturgical theology's use of Ricoeur have pointed out, is whether his anthropology and his accompanying view of the self is adequate."⁶⁴ However, Zimmerman's book was completed before the publication of Ricoeur's later works, most notably *Oneself as Another* (OAA),⁶⁵ whose explicit hypothesis is the problem of selfhood. While this criticism may stand with respect to her former work, therefore, its general import must be challenged. In cursory fashion, Zimmerman has in fact attempted to do so, probing the potential of a liturgical reading of OAA in "Liturgical Assembly: Who is the Subject of Liturgy?"⁶⁶ The treatment of OAA below will incorporate the seminal but undeveloped insights placed on the table therein.

Liturgy as Living Faith

Synopsis. In her more recent *Liturgy as Living Faith*, Zimmerman sets out to elaborate a liturgical spirituality, approaching the main elements of the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite (Eucharist, Baptism and the principal hours of the Office, Lauds and Vespers) from the perspective of how their *structure* corresponds to the shape of the Paschal Mystery, taken as the common referent of both Christian liturgy and Christian life as a whole. Her goal is to

64. Michael B. Aune, "(Review) *Liturgy as a Language of Faith: A Liturgical Methodology in the Mode of Paul Ricoeur's Textual Hermeneutics*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 734–35.

65. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, (originally published as *Soi-même comme un autre* [L'ordre philosophique]. Paris: Seuil, 1990), trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

66. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, "Liturgical Assembly: Who is the Subject of Liturgy?" *Liturgical Ministry* 3 (Spring 1994): 41–51.

overcome a dualism between liturgy and life, showing how what are often taken to be discrete domains are in fact part of a single hermeneutical continuum: “In this volume we draw on the gains of specific linguistically based methods to support our thesis that the deep, dynamic structure of liturgy is identical to the deep, dynamic structure of Christian living....What we celebrate in liturgy is none other than what we live as Christians committed to entering into the ongoing redemptive work of the Risen Christ.”⁶⁷

The book is divided into two parts, “Methodological Perspectives” and “Pastoral Interpretations,” with the combined goal of conducting a “postcritical methodological exercise.” Chapter 1 offers a reading of Deuteronomy, drawing upon historical-critical findings to posit the intrinsic connection between the liturgical commemoration of the *magnalia Dei* wrought for the Israelites, and their being enjoined to execute justice on behalf of the “sojourner, the fatherless and the widow.” Liturgical memory does not involve mere recall, but rather praxis. Zimmerman concludes that while the historical-critical method can thus *demonstrate* an ontological link between liturgy and life, it cannot *explain* it—such will be the task of a postcritical method.⁶⁸

Chapter 2 is an analogous reading of the subapostolic period wherein works of mercy (*diakonia*) were similarly integrated into worship. For the early Church, “doing for others is itself an extended liturgical activity. Concerned human activity is so basic to being Christian that it is an integral part of ritual expression.”⁶⁹ In particular, such activity—a response to the injunction of the Gospel to do good works so that others may glorify the Father in heaven—is directed toward Christ hidden in the poor, and realized in terms of fasting and almsgiving; the latter flows from the former as an expression of stewardship since the money saved from

67. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, viii.

68. Zimmerman observes that “critical methods are limited in that they cannot search beyond the context in which a text was produced. Postcritical methods bracket (set aside) original contexts to focus on meaning in a new context” (*Liturgy as Living Faith: A Liturgical Spirituality* [Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1993], 53). Liturgical history, that is, is not equivalent to liturgical theology.

69. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, x.

fasting was to be lavished upon the poor. Zimmerman treats the Eucharist, which engenders *diakonia*, under the figures of “unity,” explicated according to the monoepiscopal theology of Ignatius of Antioch; “presence,” i.e., the liturgical community’s solidarity one with another as one Body in and through the celebration of the Eucharist, as recounted by Justin Martyr; “sacrifice,” in terms of the early sources’ attestation to a sacramental fulfillment in the Church of Old Testament sacrificial practice as well as to a conflation of the Eucharist and martyrdom (e.g., that of St. Polycarp); and finally, of “eschatology,” the promise of the resurrection and eternal life heralded by the Eucharist.⁷⁰

The third and fourth chapters mark a shift to the delineation of a postcritical method able to attend to the depth structure of texts. This is carried out through dialogue with language philosophy, hermeneutics and scriptural exegesis, particularly the thought of Ricoeur. Chapter 3 rehearses Ricoeur’s tripartite method of textual hermeneutics, described above (participation, distanciation and appropriation). Liturgical celebration, in this connection, becomes the moment of distanciation, a reflective/critical moment vis-à-vis a continuous commitment to Christian living.⁷¹ Liturgy is a moment “out of time” that allows for a critique of the way we live the Christian mystery: “The celebration of liturgy presents the meaning of our whole Christian living to us in a concrete and manageable ritual moment. To discover the inner dynamic—the deep structure—of Christian liturgy is to discover the inner dynamic—the deep structure—of Christian living. We see ourselves in the liturgy both as we are and as we can become.”⁷² In this chapter, Zimmerman also outlines Ricoeur’s application of

70. “Eucharist is a vertical movement of offering, praising and blessing God. It is a horizontal movement of unity, sharing and caring for others. Jesus is one with his community and at the same time he leads the community to the Father. We cannot reach the Father except through Jesus who is visible in his Body and shared in thanksgiving. There is a dynamic relationship between these moments...” (Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 32).

71. “Distanciation is a distinct moment of interpretation directed toward the internal structure of the work in itself without any regard to the subject who produced the text or the one who interprets it. A text has its own ‘world’ of possibilities that opens up alternatives for human living” (Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 40). Zimmerman does not appear to perceive, or at least consider, the potential discrepancies between Ricoeur’s hermeneutical and narrative arcs, as analyzed by Dan Stiver in *Theology After Ricoeur*, nor the way they may affect the applicability of Ricoeur’s moments to the study of liturgy.

72. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 42.

the paradigm of the text to *action*, that is, “meaningful human activity”; action in this respect has a fourfold quality of pertaining to the ethical-political sphere, manifesting human freedom, being susceptible of interpretation according to “ideology” and schematization in terms of “praxis.”

In Chapter 4 the author conducts a reading of the Lucan narrative of the Last Supper, seeking to uncover therein the form of the Paschal Mystery. She first addresses the typical practice of meals in Jewish culture, the use of meal scenarios in Luke generally (featuring table fellowship with the outcast) and then, the specifics of the Lucan account of the Last Supper. The “table-talk” of Jesus with his disciples implies the need for them to participate in his Passion, to appropriate it for themselves even before it occurs; it provides for an interpretation of the Last Supper in the light of the imminent Passion. Her structural analysis displays two dynamics: the “not yet” and the “already.” The Paschal Mystery is to be understood as a phenomenon situated between two kingdoms, a dialectic in the truest sense, an enriching movement back and forth between the fact of redemption and its process. Hence it is not simply a *past* event, since it figures in the constitution of our reality here and now, or rather, we figure in the constitution of ourselves by means of it:

To understand the Paschal Mystery in terms of a soteriological-eschatological tension brings us face-to-face with the fact that the Paschal Mystery cannot be relegated to a past historical event. Hardly, for the P.M. has very much to do with our own relationship to God and to others in the concrete, everyday here and now. There is nothing “automatic” about Jesus’ redemptive activity; that activity always demands an interaction with our own activity....[O]ur ongoing appropriation of redemption is played out in the choices we make in our everyday lives. That is what we celebrate when we do Eucharist “in memory of me.” The structure of Jesus’ death and Resurrection is not only interpretive of his actions at the Lord’s Supper, it is also a

perfect analogue to our Christian living.⁷³

Part Two of the book conducts an investigation of particular rites in light of Ricoeur's three methodic moments, through an application of the concept of meaningful action to the liturgical domain. Thus Chapter 5 explores the basis of *participation*, namely the self-understanding of Christians as members of the Body of Christ. The sixth through eighth chapters are pastoral interpretations of the "moments of distancing" constituted by Lauds and Vespers, Sunday Eucharist and the liturgical year, respectively. Chapter 9 treats the moment of *appropriation*, that is, of choosing between new existential possibilities.

Evaluation. Zimmerman's scriptural exegesis in this work, as well as her interpretation of Roman liturgical rites, are rich and evocative. Nonetheless, they seem disconnected from the chapters where she treats Ricoeur. Her overall project of elaborating a liturgical spirituality does not appropriate Ricoeur's thought, so much as employ one element, namely the hermeneutical arc, as an organizing principle.

A case in point is Chapter 4, which strangely makes no mention of Ricoeur, even though it follows upon a highly technical presentation of participation-distancing-appropriation and the theory of meaningful action in the preceding chapter. Given that the burden of the chapter is to establish the nature of the Paschal Mystery, specifically interrogating the connection between past events and their meaning for us today, one might have expected the author to have adduced Ricoeur's reflections on the reality of the historical past or narrative identity. Zimmerman also fails to clarify the connection between the Lucan account of the Lord's Supper and present liturgical practice, i.e., why it should be seen as paradigmatic for our understanding of the Paschal Mystery, and not the narratives of the other Gospels, not to say the theology of the Epistles. Here, an incorporation of Ricoeur's insights

⁷³ Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 69.

into the polyphonicity of biblical genres, and an attempt to discern the modalities of the notion of Paschal Mystery elsewhere in the Bible, would have proven beneficial.

A similar discrepancy is evident in Chapter 5, where Zimmerman seeks to adumbrate the shape of participation in the Christian tradition by probing several “visages”: Paschal Mystery, Baptism, Body of Christ, Ministry of the Assembly (Priesthood of the Faithful, Gifts of the Spirit), Community (Liturgical Community – Sociological Community) and Prayer (Liturgical and Devotional). Although claiming to have used the “methodological considerations presented in chapter 3 to interpret what we have called visages of Christian identity,”⁷⁴ this chapter contains effectively no references to Ricoeur beyond the first paragraph and before the last, and no explanation of how the hermeneutical arc or theory of meaningful action applies specifically to the theological data discussed: one simply does not encounter the promised “innovative use of [Ricoeur’s] insights.”⁷⁵ A Ricoeurian analysis would arguably proceed by regarding the “visages” as axial metaphors of the Christian tradition, and adducing Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor to unpack their import.

Thirdly, Zimmerman is not consistent in her professed intention to apply a postcritical method to the interpretation of liturgy. She contends that “critical methods are limited in that they cannot search beyond the context in which a text was produced. Postcritical methods bracket (set aside) original contexts to focus on meaning in a new context.”⁷⁶ Given this premise, one would expect a privileging of the matter of the liturgical text, what Ricoeur calls the “world of the text” that opens out in front of it. Instead, we find the author opining, for instance, that the praying of the Psalms in a liturgical context should *not* be Christologically focused: “To pray the Psalms Christologically is to distort them because we have taken them out of their cultural context. It also shortchanges us because Israel’s history stands on its own

74. Ibid., 87.

75. Ibid., 75.

76. Ibid., 53.

as our history.”⁷⁷

This is a curious interpretation not only because the recitation of the Psalms in classical Christian liturgical usage, including that of the Roman Rite, is almost invariably concluded with a Trinitarian doxology, but also because the Psalms as presented in the revised Liturgy of the Hours—the object of the author’s criticism in this connection—include not only Christological subtitles but the novel element of “Psalm prayers” (to be recited after the doxology) whose rationale is precisely a typological interpretation of the preceding text. In other words, the “new context” of Christian liturgy makes it all but impossible *not* to pray the Psalms Christologically. Furthermore, as indicated above, Ricoeur, for his part, regards the liturgical reinterpretation of Scripture as a positive function of the “surplus of meaning” inherent in it as a poetical text.⁷⁸

Moreover, since Zimmerman’s thesis is that the Paschal Mystery is not simply a past event but one which actively refigures our present, it seems a *non sequitur* to suggest that “Israel’s history stands on its own as our history”: surely, it is “our history” — and expressly does *not* “stand on its own” — precisely because the Church, following the example of Christ, has interpreted it as typifying the Paschal Mystery. The import of Zimmerman’s discussion of Deuteronomy and the Lucan Last Supper, after all, was expressly to show that events of revelation are meaningful in the measure they come to fulfillment, in the midst of those who celebrate. This view, however, is at odds with her suggestion that even when a psalm is attributed to David, it should be seen rather as the corporate voice of Israel, an expression of the latter’s self-understanding, given the fact that it was incorporated into a volume destined for communal worship (“There is a dynamic in the psalms, then, that draws us into a larger framework”⁷⁹). Here one is at a loss to account for why she can approve of the Old Testament

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77. *Ibid.*, 95.

78. It is worth noting that in the revised Roman offices of Lauds and Vespers there are no “fixed psalms,” and therefore any attempt to plumb their “deep structure” must attend rather to the ordinary elements (such as the Trinitarian doxology) into which the variable elements (such as the Psalms themselves) are integrated.

79. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 95.

cult's reinterpretation of a psalm, but take issue with an analogous appropriation on the part of the early Church—especially when, as indicated above, she countenances favourably the reinterpretation of Old Testament sacrifice effected in sub-apostolic Eucharistic theology.

Zimmerman's discussion of the Psalms in fact manifests an assimilation of them to the structural analysis of the Paschal Mystery afforded by her reading of the Lucan Last Supper. The eschatological-soteriological dialectic she uncovers in this analysis seems to be imposed upon the Psalms with the effect of reducing the specificity of the genre in question, and its subgenres. Thus she writes:

Psalmody—an idealized and comprehensive recitation of the relationship between God and God's people—captures an eschatological moment in which we liturgically experience the fullness of God's love and fidelity. Psalmody is a reassuring moment of hope in which we identify with all the promises God has already fulfilled. Their narrative genre, therefore, is essential to grasping the eschatological character of the psalms. By drawing us into God's story of relationship with God's people, the psalms bracket chronological time and enable us to enter into liturgical time during which God's past, present and future deeds on our behalf are all experienced as 'at hand' and fulfilled. The eschatological hope that can be released by the psalms has as its basis the witness to God's unwavering love and fidelity.⁸⁰

There are several issues here. Firstly, the notion that the Psalms render God's future deeds 'at hand' surely implies, in a Christian context, the inclusion of the Christological referent, which Zimmerman has already disavowed. Secondly, Ricoeur would not agree that the Psalms should be categorized as "narrative"; to the contrary, he finds them to exemplify the lyric form and be irreducible to another. Hence he writes in their regard: "The praise addressed to God's prodigious accomplishments in nature and history is not a movement of the heart which is

⁸⁰. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 98.

added to narrative genre without any effect on its nucleus. In fact, celebration elevates the story and turns it into an invocation....Under the three figures of praise, supplication, and thanksgiving human speech becomes invocation. It is addressed to God in the second person, without limiting itself to designating him in the third person as in narration, or to speaking in the first person in his name as in prophecy.”⁸¹ While Zimmerman is undoubtedly correct to suggest that the Psalms may “captur[e] an eschatological moment in which we liturgically experience the fullness of God’s love and fidelity,” that cannot be the whole of the matter; as Ricoeur notes, the Psalter also contains the genre of supplication, which category includes psalms of deprecation. It is difficult to understand how such texts can be seen as offering a “reassuring moment of hope”; they present the voice of one caught *in medias res*, in a soteriological flux as yet unresolved. I would suggest, *pace* Zimmerman, that it is *only* by reading such texts Christologically that they acquire an “eschatological hope.”⁸² It would have been helpful also, in this connection, for the author to have developed her distinction between chronological and liturgical time. Time is a theme to which Ricoeur has devoted much reflection, and the complexities of his thought do not emerge in the simple distinction rehearsed here.

Finally, Zimmerman’s presentation of Ricoeur’s notion of “meaningful action” in Part One presents interesting possibilities, but is ultimately under-exploited in the course of Part Two’s pastoral interpretations.⁸³ The treatment of given rites remains an exegesis of the

81. Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 88–89.

82. Zimmerman creates a neat dialectic by viewing the Psalmody of the Office as an eschatological moment, and the intercessions which follow, a soteriological one; she categorizes the intercessions as expressing an “unfinished need” vis-à-vis the reassuring hope of the Psalms.

83. Her resumé of Ricoeur’s notion of meaningful action, with its fourfold taxonomy, does not carry over to her actual analysis of the rites under consideration. For example, it is hard to understand how liturgy can provide for the critique of its own ideology; how, that is, one can simultaneously affirm belonging in and through the act of participating in a rite, and critique its legitimacy. If, “Liturgy functions as a kind of normative will that shapes the meaning of Christian living without hindering our own freedom of choice (arbitrary will),” nonetheless, the arbitrary will comes into focus rather outside of the liturgical context, when the corporate language of the “first-person plural” is replaced by the resumption of the first-person singular of ordinary discourse (Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 137).

respective liturgical *texts*: specifically, of the non-rubrical elements therein. We do not find here, as in her earlier work, a demonstrable concern to attend to the non-textual dimensions of liturgical celebration, to its embodied character. She clarifies, on the one hand, that meaningful action—in this case ritual—can be construed *as* text, inasmuch as it is susceptible of interpretation in a manner analogous to that of text. On the other hand, this operative assumption does not lead to a consideration, for example, of the musical, kinetic, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, iconographic or architectural aspects of celebration. It is not the case, of course, that these can be very easily categorized, but that they, rather than the verbal elements, are the dimensions of the liturgical “text” arguably most subject to modulation *within* a given tradition. It is somewhat confusing then, that Zimmerman oscillates between two meanings of text in this regard: the stricter sense of the liturgical script, and the wider, of its embodied celebration. She appears to have the latter sense in mind in asserting, “Liturgy differs from most kinds of other texts because liturgy is constantly being produced. Liturgy is never a fixed text as are, for example, classic works of literature or art. The text of liturgy is necessarily fluid because its ‘authors’ are subjects who live through a tradition. We celebrate liturgy as part of a tradition which we, in turn, are helping to constitute.”⁸⁴ But it is the former sense that guides her pastoral interpretations, which are based simply on the skeletal structure of the liturgical texts themselves.⁸⁵

It is also worth questioning the soundness of Zimmerman’s overall application of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc in the present connection. Dan Stiver has suggested that many interpreters of Ricoeur unwittingly conflate his hermeneutical and narrative arcs, despite the fact that the second moments of each, distanciation and configuration, involve opposite

84. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 89. One could contend that dramatic works of literature are, on the contrary, subject to a very similar dynamic as liturgy, inasmuch as the performers and spectators of a Shakespearean play, for example, “author” the “text” presented on any given occasion—but not in any substantial sense the Bard’s script itself.

85. In other words, Zimmerman considers the invariable features of a given service (i.e. its “ordinary”) rather than as informed by a given set of propers.

epistemological operations.⁸⁶ It would seem that Zimmerman is complicit in this regard inasmuch as she situates liturgical celebration as a moment of distancing between the moments of belonging to the Christian tradition (participation), and of reconstituting that belonging through transformative praxis (refiguration). Liturgical celebration functions, in her estimation, as a *critical* moment that challenges the first naïveté of Christian identity propelling it to rediscover itself as a dynamic becoming. Hence, “Tradition refers to the moment of participation. When we critique that tradition [i.e. by participating in liturgy], we have entered a reflective moment of distancing.”⁸⁷

It is not at all clear, however, that liturgical celebration provides for such distancing as understood by Ricoeur, who appears instead to regard the “religious moment” as one of profound *conviction*, intercalated with the moment of critique offered by the philosophical enterprise. For he considers “the religious moment as such not being a critical moment; it is the moment of adhering to a word reputed to have come from farther and from higher than myself, and this occurs in a kerygmatic reading within a profession of faith. At this level, one finds, then, the idea of a dependence or a submission to an earlier word...What seems to me to be constitutive of the religious is, therefore, the fact of crediting a word, in accordance with a certain code and within the limits of a certain canon.”⁸⁸ One could well argue, therefore, again *pace* Zimmerman, that it is the existential critique posed by pluralism, or by the experience of suffering or other “limit experiences,” if not the less common route of avowed philosophical reflection, that issues the challenge to dare a mature appropriation of faith, expressed in a renewed commitment to engage in liturgical praxis. Rather than Zimmerman’s model of “life - liturgy - life,” we could see the process as “liturgy- life - liturgy”: in this latter, liturgy funds the

86. “[T]he analytical, semiotic mode of explanation does not appear to allow for a configured narrative world of the text. The configuration of a fictive world is an act of the synthetic imagination. The critical analysis of such a world into its parts is quite a different process. Thus there seems to be a distinction between a configurative moment and an explanatory moment” (Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 71).

87. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 89.

88. Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, 144–45.

moment of participation, in which Zimmerman's "visages" of Christian identity come into focus; life, in turn, is the arena where recognition of oneself in these "visages" is challenged. To return to liturgy is to pass from doubt to faith.

Furthermore, where Ricoeur's arc takes the reader and text as its *point de départ*, cult is arguably better understood not as a *work* which we encounter as a discrete phenomenon, but rather, like language and culture more broadly, something that interprets us *before* we come to the act of interpretation.⁸⁹ Certainly, in the case of those raised in a given tradition, reflection on that tradition occurs "too late." As Ricoeur avers: "To be a religious subject is to agree to enter or *to have already entered* into this vast circuit involving a founding word, mediating texts, and traditions of interpretation" (emphasis mine). He muses further concerning his own faith journey that it is an instance of "chance transformed into destiny by continuous choice....I would agree to say that a religion is like a language into which one is either born or has been transferred by exile or hospitality; in any event, one feels at home there, which implies a recognition that there are other languages spoken by other people."⁹⁰ The distinction between being born *into* a tradition and entering it as an adult is perhaps significant; does the religious moment, and hence liturgical celebration, function differently in each case?

The Hermeneutical Arc vs. the Narrative Arc

Aside from the two major texts treated above, Zimmerman has explored the pertinence of Ricoeur for liturgical studies in several articles. In "Paschal Mystery, Whose Mystery," we see a reprise of the contours of the life-liturgy-life arc elaborated in *Liturgy as Living Faith*. Here, however, it is the narrative arc elaborated in *Time and Narrative*,⁹¹ rather than his earlier

89. In regard to the liturgical year, Zimmerman observes that it operates as a "text" in Ricoeur's analogous sense, as a "document of human life" that leaves traces upon history. The liturgical year, as a phenomenon present to us in and out of the ritual moment, shows how liturgy explodes the cultic occasion. It is not an event but rather a state ordered by the liturgical texts but not bound to them.

90. Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, 145.

91. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, (originally published as *Temps et récit. Tome I* [L'ordre philosophique]. Paris: Seuil, 1983), trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

hermeneutical arc, that provides the interpretive paradigm. The narrative arc involves a tripartite variation upon the Aristotelian concept of the redescription of human action in poetry, namely *mimesis*: Ricoeur's *mimesis*₁ (prefiguration); *mimesis*₂ (configuration); and *mimesis*₃ (refiguration). This model lends itself much more readily to the liturgical application afforded it by Zimmerman, in my opinion, since it moves from an initial "guess" at meaning, through a "following" of a story, to a transformation of action in the light of the world proposed in front of the "text"—in the case at hand, the celebration of liturgy.

Zimmerman's principal questions are "How do we participate in a historical event that is past and not yet come?" and "How do we live this mystery today?";⁹² like David Stosur, she perceives in Ricoeur's narrative theory a model for responding to the temporal *aporias* they imply: "The narrative approach directly addresses the recurring challenge of the relationship of liturgy and life. As Ricoeur remarks, 'narrative has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and of suffering in *mimesis*₃' (T& N, vol. 1, 70). Liturgy, then, from the purview of narrative theory, has its fullest meaning only when the emplotment of action that liturgy celebrates actually refigures the lives of those who celebrate. In such a way is Christ's mystery *our* mystery."⁹³

Since the reader's response, according to Ricoeur, forms a critical part of the mediation of narrative, so liturgy cannot be understood as such without including our appropriation of its story in our lives. As Stosur neatly puts it, "[O]ne's true identity—one's real life—can be found only in living for and with others, 'refiguring' our stories in the power of the Spirit along the lines of narrative transformation 'configured' in the story of Christ's paschal mystery."⁹⁴

Zimmerman elsewhere reiterates that liturgy merely "ritualizes what, in fact, Christian living is all about";⁹⁵ it reaches fulfillment beyond the assembly, in Ricoeur's "just institutions." Such

92. Zimmerman, "Paschal Mystery," 304.

93. Zimmerman, "Paschal Mystery," 310.

94. Stosur, *op. cit.*, 37.

95. Zimmerman, "Liturgical Assembly," 51.

ethical engagement, moreover, is not only the currency of refiguration, but also the stock on which further prefiguration trades, in a continuous mimetic economy leading back to ritual configuration.

We will have occasion to reflect further on this trajectory later on. At present it suffices to note that while the paradigm is promising, what does not emerge in the considerations of Zimmerman is the question of the followability of the narrative at hand; in other words, there seems to be an implicit assumption that the story of Christ's Paschal Mystery is itself readily comprehensible and that, moreover, any plurality of interpretations is effectively free of conflict. Graham Hughes finds such optimism to be the hallmark of what he terms the "church theology" approach to liturgical theology. By contrast, he contends—in the vein of Guardini's discontentment—that postmodern (in Hughes' lexicon, "late modern") worshippers actually suffer from an impaired capacity to grasp liturgical meaning: that they follow only with difficulty the narrative presented by liturgy. He thus contests the conviction shared by scholars such as Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanaugh and Geoffrey Wainwright, that "the church's traditional liturgical formulations...when joined with an appropriate performance of them, may confidently be relied upon to effect their own meanings."⁹⁶ To the contrary, he argues, it is clear that "the precepts of modernity have seriously undermined for vast numbers of people in the western world...their confidence in a theistic reading of reality." We suffer from a "religious disenchantment"; our societies "function without recourse to religion"; and for many people's existence, "the question of belief or disbelief is simply not an issue."⁹⁷ The conclusion of his analysis is that those who practice "church theology" need to be disabused of their naïveté; the problem of the retrieval of meaning is acute, and cannot be resolved simply by a repristination of the liturgical *status quo ante*.⁹⁸

96. Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003), 222.

97. *Ibid.*, 230–31.

98. "My discussion of the 'church' liturgical theologians should make it clear that it seems to me there is no future in an 'old' or 'first' naïveté that simply wishes modernity were not a factor. This seems to me to eviscerate everything we know...about the work of meaning-completion which readers of texts, recipients of signs and interpreters of

One may suggest, however, that Hughes' characterization of "church theology" is perhaps simplistic. Alexander Schmemmann, as we have seen, was well aware that the due celebration of liturgy did not lead automatically to its proper interpretation, not to say, appropriation. Rather, he held, with Zimmerman and Stosur, that the liturgies handed down in the classical traditions of the Church—in his case, the Byzantine Rite, in theirs, the Roman—ultimately exemplify that, as Ricoeur famously put it, "the symbol gives rise to thought." Schmemmann's confidence that liturgy not only generated but articulated all authentic theology fits well with Ricoeur's conviction that "what the symbol gives rise to is thinking. After the gift, positing. The aphorism suggests at the same time that everything has already been said enigmatically and yet that it is always necessary to begin everything and to begin it again in the dimension of thinking."⁹⁹ If Hughes does well to indicate the caesura in thinking that can obtain as a result of modern disenchantment, he arguably underestimates the resilience of the liturgy, taken as a compound symbol, its remarkable potential to redeploy meaning in the face of doubt and indifference.

Summary

Zimmerman argues that a distinction must be maintained between Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics as a *framework* out of which a given study might be carried out, and the use of a particular heuristic tool applicable to a specific text.¹⁰⁰ She views this distinction between theory and method as critical to ensuring the preservation of Ricoeur's dialectical, indirect approach to ontology, which remains open-ended, oscillating between poles of interpretation rather than collating them. Within the basic dialectic of participation-distanciation-appropriation, there remain almost limitless possibilities. Hence her critique of one theologian's assessment of Ricoeur's project:

reality undertake in the construction of meanings. In our time, the recipients of liturgical signs are inhabitants of this modern culture and complete their meanings from within it" (Hughes, op cit., 253)

⁹⁹ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 349

¹⁰⁰ Joyce Ann Zimmerman, "(Review) Fodor, James *Christian Hermeneutics* Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995)," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (1998). 87

What [James] Fodor¹⁰¹ portrays as problematic—“Ricoeur also attempts to incorporate the emphases and contributions of literary and philosophical analyses which are, in character, fundamentally anti-referential”—is exactly the point of Ricoeur’s dialectical method: the ontological moment is located in the moments of participation and appropriation; the moment of distanciation is epistemological and admits of any number of possible methods, even “anti-referential” ones. This is an important distinction for actually applying Ricoeur’s hermeneutics to real texts (which Ricoeur rarely does, as Fodor rightly points out): exegesis of texts requires an analytic moment, and Ricoeur allows for any number of methods to be used. Different texts (e.g., biblical text or liturgical text) may best be interpreted by very different analytical tools (including semiotics, structuralism, etc.) without sacrificing reference because of the dialectic between sense and reference (or, if you will, between configuration and refiguration, or between epistemology and ontology).¹⁰²

As we have seen, Zimmerman has developed several devices to service the explanatory moment of distanciation, while leaving room in the toolkit for new implements.

The Turn to Ricoeur in Liturgical Theology II - Bridget Nichols

Bridget Nichols’ monograph, *Liturgical Hermeneutics: Interpreting Liturgical Rites in Performance*, while not explicitly oriented exclusively toward Ricoeur in the manner of Zimmerman’s *Liturgy as a Language of Faith*, carries out a similar enterprise of discerning how hermeneutics, particularly the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur, applies to the interpretation of liturgy. Nichols’ subtitle, however, “interpreting liturgical rites *in performance*,” evinces her conviction that liturgical hermeneutics has hitherto privileged the interpretation of the liturgical *text*. She intends rather to comprehend the manner in which meaning obtains in the course of the enactment of said text. Nichols treats three services in the Anglican liturgical

101. James Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

102. Zimmerman, “Fodor (Review),” 88.

tradition, namely the Eucharist, Baptism and the funeral service, and aspires to give consideration to both the liturgical text and the spatio-temporal implications of rubrics.

Liturgical Hermeneutics

Synopsis. At the outset, Nichols points to a discrepancy which will recur like a leitmotif in the course of her study:

The distinctive duality in the nature of liturgy has engendered a clear division between theory and practice. On the one hand, there are professional liturgists who have traced the history and origins of rites, and whose findings continue to enrich the understanding of liturgical practice as it has developed over the course of the centuries. On the other hand, there are countless Christians who have conducted their worship according to prescribed forms over the same period, and whose lives are directly affected as a result. Their awareness of the processes they engage in represents another potentially illuminating approach to ritual.¹⁰³

At issue here is a concern to balance the critical study of liturgical texts, with reflection upon the meaning they have as celebrations in the life of actual people—in other words, to mediate between a deductive, qualitative methodology, and an inductive, quantitative one. What does it mean to interpret a liturgy in or as a “performance,” as opposed to as a text? We will return to this below, as it forms the substance of the critique that has been levelled against Nichols’ work.

She sees in the early twentieth-century Anglican Benedictine Dom Gregory Dix a shift from a historical-critical to a hermeneutical approach to the study of liturgy: “Dix’s pioneering achievement then, is to shift the ground of liturgical research. Instead of dwelling on considerations of the meaning of liturgy, he paves the way for an investigation of what it is that

¹⁰³. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 15.

makes liturgy a meaningful practice.”¹⁰⁴ For Nichols, the meaning of liturgy is to be found in a personal negotiation between one’s own faith, and the propositions of the Christian Faith itself, as these latter are dynamically presented through the process of the liturgical event.

Nichols begins with a review of the origins of hermeneutics and an exposé of the thought of Gadamer—specifically his well-known idea of the “fusion of horizons”—as this is developed by Ricoeur. In this connection, she observes that Romantic hermeneutics, which sought to connect the reader with the authorial genius behind a given text, proves particularly fruitless where anonymous texts are concerned. Following Ricoeur she asserts that the original context and audience of a text are similarly tangential to its contemporary power to propose a world which can be appropriated by the reader, in keeping with which his or her own life situation can be transformed.

The author proceeds to establish a dialectic, which will govern her interpretation of the rites in question, between two meanings of faith, as written with a majuscule or miniscule “f.” The former is the tradition “handed down through the medium of scriptural writing, and distancing the congregation of the present time from the original producer of the biblical utterance. It is understood here as a credal position based on biblical evidence, and amplified by the Church’s doctrinal pronouncements. These are summed up, for example, in the tenets of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.”¹⁰⁵ The latter, by contrast, “evades confident definition. It

¹⁰⁴ Ibid , 18

¹⁰⁵ Bridget Nichols, op cit , 26 Nichols approaches the Creed as a datum in itself, rather than as an element of the liturgy In this respect, she neglects the performative quality of the Creed, i e , the fact that it presents its propositions in the form of an attestation “I believe in ” Not only for Byzantine-Rite Christians, who recite the Creed at every Divine Liturgy, Baptism and Office of Compline, as well as in the course of their prescribed daily prayers; but also for Western Christians, who traditionally recite the Nicene Creed at Mass, and the Apostle’s Creed devotionally (e g , as part of the Rosary) and—in the Anglican tradition—at evensong, the Creed serves as a *prayer*, rather than chiefly a referent for prayer In the terminology of J.L. Austin, which Nichols finds to be highly instructive, the Creed has both *illocutionary* as well as *perlocutionary* force, and thus is perhaps not to be taken as a decontextualized reference point, as Nichols does Indeed, the Creed has veritable *perlocutionary* force as well, inasmuch as it is traditionally the act of reciting the Creed on the part of a catechumen (or his sponsors) that allows him to be admitted to baptism.

It is doubtful that Ricoeur would countenance this distinction, as he regards the encounter with “Faith” to be an encounter with the primary texts of Scripture, theology being taken as a second order enterprise. He warns against abstraction from the originary word of revelation, and hence prefers to interpret the polyphonic discourse of the Bible rather than the works of theology

belongs instead to each individual worshipper and has its being in the individual's appropriation of the community's proclamation of the Faith."¹⁰⁶ "The Faith" and "faith" subsist in a dialectical relationship that comes to light in the liturgical act: "Liturgy is therefore a discourse, or better, a practice, generated by the tension between faith and the Faith. This is a version of the hermeneutic circle to the extent that neither can properly be identified as the origin of the discourse."¹⁰⁷ It is, moreover, a locus of "risk"; the structural divisions in the services studied reveal a recurring pattern of "separation, transition and incorporation," through the ebb and flow of which participants must continually confront the existential challenge of trusting in the world proposed.¹⁰⁸

Critique of Zimmerman. Early on in *Liturgical Hermeneutics* Nichols issues a mercurial dismissal of Zimmerman's work, accusing the latter of "misappropriat[ing] Ricoeur's theory of the text by implying strongly that liturgical texts carry an implicit and predetermined meaning, which is rendered explicit in performance."¹⁰⁹ Hence, "Zimmerman's structural-semiotic interest predisposes her to find objective meaning in the liturgical text. Treating liturgy as a "closed system of discourse" with its beginning and end connected by an 'internal logic,' she identifies the task of hermeneutics as being to '[uncover] this inner logic as a structure unique to that text.'"¹¹⁰

What is perplexing about this criticism is that Zimmerman's approach actually mirrors Ricoeur's own, in its effort to cede due place to the structural moment of explanation which can compass the range of objective meanings constituted by the formal features of a text.¹¹¹ Surprisingly, Nichols tends to describe her own project in the very terms with which she castigates Zimmerman. For her, "A *structural* method related to eucharistic language in its role

106. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 26.

107. Ibid., 27.

108. Ibid., 59.

109. Ibid., 32.

110. Ibid.

111. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 87–88.

as a threshold language opens up a route towards the hermeneutical concerns of the ASB [Alternate Service Book] rite;¹¹² and she attests, “The liturgical rite is itself a *closed system*, comprising a variety of religio-literary genres that includes prayer, psalmody, prose narrative, prophecy, exegetical and homiletic forms, and credal statements.”¹¹³

Nichols then elaborates upon her initial objection with a remark bordering on the incoherent:

Zimmerman derives a whole metaphor of liturgical interpretation from the primacy of the text: “The ‘reading’ of a liturgical text is, in actuality, its celebration. From this, certain questions arise: Is the recovery of the meaning of a liturgical text a wholly subjective venture depending on its particular celebration by a local worshipping community? Or is there an objectivity about its meaning that threads its way into each celebration, minimizing the conflict of interpretations?” Such a distortion shows how easily misappropriations might occur and how little resistance Ricoeur’s textual hermeneutics offers to an ideal of objective meaning.¹¹⁴

Unfortunately, Nichols does not seem to note the irony of accusing Zimmerman, on the one hand, of misappropriating the meaning of Ricoeur’s texts, and suggesting, on the other that texts do *not* in fact contain an “objective meaning”; if there is no objective meaning, one might riposte, on what basis is Zimmerman’s said misappropriation, i.e., misinterpretation, of Ricoeur to be judged? Moreover, it is Ricoeur himself, not Zimmerman, who has posited the text as a metaphor for the interpretation of “meaningful action.”¹¹⁵

In any event, Zimmerman is not in this context speaking metaphorically as such but rather—again, ironically, given the thrust of Nichols’ own work—arguing that liturgical texts

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112. Bridget Nichols, *op. cit.*, 91 (emphasis mine).

113. Bridget Nichols, *op. cit.*, 122 (emphasis mine).

114. Bridget Nichols, *op. cit.*, 33.

115. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, *Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 144–67.

are not meant to be read privately as literature but enacted corporately, even as a dramatic script is intended to be realized in theatrical production. Indeed, Zimmerman is, in my opinion, making *precisely the same point* as Nichols, that a liturgical rite needs must be interpreted in and as *performance*. Furthermore, her query regarding the way in which meaning is negotiated between the shape of the text and the penumbra of possible celebrations, and her acknowledgement of what Ricoeur calls the spectre of the “conflict of interpretations” gives further evidence that she *does not* regard the text as having a univocal, ideal meaning, but rather as proposing a world subject to a hermeneutical plurivocity in respect of the plurality of liturgical participants.

Nevertheless, Nichols persists in this line of attack, indicting Zimmerman for allegedly privileging the interpretation of the liturgical text rather than performance:

Yet a clear priority of the written text over the liturgical performance emerges from her analytical premises. Thus Zimmerman treats the celebration of a written liturgical rite as the text’s means of imprinting its status as “event” on the course of history. Under these conditions, the performance has its principal function in “lending [the text] an historical dimension [which is] part and parcel of its meaning”Viewed thus, the performance does not propose a world to the worshippers or, better still, allow the worshippers to assist in proposing the world of the rite. On the contrary, its purpose is to demonstrate that there is a meaning to be extracted.¹¹⁶

It is hard to sympathize with Nichols’ objections in this connection; how else can the performance of the liturgical text allow for the proposing of a world, if not on account of the fact that there *is* meaning in said text, a meaning which is “extracted” through its dynamic realization as ritual—or at least, to use Gadamer’s terms, a definite horizon which can fuse with that adduced by the worshipper?

116. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 32–33.

Ultimately, given the categorical rejection of Zimmerman's work (it is not mentioned again in the course of Nichols' work, nor is there any attempt to engage the substance of her thought), it is ironic to find Nichols also ceding primacy to the liturgical text. She offers the disclaimer that despite her intention to treat *performance*, she has been obliged, for sake of methodological economy, to "presuppose at all times an ideal performance."¹¹⁷ This ideal performance is derived from none other than the written rite itself, text and rubrics. There is no pretension of conducting empirical research into *actual* performances, nor even—less excusably—to posit an ideal setting (architecture, vesture, music, choreography, etc.) for the rites under consideration, nor yet to consider how contextual variables might affect the transaction of meaning accomplished in the performance.

It is true that in one instance, namely a comparison of the 1552 and 1662 orders for the Eucharist, Nichols demonstrates convincingly how an alteration in the arrangement of the altar-table and seating of congregants would condition the interpretation given to the rite, but this adversion to non-textual factors is far from consistently practiced. In fact, the author acknowledges that she is not in a position to take account of the "other features of liturgical performance which have equally important structural claims, preeminently music and physical gesture," and thus adheres to the liturgical text as given in the *editio typica* of the Anglican rites in question. Revealingly, she describes her own approach as follows: "The trend in the methodology which this thesis establishes, with its reliance on Ricoeur, Gadamer, and in due course, Derrida and Austin, is towards issues of language. This dictates the scope of its considerations."¹¹⁸

117. Ibid., 46.

118. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 91. What makes Nichols' criticism of Zimmerman all the more astonishing in this regard is that the latter actually *does* endeavour to assess the significance of the performative dynamism of a liturgical text. This is after all the rationale for her synthesis of the communications theory of Roman Jakobson with the semantics of Ricoeur; by applying the Jakobsonian "codes" and "functions" to the rubrics of her chosen service, the Eucharist of the Roman Rite, Zimmerman seeks to elucidate the indicators of *action* represented by the rubrics.

Evaluation. Notwithstanding the discrepancies just mentioned, Nichols does offer insight into the way in which the liturgy provides for self-interpretation, in keeping with Ricoeur's insistence that interpretation has an "ontological vehemence." For Nichols, the limit-expression of "the Kingdom" promotes a Ricoeurian "reorientation through disorientation" by being incorporated as the reference point for the liturgical services under consideration. She stresses that this is a dynamic process, occurring over time as congregants are repeatedly exposed to the narrative of the liturgy, producing a hermeneutical circle: "We now enter an interpretative circle that denies any one point of origin for the practice of liturgy. The matter of whether worshippers continue to participate in liturgical action because they believe in the textually enshrined promise of the Kingdom, or whether they gain glimpses of the Kingdom as a consequence of their belief in the validity of the act of worship is not a case for decision, but for an act of faith."¹¹⁹

As her criticism of Zimmerman illustrates, Nichols is vulnerable to a certain obscurantism, leading her to contradict herself on several occasions. I adduce below Martin Stringer's critique of Nichols' notion of "performance," which supplements that given above in regard to her reading of Zimmerman. Another instance of where she gives back with one hand what she has taken away with the other is with respect to her ambiguous notion of "faith." While challenging Zimmerman for allegedly suggesting that there *is* meaning in the liturgical text itself, she approvingly cites Ricoeur's observation that "what in theological language is called 'faith' is constituted in the strongest sense of this term, by the new being that is the 'thing' of the text."¹²⁰ It is the "threshold" quality of this "new being," in turn, that provides the guiding thread for her reading of the select Anglican services, in which she seeks to identify how the given ritual configuration of texts and actions does or does not successfully promote its appropriation. She takes as a *point de départ*, in other words, Ricoeur's understanding of

119. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 37.

120. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 37. The quote is taken from "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics," in Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 99.

biblical faith (the “new being” fomented by the biblical text), saying that it provides the “ground” of liturgy.¹²¹ The biblical text in this instance is evidently taken to have a meaning of its own. And yet she alternatively claims that it is important to progress from “questions of the meaning of liturgy, to a concern with what makes liturgy a meaningful action,” and then to attain to the determination of “the ground or referent for meaningful action, as distinct from an endorsement of reified meaning.”¹²²

One wonders why the meaning of the biblical text is seen to possess a hermetic meaning, namely the “faith” which will serve as the ground for liturgy, while the liturgy must be defended against being besieged with such: is the acquisition of biblical faith not a performative enterprise in its own right, similarly subject to the dynamics of action? Certainly an Eastern Christian perspective would not see biblical faith as obtaining apart from its cultivation within the liturgical act, inasmuch as the liturgy is seen as the very arena within which the Bible is encountered.¹²³ Nichols perhaps betrays a Protestant bias in this connection, in her presumption that the liturgical subject has an *a priori* biblical frame of reference.¹²⁴

This presumption is further exacerbated in her attempt to posit “the Faith,” as one of the poles between which the negotiation of liturgical meaning unfolds, on the basis of the Creeds; if meaning is not to be found *in* texts, how can the Creeds, apart from a performative context, serve as monuments of “the Faith”? Again, within an Eastern Christian context, the Creed functions as a *prayer*, an element *within* the liturgical performance, rather than a discrete site of meaning; but Nichols inconsistently assumes the Creed to have a meaning (i.e., the representation of “the Faith”) instead of asking what makes it meaningful. It is at least questionable that the meaning of Creed should be isolated from its performance, especially

121. Bridget Nichols, *op. cit.*, 39.

122. *Ibid.*, 35–36.

123. Cf. our discussion above of Anton Ugolnik, *op. cit.*

124. A question could also be raised with respect to the notion that faith is the “ground” of liturgy. It would perhaps be better, in a Ricoeurian perspective, to suggest that liturgy is grounded in anthropology, inasmuch as we are epistemologically predisposed to narration, on account of our natural faculty for grasping the world symbolically. We must tell stories to make sense of our actions.

when it features as a part of the liturgy also in the Anglican eucharistic rites considered by Nichols. Hence the ambiguity of her hypothesis: "My founding premise is that, through the cognitive propositions of the Faith, worshipers find themselves placed in the prospect of the Kingdom in what I have defined as threshold positions. From these positions, the individuals who make up the congregation are empowered to make their personal appropriation, in faith, of the promises set out in the rite."¹²⁵

A final criticism relates to Nichols' disclaimer concerning the serviceability of an "ideal performance."¹²⁶ She avers, "Always, it must be emphasised that little profit will accrue from treating services as illustrative models for the methodological hypotheses of liturgical hermeneutics,"¹²⁷ yet does not explain why this is so. To the contrary, this quote aptly describes Nichols' own programme: on the hypothesis that Ricoeur and Gadamer can tender a richer comprehension of the nature of liturgical performance, she scrutinizes a series of Anglican rites to determine how they mediate between "the Faith" and "faith," by placing worshipers in a "threshold position" wherein they can encounter the world of "the Kingdom." Indeed, I would advise that liturgical hermeneutics, unlike, for example, the historical-critical practice of *Liturgiewissenschaft*, adheres precisely to this pattern, at once embraced and disavowed by Nichols; where the latter discipline, being inductive, begins with the collation and codification of liturgical manuscripts, the former starts with a heuristic and proceeds deductively, testing it upon extant liturgical material, with a view to elaborating a new mode of understanding. It seems to be an instance of the proverbial cutting off the branch upon which one sits, for Nichols to assert that liturgical hermeneutics can be anything *other* than the application of a

125. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 87.

126. "At all times, I have had to be content with a notion of the 'ideal performance'. This assumes a rite which follows the provisions of the written liturgy closely, and does not fluctuate according to the whim of the priest or the congregation. Such an assumption does not, of course, exactly reflect the procedures carried on day by day in Anglican churches. Equally, it does not seek a platonic liturgy on which all other liturgical rites are modelled" (Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 46).

127. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 46.

given method to a liturgical text/performance, with a view to illustrating how the former lends perspicuousness to the latter.

Several aspects of Nichols' work, however, should be retained, the above criticisms notwithstanding. Firstly, her treatment of J.L. Austin's categories of "speech acts" resumes the important discussion concerning the manner in which speech and action are related; just as Ricoeur sees "meaningful action" as susceptible of being treated as "text," so Austin's work brings into relief the fact that speech is never simply propositional (the locutionary act), but results from an illocutionary impetus, conveying perlocutionary effects in its wake. As we will see further on, this reciprocal construal of text and action according to each other's criteria proves an important theme in Ricoeur's work. Nichols' invocation of Derrida's concept of the "written performative" is a welcome cross-reference in this connection.¹²⁸

Secondly, she makes a valuable observation regarding the manner in which Ricoeur's notion of the polyphonic discourse of Scripture—the varied voices with which it speaks in respect of its plurality of genres—is compounded exponentially by being situated amidst the similar polyphony of the liturgical idiom, which in the latter case includes both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression. As mentioned earlier, Ricoeur, especially in *Thinking Biblically*, exhibits an awareness of how Scripture's surplus of meaning is increased by liturgical configuration; in this connection, the twin challenge is to avoid, on the one hand, a homogenization of the scriptural/liturgical discourse such that its polyphony is reduced to a monophony and, on the other, to recognize the interpretive gain that obtains through a harmonization of the voices. Nichols persuasively argues:

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128. Derrida's concept of the "written performative" suggests that a text not ostensibly addressed to a given person will, by the very act of its being read, cause that one to interpret it as in some way addressed to him personally, and to unwittingly assume the role of the recipient. Accordingly, Nichols notes that a group of individuals becomes a congregation though mutually unsealing the "letter" enclosed in the liturgical rite: "The further the congregation proceeds in the action, the greater are the commitments they find themselves making in the dialogic responses, which, like the 'program' of Derrida's letter, do not seem to be overtly dictating any pattern of behaviour" (Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 105–6).

Each time a passage from the Bible is incorporated as a reading within an act of worship, or referred to in a prayer, a double movement takes place. The new situation draws, first of all, on the force of the borrowed utterance in its original position to give power to its reference. This calls upon the whole range of background knowledge of biblical contexts which participants in liturgy are presumed to bring with them. In the next stage of the movement, the original force undergoes a transformation brought about by its new relationships with other utterances which might resonate with it typologically, thematically, or even by the seeming inappropriateness of the enforced proximity.¹²⁹

We might add that in an Eastern Christian context, the priority in this movement is typically inverted, since, as Ugolnik contends above, the Bible is principally encountered *within* the liturgy, secondarily (if at all) as a discrete “closed system.” The liturgy is seen to be the “original position” of biblical texts, its dynamics the source of their “original force.” Thus biblical theologian John Breck can insist that for Orthodox, following patristic precedent, “[E]very proper (i.e., ‘orthodox-catholic’) reading of Scripture [is] an ecclesial act. The Liturgy is the first and most basic context within which the Word of God comes to expression. While personal meditation on the Biblical texts is essential, there is no such thing as a ‘private’ reading. This is because every reading must be governed by Church Tradition, with its particular dogmatic and liturgical stance.”¹³⁰

Thirdly, Nichols’ contention that liturgy shows itself to be receptive to interpretation under the sign of “threshold, appropriation and risk” is well founded; as we shall see in our examination of the GBW, the liturgical idiom explicitly acknowledges the kinds of temporal aporias which, according to Ricoeur, render all interpretation provisional. Inasmuch as it opens

129. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 128.

130. John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and Its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 76.

out onto an eschatological horizon, as that which is to be repeated until the Lord's *parousia*, the liturgy's meaning can never be said to be fully yielded but rather held in abeyance, paradoxically, until the epiphany of that by which it will be entirely eclipsed. Nichols summarizes:

So, because of the essentially promissory nature of liturgical meaning, there is no "exhaustively definable context" for acts of worship. There is always an element of incompleteness, in that the Kingdom will come, but not yet. Liturgical action is therefore provisional, conducted on that threshold which marks its responsibility to the demands of the present, and to the demands of an order which must still come into being. Since the rite can be repeated, and indeed must be repeated "in memory of [Christ]" and "until his coming again," it is never total. Thus there can be no "free consciousness present for the totality of the operation," and fully in possession of an intention for that operation. Finally, the "full meaning" of the rite cannot be achieved until rites themselves are no longer performed.¹³¹

In this connection, Austin's categories for "speech acts" also acquire a certain tentativeness; who can measure, after all, the full extent of liturgical language's perlocutionary import? How may one gauge the ultimate result of prayer? The perlocutionary aspect of language is not, as Ricoeur concedes, simply that which is least amenable to inscription;¹³² it also evinces language's fundamental dynamic to be that of a parabola, whose trajectories can be countenanced but not delimited.

131. Bridget Nichols, *op. cit.*, 256–7.

132. "But the perlocutionary action is precisely what is the least discourse in discourse. It is the discourse as stimulus. It acts, not by my interlocutor's recognition of my intention, but sort of energetically, by direct influence upon the emotions and the affective dispositions. Thus the propositional act, the illocutionary force, and the perlocutionary action are susceptible, in a decreasing order, to the intentional exteriorization that makes inscription in writing possible" (Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 147).

Fourthly and finally, and related to the previous remark, Nichols ably demonstrates that liturgical hermeneutics has a fundamentally praxiological orientation. The performance of liturgy is not a singular event, not even one bound to a self-contained cycle of repetition, but rather a forum, or better an agora, in which the sacred and secular transact their affairs.¹³³ For Nichols, the marriage rite exemplifies such commerce, as a human reality upon which liturgy confers a divine dimension, but the principle applies, *mutatis mutandi*. Thus, “In worship, the horizons of ordinary contemporary experience are continually encountering the horizons of Christian tradition, so that ordinary life is newly evaluated under the proposals of ritual action, while the terms of Christian tradition are carried out into the everyday world at each liturgical gathering.”¹³⁴ This dynamic is not, of course, to be thought of as immune to the dialectic of ideology and utopia central to Ricoeur’s ethical and political reflections. Nichols admits that liturgy is vulnerable; an exclusive focus on the future, and one trained solely on the present, can be equally paralyzing. Yet it abides as a viable site for contemporary utopian discourse, which can subsequently translate into a critique of the ideological status quo—although liturgy too must be open to critique. It opens up the possibility of a productive tension with potential to refigure the public sphere.¹³⁵

Liturgical Text vs. Liturgical Performance

Martin Stringer extends a trenchant critique of Nichols’ project in his “Text, Context and Performance: Hermeneutics and the Study of Worship,”¹³⁶ in which he also takes opportunity to respond to her summary criticism of his own earlier work in the area. Following

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133. Nichols muses whether the very continuance of sacred vocabulary—for example, “pray” or “bless”—in the standard lexica of ordinary languages, in an age of alleged unbelief, does not witness to the irreducible presence of the numinous in the prefiguration of human action.

134. Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 264.

135. “Under the guidance of Ricoeur’s practical sense that a realistic expectation of utopia can give rise to productive action, however, there is another possibility to consider. Forms of worship which not only promise the Kingdom, but promise it as a model whose prospects can augment the existing resources of its users, can equally help to interpret secular experience” (Bridget Nichols, op. cit., 272).

136. Martin Stringer, “Text, Context and Performance: Hermeneutics and the Study of Worship,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53, no. 3 (2000): 365–79.

this critique will assist us in situating our own project amid the text vs. performance debate which, as we have found with Zimmerman and Nichols, is both imperative and intricate. He begins with what he deems an emerging perception that the method used to interpret liturgy hitherto, based as it has been on the liturgical text, has proven unequal to the task at hand, namely, the evaluation of what is fundamentally a *performative* phenomenon: "It treats the liturgy as a literary/theological text and ignores the fact that the liturgical text is only one small part of a much wider act of worship."¹³⁷

Nichols is singled out as representative of those scholars endeavouring to alter the *status quo*, although acknowledgment is made of the work of Joyce Ann Zimmerman, as also of Kieran Flanagan.¹³⁸ Stringer indicates that his own approach has been ethnographic and diagnostic: in researching the experiences of several Manchester congregations, he determined that ordinary people "did not 'understand' the liturgy in theological terms at all. Rather, their understanding was based on very different criteria which have more to do with their own life problems, visual and performative aspects of the rite and their personal relations with other people taking part."¹³⁹ Liturgical meaning, in consequence, is to be found rather in the minds of those participating in a rite, than in the rite itself. This finding insinuates, in turn, that hermeneutics can only be of limited significance in the enterprise of liturgical interpretation, since it is by nature focused on the *text*.

Having reviewed the hermeneutical tradition up to and including Ricoeur, Stringer then moves on to his critique of Nichols. He takes issue firstly with the Ricoeurian notion that a text projects a "world," and that it is this world that transforms the reader who encounters it. Below I shall indicate why Stringer seems to misunderstand Ricoeur; his principal objection, as it emerges at this point, is to the manner in which Nichols claims, *prima facie*, to attend to the

137. Ibid., 365.

138. Kieran Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy: Representations of the Holy* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

139. Stringer, op. cit., 366.

world of the text as manifest in performance, while prescinding from all the variables implied by a performative context in restricting herself to the model of an “ideal” performance:

Each new order [i.e., each actual instance of an order of service] would clearly change the dynamic of a specific reading, along with the nature of the world projected by that text....The same is true for hymns, sermons and other interpolated texts that Nichols also puts to one side for ease of analysis. However, the actions and setting of the rite are also overlooked in Nichols’ conception of the “ideal” performance and this cannot be dealt with quite so easily. A liturgy can be conceived of that has no hymns, no sermon and sticks slavishly to the order of the text. No act of worship, however, can be imagined that has no setting and no action (i.e., does not involve the participation of real people). Setting and action make worship a performance.¹⁴⁰

If real people are thus necessary to any consideration of liturgy as performance, reasons Stringer, then it is consequently implausible to suggest that the “world” projected by the rite is not in some respect a function of its participants. Stringer cogently draws a parallel in this connection with the notorious anthropological dilemma concerning the participant-observer: to wit, there can be no strictly objective ethnographic account of a given culture inasmuch as the prejudices of the anthropologist necessarily condition the determination and interpretation of the data in question.

Stringer objects, furthermore, to the ideal worshipper presupposed as a corollary of Nichols’ notion of the ideal performance; he doubts that the average participant in liturgy actually keeps to the itinerary of meaning mapped out in an order of service. For Stringer, hermeneutics is bound to eventually implode under pressure of the variables of a performance-based model of liturgical interpretation; there are simply too many factors to consider. This crystallizes in his reprimand to Nichols for her unwitting neglect of the “perlocutionary”

140. Ibid., 371–72.

aspect of the liturgical idiom, viz. the manner in which, when re-realized as discourse, it results in the production of effects in the world that perdure beyond the context of the rite itself.¹⁴¹ For Stringer, hermeneutics cannot hope to capture the spectrum of action, working as it does with a textual brush:

[Nichols] has to construct an “ideal” performance of the liturgies she is discussing in order to apply hermeneutical interpretative methods to them. However, this is a “textual” construction. It is the “writing” of the original discourse or action of the rite, the “performance,” into “text” in order to interpret it. This illusion can be created because the liturgy as performance is based on a text (the text which Nichols actually chooses to use). In its use within performance, however, that text is, we might say, “unwritten,” and moves back along Ricoeur’s journey from discourse to writing, to become discourse once again, with all the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary force of that discourse.¹⁴²

The import of this statement is that each performance is unique, and so too, *a fortiori*, the “world” encountered by each participant. As Stringer admits, his critique, “taken to its logical conclusion would suggest that each individual attending the liturgy—each with their own context, their own perspective, their own levels of engagement with the rite and so on—will have their own interpretation of, or construct their own meaning for, the rite in question. This would suggest that there are as many interpretations, or ‘meanings,’ for any liturgical act as there are people attending.”¹⁴³ Only a methodology, therefore, willing to venture forth into the empirical flows, as it were, will be able to construe with any adequacy the horizon of meaning encountered in liturgical performance.

141. He cites, for example, the way in which the baptismal, ordination and marriage liturgies cause their candidates to acquire a new status that extends outside of the celebration (Stringer, op. cit., 376).

142. Stringer, op. cit., 376–77.

143. Ibid., 377–78.

This basically amounts to an apologia on behalf of the ethnographic approach taken by sociologists and anthropologists and, more recently, by liturgists who have compassed the field of ritual studies in search of an adequate vantage point from which to survey their own terrain.¹⁴⁴ For Stringer is understandably unwilling to allow his “logical conclusion” to become a solipsistic *reductio ad absurdum*. While maintaining, therefore, that liturgical meaning as such can never be determined apart from the experience of a given participant, he nevertheless grants that “the different strategies by which that meaning is derived, negotiated or constructed” can be, and that these are thus the proper object of liturgical study.¹⁴⁵ One wonders if this is an obscurantist instance of making a “distinction without a difference,” because it is not at all apparent why such strategies should prove any less idiosyncratic and inscrutable than the meaning of which they treat. It seems doubtful, moreover, that Stringer would be willing to extend his radical dubium and perspectivism to other forms of communication. Why, for example, may liturgy effectively mean anything, but Stringer’s own essay not be similarly plurivocal?

As Graham Hughes has noted, “questions might be directed to Stringer about the selective use of Ricoeur on which he bases (some at least) of his criticisms.”¹⁴⁶ Hughes does not itemize these, but the following come to mind. Firstly, Stringer does not seem to properly understand how Ricoeur conceives of the deployment of the “world of the text.” If Ricoeur did indeed hold to the notion that the text unilaterally proposes a world—i.e., without the reader bringing his or her own situation to bear upon the act of reading—it is difficult to see how he would conclude that hermeneutics cannot eschew the “conflict of interpretations.” Rather, because a text means all that it can, there will always be a plurality of interpretations reflecting

144. See, for example: Margaret Mary Kelleher, “Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 201–22 and “Hermeneutics in the Study of Liturgical Performance,” *Worship* 67, no. 4 (July 1993): 292–318; as well as Nathan D. Mitchell, *Liturgy and the Social Sciences* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

145. Stringer, *op. cit.*, 378.

146. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 124n20.

the fusion of horizons between the world of the text and the world of the given reader, with the result that the meaning that obtains is *not* singular. Yet this does not signal “to each his own” because, in truth, every interpretation must reckon with the exigencies of a work’s structure. Stringer seems to miss Ricoeur’s emphasis that texts (including liturgies) are structured works, and that while interpretations may be legion, they must appear before the tribunal convoked by the sense of the text.

In other words, Stringer’s liturgical participant seems to pass directly from the moment of prefiguration, of a guess at the meaning of the act, to refiguration, the moment of appropriating a meaning for his or her own life; what is missing, however, is the moment of configuration, wherein he or she is summoned to follow the narrative presented. If the modes of prefiguration and refiguration are in truth all but limitless, the site of meanings “too personal to be expressible in a form that people could communicate to the analyst,”¹⁴⁷ surely this is not the case in regard to the mode of configuration, subject as it is to the canons of rationality. As Hughes observes, “There cannot be a response without something to respond to (in this case [i.e., in liturgy], the pattern of the ‘typical story’) which thus makes [the construction of meaning in liturgy] a collaborative arrangement.”¹⁴⁸ Hughes insists that while Stringer acknowledges in his actual ethnographic work that meaning is forged from both the world proposed by the liturgy and the worlds adduced by its participants, his theoretical predilection is to situate meaning firmly within the minds of the latter. One sees this ambiguity in the conclusion to “Text, Context and Performance,” where he declares, “The meaning of the rite is situated in the minds of the participants rather than in the liturgical text. Or, to rephrase this in a way that Nichols might approve, priority in the relationship surrounding the negotiation of meaning lies not with the text but with each individual participant. If this is true then we can never state the ‘meaning’ of the liturgical performance in any generalised, official

147. Stringer, *op. cit.*, 378.

148. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 212.

or objective sense.”¹⁴⁹ On the premise that the discernment of meaning of liturgical rites *in performance* is thus a quixotic quest, one is faced with the option, it seems, of adopting *in toto* the methods of ritual studies. Is there no room then, for liturgical hermeneutics?

Ritual Studies and/or Liturgical Hermeneutics?

What is at stake in the preceding debate is the question of how best to take account of what Zimmerman calls the “full dynamic of an actual celebration.” In this connection, Martin Stringer is not alone in questioning the pertinence of Ricoeur’s thought. Margaret Mary Kelleher remarks, “Although Ricoeur’s influence has been widespread, there are some who point to the inadequacies of using the notion of the text as a model for studying human action. They express concern about the loss of the acting subject, the inability of the text analogue to deal adequately with the nonverbal and affective dimensions of human action, and the ease with which the sociocultural context of the action can be ignored.” Since “bodily movements, sound, facial expressions, interactions, use of space” are also “mediators of meaning,” Kelleher holds that “it is necessary to explore models beyond that of the text when searching for principles of interpretation that will do justice to the complexity of performance.”¹⁵⁰

It is arguable, however, that the *terra incognita* of “models beyond the text,” is inexorably destined to become a colony of hermeneutics. Even an anthropological methodology has eventually to face the challenge of interpretation in regard to its ethnography,¹⁵¹ a challenge recognized by none other than anthropology pioneer Clifford Geertz himself. According to Kelleher, “Interpretation plays a major role in [Geertz’s] understanding of ethnographic description and his presentation of the ethnographer as one who ‘inscribes’ social discourse and then tries to rescue and fix the ‘said’ of such discourse

149. Stringer, op. cit., 378.

150. Kelleher, “Hermeneutics & Performance,” 303.

151. Ethnography, in anthropological parlance, refers to field work itself, as well as to the *documentation* of one’s research—documentation which requires the work of configuration on the part of the author himself, as well as interpretation on the part of those who read his work. See Kelleher, “Hermeneutics & Performance,” 293.

discloses the influence of...Ricoeur.”¹⁵² Kelleher notes further that the “turn to the subject” within anthropology has generated controversy concerning the perception/description of Otherness, the subjectivity of the ethnographer and the role of prejudice and ideology in the writing of ethnography, *inter alia*, although she does not make mention of Ricoeur’s critical reflections on these matters.¹⁵³ If we think of the potent influence of the proto-ethnography recorded in the Primary Chronicle discussed above, i.e., the immense importance that the account of the Kievan emissaries’ experience of Hagia Sophia’s liturgy has had and continues to have, we can readily appreciate how ethnography occupies no neutral position.

In Ricoeur’s estimation, any text has a “surplus of meaning”; it is not simply a matter of counterposing textual univocity to performative plurivocity since, being by nature an event, a performance—like an instance of discourse—passes away, while the text, as the referent for performance, abides for further reactualization. Thus the liturgical text is a witness to performance in its own right, inasmuch as it exhibits a sedimentation of past action. Not only is the very existence of a liturgical text in some respect a witness to a tradition—whether actual or provisional—of performance, but its rubrics inscribe traces of the “meaningful action” by which it is recognizable as verily a *liturgical* text, as available for potential performance.¹⁵⁴ To explore the “world” that opens out “in front” of liturgical texts, is thus already to consider “liturgical rites in performance,” or rather, to consider liturgical performance as transcribed in its rite, “meaningful action” in its textual inscription. As Stiver assesses, apropos of the great events of salvation history: “What we have in these events is a rich interplay between actions and texts that interpret the events. Actions already involve meaning.” In turn, “The interpretation of an action is, as such, a text that calls for its own history of interpretation.”¹⁵⁵

152. Kelleher, “Hermeneutics & Performance,” 294.

153. It is in the cognitional theory of Bernard Lonergan that Kelleher finds the most comprehensive tool-kit for arbitrating between objectivity and subjectivity in the empirical researching of liturgical performance.

154. Of course, this is not always the case. As recent research has contended, the erstwhile much-lauded *Apostolic Constitutions* of Hippolytus may attest to a liturgical tradition never actually in force. Even here, however, a liturgical text arguably still witnesses to past action, namely, such liturgical practice as it countenances reforming.

155. Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 98.

Furthermore, given Ricoeur's understanding of narrative as *mimesis*, as the representation of action/passion, a consideration of the narrative shape of a liturgical text affords an entry into its configuration of past divine and human "performance" — that very "meaningful action" whose repercussions are felt along the historical continuum constituted by a given liturgical tradition. To quote Stiver again, "Hermeneutics...cannot be understood apart from action. Likewise, hermeneutics enriches the understanding of action."¹⁵⁶ With respect to liturgy, we could substitute in this connection "performance" for "action." If hermeneutics as such is typically defined precisely by its orientation toward the interpretation of texts, Ricoeur's work demonstrates that the hermeneutical operation is not for that reason isolated from the world of action. In a certain sense one could perhaps contend that a liturgical text subsumes the horizon of all possible performances for which it serves as script; while any individual celebration of a rite is, by nature, a phenomenon that goes beyond the text, this transcendence is already countenanced by the liturgical shape of the "world" proposed by it.

Finally, it is worth remembering that there is a peculiar "textuality" to *Christian* liturgy as such. Recall the observation of Jaroslav Pelikan above concerning the status of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom as one of the "symbolical books" of Orthodoxy.¹⁵⁷ It is surely not the case that the rites of just any culture are definitively transcribed, much less that they come to take on, as texts, a life of their own. Given that, as Aidan Nichols indicates, the paragon of Christian revelation is the *Word of God*,¹⁵⁸ it is not surprising that Christian liturgy has ever given primacy to *language*, and condoned its reification in liturgical texts. In his essay "Manifestation and Proclamation," Ricoeur displays keen insight into the cosmic symbols shared by Christianity and other religions, but also into the unique manner in which, from the Old Testament onward, such symbolism is transformed by being assimilated to the proclamation of the word, re-emerging as co-determined by its own "bound" character *and* by

156. Ibid., 99.

157. Pelikan, *Credo*, 405.

158. Aidan Nichols, op. cit., 51.

the scriptural narrative.¹⁵⁹ Any attempt, therefore, to interpret liturgical rites “in performance” must exercise caution lest it allow hierophany to usurp the due place of kerygma; is it insignificant that the anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom identifies its eucharistic action as *logikē latreia*, “rational worship”?

In sum, it is not a matter of “either/or,” but “both/and,” in regard to the roles of text and performance in the interpretation of liturgy. Since the potential performances of a given rite are infinite, there will always be room for an analysis directed toward the specificity of a given instantiation of the tradition. This analysis, however, needs to be inscribed; ethnography, in other words, brings one full circle back to the imperative of hermeneutics. As Kelleher indicates, the collection of empirical data still leaves the ethnographer with the outstanding challenge of assuming “the role of a mediator between the world of the liturgical assembly and that of the academy in an attempt to interpret the performance of the former to the latter.”¹⁶⁰ More acutely, as she later acknowledges, the ethnographer must confront the reality that “interpretation itself is a performance which includes among its central tasks self-appropriation on the part of the interpreter.”¹⁶¹

Nicholas Lash concurs, arguing that *all* interpretation is performative, although the form of the performance depends on the kind of text interpreted. “The fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of scripture is the life, activity and organization of the believing community.” He continues, “The poles of Christian interpretation are not, in the last analysis, written texts...but patterns of human action: what was said and done and suffered, then, by Jesus and his disciples, and what is said and done and suffered, now, by those who seek to share his obedience and his hope.”¹⁶² If all of Christian existence is in some sense a “performance” of the Gospel, an enacting of the text that solicits a corresponding labour of

159. Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), 48–67.

160. Kelleher, “Hermeneutics & Performance,” 308.

161. *Ibid.*, 316.

162. Lash, *op. cit.*, 42.

interpretation—providing the *raison d'être* for the various disciplines of theology—it does not for all that preclude attention to the biblical text *qua* text; moral theology, for example, involves attention not only to actual human behaviour—to the performance of this or that discrete act—but to the moral “world” proposed by the its textual resources. Similarly, I would submit that the methodology of ritual studies, its fecundity notwithstanding, does not efface the relevance of a hermeneutical enquiry into the meaning of liturgy as given in its texts. And for this enquiry, there would appear to be no better contemporary guide than Paul Ricoeur.

The Turn to Liturgy in Ricoeurian Philosophy

Interestingly, advocates for the pertinence of Ricoeur’s work to the theory and practice of liturgy can be found not only among those whose chief concern is liturgy, but also among Ricoeurian scholars proper. Near the end of his life, in an interview conducted on the occasion of his visit to the ecumenical community of Taizé, Ricoeur mused:

We are overwhelmed by a flood of words, by polemics, by the assault of the virtual, which today create a kind of opaque zone. But goodness is deeper than the deepest evil. We have to liberate that certainty, give it a language. And the language given here in Taizé is not the language of philosophy, not even of theology, but the language of the liturgy. And for me, the liturgy is not simply action; it is a form of thought. There is a hidden, discreet theology in the liturgy that can be summed up in the idea that “the law of prayer is the law of faith.”¹⁶³

This intuition, that liturgy discloses both thought and action, that it comprises what we may call a unique mode of being-in-the-world, was unfortunately never to become the object of systematic, critical investigation. Only one very short text is devoted explicitly to the question.¹⁶⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that thus far meagre attention has been paid by

163. Available on-line: http://www.taize.fr/en_article102.html (accessed Dec. 31, 2009).

164. Paul Ricoeur, “Postface,” in *Taizé et l’Église de Demain*, Jean-Marie Paupert (Paris: Fayard, 1967), 247–51.

students of Ricoeur to explicating the potential meaning of a liturgical practice as a “form of thought.” Nonetheless, a few sketches have been laid out, to which we now turn.

John van den Hengel

John van den Hengel confirms, in “From Text to Action in Theology,” the importance of pursuing a liturgical trajectory in regard to the application of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. He begins by positing the relevance of Ricoeur to theology taken as an enterprise conducted “under the sign of the dialectic of the Same and the Other.” That is to say, van den Hengel esteems Ricoeur’s recognition, on the one hand, of the importance in theology of the *via negativa*, or apophatic method, in the vein that this has been developed by various twentieth-century Jewish theorists, preeminently Emmanuel Lévinas; but also his insistence, on the other hand, upon the preservation of an ontology or realism in discourse about God, inasmuch as the metaphorical language of Scripture opens up a vista that truly “let[s] see the Same in the Other or the Other in the Same.”¹⁶⁵ Briefly put, whereas Lévinas begins with the *concept* of God and ends with a chimerical “*Dire sans dit*, a Name without theology,” Ricoeur begins with a reflection on the polyphonic *naming* of him in Biblical language and discovers therein an authentic and actual revelation of the divine.

Van den Hengel continues by outlining the features of a theology in the wake of Ricoeur. A barrage of modifiers is released, such a theology being termed at once hermeneutical, biblical, metaphorical, ontological, practical (narrative) and reflexive. The essential point in the final modifier is that the self that engages in theology is what Ricoeur has elsewhere called a “summoned self,” i.e., one aware of being constituted by its response to the initiative of the Other, an initiative extended as *gift*. And here we come to the threshold of the present consideration, for the author offers the following, intriguing suggestion in regard to the potential sources of theology thus conditioned:

165. 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 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 127.

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...[in] acts that reorient human action in response to the excess, disproportion or extravagance of the Naming of God, such as proclamation, liturgy, praise. For theology this has far-reaching repercussions. *It would mean to give priority in our theological enterprise to the praxis of faith-life rather than to theoretical discussion of meaning.*¹⁶⁶

In other words, as van den Hengel concludes, “a practical theology will have to explore further what Ricoeur has identified as the hyper-ethical acts that flow from the Gospel. It might encourage us to return perhaps to the acts which the Church originally identified as her response to the Gospel: *kerygma*, *koinonia*, *leitourgia* and *diakonia*: the acts of proclamation, communion, giving praise and service as hyper-ethical acts.”¹⁶⁷

Similarly, in an essay on the implications of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* for Christology, van den Hengel suggests that liturgy may prove to be the site *par excellence* for an appropriation of the “historical intentionality” of the Gospels. He argues that the Gospel genre configures the life of Christ, by means of fictive devices, with a view to the “refiguration of the field of human action and temporality.”¹⁶⁸ The text is oriented toward the world in front of it, through the mediation of the believing community, revealing, according to the author, as much about the incipient Christian community as about Christ. There is nothing insidious in this fact, however, since it simply demonstrates the way in which historiography proves meaningful: by incorporating our own response to the action of the past. The genesis of history, indeed, lies in our narrative pre-understanding, as the faculty enabling our collection of disparate events into a coherent whole; if historical-critical research can adumbrate the contours of the events that inspired the Gospels, it is nonetheless the Gospel text that offers the “historical Jesus,” i.e., that

166. van den Hengel, “From Text to Action,” 132 (emphasis mine).

167. van den Hengel, “From Text to Action,” 133.

168. John van den Hengel, “Jesus Between Fiction and History,” in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville, VI: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 147.

“makes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus intelligible and followable.”¹⁶⁹ In response to van den Hengel’s Ricoeurian reading of the Gospel genre, we might perhaps think of the Gospels as presenting a textual equivalent of the Möbius strip: there is only one side to the protagonist of the Gospels, one surface upon which to encounter the “Jesus of history” ever already known as the “Christ of faith.

Such an encounter, however, does not obtain in isolation; if the very inscription of the Gospel attests to “a worldview and life pattern of an ecclesial community,”¹⁷⁰ then, *a fortiori*, its reception solicits an analogous context. Van den Hengel thus asserts, citing an unspecified text of Ricoeur, that it is within the performative arena of liturgy that such a context is effectively constituted: “Finally, at the level of appropriation I would agree with a more recent text of Ricoeur where he proposes liturgy as the most adequate setting for the reading of the scripture text. Liturgy includes not only the proclamation of the Word in preaching but the refiguration of the death and resurrection of Jesus in a ritual reenactment as well. The configuration of the life, death and resurrection in the Gospel text finds its fullest appropriation in its liturgical remembering.”¹⁷¹ Liturgy, he continues, offers a nexus for the melding of narrative time with what Ricoeur calls chronological or cosmic time, bringing one back “from text to action,” from a narrative mediation of the temporal, to a temporal mediation of the narrative. He concludes, evocatively: “In line with Ricoeur’s concept of history, a liturgical appropriation that makes use of the symbols of nature, regeneration, sustenance, covenanting, space and time is more attentive to the cosmic temporality. It transcends the narrative identity and appropriation and is a freer testing of the real.”¹⁷²

Peter Kenny

Pace van den Hengel’s optimism, Peter Kenny, while echoing the former’s estimation of liturgy, questions whether Ricoeur himself came to a full realization of the matter. In a reprise

169. *Ibid.*, 148.

170. *Ibid.*, 149.

171. *Ibid.*

of the line of argument proposed by Ugolnik above, Kenny contends that Ricoeur has consistently valorized the reader-text model to a fault, bespeaking in the process a characteristically Protestant hermeneutic that fails to do justice to the manner in which the Catholic (and we can add Orthodox) Christian traditions experience the biblical revelation beyond the text. Critiquing Ricoeur's alleged assumption that reflection on religion ought to be based on *texts*, Kenny writes:

While philosophical or theological discussion about religion will use language to describe it and interpret it, it does not follow that "the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own terms is to inquire into its linguistic expression." This is reductive: it is just as important to discuss and interpret its activities, its liturgies, its recommended lifestyles, as well as its sacred texts. The creative interaction between what is textual...and what is non-textual (liturgical rites and/or following a way of life guided by specific practices) is here not properly appreciated. The non-linguistic and non-textual religious expressions may be more difficult to describe and evaluate philosophically, yet they are just as real as textual expressions.¹⁷³

Kenny probably overstates his case. For Ricoeur not infrequently *does* countenance a dialectic between the verbal and the non-verbal—in his own terms, between "manifestation and proclamation." There is a "subtle equilibrium" at work, he says, expressed historically in the Church as "a dialectic of preaching and sacraments": "[In] preaching the kerygmatic element carries the day with its concern to 'apply' the word here and now both ethically and politically. In the sacrament, symbolism has the upper hand. We need only recall the correspondences

172. Ibid.

173. Peter Kenny, "Conviction, Critique and Christian Theology: Some Reflections on Reading Ricoeur," in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny and Peter Kenny (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 103. Curiously, Kenny does not treat Ricoeur's understanding of "meaningful action" as text, i.e., his attempt to include an interpretation of non-textual phenomena alongside textual, precisely by elaborating a paradigm that can serve to integrate them both.

baptism awakens between the primordial waters, where all form is abolished, the flood, the water of death, and the water of purification...The sacrament, we could say, is the mutation of sacred ritual into the kerygmatic realm.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, Ricoeur's reflections in *Critique and Conviction*, on his friendship with that master of *Religionswissenschaft* Mircea Eliade, display a keen sensitivity to the merit of an approach that begins with the *ritual* embodiment of meaning. Despite his ambivalence concerning Eliade's actual accomplishments, Ricoeur applauds the latter's methodological *a priori*: "The liturgical sense of Orthodoxy nevertheless allowed him to affirm that before doctrine come belief, before belief the rite, before the rite the liturgy."¹⁷⁵ Of course, to give theoretical primacy to the liturgy, to Kenny's "non-linguistic and non-textual religious expressions," is one thing; quite another is to work out in practice how these expressions can be rendered susceptible of *interpretation*—hence the debate adumbrated above concerning the contiguity of liturgical texts and their performances.

Ricoeur, at any rate, appears to provide approbation, if more in the way of suggestion than scrutiny, for the present analysis. That he ended his career with a text that itself concludes with a meditation on the uniqueness of the phenomenon of the ceremonial exchange of gifts is perhaps telling;¹⁷⁶ where might he have gone with his nascent insights into the power of ritual, had he had opportunity to further extend his speculations? Would he have been eventually impelled to plot the course of hermeneutics through the high seas of liturgical experience? His interview at Taizé, quoted above, intimates an answer in the affirmative. Ricoeur's counsel that liturgy is a kind of *language*, distinct from that of theology, implies that it invites a distinct mode of interpretation, irreducible to that proper to the biblical "form of thought" to which it is nonetheless related – a form Ricoeur regards as an authentic, if "non-philosophical manner of

174 Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 67.

175 Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, 32

176 Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, (originally published as *Parcours de la reconnaissance* Trois études [Les Essais] Paris Éditions Stock, 2004), trans David Pellauer (Cambridge, MA & London, England Harvard University Press, 2006), 225–46

thinking and being.”¹⁷⁷ This is so, not simply because liturgy employs, as explained above, idioms other than the linguistic, but also because its linguistic dimension incorporates something of the speculative language that while nascent in the Bible itself, undergoes a notable maturation in the patristic attempt to reconcile biblical and philosophical discourse.¹⁷⁸ As we shall see below, the GBW is exemplary in this respect, in appropriating within a narrative context the apophatic terminology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It is to this terminology that Ricoeur is surely alluding, in *Critique and Conviction*, when he speaks of the “half-philosophical, half-theological speculation on the divine names,” opining that “the critique of the names that are unsuitable for God is at once the philosophical injected into the religious, but also a sort of asceticism internal to the religious that seeks to rid itself of what is unworthy of God.”¹⁷⁹

Summary: The Topography of a Ricoeurian Detour

Bridget Nichols proclaims that “liturgical hermeneutics is responsible not only for finding an adequate way of approaching this unique form of discourse, but also for seeking an ever more precise means of discussing liturgical faith.”¹⁸⁰ But this precision can surely only be achieved piecemeal, by a response to specific questions. As Kelleher argues, in “Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method,” method develops in tandem with the quest to explain that which is as yet unexplained. It is the nature of the object under investigation which contours the method to be used in any given exercise. She proposes that there are at least three areas that require attention in any sound liturgical theology, for “in accord with the social, symbolic

177. Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, 149

178 Of course, the question of the *legitimacy* of this maturation has engendered a venerable pedigree of debate Ricoeur’s thoughts on the matter are well-known, if also subject in their turn to controversy “I have always been mistrustful with respect to speculation termed ontotheological, and I had a critical reaction to any attempt to fuse the Greek verb *to be* and God, in spite of Exodus 3 14 My mistrust of the proofs of the existence of God had led me always to treat philosophy as an anthropology” (*Critique and Conviction*, 150) For an thoughtful critique of this “dualism” (which in the same paragraph, Ricoeur describes as pushing him at one period of his life “to the point of excluding any encounter of God in philosophy), see Dan R Stiver, op cit , 229–52 Dan R Stiver, op. cit , 229–52

179 Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, 164

180 Bridget Nichols, op cit , 37

and processual nature of liturgy, a particular method constructed for the purpose of objectifying the public horizon that is mediated in liturgical praxis will have to include questions about the assembly or ritual subject, the ritual symbols,¹⁸¹ and the ritual process.”¹⁸²

Although she expressly presents these criteria in terms of an ethnographic methodology more in keeping with the quantitative research of ritual studies than with the qualitative interrogations of hermeneutics, I believe that they also obtain, *mutatis mutandi*, in the domain of the latter. Language and subjectivity are certainly twin concerns of Ricoeur, which come together in his considerations of the narrative operation, of which the ritual process is arguably a species. Hence our Ricoeurian detour will attend to an exploration of his work in these three interrelated areas, before concluding with an application to the GBW.

What will prove to be the unifying theme in our investigation? David Kaplan explains that while Ricoeur’s diffuse output is neither readily nor easily categorized—such that even he himself found it difficult to do so—there is nevertheless a “guiding thread” through the labyrinth: the notion of “human capability” (*l’homme capable*).¹⁸³ In an eloquently capacious paragraph, worth quoting despite its inordinate length, Kaplan offers a remarkable summation of the Ricoeurian corpus, under the sign of *homo capax*:

Unraveling the interrelated threads of the concept of capability has taken Ricoeur a lifetime. It is not difficult to see why; the concept of capability implies a web of related phenomena. It implies a notion of the will as embodied, free and receptive. It implies an existential and material relation to the world, what Ricoeur once characterized as “the fault” (*la faute*). It implies a relation to language through which we relate to the world, initially described in terms of symbols, then texts, then narratives, then translation as successive models of the linguistic mediation of experience. Capability implies a

181. Words, for Kelleher, are a genre of symbols, alongside “objects, actions, relationships...gestures, and arrangements of space.”

182. Kelleher, “Liturgical Theology,” 211.

183. Kaplan, op. cit., 2.

relation to the unconscious and other structured systems, above all language and systematically distorted communication. It implies a relation to the imagination that figures into action and language at the most fundamental condition of possible speech and action. It implies a relation to creative realms “as if” they could exist, including the realism of literature, poetry, and the divine. Capability implies a relation to the other with whom we live and without whom we would be unable even to understand ourselves. It implies moral relationships with others to whom we are accountable. Capability implies the imputability of actions undertaken and endured, as well as the quest for recognition of ourselves, other selves, and multiple forms of alterity. It implies a relation to memory, to history, and to forgetting, the interrelated concepts that attest equally to our human capacities as to our human vulnerabilities.¹⁸⁴

In line with these implications, it is the question of how to construe the liturgical faculty of *l'homme capable*—how to discern in such a one the form of Schmemmann's *homo adorans*—that will impel our reading and reflection upon Ricoeur. Obversely put, it is the question of how liturgy, as an instantiation of Ricoeur's principle that “the symbol gives rise to thought,” manifests *l'homme capable* specifically as *homo capax Dei*.

By following this line of inquiry, we implicitly endeavour a response to the query of Guardini with which introduced our project, namely whether humanity in the modern age is “no longer capable of a liturgical act.” This very question also animates Ricoeur's brief but poignant *postface* to *Taizé et l'Église de demain*.¹⁸⁵ He asks, almost in the language of the former, whether the liturgy of Taizé, based as it is on the classical liturgical traditions of the Church, is not destined, in our industrial age, together with them to suffer obsolescence; whether a rootedness in the agrarian and pastoral symbols of a former era does not necessitate their becoming a museum piece, a specimen of cultural exoticism, deprived of relevance to the

184. *Ibid.*, 3.

185. Ricoeur, “Postface.”

contemporary world. Taking up his own admittedly grave challenge, he ventures that liturgical symbolism, in its function as memorial, combats the forgetfulness of a technological age that expends itself and expires in a utilitarian mode of being. Liturgy, however, like poetry, offers a means to resist the loss of memory; Ricoeur thus invites modern man to conclude a new “pact” *between* technology and poetry, to embrace progress but be founded, through poetry, in the “archaic.” He proposes further that the archaic is, in Christian liturgy, explicitly oriented to the eschatological, that the gathering of the community through the symbolic tends toward its very sending forth unto effective action in the world. And he concludes by insisting that the liturgical symbol fulfills a role analogous to hermeneutics itself by enacting, on the level of representation, the theoretical passage navigated by the former from a first to a second naïveté.

Most intriguing, however, is Ricoeur’s appreciation of the paradoxical role of liturgy in the (de)constitution of the self:

Je suis reconnaissant à la liturgie de m’arracher à ma subjectivité, de m’offrir, non mes mots, non mes gestes, mais ceux de la communauté. Je suis heureux de cette objectivation de mes sentiments eux-mêmes; en entrant dans l’expression culturelle, je suis arraché à l’effusion sentimentale; j’entre dans la forme qui me forme; en reprenant à mon compte le texte liturgique, je deviens texte moi-même, orant et chantant. Oui, par la liturgie, je suis fondamentalement dépréoccupé de moi-même....Voilà le dépaysement salutaire qui remet le moi dans la communauté, l’individu dans l’histoire et l’homme dans la création.¹⁸⁶

In light of these remarks the present enterprise seems a fair wager. It is clear that for Ricoeur,

186. “I am grateful to the liturgy for delivering me out of my subjectivity, for offering me, not my words or gestures, but those of the community. I am happy with this objectification of my emotions; in entering into the ritual idiom, I am delivered from emotional effusion; I enter into a form that in turn forms me; by taking up in my own way the liturgical text I become text myself, in prayer and song. Indeed, by the liturgy, I am fundamentally divested of preoccupation with myself....Behold the salutary disorientation that resituates the “I” amidst community, the individual amidst history and the human person amidst creation [translation mine]” (Ricoeur, “Postface,” 249–50).

liturgy opens a vista within which specific features of *homo capax* can be described. What remains in the following chapters is to explicate how.

CHAPTER 2

“No Tongue Can Hymn Your Wonders”

The Naming of God in Liturgical Language

“The Linguistic Turn”

Our project of harnessing the work of Paul Ricoeur in the service of liturgical theology, and specifically the interpretation of the Great Blessing of Water (GBW), needs to be situated in the context of a much broader intellectual trend, namely the appropriation within philosophy and theology of what has been called the “linguistic turn.” I would agree with the suggestion that this movement is proving to be as axial as the “turn to the subject” initiated by Descartes and consolidated by Kant, challenging the received view of language as a secondary, expressive phenomenon by bringing into relief its primacy in the constitution of knowledge.¹ Thus, according to Michael Scanlon, “The most important lesson to be learned by the linguistic turn...[is] that language is primarily a vocal actualization of the tendency to see reality symbolically.” The symbolic vision effected by language is taken in this connection to be the “key to the specifically human,” thus retrieving Aristotle’s classic conception of the human person as a “speaking animal” (*to zoon logon echōn*).²

1. A comprehensive guide to this movement can be found in Dan Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language Sign, Symbol and Story* (Malden, MA Blackwell Publishers, 1996)

2. George Kilcourse, ed., *The Linguistic Turn and Contemporary Theology Essays on the Theme with an Introduction by Michael J. Scanlon*, Current Issues in Theology (Macon, GA Catholic Theological Society of America, 1987), viii

Echoing the seminal insight of contemporary liturgical theologians, such as David Fagerberg, regarding the distinction between *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda*,³ Scanlon asserts that the linguistic turn has brought into relief the difference between originary *religious* discourse and derivative *theological* discourse: “Narrative (with symbol and myth as its building blocks) is the primary language of religion and faith. The ‘speech acts’ of religion are worship, liturgy, and ritual, and here the speech is that of symbol and story. Theological discourse is secondary.”⁴ In sum, the distinction is between the language *of* faith and the language *about* it.

Since religious discourse as such emerges preeminently in liturgical action, it brings to light the essential intersubjectivity of language, as well as its performativity—both salient concerns in contemporary philosophy. Scanlon notes in this regard that Aristotle already grasped the social dimension of language, and the political implications of defining the human person as a “speaking animal”; the linguistic turn also entails, therefore, a rehabilitation of the latter’s notion of *phronēsis*, “that practical knowledge that liberates people for responsible living in community.”⁵ Scanlon concludes that all theology is bound henceforth to be both hermeneutical and praxiological: “It is difficult to overstate the import for theology of the contemporary linguistic turn. It is *in no way* a continuing chapter of the modern ‘turn to the subject.’ It is, rather, a ‘horizon shift’ of seminal significance for the future of theology. As a horizon shift, the linguistic turn is fundamentally sublativ of previous antinomies, such as that between theory and praxis.”⁶

While a Ricoeurian analysis of the intersubjectivity and performativity of liturgical language will occupy us in Chapter 3, the present chapter delves into the attributes of liturgical speech, operative, in Scanlon’s terms, as “symbol and story.” In doing so, we take up one of the

3. David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2004).

4. Kilcourse, *op. cit.*, ix.

5. *Ibid.*, x.

6. *Ibid.*

tasks that Zimmerman's methodology consciously "brackets," namely to "capitalize on the richness of the text's metaphoric prayer language" ⁷ Metaphor exemplifies, for Ricoeur, the fundamental *creativity* of language, and serves as a mediating term between symbolism and narrative. Not only did he dedicate an early monograph to the study of metaphor *per se*, but he has continually returned to the phenomenon of metaphoricity in his later works—such that one can consider it a Ricoeurian *topos*.⁸

Religious Language and Experience

It must be remembered that to consider the metaphorical processes of liturgical language is decidedly *not* to depart from a practical concern for liturgy as enacted. Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor provides warrant for Scanlon's claim that interpretation is essentially *praxiological*, since what is at stake is an imaginative construal of human action that may result in its effective redeployment. Zimmerman observes that of the three general methodologies adopted by contemporary approaches to language, the one represented by Ricoeur exhibits the greatest concern with the *reference* of speech.⁹ She categorizes the trends within Anglo-American analytic philosophy, and the work of such linguists as Noam Chomsky, as being solely preoccupied with the sense of language, its internal operations as a *system*. Communications theorists, by contrast, go a step further in their focus on linguistic *usage*; in this school she places the later Wittgenstein, and his heirs (e.g., J.L. Austin, J. Searle

⁷ Zimmerman, *Liturgy as a Language*, 187

⁸ The key works are "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed and trans John B Thompson [Paris: Cambridge University Press; Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981], 165–81), *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, (originally published as *La métaphore vive* [L'ordre philosophique] Paris: Seuil, 1975), trans Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press Inc., 1978), and "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 143–59. A valuable summary of Ricoeur's thought on metaphor is given by Mary Gerhart in "The Live Metaphor," which he approves and clarifies in the "Reply to Mary Gerhart" that follows (Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* [Chicago: Open Court, 1996], 216–32, 233–35).

⁹ "Reference is that logically prior source of meaning (experience) which is brought to language and is uncovered in the interpretive act as an extralinguistic dimension of discourse" Joyce Ann Zimmerman, "Language and Human Experience," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press, 1990), 645.

and R. Jakobson) who, elaborating the notion of “language games,” have clarified the modalities of performativity, i.e., the relationship of language to its users. But it is the third group, broadly termed “philosophers of language” (e.g., Husserl, Heidegger and Ricoeur) who, in Zimmerman’s estimation, truly confront the enigma posed by language. Such thinkers “are not content to say simply that language expresses human experience. Rather, they wish to uncover the determinate relationship between language and human experience and its ontological significance. They seek to explain how language discloses being in new ways. For them, language not only expresses human experience, but in fact constitutes a creative redescription of reality.”¹⁰

Ricoeur’s own views in this connection are well articulated near the end of *Oneself as Another* where, considering the ontology connoted by linguistic analysis, he sees fit to issue a note of caution:

[P]aradoxically, the *linguistic turn*, despite the referential twist of philosophical semantics, has often signified a refusal to “go outside” of language and a mistrust equal to that of French structuralism with respect to any extralinguistic order. It is even important to emphasize that the implicit axiom that “everything is language” has often led to a closed semanticism, incapable of accounting for human action as actually *happening* in the world, as though linguistic analysis condemned us to jumping from one language game to another, without thought ever being able to meet up with *actual* action.¹¹

He proceeds to reiterate his commitment to the “ontological vehemence” of all language, even those uses which, *prima facie*, appear non-referential—for example, metaphor and narrative fiction.

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10. Zimmerman, “Language and Human Experience,” 644.

11. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 301.

Such uses display how meaning obtains not so much *in* a realm of antecedent experience, subsequently disclosed by language, but rather in the very interpretation of experience afforded by ordinary languages, consequently rendering hermeneutics an existential act. As Zimmerman summarizes, concerning the outlook of Ricoeur *et alia*: “Interpretation of discourse is a process whereby meaning emerges as new possibilities to be lived, with and through its potential redescription of reality. This process delivers an extralinguistic import that effects an ontological claim on language-use and its relationship to human experience.”¹²

In this contention we rejoin the debate with which we concluded Chapter One concerning the role of performance in liturgical hermeneutics; while it is clear that liturgy, as realized ritually, manifests its “ontological vehemence” most efficaciously, it is also the case that empirical study of actual celebrations does not exhaust the surplus of meaning borne by a liturgical text.¹³ To adduce a musical analogy: the study of a symphony can proceed both inductively, through attendance at performances, or at least analysis of recordings of them; but also, deductively, through attention to the orchestral score itself—an attention neither devoid of awareness of its concert destiny, nor again circumscribed by such performances as have already taken place—in quest of discovering new dimensions of the musical “world” proposed by its score.

In point of fact, Ricoeur adduces this very analogy on multiple occasions, when discussing the way in which the text, distanced from its original context by the sheer fact of inscription, awaits performative reactivation on the part of the reader(s). Thus in “Naming God,” he can declare, “Writing, in its turn, is restored to living speech by means of the various

12. Zimmerman, “Language and Human Experience,” 645.

13. “While the ontological as such is never directly accessible, it is recoverable in narrative through the relationship of the world given in the literary language and in the redescription of the world of the readers by means of their having entered into the story and having thus appropriated new possibilities to their experience....In a sense, the reading/hearing of a story is none other than a reshaping of human action” (Zimmerman, “Language and Human Experience,” 648).

acts of discourse that reactualize the text. Reading and preaching are such actualizations of writing into speech. A text, in this regard, is like a musical score that requires execution.”¹⁴ And in *Interpretation Theory*, he elaborates:

With writing, the verbal meaning of the text no longer coincides with the mental meaning of intention of the text. This intention is both fulfilled and abolished by the text, which is no longer the voice of someone present. The text is mute. An asymmetric relation obtains between text and reader, in which only one of the partners speaks for the two. The text is like a musical score and the reader like the orchestra conductor who obeys the instructions of the notation. Consequently, to understand is not merely to repeat the speech event in a similar event, it is to generate a new event beginning from the text in which the initial event has been objectified.¹⁵

To treat the phenomenon of metaphoricity in liturgical language, therefore, is to elucidate the process, at its point of origin, by which a “new event” is generated in a given reading/performance, since it is the power of metaphor for *innovation* (in which act the interpreter plays no small part) that allows interpretation to eschew mere repetition. While it is certainly legitimate to also study and transcribe actual instances of the text’s being reactivated (actual liturgical celebrations), such instances perforce refer back to the textual mediation through which they are recognized to belong to a given tradition.

As we suggested above, it may well be that this feature of textuality, ubiquitous in liturgy in correspondence to the particular “scripturality” of Christianity, is what distinguishes it, in principle, from the phenomena historically considered in the field of ritual studies: for

¹⁴ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 219

¹⁵ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 75 In a sense, the analysis of a text is also a *performance*, since it requires an existential engagement with its “matter” or “tissue.” Naturally, as Zimmerman points out on multiple occasions, the form of performance envisioned by the liturgical text, as analogously by a theatrical script, is that of embodied, communal celebration. This end does not exclude from the interpretive process, however, a *critical* moment—of which the present work, as a second-order discourse *about* liturgy, rather than a first-order instance of liturgical speech, is an example

example, the paradigmatic treatment of the Balinese cockfight by anthropologist Clifford Geertz,¹⁶ or the various case studies collected by Ronald Grimes in his *Ritual Criticism*.¹⁷ Where ritual studies stresses the primacy of ritual over myth/narrative, and rightfully draws attention to the absence of linguistic mediation—written, if not oral—in given instances, liturgical theology must situate itself within a ritual matrix grounded in a tradition of inscription. *Mutatis mutandi*, Ricoeur's declaration concerning the centrality of the Bible to Christian faith is apposite also to a hermeneutics of liturgy: "What is presupposed is that faith, inasmuch as it is lived experience, is instructed—in the sense of being formed, clarified, and educated—within the network of texts that in each instance preaching brings back to living speech. This presupposition of the textuality of faith distinguishes biblical faith ('Bible' meaning book) from all others. In one sense, therefore, texts do precede life. I can name God in my faith because the texts preached to me have already named God."¹⁸

One can even analogously extend this contention to the *primacy* of liturgical text over liturgical celebration; if, in the first instance, the liturgy was orally transmitted, existent *only* as "living speech," its sedimentation through inscription has resulted in its becoming a similar "network" that actual celebration now restores to life. Liturgical texts, in this sense, do precede (liturgical) life; whatever the interplay between the descriptive and the prescriptive functions at their point of origin, the game is surely determined by the latter for those who live a tradition in the wake of its inscription. That is to say, the textuality of the liturgy, to the extent that such perforce begs the question of its own status, ineluctably demands the labour of interpretation. As Schmemmann wryly observes, with respect to the regulative character of the Orthodox *typicon* (*ordo*), it presents itself as a hermeneutical *sine qua non* for diametrically

16. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *Myth, Symbol and Culture*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), 1–38.

17. Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).

18. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 218.

opposed liturgical camps.¹⁹

A parallel may be drawn, therefore, between Ricoeur's insistence on maintaining the dialectic between a reification of the text and a reification of spoken discourse: accordingly, we may suggest that a study of liturgical performance needs to be held in tension with a hermeneutics of the liturgical script.²⁰ Ricoeur helpfully observes that if it be true, as in Plato's *Phaedrus*, that something is lost when oral communication is committed to writing—that which “belongs to the voice, the facial expression, and the common situation of interlocutors in a face-to-face setting”—it is also true that the reconversion of writing into speech, while legitimately aspiring to a dialogical situation of communication, can not for all that pretend to identify the post-scriptural experience with the pre-scriptural, since the “scriptuary” step introduces an irreducible moment of mediation.²¹

Construing Metaphor

To return to the gravamen of this chapter, namely the operation of religious language, and the role played therein by metaphor, we must consider the properties of the latter, by dint of which it undertakes the portentous “redescription of reality” with which Zimmerman, following Ricoeur, credits it. To navigate this major current in Ricoeur's thought, we will proceed in three stages. First, we will follow the course of his exegetical works, to gain an appreciation of how his general theory of metaphoricity relates specifically to religious discourse: to wit, the way in which the scriptural naming of God functions in a manner analogous to that of the metaphor. Secondly, we will consider prominent attempts both at

19. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 132–33.

20. Since liturgy *is* scripted, one must attend to particular scripts—in our case, that of the GBW—and *not* simply the performance, as if the performance obtained apart from the mediation of text. While ritual theory may, in the study of non-Christian rites, be able to identify examples wherein a scriptuary step has *not* been taken, this is manifestly not the case as concerns Christian liturgy. Ricoeur explains the “independence” of the text, and its importance, as follows: “The triple independence of the text with regard to its author, its context, and its initial audience explains why texts are open to innumerable ‘recontextualizations’ through listening and reading that are a reply to the ‘decontextualization’ already contained in the very act of writing or, more exactly, or publication” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 219).

21. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 219.

validating and discrediting Ricoeur's theory, in terms of their pertinence to liturgical theology. Finally, we will propose that a metaphorical dialectic only marginally developed in Ricoeur, namely that inhering between apophatic and kataphatic discourse, lies at the heart of the Byzantine liturgical idiom, to the effect of its becoming a "mixed" genre between the primary, pre-theoretical discourse in which Ricoeur places the biblical texts and the secondary, derivative genre to which he assigns theology as such. This idiom, we will suggest, is also *mixed* on account of its incorporation of a further dialectic beyond that of primary and secondary discourse, to wit, that which obtains between the naming of God in the formulae of the text itself, and the recognition of him in the extralinguistic, sacramental phenomena to which the formulae advert. This triple line of inquiry will serve to orient the first third of our analysis, in Chapter 5, of the GBW itself.

"Naming God"

The intersection between the work of metaphor and that of religious discourse can be readily attained via the seventh and eighth of Ricoeur's Gifford Lectures,²² which were not published alongside the others in *Oneself as Another*, due to their explicitly religious orientation. (Ricoeur has been very concerned, throughout his career, to separate his philosophical from his exegetical, not to say theological, enterprise, a fact to which he often referred ambivalently himself, and which has received criticism from Ricoeurian scholars).²³ These latter lectures will also prove germane to the effort undertaken in the next chapter to apply Ricoeur's philosophy of the self to liturgical subjectivity, given that they bring into relief the implications of said philosophy to the question of the biblical subject. Since they hearken back, however, to

22 For the seventh, see "The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures," trans David Pellauer, in *The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures*, in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. David E. Aune and John McCarthy (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 201–20, as well as the *repetitio*, with a distinct introduction, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn"* *The French Debate*, Dominique Janicaud, et al (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 127–46. For the eighth, see "The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation" in *Figuring the Sacred*, 262–78.

23 Dan Stiver, for example, remarks "Ricoeur's sometime view that his philosophy is separable from his religious beliefs seems naive and curiously 'modern.' It is especially ironic since the main tenor of his thought runs against such a separation" (*Theology After Ricoeur*, 241).

Ricoeur's earlier exegetical explorations of the way in which Scripture "names God," it is to these that we first must turn.

Ricoeur begins a principal exegetical essay, "Naming God," with an apologia: "Shall I tolerate the fact that thinking, which aims at what is universal and necessary, is linked in a contingent way to individual events and particular texts that report them? Yes, I shall assume this contingency, so scandalous for thinking, as one aspect of the presupposition attached to listening."²⁴ In other words, if one wishes to understand the operations of language, it does not suffice to treat them in abstract categories: an engagement with specific examples is required. Ricoeur sees the language of Scripture as a field ripe for the harvest of hermeneutical insights, and wagers that gleaning therein will furnish him with a fuller comprehension than otherwise. *Faith* as such is not accessible to hermeneutics, since it is at once the opaque origin and limit of interpretation; the linguistic *mediations* of faith, however, are certainly accessible, and it is in their confines that Ricoeur intends to carry out his investigation.

This investigation is impelled by the question of how best to categorize religious discourse as such. His initial strategy is to consider it as a species of *poetic* discourse, but the course of his ruminations results in ascribing to it particular attributes, in respect of which this categorization is subject to a unexpected reversal, recapitulated in "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics."²⁵ There Ricoeur argues that the ontological vehemence of the Bible is such as to claim the prerogative of serving as the first principle or *organon* of *all* interpretation, over and against a philosophical pretension to take it as a mere case study in general hermeneutic theory. As will become evident, religious discourse conceives a similar mutiny upon the poetic discourse to which it is ostensibly subservient.

Ricoeur distinguishes poetic discourse from several others, including "ordinary,"

24. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 218

25 Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans Kathleen Blamey and John B Thompson, foreword by Richard Kearney (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 89–104

quotidian discourse, scientific, historical and sociological.²⁶ Anticipating criticism concerning the lack or unreality of *reference* in poetic discourse, he argues that such discourse does *not* celebrate only itself, despite appearances to the contrary that, in the absence of an empirical correlate, it is “without any bearing on true knowledge of the world.”²⁷ Conceding the criticism at first, in order to then beg the question, Ricoeur contends, in a passage worth quoting at length:

In this sense, it is true that poetry is a suspension of the descriptive function. It does not add to our knowledge of objects. But this suspension is the wholly negative condition for the liberation of a more originary referential function, which may be called second-order only because discourse that has a descriptive function has usurped the first rank in daily life, assisted, in this respect, by science. Poetic discourse is also about the world, but not about the manipulable objects of our everyday environment. It refers to our many ways of belonging to the world before we oppose ourselves to things understood as “objects” that stand before a “subject.” If we have become blind to these modalities of *rootedness* and *belonging-to* (*appartenance*) that precede the relation of a subject to objects, it is because we have, in an uncritical way, ratified a certain concept of truth, defined by adequation to real objects and submitted to a criterion of empirical verification and falsification. Poetic discourse precisely calls into question these uncritical concepts of adequation and verification. In so doing, it calls into question the reduction of the referential function to descriptive discourse and opens the field of a nondescriptive reference to the world.²⁸

²⁶ Pace Graham Ward’s criticisms below (“Biblical Narrative and the Theology of Metonymy,” *Modern Theology* 7, no. 4 [July 1991] 335–49), Ricoeur does not in fact remain vague about what ordinary discourse is, even if one could question whether scientific discourse itself does not depend upon metaphors for its own intelligibility, à la Thomas Kuhn. This is precisely the drift of Sallie McFague, in *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982).

²⁷ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 221.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

Now the claim that the descriptive function is most appropriately equated with scientific discourse has been contested in several quarters.²⁹ It is important to grant the point to Ricoeur, however, for the sake of argument; if anything, he entrusts too *little* to poetic discourse, rather than too much, in the bailiwick he allots it, inclusive of narrative fiction, lyricism and even the essay.

If religious discourse *is* to be initially broached as a species of poetic discourse, as a form of language whose truth is to be termed “manifestation” rather than “adequation,” what differentiates it from other such species? According to Ricoeur, it is the “naming of God” that “specifies the religious at the interior of the poetic.”³⁰ Religious discourse, however, is not on this account to be confused with theology, whose recourse to speculative philosophical concepts disbars it from claiming the title “originary” after the manner of Scripture itself.³¹ To listen to originary discourse is to eschew the ontotheological amalgamation of God and Being to which the theological tradition has historically borne witness, if not to execrate it as a legitimate endeavour in its own sphere.

In his later work we see that Ricoeur, while personally sympathetic to the disdain of many modern theologians towards ontotheology, steadfastly refuses to condemn the

29 Ricoeur presumes that poetic discourse suspends first-order reference—whether ordinary or scientific. Several theorists, however, have appealed to the essential metaphoricity of scientific models themselves. Ricoeur’s argument only stands to gain, however, rather than lose force, from the assertion that metaphor is operative not only within, but also beyond, the bounds of poetic discourse.

A key text in this connection is Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965). Barfield’s thesis is that in modernity, we have ceased to experience “participation”—equivalent to Ricoeur’s notion of “our many ways of belonging to the world before we oppose ourselves to things understood as ‘objects’ that stand before a ‘subject’”—since language has ceased to be encountered as providing “representations” of the “unrepresented.” He challenges the ensuing loss of an “iconic” mode of perception.

30 Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 223.

31 Ricoeur will eventually qualify this distinction, in the volume produced with exegete André LaCoque, *Thinking Biblically*. There he probes the “veritable event in thinking” displayed in the Septuagint’s translation of Exodus 3:14, the encounter of Moses and the Burning Bush (*Thinking Biblically*, 331). In that instance, he sees the originary biblical discourse already countenancing the ontotheological tradition, inasmuch as the history of Greek philosophical speculation on Being makes an entrée into the forum of God’s self-revelation. The unnameable Name is thus irrevocably defined according to a heterogeneous frame of reference.

intellectual labour that has struggled, from the translation of the Septuagint onward, to mediate between the Hellenic and Hebraic worlds of thought. Indeed, he is uncertain that it would even have been possible to avoid this labour, given the exigencies of translation: “There is no innocent translation; I mean one that could escape the history of reception of our texts, a history that itself is immediately a history of interpretation. To translate is already to interpret.”³² And he finds evidence, up to the high Middle Ages, of circumspect minds who maintained a dialectical approach to the ontotheological question, preserving, in the midst of their analogical postulates, the relativizing critique of the apophatic tradition. Hence he can laud the efforts of Aquinas and other Scholastics, even if he considers that another “event in thinking”—in which the ontotheological tradition will have to be unthought, as it were—may rightly be demanded by our contemporaries:

They [the scholastics] held that Being could be spoken of in affirmative statements, at the horizon of an elevation to the highest point of the most sublime titles and attributes encountered along the road of not just rational speculation but also spiritual purification. These two ways, the apophatic and the analogical, mutually presupposed each other insofar as, on the one hand, what one negates is always something that one represents to oneself, even when it is a question of the most sublime attributes of God, and, on the other hand, the elevation to the highest point of these titles and attributes by the way of eminence is equivalent to negating what we ordinarily affirm concerning such attributes.³³

As we shall see later on, this commendation of the dialectic of the kataphatic and apophatic favours the peculiarity of the “naming of God” as it occurs in the liturgical idiom.

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32. LaCoque and Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, 331.

33. *Ibid.*, 342.

The Polyphonicity of Scripture

Ricoeur's concern with distinguishing theological discourse from the originary religious discourse displayed in the biblical texts, derives not from a principled objection to the discipline of theology, to which he on several occasions cedes due rights and responsibilities, but rather from a sense that the *self* which puts itself in the position of listener must be divested of the kind of systematic integration to which theology is inclined, if not necessarily bound—in order to confront the real dissonances articulated by Scripture's denomination of the divine.³⁴ For Ricoeur considers it an often overlooked but immensely important fact that the naming of God is not simple but multiple; discrete biblical genres name God in different ways, with the result that each genre produces a particular style of the confession of faith.

Ricoeur calls this phenomenon the "polyphonicity" of Scripture, and he defends it against any attempt to reduce the music, as it were, to a monophony. Several "voices" emerge in his analysis: narrative is preponderant, with a naming of God in the third person, as the primary agent of history; prophecy speaks instead in the first person, doubling the ego of the prophet with that of the divine "I"; hymns and laments address God as the dialogue partner of prayer; wisdom literature, in turn, also speaks of God in the third person, but chiefly the inaugurator of a impersonal cosmic order rather than as one who interrupts the ordinary course of affairs to intervene on behalf of his people:

Thus God is named in diverse ways in narration that recounts the divine acts, prophecy that speaks in the divine name, prescription that designates God as the source of the imperative, wisdom that seeks God as the meaning of meaning, and the hymn that involves God in the second person....The word "God"...presupposes the entire context

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34. For Ricoeur, true listening equally requires a letting go of onto-theological "knowledge" and a disavowal of the narcissistic self-founding ego of Descartes and Kant: "This double renouncing of the absolute 'object' and the absolute 'subject' is the price that must be paid to enter into a radically nonspeculative and prephilosophical mode of language" (*Figuring the Sacred*, 224.) We will develop our reflection on the "summoned self" that results from this renunciation in the next chapter.

of narratives, prophecies, laws, wisdom writings, psalms, and so on. The referent “God” is thus intended by the convergence of all these partial discourses. It expresses the circulation of meaning among all the forms of discourse wherein God is named.³⁵

In this perspective, the unity of Scripture appears as fundamentally *canonical*, in the sense that the disparate books are, *prima facie*, only co-ordinated in their very difference by having a common divine referent. At the risk of sounding tautological, this means that although God is named *differently* by the biblical genres, it is nevertheless *God* who is named. Ricoeur deems it essential that the different means of naming God be brought into a “living dialectic” that will display their “interferences” with each other.³⁶ The provocation that ensues exemplifies the alterity of God himself, who cannot be circumscribed by any one mode of discourse, but constantly escapes coherent determination.³⁷ Hence Ricoeur cites the contrast between the Old Testament narratives which found the identity of the people of Israel, and the prophecies which jeopardize that identity, by proclaiming it vulnerable to the wrath and judgment of the “Day of the Lord”; what is secured by one genre, is menaced by another.

The scrambling that results from the juxtaposition of biblical genres inhibits the reader from forming a clear picture of who God is, and hence from being able to matte and frame such a picture; what is displayed, therefore, is a definitive indefiniteness, as it were. As the referent of the different discourses of Scripture, God is also “the index of their incompleteness”: the figure which escapes them all.³⁸ In consequence, “God” becomes what Ricoeur terms a “limit-

35. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 227–28.

36. *Ibid.*, 226.

37. Ricoeur argues, however, that the overarching schema of Scripture is narrative: God, named as the one who accomplishes *magnalia*, both in Old Testament and the New, grounds the interpretation of time itself: “God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and is, therefore, the Actant of the great gesture of deliverance. And God’s meaning as Actant is bound up with the founding events in which the community of interpretation recognizes itself as enrooted, set up, and established. It is these events that name God....God is designated by the transcendence of the founding events in relation to the ordinary course of history....To the extent that the narrative genre is primary, God’s imprint is in history before being in speech. Speech comes second inasmuch as it confesses the trace of God in the event” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 225).

38. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 226.

expression," i.e., an expression which cannot be fully *thought*, specifically because it dwells at the frontier of thinking. Limit-expressions simultaneously attract and resist the work of interpretation; they reveal *and* conceal, in dialectical fashion. The naming of God, therefore, cannot reasonably lead to a reification of the *idea* of God who, inasmuch as he gives himself, also withdraws: the *Deus revelatus* is at one and the same time a *Deus absconditus*.

The revelation of the Divine Name in Ex. 3:14 serves, in Ricoeur's estimation, as the paragon of this paradox. The pericope brings the ultimate unnameability of God into focus, precisely in its disclosure of a name which is not really a *name*. Rather than accomplishing an ontotheological "capping off" of other narratives, Ricoeur argues that the passage refers the Name back to the narratives of the patriarchs—"He-Who-Is" is "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"—such that the speculative is subsumed by the historical.

The New Testament, however, offers an analogous "recession into infinity of the referent 'God,'"³⁹ in the naming of God under the ciphers of "the Kingdom of heaven" and "the Kingdom of God." This kingdom can only be signified by "parables, proverbs and paradoxes" whose cumulative connotations, according to Ricoeur, are as puzzling as the multiplicity of images of the divine in the Old Testament. The metaphoricity of the parables also parallels the previous dialectic, since here, as there, there is both affirmation *and* negation: to the extent that "the Kingdom" is *like* that which is recounted in the parables, there is revelation; to the extent that it is *only* like unto it, rather than being equivalent, a veil is drawn. As Ricoeur explains: "Paradoxes and hyperboles dissuade hearers in some way from forming a coherent project of their lives and from making their existence into a continuous whole....In the same way that the proverb (submitted to the law of paradox and hyperbole) only reorients by first disorienting, the parable (submitted to what I call the law of extravagance) makes the extraordinary break forth in the ordinary."⁴⁰ By "law of extravagance" Ricoeur intends the

39. Ibid., 228.

40. Ibid., 229.

element of the implausible in parables that confounds a facile interpretation of them; the tension between the implausibility of their plots and the quotidian realism of their details compels the hearers to acknowledge the “Wholly Other”:

If the case of the parable is exemplary, it is because it combines a narrative structure, a metaphorical process, and a limit-expression. In this way, it constitutes a short summary of the naming of God. Through its narrative structure, it recalls the original rootedness of the language of faith in narratives. Through its metaphorical process, it makes manifest the poetic character of the language of faith as a whole. And finally, in joining metaphor and limit-expression, it furnishes the matrix for theological language inasmuch as this language conjoins analogy and negation in the way of eminence: “God is like..., God is not...”⁴¹

Ricoeur anticipates the Christological concern of those who might, on the one hand, be persuaded by his analysis of the Gospel genres but also, on the other, feel apprehension at its apparent displacement of the character of Jesus. He is disinclined to assuage this concern by any move that will simply substitute, in a Monophysite fashion, the naming of Christ for the naming of God.⁴² Christ himself names God by praying *to* him, as well as speaking about his kingdom, complexifying the various namings of the Old Testament. But Christ is also associated with God in a unique way, and this places further pressure on the fragile consensus of those namings; now the conflict is intensified, to the degree that the limit-expression “God” is impelled to accept an equivalence with the Christ-figure. Ricoeur concedes that it is equally difficult to write Christology from above and from below, since it needs must comprehend

41. Ibid., 230.

42. As we shall see, one of the features of Byzantine liturgical discourse is precisely its tendency to do just this, namely, to give voice to a neo-Chalcedonian ethos, “a development in Byzantine Christology after the Council of Chalcedon which caused the Byzantines to disproportionately emphasize the divinity of Christ (at the expense of his humanity) in an attempt to win back the non-Chalcedonians” (Peter Galadza, “Canadian Ukrainian Catholic Worship: Towards a Framework for Analysis,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 34, no. 1–2 [1993]: 256n14). Of course, this aspect of the “world behind the text” is tangential to the dynamics of the “world in front of the text.”

“under the form of the most extreme tension and conflict—God’s determining the existence of Jesus and the naming of God by all the biblical texts”⁴³

Our review of Ricoeur’s exegetical work on the naming of God concludes with his momentous reversal, anticipated above, in the categorization of religious discourse. We have seen that at a certain level he insists it to be a species of poetic discourse, manifesting the latter’s characteristic traits: a break with ordinary discourse on account of the primacy of metaphor, for example, and the opening up of a new world, “constituted in the crucible of semantic innovation,” which serves to inspire biblical readers, through a new self-understanding, to become the sort of persons capable of inhabiting this world.

Nevertheless, religious language transcends the poetic, precisely because the naming of God has a *sui generis* potential to refigure the world, deploying, as it were, a phalanx of *ultimate* concerns.⁴⁴ Ricoeur proffers an original account of how Scripture capitalizes on this potential, arguing that biblical genres are established not at the level of concepts but rather that of the Kantian *schema*: that is, they provide “models” for the Divine Name, “rules for producing figures of the divine” which are not in fact principally figures of the divine, but rather figures of God’s presence in the midst of his people.⁴⁵

The import of this distinction is that the biblical figures of the divine themselves are the *source* of the meaning of the name “God,” long before speculative thought brings to the table

43. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 231.

44. *Ibid.*, 232.

45. Ricoeur does not develop, in this context, exactly what he intends by reference to this notoriously convoluted term of Kant. He seems to wish to emphasize, on the one hand, the importance of the biblical figures, over and against a view which would categorize them as secondary or derivative; for Ricoeur, one does not go around Scripture, but through it. As he elsewhere declares: “The literary genres of the Bible do not constitute a rhetorical façade which it would be possible to pull down in order to reveal some thought content that is indifferent to its literary vehicle” (*On Biblical Interpretation*, 91). On the other hand, he is chary of attaching preeminence to any one figure or set of figures, as if such could be taken on their own rather than being set in dialectic with all others.

According to Kant, the schema of a pure concept—such as “God” is, being by definition immune to empirical observation—serves as the model according to which images of said concept are represented to the mind (Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995], 360–62). But in regard to God, Kant does not begin with Scripture, but rather with the exigencies of the ethical imperative (*A Kant Dictionary*, 215–16). By contrast, Ricoeur privileges originary discourse and thus accords primacy to its models.

the produce of ratiocination concerning the First Cause or Unmoved Mover or what have you. Hence Ricoeur can contend that the naming of God in Scripture subverts any suzerainty philosophy might aspire to exercise:

[T]he word “God” does not function as a philosophical concept, whether this be being in either the medieval or in the Heideggerian sense of being. Even if one is tempted to say—in the theological metalanguage of all these pretheological languages—that “God” is the religious name for being, still the word “God” says more: it presupposes the total context constituted by the whole space of gravitation of stories, prophecies, laws hymns and so forth. To understand the word “God” is to follow the direction of meaning of the word...its double power to gather all the significations that issue from the partial discourses and to open up a horizon that escapes from the closure of discourse.⁴⁶

In “opening up a horizon” beyond that of the Scripture itself, the naming of God exerts a force upon the reader, compelled as he or she is to countenance a response to the enigma presented in its figures.

Now such a response might well, in the first instance, entail the application of speculative thought to the biblical word. Ricoeur asserts that due to their vivid anthropomorphisms, the scriptural figures of the divine naturally tend toward idolatry; to function as models, therefore, such need to be set in dialectical relationship with the ineffability represented by the Divine Name. This name, in turn, by reason of its very unnameability, subverts the natural meaning of the models, compelling the reader to “think more.” Ricoeur expands the category of limit-expressions, which he has already employed to designate the use by Scriptural genres—for example, the Gospel parables of paradox and hyperbole— and includes therein (drawing upon the work of I.A. Ramsey) the work of “qualifiers” which serve

46. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 45–46.

to complement and correct the models.⁴⁷ Thus models and qualifiers *together* expose the “mutation” of the poetic in the religious; the qualifiers, in the form of limit-expressions, intensify the naming of God and give rise to the “negative way,” “at a higher degree of conceptuality,” and also, to unpredictable applications in the realm of praxis.⁴⁸

Such applications constitute a second result of understanding oneself “in front of the text”: beyond speculative engagement with the *word*, there abides practical engagement with the *world*. While the Gospel does not promote a specific program, its limit-expressions open us up to “limit-experiences,” to unlimited possibilities for action. Thus Ricoeur avers: “If language does not exist for itself, but in view of the world that it opens up and uncovers, then the interpretation of language is not distinct from the interpretation of the world. Hence self-understanding in the face of the text will have the same amplitude as the world of the text. Far, therefore, from being closed in upon a person or a dialogue, this understanding will have the multidimensional character of biblical poetics. It will be cosmic, ethical, and political.”⁴⁹

Liturgical Polyphonicity

We have seen, in the treatment of “Naming God” above, that Ricoeur places paramount value on recognizing the variety of forms of discourse in the Scripture, as so many ways of naming God; this variety in turn mirrors a range of possible applications in the world to which the responding self may be inclined. One such response, that of speculative thought, is brought

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47 Stiver explains the partnership between models and qualifiers, as conceived by Ramsey, as follows “The application [of Ramsey’s thought] to religious language is that ‘heavenly father’ or ‘kingdom of heaven’ represent models that are given their metaphorical and disclosive impetus by a ‘qualifier’ from an ‘odd’ or very different realm. When we begin with ‘father’ and add ‘heavenly,’ we are alerted to the fact that language is being used in an unusual way and that a kind of reality is referred to that is likewise unusual” (*Philosophy of Religious Language*, 77). While Ramsey’s philosophy of models and qualifiers is similar to that of the apophatic tradition, the latter tends to emphasize, according to Stiver, the non-cognitive but rather evocative character of religious language, whereas the former claims that a real, if oblique, disclosure obtains in and through it.

It should be noted that while Ricoeur, in “Naming God,” only briefly adverts to the terminology of the apophatic tradition, it will appear in his later work, and is certainly apropos. It would seem that he avoids developing it there because of the association with a posterior, *theological* discourse, rather than with the originary discourse of Scripture itself. As we shall see, such terminology is a characteristic feature of the Byzantine liturgical idiom.

48 “The combined interplay of models and their qualifiers continues in a wholly significant fashion in the practice that results in the transfer from texts to life” (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 234).

49 Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 235.

to the limit in its encounter with the anthropomorphic appellations of the Bible. This situation is managed, at one level, by Scripture's own adducing of qualifying expressions into the naming of God, whose cumulative effect is to further accentuate the elusiveness of "God." The later theological dialectic of the apophatic and kataphatic explicitly thematizes the very incommensurability of language as concerns the divine, a fact already implicit in the plurality of namings presented in and by the different biblical genres—this plurality Ricoeur names "polyphonicity." But how does all this concern liturgy?

Consider that Ricoeur alternates between acknowledging, at one remove, what we might call the "specificity of liturgical language" (as instanced by the appreciation of Taizé with which our first chapter concluded), and belying it, on the other, by astonishingly minimalistic statements, such as the following, made in the course of a 1994 interview: "I do not use liturgy at all in the sense of ritual but in the sense of the ritualization of the order of [biblical] reading."⁵⁰ Here, although positing a dialectic between the "cyclical time of reading" the Bible provided by the use of a lectionary, and its fresh appropriation in preaching, Ricoeur appears to overlook the possibility that *other* texts used liturgically might affect this dialectic, or again that they might figure prominently in their own right within the ritual context: the possibility, in other words, that liturgical genres might participate along with the biblical in generating a polyphonicity peculiar to the doxological context, as distinguished from that of *lectio divina* (Ricoeur's default reading situation). One might expect of Ricoeur, if not an appreciation of Byzantine hymnography, at least a due consideration of the role played, for instance, by Protestant hymnody in mediating the appropriation of Scripture.⁵¹

50. Paul Ricoeur, David Pellauer, and John McCarthy, "Conversation," in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. David E. Aune and John McCarthy (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 228.

51. A peculiarity of liturgical language, is that it *functions* as originary discourse—for Ricoeur identifies liturgical formularies as one such genre—but is nonetheless replete, in the case of the Byzantine Rite, with theological terminology derived from the speculative works of the Church Fathers, which feature Ricoeur associates with *secondary* discourse. Ricoeur seems strangely indifferent to this feature of the liturgical idiom, its identity as what he is wont to call a "mixed discourse." While it is plausible that Byzantine texts incorporate the greatest amount of philosophical *theologia*—in the patristic sense of speculative discourse about the inner life of the Holy Trinity—the conceptual formulae already evident in the New Testament epistles, and developed not only by the Fathers but also

Contrastingly, he *does* recognize such a nexus in his 1998 interpretation of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Song of Songs,⁵² where he emphasizes the role of (re)use in regard to the surplus of meaning of a Biblical text. The citation of a given text in a new context, and especially its appropriation in liturgy, hymnody *and* preaching, causes a new meaning to be born from the tryst, so to speak, of erstwhile strangers. Hence, “The restatement of the cited text in another situation for speaking produces a displacement, a transference...[which] stems from another epistemological category than the search for the true meaning, than an explication and the search for an adequation between this explication and the features that convey the obvious sense. We have to speak of a ‘use’ of the text or, if one prefers, of a reuse.”⁵³

What ought to garner our attention here is Ricoeur’s prescinding from the question of the *original* meaning of the text; he remains equally opposed to those who would reduce the Song of Songs to erotica, and to those who insists upon its allegorization, advocating rather on behalf of the potential for the text to engender *new* meanings through juxtaposition. Alluding to the mystagogy of St. Cyril of Jerusalem as well as that of St. Ambrose, he marvels at how their baptismal mimesis retrieves the dramatic structure of the Song by its very transposition into a new situation. The “original” meaning of a text, if not entirely impenetrable, is nevertheless marginal. As he explains:

The liturgy makes use of a dialogical structure, where the participation of the worshippers is constitutive of the working of the liturgical action under the imprint of a convocation that generates a new “us.” The practice of language within the liturgical framework has one specific intention, that of drawing near to a “mystery” that is as much enacted as said. Consequently, when the liturgy cites the texts of Scripture, the participants reassume the movement of involvement and commitment through the

by the deliberations of the Ecumenical Councils, redound also in the other classical Rites of the Church.

52. LaCoque and Ricoeur, op. cit., 265–306.

53. Ibid., 277.

words and in the dialogue of the protagonists of the originary dialogue. In this way, the liturgy becomes a privileged place for the reproduction of the text.⁵⁴

Continuing his reflections, with respect to the creative role of hymnody in recontextualizing Scripture, he adds:

We can thus understand why the explicit or implicit quotations of the Song of Songs in hymns also find their final justification in the disposition of those who receive the text by quoting it. In truth, it is no longer a question of an explicit quotation, but rather of a genuine reuse, of a creation of new variations in those sung prayers that make up hymns. If we add that the hymn has not ceased to be a place of theological production...we also will realize that the hymn is one of the privileged places where we can catch sight of the augmentation of meaning at work in certain forms of the reception of the biblical text.⁵⁵

What impresses Ricoeur in both these instances, as in the phenomenon of preaching to which he more customarily refers, is the implication of the “reader”: the process is one in which he or she is addressed in the second-person (and addresses others in such), manifesting an ontological vehemence otherwise latent in the text.⁵⁶

Ricoeur concludes that given the intertextuality of the biblical canon, contemporary readings ought to feel at ease eclectically placing one text in the light of another, confident in

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54. LaCoque and Ricoeur, op. cit., 279. Ricoeur is adamant that liturgical gesture requires a verbal hermeneutic, to become meaningful: “The liturgical gesture would remain mute without the aid of words from the Song of Songs, reinterpreted by the very gesture that seek and finds its expression in these words. In this way, an exchange is brought about between the rite and the poem. The rite opens the space of ‘sacramental mystery’ to the poem, the poem gives the rite the rightness of an appropriate word. In this sense, it is not first the Song of Songs but rather the rite that one interprets in citing the Song of Songs. This latter is thus put in the position of an ‘interpretant’ before being itself given over to interpretation. What is more, it is not just the rite that is interpreted by the words of the poem, but the faithful people themselves who recognize themselves in the gestures of the rite. Whence the place of exhortation in catechesis; the faithful being urged to put themselves in the place of the beloved so as to be able to speak the words of the Song of Songs” (*Thinking Biblically*, 280).

55. LaCoque and Ricoeur, op. cit., 280.

56. Ibid., 282.

the resultant production of new meaning. The displacement and transference that liturgy, hymnody and preaching exemplify is already implicitly operative in the very combining of discrete texts between the same covers;⁵⁷ there cannot but be polyphony, we might say, given the presence of so many “voices” on the same stage.⁵⁸

What Ricoeur once termed the “ritualization of the order of reading,” therefore, while certainly an integral aspect of liturgy, does not do justice to the complexity of the “augmentation of meaning” that actually obtains in the interaction of liturgical genres. As with the baptismal use of the Song of Songs, so also other texts—pre-eminently the Psalms—are, in the course of the liturgy, both heard as *readings* and uttered on the lips of worshippers as *hymns*, a reactivation of the text that in the latter case actually corresponds to its original use. Such reuse, moreover, incorporates the “creation of new variations,” the labour of “theological production,” inasmuch as biblical texts are not simply rehearsed *in toto* but intercalated with hymnographic genres, woven into them and/or adopted as the paradigms according to which the latter are composed. Together with the act of preaching that Ricoeur so often credits with the task of restoring the biblical word to “living speech,” hymnography does not simply lend orality to that word, but truly speaks it anew.

In fact, in light of Ricoeur’s twofold recognition of the role of *utterance* in liturgical discourse—rather than reading *qua* reading (although individual reading is performative in its own way)—and its assimilation of non-biblical texts, we can discern a liturgical polyphonicity, in which the diverse genres of Scripture confront not only hymnography (such as troparia and

57. Ricoeur does not seem to countenance the *primacy* of liturgical use, in the sense of its nascent intertextuality preceding the formation of the biblical canon as such. An Orthodox perspective would wish to affirm that the canon itself is the function of the liturgical practice of the early Church, i.e., that the books which were eventually deemed canonical acquired their status as a result of having gained ecclesiastical approbation through public proclamation in the worshipping assembly.

58. “In other words, it is to the general phenomenon of intertextuality, as an effect of reading, rather than allegory, as allegedly immanent within Scripture, that we may appeal in order to generate theological readings of the Song of Songs, setting out, almost like sparks of new meaning, points of intersection among the texts that belong to the biblical canon...Before any reuse of these texts there would be the intersecting reading that takes place within the canon” (LaCoque and Ricoeur, op. cit., 295).

stichera), but also greetings, blessings, exhortations and, of course, prayers. Furthermore, to extend the musical analogy, this verbal polyphony is complemented by the “counterpoint” issuing from the architectural settings of liturgy, as well as its images, objects, gestures, processions, and so forth. The symphony of liturgy, then, resounds at both the textual and the aesthetic levels, and between them; indeed, one might paraphrase Ricoeur to the effect that it is the orchestration of these levels, conducted according to rubrics, that specifies the *liturgical* at the interior of the *religious*.

Liturgy as “Language-Event”

David Power, although not mentioned in Chapter 1 in the context of those who have made Ricoeur’s work the explicit burden of their own, has consistently endeavoured to incorporate Ricoeurian insights into his liturgical theology. It is worth perusing his sketch of liturgy as a “language-event,” since it complements our development of a liturgical analogue to Ricoeur’s polyphonic naming of God.⁵⁹ Power’s “language-event” refers to the fact that liturgy, while not reducible to language, requires verbal articulation to be meaningful; it constitutes a particular kind of linguistic performance. There are, in his estimation, two key channels through which the resources of language issue within a postmodern context: the first he terms a “retrieval of the medieval,” funded by “neoplatonic idealism.” Although he does not cite examples, Power would appear to be referring to movements such as “Radical Orthodoxy,”

59. “The heuristic within which both the breakdown and the emergence of creative expressions may be appropriated is that of sacrament as a language-event. This indeed fits within a larger context in which the redemptive act itself is considered as a language-event. Jesus was manifested at this baptism and on the Cross as the Word coming forth from God, and those who believed gave testimony to this in their preaching, in their lives and in their writings. The written Word passes on the saying and teachings of Jesus, and the narratives of his passion and death. In the narratives of the resurrection in the Spirit, there is added the hope of the Second Coming, the assurance of the presence of Christ in his body the Church, and the gift of the Spirit to animate this body, enabling it to keep memory and interpret the truth, in word and in deed. It is in what is proclaimed as the Paschal Event that the redemptive operation of Word and spirit has its centre, and it is this which is at the heart of sacramental remembrance in the Church” (David N. Power, “The Language of Sacramental Memorial: Rupture, Excess and Abundance,” in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context*, ed. L. Boeve and L. Leijssen [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001], 138–39).

whose valorization of medieval liturgy emerges most notably in Catherine Pickstock's apologia for the *usus antiquior* of the Roman Rite.⁶⁰

The second course, to which Power himself adheres, is styled "the opening to the creative power of language." Explaining his methodology, he pleads:

The perception of sacrament as language-event seems an apt heuristic with which to engage the note of the discontinuous and the disruptive that marks our sensitivity to broken time. It allows us to see God's action in the past and in the present, without having to relate them by an unbroken sequence of events, and without having to look for some causative force outside language usage itself. A ritual or sacramental event relates to an event within time through the capacities and power of language to carry it forward, and to allow it to enter afresh into lives, however they may have been disrupted and broken. By that same token, the heuristic of language event brings sacramental expression into the realm of the practical. Redescribing reality through remembrance of the Cross, sacrament points to the Christian praxis which goes with such remembrance. On this account, the heuristic of language event could also be called a heuristic of poesis and praxis. It is concerned with the forms and power of language, and at the same time with the paradigms of Christ-like action that are evoked through this language.⁶¹

Now there are many elements of this approach which resonate with the Ricoeurian hermeneutic of "naming God" adumbrated above. As in the literary approach of Ricoeur, Power wishes to bracket discussion of the primary denotation of liturgical speech and its extralinguistic field of reference, i.e., the catena of historical events to which it ostensibly refers. But he also follows Ricoeur in stressing the ontological vehemence of such speech, its capacity

60. Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

61. Power, op. cit., 139.

to refigure the lives of those who perform it. Thirdly, he sees language as funding, through its mimetic resources, a mediation of the experience of *time*; God can thus be encountered as a character in a plot which also includes us.⁶² Further parallels can be drawn, particularly in regard to his treatment of sacrament-as-language-event as a “rupture.”

Power employs the term “rupture” to describe the process by which the narrative deployed in liturgy comes to be challenged by dynamics from both within and without. There is external rupture resulting from the unbelief of culture at large, its blanket incredulity toward meta-narratives, as well as from the existential crises suffered by its participants, who may well find the story they rehearse in worship to not be equal to their experience.⁶³ But is it fair to regard Christianity as a meta-narrative, after the fashion of the story of scientific progress, as told from the Enlightenment onwards?

Power answers in the negative, pointing to the essential pluralism of the Christian story, its inclusion of “a number of related but nonetheless differing narratives.”⁶⁴ He contends that “looking back to the original Christ event as a language-event one notes the plurality already present in the beginning, as well as the ways in which it is interrupted by other language forms that prohibit any excess of coherence and do not allow the system to leave the

62. We shall turn, in Chapter 4, to a consideration of the light to be shed on the temporal dynamics of liturgy by Ricoeur’s account of time—and narrative. Suffice it to note here, that alongside the liturgical applications of his biblical hermeneutics adduced here, his treatment of “biblical time” is portentous, especially for a study of *Byzantine* liturgy. This is so, because of his appreciation of the unique mode of time expressed by the “today” of the hymn genre, pre-eminently evident in the Psalms. “Today” is an ubiquitous deictic in the Byzantine liturgical idiom, dramatically displayed, for example, in the GBW. Ricoeur traces a path for us to follow in interpreting it, by contrasting the temporality it expresses with several others extant in the several genres of the Old Testament (*Figuring the Sacred*, 167–80).

63. Power considers, however, that it is the perennial function of liturgical narrative to be disruptive, to the extent that, as a paradigm, it critiques the existence of those who participate in it.

64. Power concedes that the Church may nevertheless be tempted to pretend to the erstwhile status of the Enlightenment meta-narrative, in the wake of its current vicissitudes. If Christianity should advance such totalizing claims, however, it will suffer a like fate: “If the memorial of Christ is itself presented as meta-narrative, it too will be unable to integrate the realities of evil and the ethical challenge which arises from the convergence of the proclamation of the kerygma of love with this evil. After all, it does not take too much reflection to know that the Christian story and memory have in the past allowed complicity with the evil of the times and the victimisation of those who did not fit well into this narrative” (“Language of Sacramental Memorial,” 141).

'other' outside the pale of the community's story and values."⁶⁵ That is to say, the Gospel narrative, as retold in the Christian community, is precluded from becoming the proprietary preserve of the latter by the interpellation of genres such as the eschatological sayings and the parables of Christ. As Ricoeur also urges in this connection—and also with respect to the tension placed upon the founding narratives of the Old Testament by the weight of its prophetic literature—such texts destabilize the grounds of communal memory, by calling the community itself into judgement.⁶⁶

The Reconciliation of Meta-narrative and *Petits Récits*

Power's emphasis on rupture recalls Ricoeur's account of Scripture as polyphonic. As we have seen, Ricoeur finds in the Bible not a meta-narrative but an array of *petits récits*, whose mutual interference and irreducibility disrupt any project of coherence. The biblical genres generate friction between themselves, and are thus subject rather to a dynamic coherence effected by the elusive absence-in-presence of the naming of God, than to that of a static system⁶⁷—despite the demonstrable network of typological correspondences to be found in

65. Power, op. cit., 141.

66. While at one level the unique narrative of Christ stands as a measure of our life projects, it may itself fall victim to the *Zeitgeist*, to the extent that ordinary life challenges it with "events, situations and conditions which in its given form it cannot accommodate." The liturgical celebration also, whether through the exigencies of intertextuality, or in respect of its vulnerability to the often antinomian dynamics of popular religiosity, can also strain the viability of said narrative; moreover, the ethical demands of the "other" may call into question its ability to accommodate novel circumstances and concerns. According to Power, even where a community responds to such effectively, its response must be integrated into the liturgy in some way, lest a double-think obtain, in which the ritual projection of Christian identity diverges from the community's actual self-understanding ("Language of Sacramental Memorial," 143).

67. If not legitimately posited in abstraction *from* the canonical micro-narratives, therefore, a metastory can nonetheless be discerned *in* Scripture in the form of its plurivocal testimony to God's presence. As God is, one might say, contiguous but not coterminous with his naming, so the incommensurable "detail stories" of the Bible are the index to a metastory that paradoxically eludes telling: "The story of the partnership between God and Israel is, as such, not only open and ongoing but unfathomable and unspeakable. At that point the character of the metastory as that which cannot be told joins the theological theme of God's ineffability. Or rather the ineffability of the Name is the same thing as the inexhaustibility of the metastory" (*Figuring the Sacred*, 243). Ricoeur returns here to one of his preferred pericopes, Ex. 3:14, to illustrate this parallel: the God who retreats into mystery by the very giving of his unnameable name—"I am who I am"—is also the God who affirms his presence to Israel, and his historic acts of presence to the Patriarchs.

If the metastory, like the Name of God, can never be told directly, but only obliquely, by means of *petits récits*, Ricoeur reiterates that these themselves are nonetheless never *purely* narrative, but display a complex intertextuality that places them in dialectic with other modes of discourse (*Figuring the Sacred*, 245). Such a juxtaposition of genres causes texts to consequently be interpreted otherwise than if they stood alone: law becomes, through narrative, gift;

Scripture, the “Great Code” most convincingly decrypted, in Ricoeur’s estimation, by Northrop Frye.⁶⁸

Interestingly, an early text of Ricoeur argues, in forthright terms, for treating liturgy as the site *par excellence* where this dynamic coherence is generated, in the wake of the kind of rupture discerned by Power. Discussing the contemporary emergence of narrative theology, Ricoeur explains that while he is disfavoured, on the one hand, to the notion of *Heilsgeschichte*, given its pretension to “hypostasize” a singular “Christian pattern,” he finds it pertinent, on the other, as an expression of the way in which the biblical micro-narratives invite the reader into a narrative “partnership.” The stories of Scripture converge with his or her own circumstances and come to a “stage of reconciliation, when the story is reenacted in the liturgical celebration.”⁶⁹

Similarly, he adds that if the typological use of biblical stories already distinguishes them from their mundane counterparts, it is through their liturgical use that they most truly come into their own: “The reenactment of the narratives in the cultic situation and their recounting through the psalms of praise, of lamentation, and of penitence complete the complex intertwining between narrative and nonnarrative modes of discourse. The whole range of modes can thus be seen as distributed between the two poles of storytelling and praising.”⁷⁰

narrative, through law, instruction; while both are transformed through sapiential literature into expressions of wisdom, through prophecy, into the unrealized beginning of something yet to come.

68. Ricoeur lauds Frye’s discovery of a highly ramified network of correspondences, based on duality of the paradisiac/apocalyptic and the demonic, that leads to a battery of intersignifications. He accepts that Frye is right to recognize an inner coherence to the biblical field of reference, a “‘centripetal’ structure that the Bible shares with all the great poetic texts.” (“Experience and Language,” 137). Nevertheless, he is apprehensive lest this centripetal force lead to a homogenization of the biblical genres, most evident in the recurrent effort of theologians to construct a *Heilsgeschichte* that would reduce Scripture’s poetic surplus to the prosaic univocity of a conceptual frame of reference.

69. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 242. Quoting Robert MacAfee Brown (“My Story and ‘The Story,’” in *Theology Today* 32 [1975], 171), he asserts that in liturgy, “‘the story and our story become one and the same.’”

70. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 245.

Ricoeur rounds out his survey of the prospects of a specifically narrative theology, therefore, by suggesting the equiprimordiality of liturgy and narrative, together with the sapiential genre; he muses that “narrative never existed without embryonic theological thinking, just as it never existed without its polar counterpart, praise....We may therefore lay the stress either on the discontinuity between pure ‘retelling’ and theological thinking or on the continuity secured by the mediating sources, from the prescriptive to the hymnic.”⁷¹ In sum, he appears to be suggesting that liturgy serves to co-ordinate the “counterpoint,” so to speak, of Scripture’s polyphonicity.

Contrarily, however, Power clearly regards the originary pluralism attested by Ricoeur to be repercussive, impelling a diversity of historical interpretation and liturgical application.⁷² The former takes this as evidence of the general indeterminacy of metaphor, understood as an “open sign”;⁷³ inevitably, the metaphorical terms of the Bible foment myriad redescriptions of reality. Here he would seem to be implicitly pointing to the “semantic innovation” which Ricoeur places at the heart of metaphor. Such innovation manifests itself conspicuously, according to Power, in the liturgical context, because the polyvalent narrative of Christ, with its

71. Ibid., 248.

72. Ricoeur has also commented on this tendency, to which he is favourable, in reflecting on ecumenism: “It seems to me that the problem of the split between Catholicism and Protestantism rests finally on the problem of authority, and it is true that here there is, for the moment, an unbridgeable gap. But I am not at all interested in institutional ecumenism because I believe in the originally plural destination of Christianity—it is, undoubtedly, for this reason that I am not Catholic” (*Critique and Conviction*, 167). Incidentally, Ricoeur seems to have had no acquaintance with the Eastern Catholic Churches, whose history and theology challenge the dichotomous stereotype he rehearses here. For Eastern Catholics, it is precisely *because* of a belief in the “plural destination of Christianity” that they *are* Catholic, seeing the Catholic communion as serving, in principle, to foster that very pluralism—even as it also serves for its theological arbitration and critique, in which process hierarchical authority plays a prominent, if differentiated, role.

Peter Galadza, for instance, adroitly maps the “plural destination” of Catholicism charted by key documents of Vatican II such as *Lumen Gentium*, whose paragraph 23 reads: “By divine Providence it has come about that various churches, established in various places by the apostles and their successors, have in the course of time coalesced into several groups, organically united, which, preserving the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal Church, enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical usage, and their own theological and spiritual heritage....This variety of local churches with one common aspiration is splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church.” See “What is Eastern Catholic Theology? Some Ecclesial and Programmatic Dimensions,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 39, no. 1 (1998): 59–70.

73. The notion of “open sign” recalls Bridget Nichol’s discussion of Derrida’s “written performative.” See *Liturgical Hermeneutics*, 105–6.

concomitant interruptions, is there deployed exponentially. The range of interpretive possibilities are indicated, if not circumscribed, by an actual plurality of extant liturgical traditions, whose mutual irreducibility serves as an index of the surplus of meaning in the Christ-event. Citing the example of the commemoration of Christ's baptism in different Rites, Power opines, "In comparing such prayers, one would find both a plurality of prayer forms and a diversified interpretation of the same root metaphor for Christ's death or for the sacramental action, before which claims to meta-narrative would seem feeble."⁷⁴ In other words, where Ricoeur, with a more facile understanding of liturgy, privileges its capacity to gather together, Power draws attention to its propensity to scatter afresh, as it were, what it gathers.

We see in this connection an echo, in a speculative register, of the findings of *Liturgiewissenschaft*, as illustrated in the work of Oriental liturgist Robert Taft. Presenting an apology for the formal recognition granted by the Catholic Church to the ancient anaphora of Addai and Mari as used by the Assyrian Church of the East—in which, conspicuously, the Eucharistic *verba Domini* do not occur—Taft argues that the sacramental mystery of Christ's real presence is not the province of any one of the classical liturgies, much less of their derivative doctrinal systems.⁷⁵ Rather, there abides a chthonic unity between all the ancient Rites, hidden as that may sometimes be by what emerges on the surface:

I believe one can say there *are* irreducible local differences in the *liturgical expression* of what I would take to be the fully reconcilable *teaching* of both East and West on the

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⁷⁴ Power, op cit, 144

⁷⁵ Taft explains this distinction as follows. "It is axiomatic in contemporary liturgical theology to distinguish between *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda*. *Theologia prima*, or first-level theology, is the faith expressed in the liturgical life of the church antecedent to speculative questioning of its theoretical implications, prior to its systematisation in the dogmatic propositions of *theologia secunda* or systematic reflection on the lived mystery of the church. Liturgical language, the language of *theologia prima*, is typological, metaphorical, more redolent of Bible and prayer than of school and thesis, more patristic than scholastic, more impressionistic than systematic, more suggestive than probative. In a word, it is symbolic and evocative, not philosophical and ontological" (Robert Taft, "Mass Without Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001," *Worship* 77, no. 6 [2003] 494)

Eucharist: that the gifts of bread and wine are sanctified via a prayer, the anaphora, which applies to the present gifts of bread and wine that Jesus handed on. *How* the individual anaphoras express this application has varied widely depending on local tradition, particular history, and the doctrinal concerns of time and place. In my view these differences *cannot* with any historical legitimacy be seen in dogmatic conflict with parallel but divergent expressions of the same basic realities in a different historico-ecclesial milieu.⁷⁶

According to Taft, therefore, an intractable plurality of forms set forth an originally common experience. What remains undetermined here, however, as also in the analysis of Power, is the question of the criteriology by which one may presume to arbitrate between a legitimate interpretation of the Christ-event, and an illegitimate. To what extent, that is, is not all “dogmatic conflict” potentially susceptible of a hermeneutic treatment, one that can frame it in terms of “parallel but divergent expressions of the same basic realities”?

This very point is raised in response to Power’s paper,⁷⁷ and has been made by numerous students of Ricoeur. It is the question, essentially, of how the “poetic” cast of a text is related to its “truth” value. The difficulties faced by liturgical scholars, for example, under the guise of a liturgical “aberration” such as the anaphora of Addai and Mari, are not foreign to those engaged in contemporary biblical studies, presented as they are with the perhaps disconcerting spectre of the Gnostic Gospels; or again, to systematic or spiritual theologians, when confronted by the visage of non-Christian Scriptures and mystical experience, respectively. Essentially, it is a challenge that brings to light the problem of how best to

76. Robert Taft, “Mass Without Consecration?” 505–6.

77. Werner Jeanrond asks for a “more dialectical consideration of ongoing sacramental action and critical and self-critical theological theory,” going on to contend that the fields of intra-religious dialogue and ecumenism both bring into relief the challenges that ensue where “rupture” is regarded as a constitutive process. Effectively, Jeanrond wonders whether “rupture” does not imply a continual iconoclasm that denies normativity to a tradition (“Response to David N. Power,” in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context*, ed. L. Boeve and L. Leijssen [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001], 161–66).

construe metaphorical *truth*, whether it is proper to regard it in terms of “adequation,” or instead, “manifestation.”

The Reference of Metaphor: Truth as Manifestation

In exploring the world of a poetic text, David Tracy suggests that one confronts a “forgotten notion of truth: truth as manifestation.” Crediting Heidegger with its rediscovery, Gadamer and Ricoeur, with its elaboration, Tracy contends that prior to the formulation of criteria of adequation or “correspondence,” the encounter with a “classic” text, artifact, performance or ritual (or other phenomenon susceptible of interpretation) generates a dialogical interaction between such an object’s “power of disclosure and concealment” and the interpreting subject’s “experience of recognition.”⁷⁸ Truth emerges from this interaction as that which is first manifested, and only subsequently justified discursively:

When interpreters claim to recognize any manifestation, they also implicitly claim a relative adequacy for that interpretation. Others may or may not agree. At that point argument can enter anew. Arguments are by definition intersubjective and communal. As the means of argument become explicit, the implicitly intersubjective nature of all truth as manifestation can also become an explicit claim to an argued consensus of warranted beliefs for a particular community of inquiry. Then models of truth as correspondence are acknowledged not as primary but as important, once understood as the consensual truth of warranted beliefs.⁷⁹

I take Tracy to mean that there is an epistemological primacy to the *experience* of a phenomenon, over against its reification, through conceptual abstraction, into a larger frame of reference. This very question lies at the root of metaphor because it, like poetic texts on a larger scale, has traditionally had its epistemological import placed in abeyance. Tracy may be held

78. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 28.

79. *Ibid.*, 29.

up as representative of a reaction against the radical cynicism toward figurative language promoted by logical positivism in the early twentieth century, a movement which, in Dan Stiver's incisive evaluation, held that "religious beliefs are not yet in the ballpark of truth and falsity or of being supported by evidence. In other words, they have not achieved the merit of being meaningful, albeit false; they are simply cognitive nonsense."⁸⁰

As Stiver explains, the tide eventually turned against the so-called Vienna circle because its approach to verification and falsification began to be seen as facile and naïve by its own members. One result was that subsequent intellectual trends would favour metaphor as illustrating how language can and does mean in ways not strictly susceptible of empirical analysis. Ricoeur's work follows this development: as van den Hengel avers, "Of primary significance to Ricoeur's venture [has been] the growing awareness of the power of language to signify what could not be said, the capacity of language to bring us to the threshold of what cannot be said."⁸¹ Metaphor is of seminal importance expressly because it solicits a manifestation of that which otherwise would remain latent. Poetic discourse unleashes, in Ricoeur's terms, the "power of metaphorical language, which says to us not, 'This is *like* that,' but 'This *is* that.' Only through the channel of poetry can one draw close to the kerygmatic language of the Bible, when the latter proclaims, in a metaphoric way: the Lord is my rock, my fortress...etc."⁸²

To further elucidate the irreducibility of metaphor, and corroborate Ricoeur's theory, I would like to adduce what might perhaps be deemed a surprising parallel. C.S. Lewis was, like Ricoeur, preoccupied with the problem of the power of figurative language, although he responded to this problem by recourse to literary criticism, theological apologetics and (ultimately) children's fantasy, rather than through philosophy. In a key essay, he distinguishes

80. Dan Stiver, op. cit., 44.

81. John van den Hengel, "Naming the Unspeakable," in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński, Hermeneutic Series, Volume 3 (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press (The International Institute for Hermeneutics), 2003), 244.

82. Ricoeur, "Experience and Language," 136.

between objects to which we have non-metaphorical access, and objects of thought, which can *only* be predicated indirectly, metaphorically. In the latter case, it is impossible to avoid the use of metaphor, if not to exchange a richer metaphorical discourse for a poorer. His argument is worth following,⁸³ as it will provide a foil for understanding the “metaphormania” of which Ricoeur is both disciple and master.⁸⁴

Lewis contends that it is essential to distinguish two kinds of metaphor: what he calls “magistral” metaphors are those we employ to explain something that could well be explained otherwise, something which can be accessed independently and hence described in various ways; “pupillary” metaphors, by contrast, are those which are necessary for the understanding of what they treat, which serve as the unique mode of access to their object.⁸⁵ The latter involves a new form of *seeing*, since it allows for a certain perception of something hitherto obscure. The former is rather created for the express purpose of illustrating to another, what one already sees apart from the metaphor itself. This “magistral” use is possible, however, “only because we have other methods of expressing the thing: we could say it, or we suppose that we could say it, literally instead. This clear conception we owe to other sources—to our

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83. That Ricoeur and Lewis prove to be mutually illuminating has been demonstrated at length in Mara E. Donaldson, *Holy Places Are Dark Places: C.S. Lewis and Paul Ricoeur on Narrative Transformation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989).

84. The term is Mark Johnson’s: “We are in the midst of a metaphormania. Only three decades ago the situation was just the opposite: poets created metaphors, everybody used them, and philosophers (linguists, psychologists, etc.) ignored them. Today we seem possessed by metaphor” (*Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1981], ix, cited in Dan Stiver, op. cit., 112).

85. Lewis’ distinction highlights the equivocity of the term metaphor itself. As Stiver explains, contemporary discussion of metaphoricity invokes the alternative terminology of “symbol” as well as “analogy,” with a cumulative effect that is often confusing. The use of “analogy” typically reflects Lewis’ magistral sense of metaphor, i.e., the adaptation of univocal language to new contexts on the basis of evident aptness, an adaptation that for Stiver can render the metaphor in question either a “stable” or “everyday” one—“well-known, familiar, but nonetheless still vital, metaphorical relations”—or else, eventually, one “dead,” that is to say, a metaphor included in the lexicon whose very metaphoricity is forgotten through repeated use (*Philosophy of Religious Language*, 126). The uniqueness of metaphor, as understood in contrast to analogy, however, is in the shock it occasions, which Ricoeur terms a “semantic impertinence”: it cannot be reduced to univocal language, but only converted into the terms of yet another metaphor, if at all. For its part, “symbol” customarily has a non-linguistic denotation which contours its linguistic connotations. Stiver concludes that “we can probably not overcome the disparity of definition. It is arguable that metaphor, analogy and symbol can be seen as very similar, and it is arguable that they are very different. What is important is always to be attentive to how thinkers are using their terms” (*Philosophy of Religious Language*, 127).

previous studies. We can adopt the new metaphor as a temporary tool which we dominate and by which we are not dominated ourselves, only because we have other tools in our box.”⁸⁶

The “pupillary” use of metaphor is activated instead in those instances where we have no other means to articulate the thing in question: “For all of us there are things which we cannot fully understand at all, but of which we can get a faint inkling by means of metaphor. And in such cases the relation between the thought and the metaphor is precisely the opposite of the relation which arises when it is we ourselves who understand and then invent the metaphors to help others. We are here entirely at the mercy of the metaphor.”⁸⁷ Between these two extremes of metaphor (those by which we teach, and those by which we learn), lies the

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86. C.S. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” in *The Play of Language*, ed. Leonard F. Dean, Walker Gibson, and Kenneth G. Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 290.

87. Lewis, “Bluspels,” 291. This distinction does not seem to be appreciated by Sallie McFague, who proposes in *Metaphorical Theology* that the path to theological emancipation is for all metaphors to be relativized. She objects to the traditional hegemony of certain Scriptural metaphors, such as the use of Father for God, and suggests that new metaphors be coined to substitute for, or complement, those favoured by tradition. C.S. Lewis also advocates, in the case of magistral metaphors, a creativity ordered to a greater comprehension of that referred to by metaphor; in other words, the production of new metaphors demonstrates that someone has adequately understood a phenomenon so as to be able to give an account of it from multiple perspectives. The catch, however, is that one must have independent access to such a phenomenon, for the metaphor to be dispensable, or even ancillary. The problem with advocating an iconoclasm toward the metaphors used in the naming of God is that it is only through them that God is known as such—excepting that mystical experience whose very rarity, ineffability and individuality make it of limited value for interpreting a traditional, communal text such as the Bible. That is, one must perforce claim, in attempting to transcend the metaphors of Scripture, that one has had an experience equal or superior to its authors, in virtue of which a competence for describing the divine has been acquired. If mystics qualify for this prerogative, as McFague suggests, it does not follow that the biblical text is rendered superfluous, for them or others. Ricoeur’s whole approach to Scripture turns on the fact that one must confront the specificity of the naming of God therein, and not eschew by a philosophical *a priori* decision that any metaphor is as good as another: this latter position is tantamount to the claim that God *cannot* reveal himself.

If with McFague, Ricoeur and, in truth, the Christian theological tradition as whole, one recognizes the metaphoricity of the naming of God in Scripture, one nonetheless faces the inevitability of our having no respective linguistic substitute. To avoid the metaphors given in Scripture is to renounce the possibility of speaking of the God manifest by them. To create new metaphors, by contrast, is to claim the privilege of getting behind those metaphors, so as to know the reality to which they refer directly. McFague does not seek to be so bold, but rather affirms that metaphors given short shrift in Scripture ought to be rehabilitated so as to gain a new standing. But this is again to presume upon the specificity of the naming of God—to pretend to the place of arbitrating to what extent such naming is appropriate or not, which is, again, tantamount to claiming to get behind the metaphor, to approach it in magistral rather than pupillary fashion. McFague does suggest that one can reduce the primary metaphors of Scripture to a common denominator, namely that of personhood, and that therefore as long as this feature is respected, new or marginal metaphors may take the place of the former. But if any and all *Kenningar* can be deemed apropos, does the result not follow that none is? In this connection, Ricoeur’s aversion to the role of qualifiers—terms which make metaphors say *more* than they ordinarily would, rendering them “limit-expressions”—is pertinent, since such extend the frontiers of their metaphors while remaining within their territory, so to speak.

range of types that form ordinary discourse.⁸⁸ Dan Stiver, discussing Ricoeur's view of metaphor, affords a succinct restatement of Lewis' point:

Metaphor has long been recognized as a literary device that enables us to depict well-known things in striking and focused ways; in other words, metaphor adorns what we already know in dashing new clothes. Philosophically speaking, what is important about metaphor is that it can do more than embellish; it can direct us to what we have never seen before. The primary reference is negated only to open up reference at another level, "another power of speaking the world." As Ricoeur puts it, metaphor possesses an "ontological vehemence" that leads us to redescribe reality.⁸⁹

Lewis makes a further distinction, moreover, that brings into even greater relief this generative dimension of metaphoricity. With sensible objects, he argues, it is evident that the words we use to refer to them are not determined by their etymology; a term can lose its original, perhaps metaphorical, meaning, but still be serviceable, since the object referred to is at hand. In the case of mental objects, the matter is more difficult: since independence from a metaphor can only result from being able to know something otherwise, abstract thought, which depends upon language, is not readily dissociable from its idiom. When this appears to occur, it is a matter rather of exchanging one metaphor for another, one set of symbols for another.

88. Lewis notes that the "pupillary" metaphor works in two opposing ways: the pupil who never acquires the independent access to the matter originally perceived metaphorically may end up forgetting the metaphorical quality of the terms employed, deadening them through a literalism that risks degenerating into meaninglessness. (One wonders if Lewis is here acknowledging the potential critique of logical positivism).

A pupil who becomes a "master," however, would be unaffected by the career of the metaphor by which he first came to grasp an object, since his later, non-metaphorical access to it has rendered the metaphor superfluous: "Our thought is independent of the metaphors we employ, in so far as these metaphors are optional: that is, in so far as we are able to have the same idea without them....On the other hand, where the metaphor is our only method of reaching a given idea at all, there our thinking is limited by the metaphor so long as we retain the metaphor; and when the metaphor becomes fossilized, our 'thinking' is not thinking at all, but mere sound or mere incipient movements in the larynx" ("Bluspels," 294-95).

89. Dan Stiver, *op. cit.*, 117.

As a case in point, Lewis cites the metaphorical use of the word “soul”: what it refers to, if not natural breath, is an enigma that can only be described by similarly metaphorical expressions. Where there is no *literal* apprehension, we cannot but use metaphors.⁹⁰ But metaphor does offer a real, if limited, vision of its object, according to Lewis; by keeping multiple metaphors in play, and remembering their metaphoricity, that which lies beyond our ken can be approached. Rather than a quixotic quest for univocity, the prudent course is to become aware of the metaphoricity of one’s own language, and endeavour to create *new* metaphors—a productive task Lewis assigns the imagination.

As if foreshadowing the estimation of Ricoeur, Lewis boldly asserts: “It will have escaped no one that in such a scale of writers the poets will take the highest place; and among the poets those who have at once the tenderest care for old words and the surest instinct for the creation of new metaphors.”⁹¹ And yet Lewis insists that he carefully distinguishes “truth” from “meaning,” and it is here we rejoin the question adumbrated by Tracy in terms of “adequation” and “manifestation.” Lewis insists: “We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth: but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.” And he concludes, evocatively: “It is, I confess, undeniable that such a view indirectly implies a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself.”⁹²

90. This is, of course, the view advanced by Ricoeur in *The Symbolism of Evil*.

91. Lewis, “Bluspels,” 300.

92. Lewis, “Bluspels,” 301–2. Without saying so directly, Lewis is evidently taking a high view of the imagination, with which Ricoeur will also side over and against the Enlightenment denigration of the faculty as merely “reproductive.” Ricoeur esteems the imagination’s “productive” capacity, that which enables it to create, through metaphor, new meaning—and in turn new ways of seeing and being. As Richard Kearney explains: “A poetic imagination is one which creates meaning by responding to the desire of being to be expressed. It is a Janus facing in two directions at once—back to the being that is being revealed and forward to the language that is revealing. And at the level of language itself, it also does double-duty, for it produces a text which opens up new horizons of meaning for the reader. The poetic imagination liberates the reader into a free space of possibility, suspending the reference to the immediate world of perception (both the author’s and the reader’s) and thereby disclosing ‘new ways of being in

I think that we encounter here an eloquent statement of the problem: there is an inescapable dialectic between truth and meaning, adequation and manifestation; what metaphor through the imagination manifests must still be submitted to rational judgment. Surely Ricoeur engages this very issue, in his attempt to both relate and distinguish history and fiction, which matter we will treat below, in Chapter 5, in our analysis of the GBW. Here we can simply cite an anecdote to which Ricoeur repeatedly returns in attempting to demonstrate the metaphoricity of poetic discourse: he recalls that the story tellers of Majorca traditionally began their tales with the paradoxical caveat "*Aixo era y no era* (it was and it was not)," at once unmaking, as it were, what was yet to be created.⁹³

Yet Ricoeur, like Lewis, nonetheless insists upon the pre-eminence of poetic discourse, precisely on the grounds that it restores an authentic belonging in the world. In this respect, the former's thoughts on symbolism are germane: the symbolic use of water, for example, is "bound" to a certain range of primordial meanings, deriving from the role of water in the cosmos.⁹⁴ Similarly, Lewis appeals to a kind of "psycho-physical parallelism" in the universe, on account of which our original metaphors, viz. symbols—on the basis of which we make determinations of true and false—are themselves bearers of truth (e.g., "good" is to be equated with "light," not arbitrarily, but naturally). It is because of the power of poetic discourse to *manifest* truth of some kind, that the question of the relationship of *that* to truth taken as adequation is subsequently rendered salient.

the world.' The function of 'semantic innovation'—which is most proper to imagination—is therefore, in its most fundamental sense, an ontological event" ("Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutic Imagination," in *The Narrative Path: The Later Works of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Peter T. Kemp and David Rasmussen [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989], 5).

93. "The 'it was and it was not' of the Majorca storytellers rules both the split reference of the metaphorical statement and the contradictory structure of fiction. Yet, we may say as well that the structure of the fiction not only reflects but completes the logical structure of the split reference. The poet is this genius who generates split references *by* creating fictions. It is in fiction that the 'absence' proper to the power of suspending what we call 'reality' in ordinary language concretely coalesces and fuses with the *positive insight* into the potentialities of our being in the world which our everyday transactions with manipulable objects tend to conceal" (Ricoeur, "Metaphorical Process").

94. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 53.

In his writings on metaphor, Ricoeur explicitly commends this judgment. Discussing the relation between first-order and second-order reference, with the latter (the kind of reference fomented by metaphor) serving ultimately to ground the former (that which is intended by ordinary or univocal discourse), he explains: “[P]oetic language is no less *about* reality than any other use of language... [Metaphorical reference] is called second-order only with respect to the primacy of the reference of ordinary language. For, in another respect, it constitutes the primordial reference to the extent that it suggests, reveals, unconceals—or whatever you say—the deep structures of reality to which we are related as mortals who are born into this world and who *dwell* in it for a while.”⁹⁵

And Ricoeurian commentator David Pellauer concurs that the hermeneut indeed situates manifestation at the basis of adequation, as a function of his understanding of the truth of metaphor:

[L]ive metaphor suspends our ordinary way of referring to reality in favour of a second-order reference that redescribes reality. But this redescription is itself always another interpretation of the way things really are. There is a sense of truth at work here that is itself metaphorical. It operates as a kind of manifestation rather than as a simple relation of correspondence or coherence. As a heuristic fiction that can lead to new understanding, such metaphorical truth may even be said to be the ground for truth as correspondence or coherence.⁹⁶

That metaphor serves to fund truth, however, has proven to be a controversial claim. We turn next to the charges that have been brought against Ricoeur in this regard.

95. Ricoeur, “Metaphorical Process,” 153.

96. David Pellauer, *Ricoeur: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 69.

The Limits of Metaphor

A trenchant critique of Ricoeur's view of metaphor has been set forth by Graham Ward in "Biblical Narrative and the Theology of Metonymy."⁹⁷ It would not be prudent to proceed without attempting to answer its momentous claims which, if correct, undermine the applicability of Ricoeur's work to the interpretation of liturgy. In short, Ward alleges that modern biblical reading has gone awry to the extent that it has accepted the view of metaphor promoted by, for example, David Tracy and Sallie McFague, following Ricoeur. Ward's intent is to show how metaphor must be counterbalanced by "metonymy."⁹⁸

Given his view of metaphor, Ricoeur is guilty, according to Ward, of betraying the Bible's status as *revelation*. The former is accused of a cryptodoceticism, subordinating the historical, literal level of Scripture to one of existential disclosure, with the result that theological thinking becomes a form of "art-appreciation," the Bible, one more poetic text. By doing so, Ricoeur allegedly relativizes what is in fact *sui generis*, namely Christ and the biblical witness to him. To the contrary, protests Ward:

The uniqueness of the Incarnation creates what Arthur Cohen, discussing the importance of the Holocaust, calls an historical rupture or caesura which leaves us without a language to define it. The corollary, then, of uniqueness is ineffability. The justification of Scripture being a sacred book must rest upon the fact it testifies, or claims to testify, to an event set apart from other events, an ineffable event. A narrative theology which views Christian historical narrative mediating or serving "as the

97. Ward, op. cit.

98. Drawing on Umberto Eco's notion of "overcoding" in discourse, in which light he distinguishes metaphor from metonymy, Ward argues (following Jakobson and Jacques Lacan) that discourse is best understood as cruciform, with both a vertical, metaphorical axis, and a horizontal, metonymic one; as a result, the biblical text, for example, cannot be said to be purely metaphorical—the charge he brings against Ricoeur—since this would discount one of the poles between which its discourse oscillates. Ward concludes that Derrida's deconstructionism, with its admission of *différance*, provides the most balanced hermeneutic, since it does not attempt to determine meaning one way or another, but holds in tension the literal sense of a text, what Ward calls the *sensus rectus* together with an openness to an undetermined *sensus obliquus*.

occasion for the [disclosive] encounter,” which views the authority of Scripture as “not something intrinsic to it as Scripture; its authority is in its role in the life of the Christian community,” can only use the terms “revelation,” “truth,” or “Christian” metaphorically or inappropriately. The “truth” here is subjective experience that is only collectively defined as Christian because such individuals belong to “the Christian community”Such a Christology has no ontological foundation independent of the reader’s own. It is “revelation” only by misnomer.⁹⁹

These are weighty charges, indeed; let us try to summarize them. Ward admonishes Ricoeur for 1) ignoring the *uniqueness* of the events attested in Scripture; 2) subverting the due authority of the Bible by making it a function of the believing community; and 3) subscribing to a perilously subjectivist notion of biblical “truth.” These are complemented, in turn, by a further, compound charge, namely that Ricoeur puts forward a vague and confusing idea of what constitutes poetic discourse, based on an erroneous estimation of the nature and role of metaphor.

Historicity and Ineffability

While Ward’s article appeared before Ricoeur’s magisterial *Memory, History, Forgetting* (*MHF*)¹⁰⁰—a tome expressly devoted to the issues arising from the singularity of historical events vis-à-vis their literary representation—it is nonetheless implausible that the latter does not appreciate the uniqueness of the biblical witness. Already in 1982, he acknowledged the problem of historicity in Scripture, viz., that there is a *problem* specifically because of the historical intentionality of the biblical text: it *is* irreducible to fiction. Criticizing the tendency of narrative theologians, such as the “Yale School” associated with Hans Frei,¹⁰¹ to disregard the

99. Ward, op. cit., 336–37.

100. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (originally published as *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* [L’ordre philosophique]. Paris: Seuil, 2000), trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

101. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980).

Scripture's claims to facticity, Ricoeur maintains that whatever may be gleaned from foraging among the immanent, literary qualities of the text—an activity to which he is admittedly inclined—one cannot ultimately equate relevance and truth:

But the practical use of the biblical stories is not a substitute for an inquiry into the relation between story and history. It is an indisputable trait of the basic stories of the Bible that they are history-like, with the exception of intended fictions such as parables and maybe some stories in the Old Testament, Jonah and others....We are left, therefore, with a quandary: we can neither be content with a concept of story that would elude the dialectic of story and history nor use a concept of history that would not take into account this variable curve of relationships between story and history.¹⁰²

In *MHF*, Ricoeur will observe that the Holocaust does indeed foment a crisis of representation; unlike Ward, however, he argues that the very ineffability of such an event is what justifies, paradoxically, the role of historical fiction. To the extent that all representations are inadequate to what they “stand in” for, they are fictional; and yet to mitigate the onset of forgetting, there may even be warrant for them to *intensify* their use of fictive devices, in order that the reader, otherwise inexorably removed from the event concerned, may be at least brought to the threshold of appreciating what has in fact taken place. In other words, it is precisely *because* of the uniqueness of historical events, that historiography recruits metaphoricity to its service, inasmuch as the historical description both *is* and, simultaneously, *is not* the truth of what has occurred.

Ward's criticism would thus seem to lead into a cul-de-sac, for if the Incarnation were *completely* ineffable, there could not even be any accounts of it, the Evangelists themselves presumably being bereft of appropriate language. If, rather, ineffability does not *tout court* preclude description (and, in turn, inscription) then the resultant texts—whether treating of the

102. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 244–45.

Incarnation or the Shoah—ought to be duly subject to analyses in keeping with their genre. It is curious in this regard that Ward cites the example of Holocaust literature as analogous to the Bible on the basis of their common commitment to testify to “ineffable events”; one doubts that he intends to imply that such literature is therefore equivalent to Scripture, purely because it also purports to deal with “uniqueness.”

The “Sacred Text” and Its Community

Ward’s second criticism, that Ricoeur subordinates the authority of Bible to the believing community, with a resultant depreciation of the former’s inspired status, is to a certain extent legitimate. Certainly, Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc requires a theory of inspiration to take account, on the one hand, of how the *reader* of the text is also inspired, in the very act of appropriating the text—a theory that Ricoeur does not elaborate systematically. His stated views on this matter, moreover, are subtle and easily misunderstood. Because Ricoeur appreciates the historical process by which the Bible was produced and canonized, he is reluctant to speak of its authority apart from the community integral to this process. Indeed, he suggests that a critically edited text, to the extent that it is not the text of believers but of academics, may not merit the designation of “sacred text.”¹⁰³ Since the history of the biblical canon testifies to a gradual sifting of books, in which some originally included were later excluded (and vice-versa) Ricoeur is wary of a reification of the Bible *per se*; it is the authority conferred upon the biblical anthology by the early Christian community—an authority, to be sure, that from the perspective of that community was warranted by the respective texts themselves—that has given us the Scriptures we know today, Scriptures which have been

103. While challenging the academic usurpation of the biblical text, Ricoeur nonetheless affirms that the critical function is concomitant in a specifically *Christian* approach to its “sacred text”: “Maybe in the case of Christianity there is no sacred text, because it is not the text that is sacred but the one about which it is spoken. For instance, there is no privilege of the language in which it was said for the first time...There is already something that allows the critical act; the critical act is not forbidden by the nature of the text, because it is not a sacred text in the sense in which the Qur’an is sacred...But in Christianity, translation is quite possible, for the Septuagint is a kind of desacralization of the original language” (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 68).

further subject to the vicissitudes of a complicated *reception* history.¹⁰⁴ Thus Ricoeur proposes:

It is a hermeneutical act to recognize oneself as founded by a text and to read this text as founding. There is a reciprocity between the reading and the existing self-recognition of the identity of the community. There comes to mind the distinction that Augustine makes in *De christiana doctrina* [sic] between *signum* and *res*: we are aware that the *signum* is not the *res*, and there is a history of possible critical approaches to the *signum*. I wonder whether this actually implies a certain distance between the text and its reality, what it is about.¹⁰⁵

Here he recognizes the Bible's authority as intrinsically linked to the community that receives it; this is by no means to deprecate the Scriptures, but simply to acknowledge that the corollary of any authority is a party which receives it as such. It is also important that Ricoeur is unwilling to exclude the possibility that there are *other* sacred texts, texts which have been recognized by other communities as authoritative for themselves.¹⁰⁶

104. Ward provides his own version of Ricoeur's notion of distanciation in the following: "We cannot use as a hermeneutic for a text a model of language and reference developed by speech-act theorists. Putnam is surely right in insisting that it is people who refer not words, but only within certain restricted speech-acts. Within texts, it is words that 'refer' the writer's work to the reader's, not people. Meaning issues from the perichoretic interplay of writer-language-reader; not simply the writer's intention, nor the reader's projection, nor the autonomous power of words, but all three critically examining each other....A paradox ensues—there is, on the one hand, because of language's connative value, a surplus of meaning, while, on the other, no definite meaning at all" ("Biblical Narrative," 341). Bizarrely, he does not seem to notice the similarity of his plea to Ricoeur's perpetual contention on behalf of the singularity of the act of inscription, in whose wake of which hermeneutics finds its purpose. Nor does he credit Ricoeur in speaking here of a "surplus of meaning." Cf. "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" in Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 75–88.

Although Ward correctly observes that in *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur no longer speaks, as he did in *The Rule of Metaphor*, of "reference," *per se*, but rather of configuration, he does not appear to appreciate that this is due to the latter's intention to honour the active role of the reader in grasping a metaphor, following a narrative: the reader brings his or her own "world" into alignment with that of the text, and the "fusion of horizons" manifests a unique field of reference. This is all the more surprising since Ward concludes with a similar call for understanding reference or meaning as a joint enterprise of "writer-language-reader."

105. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 69.

106. It is not possible to take up, in the present context, the important question of how Ricoeur's views impinge upon the issues arising from interreligious dialogue. If, in the Christian precinct, the main hermeneutical problem concerns the relationship between Scripture and tradition, and the way to conceive of the biblical books vis-à-vis other literature, this certainly does invite reflection on the nature and operation of other religions' scriptures, whether indeed they follow the same pattern, and how their naming of God, understood in terms of "manifestation," is to be

Truth as Manifest in the Poetic Function

Thirdly, Ward contends that Ricoeur makes himself vulnerable to a subjectivist notion of truth. This is in fact a standard complaint against Ricoeur, but it does not hold up under the evidence. Certainly, as we have seen, Ricoeur holds to the possibility of truth considered as *manifestation* rather than *adequation*; but the nature of the former is decidedly *not* such as can be reduced to “subjective experience.” If there is a “disclosive encounter,” it proceeds not from the predilections of the reader of a text, but rather from the textual “world,” whose *haecceity*, we might say, to use the idiom of Duns Scotus, imposes itself upon the reader;¹⁰⁷ the one who opens the Scriptures finds himself or herself in the position of a “summoned subject,” and the summons in question is—as Ricoeur’s analyses of biblical polyphony are designed to demonstrate—coterminous with a given text’s specific and objective manner of naming God.

The most strident criticism proffered by Ward, however, concerns Ricoeur’s allegedly vague and confusing idea of what constitutes poetic discourse, an idea Ward sees as based on an erroneous estimation of the nature and role of metaphor.¹⁰⁸ This criticism resumes at a deeper level those treated above, since it is obvious that Ricoeur does place the operation of metaphor at the heart of biblical interpretation, and equally, that he regards the language of the Scriptures as fundamentally poetic. Ward builds his case on the basis of Ricoeur’s “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” with reference also to *The Rule of Metaphor*. The three key postulates he identifies in these works are Ricoeur’s distinction of biblical genres (explained above by reference to “Naming God”); his opposition of the referential function of

interpreted in light of the biblical naming of God.

107. Ricoeur defines his “nonreligious, nontheistic, nonbiblical” sense of revelation as follows: “Revelation, in this sense, designates the emergence of another concept of truth than truth as adequation, regulated by the criteria of verification and falsification: a concept of truth as manifestation, in the sense of letting be what shows itself. What shows itself is each time the proposing of a world, a world wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 223).

108. “The idea of revelation that emerges in Ricoeur’s essay, therefore, suffers from ill-defined terminology and oversimplification. It lacks the textual analysis that would have recognized the degrees of ‘overcoding’ [in the sense given the term by Umberto Eco] in a specific discourse and presented criteria for textual misreadings. The root of Ricoeur’s error lies, I believe, in his understanding of the referential function of metaphor which results in what he variously describes in his work as the ‘inversion of ordinary language’” (Ward, *op. cit.*, 338).

poetic discourse to that of its “ordinary” and scientific counterparts; and his affirmation that poetic language restores participation in reality through its redescription of the same. Ward submits that Ricoeur does *not* in fact base his theory of poetic discourse on specific texts; that he begs the question of what “ordinary” discourse is, by subsuming all the genres of the Bible under the rubric of the poetic; and that the referentiality for which he advocates does not correspond to the objective reference of the text. We shall take up these contentions in turn.

As we have seen, Ricoeur does indeed treat specific poetic texts, if not especially in the context of *The Rule of Metaphor*. He consistently eschews theology in favour of a close reading of biblical excerpts, which he typically situates in terms of what contemporary exegetes have to say in their respect: *Thinking Biblically*, for example, is constructed precisely as collaboration with a prominent exegete in the interpretation of a series of Old Testament texts. For its part, *Time and Narrative* includes in its second volume an extended treatment of three novels.¹⁰⁹ And already in the seventies, Ricoeur’s exegetical work on Christ’s parables and sayings had been published as an extended article.¹¹⁰

In the second place, Ward asks if applying the designation “poetic” to the many genres of Scripture does not beg the question of what is *not* categorizable as such.¹¹¹ I wonder if he has not misunderstood Ricoeur’s nuanced distinctions in this connection: Ricoeur does *not* say that the Bible simply *is* poetic discourse, but rather that the poetic *function* of language provides a ready analogue for understanding the meaning of the term “revelation” both apart from and with respect to the Bible.¹¹² According to Ricoeur, its non-religious sense proceeds from the way in which the poetic function “designates the emergence of another concept of truth than truth as adequation, regulated by the criteria of verification and falsification: a concept of truth

109 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, (originally published as *Temps et récit Tome II La configuration dans le récit de fiction* (L’ordre philosophique) Paris Seuil, 1984), trans Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 100–152 The novels at issue are Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* and Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*

110. Paul Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 4 (1975): 29–148.

111 Ward, *op cit*, 338

112 Ricoeur, *On Biblical Interpretation*, 103

as manifestation, in the sense of letting be what shows itself. What shows itself is each time the proposing of a world."¹¹³ In other words, revelation in this sense refers to the potential of language to *mean* above and beyond the empirical categories espoused by positivism.

Its *religious* sense, by contrast, although resonating with the former, is neither derived from it, nor reducible to it.¹¹⁴ This is so, not only because of its recurrent appeal to historicity, already treated above, but preeminently because the naming of God has an ontological vehemence that places the Bible in a category all its own; as David Pellauer elaborates, the naming of God effects a kind of "limit-language" calling for "an intensity of discernment and commitment that exclude the ironic distance and skepticism that are still possible with regard to poetic language"¹¹⁵ For Ricoeur, the very naming of God itself already constitutes a testimony to that ineffability which, in Ward's estimation, duly sets the Scripture apart.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, while Ward legitimately seeks precision as to what the so-called "ordinary function of discourse" is, which Ricoeur would have "suspended"¹¹⁷ by the poetic

113 Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 223

114 Ricoeur, *On Biblical Interpretation*, 104

115 David Pellauer, "Paul Ricoeur on the Specificity of Religious Language," *The Journal of Religion* 61, no. 3 (July 1981) 278

116 Arguably, the difficulty with Ward's Christological criterion—"The justification of Scripture being a sacred book must rest upon the fact that it testifies, or claims to testify, to an event [the Incarnation] set apart from other events, an ineffable event" ("Biblical Narrative," 337–37)—is that it ironically subverts the very point he wishes to make, namely that the Bible is unique. By Ward's reckoning, Scripture has to be justified on the basis of testifying to the Incarnation, but he does not specify by what criterion, or by whom, this justification is given. Certainly Jewish readers do not see the Tanakh as testifying to the Incarnation, but not for that reason failing to testify to the ineffable! Ricoeur's locating of ineffability in the *naming* of God—a *leitmotif* that runs through the course of the Bible, with perhaps only a single exception (i.e., the Hebrew recension of Esther)—seems a more reasonable means of positing the uniqueness of the biblical text. Ward's attempt to base the uniqueness of the Bible on a theological tautology ("The uniqueness of Christianity lies in the uniqueness of Christ") is, I think, problematic, since while the New Testament takes the event of Christ as the object of its testimony, the Old Testament has, *prima facie* (i.e., prescinding here from the typological reading of the Church) no such equivalent. It is therefore not to be considered Scripture? Perplexingly, although taking Ricoeur to task for allegedly not recognizing degrees of "overcoding" within a given pericope, Ward treats Scripture in the singular as "a sacred book," and does not comment upon Ricoeur's taxonomy of the different biblical genres and their disparate manners of naming God.

117 Ward observes, with perhaps justifiable consternation, that Ricoeur makes use both of images of tension—the "suspension" or "eclipse" of reference—and those of what the former calls "tyrannical suppression," such as the latter's statement that metaphor involves the "abolition (or elimination) of reference." He asks for Ricoeur to specify whether he sees the primary and secondary references as possessing "equiprimordially," or whether rather, the one dominates the other. C. S. Lewis's distinction between "pupillary" and "magistral" metaphors may be of assistance here, since in case of the latter, the primary denotation is simply suspended—the terms used in the metaphor have

function of language,¹¹⁸ the latter actually does explicate his position, affirming, "Too often, we do not notice that we uncritically accept a certain concept of truth defined as adequation to real objects and as submitted to a criterion of empirical verification. That language in its poetic function abolishes the type of reference characteristic of such descriptive discourse...is not to be doubted."¹¹⁹ Here, as elsewhere, Ricoeur is again resisting the usurpation by logical positivism of the whole realm of linguistic meaning, and its corollary exiling of the poetic function of language to the domain of the aesthetic. It is unclear to me why Ward confuses this demarcation with an apology for poetry proper,¹²⁰ when Ricoeur avows his own purport to be otherwise.¹²¹ The poetic function of language is exercised whenever, irrespective of genre, language takes us across the frontier of the empirically verifiable, into zones where it alone can guide. That is to say, while ordinary discourse treats of objects immediately accessible to our senses, which can be designated and/or manipulated, poetic discourse speaks to phenomena which, in the vein of the argument made by C.S. Lewis above, cannot be spoken of except

been deliberately, and temporarily combined, to depict a reality independently accessed — while in the former, the primary denotation is "abolished" to the extent that it has no separate existence, serving only, by its very incongruence, to impel the imagination into a new mode of "seeing-as" and "being-as," irreducible to direct articulation.

118. Ward, op. cit., 338.

119. Ibid., 101.

120. Ward, op. cit., 337. It is intriguing that Ward suspects Ricoeur's view of poetic discourse of being Neoplatonic ("Biblical Narrative," 337); admittedly, the latter's view of symbols, as "bound" to a preternatural meaning which shows itself opaquely and never fully, if yet truly, could be construed as constrained by a nostalgia for "participation," a nostalgia which Ricoeur often renders explicit. His theory of metaphor (and with it of the productive imagination) however, is framed by a conviction that it operates a "free invention of discourse," i.e., *not* determined by a primary internal vision only given voice in a secondary, ancillary moment.

Richard Kearney explains that Ricoeur adheres to the counterintuitive belief that metaphors are *spoken* before being *seen*: "For new meanings to come into being they need to be spoken or uttered in the form of new verbal images. And this requires that the phenomenological account of imagining as appearance be supplemented by its hermeneutic account as meaning. Imagination can be recognized accordingly as the act of responding to a demand for new meaning, the demand of emerging realities to be by being said in new ways" (Kearney, "Ricoeur and the Hermeneutic Imagination," 5). Whether this is correct or not, it hardly seems appropriate to designate such a view as Neoplatonic, for which school of philosophy the imagination is typically regarded as "reproductive" rather than "productive," language, as derivative rather than originary. Dan Stiver's thoughts are apposite here: "In general, Ricoeur is such an 'incarnational' philosopher, in the sense of emphasizing how all our knowledge and language is rooted in embodied and worldly beings (related to Martin Heidegger's understanding of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world), that he can hardly suppose a disembodied and transhuman, Platonic view of texts. Ricoeur makes it clear that texts are human works produced by humans and must be interpreted as such" (Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 133).

121. Ricoeur, *On Biblical Interpretation*, 101.

metaphorically, that is by means of the application to them, through the organ of the productive imagination, of terms whose aptness is “invented” by it—an invention in which “finding” and “making” are co-original.¹²² By definition, then, any discourse which treats of *God*, must be at some level poetic, since it requires a naming of what cannot be named directly, what is not a manipulable *object*;¹²³ similarly, the articulation of the experience of evil, to which Ricoeur has also devoted much reflection, perforce engages the service of metaphoricity.¹²⁴

In the third place, Ward pleads for a circumscription of the ambit of metaphor, by adducing the notion of metonymy; this allows, in his estimation, for an objective reckoning with the “literal” reference of a text, while not necessarily excluding a metaphorical complement to it. Ward seems to presume here, however, that Ricoeur uses *metaphor* univocally. But it is not the case that the latter takes every expression in the Bible to be metaphorical, else he would not be as sensitive as he is to the contemporary historiographical problem of the verisimilitude of much of Scripture.¹²⁵ Rather, as elaborated in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur proposes that the act of following history and narrative—and *both* genres are metaphorical in this respect—requires the heuristic of a “seeing-as” that is rooted in the work of the imagination, a “grasping together” of the disparate elements of the text, through a kind

122 “It would seem that the enigma of metaphorical discourse is that it ‘invents’ in both sense of the word what it creates, it discovers, and what it finds, it invents” (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 239)

123 Stiver, discussing Aquinas’ analogical way, considers the essential unknowability of God to have been the flaw in the Angelic Doctor’s efforts, since his analogies of both attribution and proportionality are predicated on a univocal, literal use of language which, in the case of God, does not readily obtain. See *Philosophy of Religious Language*, 23–29

124 John van den Hengel proposes that the naming of God, and of evil, have been the “twin goads” to Ricoeur’s work, the foci throughout his career of that “growing awareness of the power of language to signify what could not be said, the capacity of language to bring us to the threshold of what cannot be said” (“Naming the Unspeakable,” 244)

125 A recent work of Nicholas Wolterstoff (*Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995]) also takes Ricoeur to task for an alleged reduction of theology to anthropology, a view of Scripture that betrays the divine prerogative of initiating speech to human beings—what Ward calls “the central tenet of Christian revelation in which God speaks of God through God and human beings are in the accusative not the nominative case” (Ward, *op. cit.*, 340). In a manner similar to Ward, Wolterstoff, according to Stiver’s analysis in *Theology After Ricoeur*, sees Ricoeur as not respecting the authorial intention embedded in the text. Stiver rejoins, however, that for Ricoeur, “All of Scripture refers back to God as the one who speaks in it,” albeit mediated through the human agency producing it as a textual work (*Theology After Ricoeur*, 132–33).

of narrative intelligence, in which an axial role is played by the reader's capacity to see the similar in the dissimilar: through the mimetic processes by which narrative is constructed, historical and fictional alike, the reader comes to perceive the *muthos* inherent in a given set of *peripeteia*, or otherwise discrete events. Here it is not metaphor, taken *sensu stricto*, but metaphor taken as a paradigm for epistemology, which in no way excludes the role of metonymy as a literary device.

True, Ward recognizes that Ricoeur (and others after him, such as Nicholas Lash) view metaphor as the paradigm for text interpretation, and not simply as one trope among many; what has not been appreciated, however, is that Ricoeur adopts this perspective not because he considers the biblical text, for example, to have no objective relation to the world and its history, to serve merely for an amorphous existential disclosure, but instead because he considers the dynamic of metaphor to be operative analogously at the level of the literary *work* and not only at the level of the *sentence*. As David Pellauer clarifies, religious discourse places a tension on our vision of reality, by referring not only to the world of the text—which reference includes what Ward calls the metonymic axis—but also to us, inasmuch as the limit-language expressed in the naming of God points to a figure that confronts us in the here and now: “Hence, there is a kind of double opening at work here that affects both poles of our subject-object model for organizing and interpreting our experience. On the object side, religious language points to the world of the text and beyond it to God. On the subject side, it points to our limit-experiences in and through this world. Religious language, in other words, represents an intensification of the metaphorical process that takes it to its limit, whether it be a matter of our limit-experiences or their wholly other limit-referent.”¹²⁶ This “carrying over” (*metapherein*) of the world of the text into our world, of limit-language into our limit-experience, thus constitutes a metaphorical process *par excellence*.

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126. Pellauer, “Ricoeur and Religious Language,” 277.

In conclusion, although Ward proves a worthy adversary, his critique tends itself to make Ricoeur a “straw man to be vanquished,”¹²⁷ inasmuch as the conclusion reached by the former in regard to biblical hermeneutics—namely, that one must *not* reduce the Scriptures to a Bultmannian “inquiry into the understanding of human existence”¹²⁸ by depriving it of its appeal to facticity—approximates very closely the latter’s own. If Ward were to consult not only Ricoeur’s “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” but the other essays which accompany it in *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, his concerns would perchance be mollified.

“The Specificity of Liturgical Discourse”

Our final task in this chapter, after having expounded Ricoeur’s concept of the polyphonic “naming of God” in Scripture; advocated its significance for an understanding of liturgical language as metaphorical; and responded to views both favourable and critical of it, is to apply it in a general manner to the forms of discourse operative in our select liturgical tradition, the Byzantine Rite. This will prove an essential preliminary to our subsequent analysis of the GBW. Our premise has been that liturgy manifests an analogous polyphony in its naming of God, one which resumes but also extends the genres treated by Ricoeur, to the extent that its dialectic of apophatic and kataphatic terminology allows for an incorporation of the speculative into the poetic—discourses that Ricoeur customarily regards as discrete.

Liturgy as a “Form of Thought”

In the first chapter we recalled the interview given by Ricoeur at Taizé, wherein he posits liturgy to be a “language” and more, a “form of thought,” distinct from that of theology. We suggested in turn that this admission invites the application of a distinct mode of interpretation to liturgy, irreducible to that proper to the biblical “form of thought”—an authentic, if “non-philosophical manner of thinking and being”¹²⁹—to which it is nonetheless related. To recap, this lack of equivalence derives not merely from the fact that liturgy makes

127. Ward, op. cit., 339.

128. Ibid., 345.

129. Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, 149.

use of non-verbal idioms (to which liturgical language adverts especially, if not exclusively, through its rubrics¹³⁰) but from the very features of the forms of discourse themselves. The liturgical would seem to qualify for inclusion in the set that Ricoeur terms “translation languages,” in which the poetic and the conceptual meet.

In an early, landmark essay in *Semeia*, Ricoeur elaborates this notion. Beyond the impulse within Scripture to interpret the symbolic in terms of the speculative—already evident, for instance, in the discursive interpretation by the Epistles of themes treated metaphorically in the Gospels—Ricoeur asserts that a “second step between ‘figurative’ and ‘conceptual’ discourse may be found in a variety of *semi-conceptual* modes of discourse, typical of the didactic, apologetic, and dogmatic literature from which theology emerged, in conjunction with the Greek philosophies.” He isolates Christology as an exemplar of this idiom, and suggests that already in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, there are texts which presage its exigencies. Ricoeur employs the term “translation language” because therein “the meaningful content is exploited as the basis of concepts and notions belonging to a train of thought distinct from the symbolic basis.”¹³¹

Remarkably, Ricoeur does not treat liturgical language in this relation, although it is a privileged environment for the epigenesis of thought from symbol. He is well aware that the act of canonizing the Scriptures provided an external impetus to the movement from originary forms of discourse to secondary, inasmuch as the tension introduced by having various genres confront one another begs the question of their compatibility, not to say complementarity.¹³²

130. As Zimmerman clarifies, “Liturgical language, in addition to the verbal, also takes into account the poetic, visual, aural, gustatory, tactile, olfactory, gestural: in effect, a whole linguistic gamut which cries out for interpretation especially in its textuality. As such, these liturgical texts require an interpretation that employs language-use and textual methods, areas...[which open up] a liturgical text’s relationship to experience” (“Language and Human Experience,” 649).

131. Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 135.

132. Hence he remarks, “Perhaps we would even go so far as to consider the closing of the canon as a fundamental structural act which delimits the space of the interplay of forms of discourse and determines the finite configuration within which each form and each pair of forms unfolds its signifying function” (“Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics” [22], cited in Pellauer, “Ricoeur and Religious Language,” 282).

But it is evident that liturgical traditions submit to a similar canonical process, whereby their multiple idioms are also fixed into a network. We are now in a position to consider the broader significance of this process. Given that Ricoeur affirms the genre of hymn as one of the eight forms of discourse identifiable in the Bible, we may ask how liturgy, as a composite, hymnic form of discourse, both recapitulates on a doxological plane the various biblical and non-biblical forms of discourse included in it—even as the Bible itself finds its various genres caught up into a narrative *élan*—and in consequence leads to a new, distinct mode of naming God.

Liturgy as Originary Discourse

Before passing on, however, it is important to attend to the discrepancy that emerges from our claims thus far, that liturgical discourse is originary, and the remarks just made concerning its status as a translation language. How can it be both?¹³³ To the extent that liturgy operates as poetic discourse, wherein multiple genres are subsumed under the metacategory of “hymn,” it is undoubtedly the former; and yet, because it is a “form of thought” that synthesizes the originary discourse of Scripture with theological ruminations, it is also the latter. In this respect, Ricoeur’s perspective sheds light on a tension in contemporary debate concerning the interrelationship of liturgy and theology. Certainly, despite—or rather because of—the currency given the ancient adage, “*lex orandi, lex credendi*,” it is becoming *de rigueur* to challenge the status of liturgy as “primary theology.” Michael Aune, for instance, is adamant

133. If it has not by now become apparent, the Orthodox tradition undoubtedly considers liturgical texts as originary, even aboriginary in respect of their often being deemed immune to criticism and change. Prominent contemporary Russian churchman Met. Hilarion Alfeyev provides a succinct defense of this outlook: “In my view, liturgical texts are for Orthodox Christians an incontestable doctrinal authority, whose theological irreproachability is second only to Scripture. Liturgical texts are not simply the works of outstanding theologians and poets, but also the fruits of the prayerful experience of those who have attained sanctity and theosis. The theological authority of liturgical texts is, in my opinion, even higher than that of the works of the Fathers of the Church, for not everything in the works of the latter is of equal theological value and not everything has been accepted by the fullness of the Church. Liturgical texts, on the other hand, have been accepted by the whole Church as a ‘rule of faith’ (*kanon pisteos*), for they have been read and sung everywhere in Orthodox churches over many centuries. Throughout this time, any erroneous ideas foreign to Orthodoxy that might have crept in either through misunderstanding or oversight were eliminated by Church Tradition itself, leaving only pure and authoritative doctrine clothed by the poetic forms of the Church’s hymns” (accessed Dec. 31, 2009, <http://www.kiev-orthodox.org/site/english/682/>).

that this famous tag of Prosper of Aquitaine has outlived its usefulness and ought to be demoted or sent into “retirement.”¹³⁴ But Aune’s reading of its origins fails to appreciate that paramount insight of hermeneutics: namely, that words and phrases take on a life of their own—there is such a thing as a *reception* history.¹³⁵ As in the case of the term “orthodoxy,” treated above, it is irrelevant whether, as Aune argues, Prosper did not originally intend his reference to the solemn intercessions of the Good Friday Liturgy of fifth-century Rome to constitute a theological *point de départ*, favouring rather the cumulative teachings of the popes; as it happens, the adage in question *has* become a useful shorthand for expressing the intimate relationship between how one prays and what one believes. Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanaugh and David Fagerberg—the theologians charged by Aune with the trespass of claiming that “liturgy is a ‘source’ for theology,” and advancing such “to the status of a methodological principle”¹³⁶—do not require Prosper for an accomplice; Ricoeur makes much the same point, via the more oblique terminology of philosophy, in the famous concluding chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil*: “‘The symbol gives rise to thought.’ That sentence...says two things: the symbol gives; but what it gives is occasion for thought, something to think about.”¹³⁷ In a sense, it is impossible for liturgy not to constitute a source for theology, to the extent that a genuine encounter with its symbolism will elicit reflection.¹³⁸

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134. Michael B. Aune, “Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship,” *Worship* 81, no. 1 (2007): 65–68.

135. Surely the author is not prepared, for example, to renege upon the Christological interpretation of Old Testament prophecies, merely because it can be demonstrated that taken in context, the texts in question had no such purview!

136. Aune, “Liturgy & Theology: Part I,” 65–66.

137. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 348.

138. This is ironically manifest in the second part of Aune’s two-part article, where he quotes various Eastern liturgical texts *ad libitum* precisely in order to confute prevalent trends in contemporary Western liturgical theology: it is the Ethiopian version of the *Sanctus*, for example, whose theocentricity or “numinous or epiphanic character” show the hymn to be “not so much about ‘us’ but about the incarnation—the divine activity among us and for us.” Absent here is any concern with the historical context in which the Ethiopian *Sanctus* acquired its extant form, or any preoccupation with legitimating the antecedent theology brought to light in the text; where Prosper of Aquitaine’s tag is bound to what he ostensibly intended by it, the meaning of the Ethiopian *Sanctus* is found in the way it corrects the allegedly outré musings of contemporary liturgist Gail Ramshaw (“Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship,” *Worship* 81, no. 2 [2007]: 144, 145).

We will return to Aune below, in connection with our explorations of Ricoeur's work on historiography. For the moment, it suffices to note that his contradictory method of chiding such theology as would posit liturgy as its source, and subsequently invoking a disparate array of liturgical data in the service of the primacy of an abstract principle ("God's nearness and activity in Christian worship")¹³⁹ illustrate the quandary of locating what Ricoeur calls a "radical beginning." *Mutatis mutandi*, I think the latter's comments are germane to the equivocation that besets the former's pertinacious critique of *lex orandi, lex credendi*:

The beginning is not what one finds first; the point of departure must be reached, it must be won. Understanding of symbols can play a part in the movement towards the point of departure; for, if the beginning is to be reached, it is first necessary for thought to inhabit the fullness of language....The illusion is not in looking for a point of departure, but in looking for it without presuppositions. There is no philosophy without presuppositions. A meditation on symbols starts from speech that has already taken place, and in which everything has already been said in some fashion; it wishes to be thought with its presuppositions.¹⁴⁰

As far as theology is concerned, therefore, one cannot simply posit, as does Aune, that liturgical theology ought to respond to the contemporary fragmentation and relativism in the theological enterprise—his underlying concern¹⁴¹—with a blithe invitation to "reconsider the concrete object of theology itself...the concrete character of revelation as the speech or discourse

139. Aune, "Liturgy & Theology: Part II," 142. Aune does not seem to realize the curious way in which he returns, by the end of the second part of his article, to the very positions he critiqued at its outset. In praising the work of Reinhard Meßner, he observes that the same has been able to overcome the gap between dogma and liturgy through recourse to several scholars who "have sought to develop a theology of liturgy from liturgical texts themselves and to carry forward the implications of such theologizing for a renewed understanding of dogma/dogmatics and for ecumenical theology" ("Liturgy & Theology: Part II," 159 [emphasis mine]). Bizarrely, this is a veritable précis of the methodology of Alexander Schmemmann, whom Aune castigates for a naïveté concerning the historical normativity of the Byzantine tradition.

140. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 348.

141. Aune, "Liturgy & Theology: Part II," 154.

of the incarnate One, Jesus, about God,” as if this offers a panacea for all hermeneutic woes.¹⁴² To wit, if revelation is given as such only in the “concrete,” this implies respecting the polyphonicity of the naming of God in that Scriptural discourse to which Aune is presumably referring; and, in accord with the historical consciousness which forms one part of his recommended remedy, an appreciation of the polyphonicity that obtains in liturgical speech as well.¹⁴³ In other words, if theology is, as Aune agrees, best understood in its originary, pre-Nicene sense of “speaking of God by speaking to God,”¹⁴⁴ then liturgical texts are, after all, the place to *seek* “the beginning,” for it is in the particularity of such texts—as embodied in performance, to be sure—that the naming of God in their respective traditions obtains, a naming which transmits the polyphonicity of Scripture but also transforms it, even as a fugue does a prelude.

The Dialectic of the Kataphatic and the Apophatic

As we have seen, Ricoeur suggests that metaphor by its very nature points to the unsayable. Responding to a text of Karl Rahner, where the latter comments on Thomas Aquinas’ view of the incomprehensibility of God, Ricoeur suggests that the “learned ignorance” (*docta ignorantia*) which Rahner counsels—a positive state of unknowing that is the *corollary* of a doctrine of revelation rather than its *contrary*—can be broached already in the mundane experience of the creativity of language in its poetic function, wherein our sense of mastery over the world is challenged, as it were, by the discovery of a *terra incognita*.¹⁴⁵

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142. Ibid.

143. Aune wishes, simply put, to “have his cake and eat it too,” by promoting an attentiveness to the fruits of historical scholarship, i.e., to the particularity of what the traditions actually say, as if such data is *ipso facto* theologically conclusive, while also maintaining that the authentic interpretation of such derives from an *a priori* doctrine—a doctrine which, amazingly, he admits to be characteristic of traditions *other* than those whose liturgical texts actually figure in his presentation: “For some traditions such as Lutheranism or Calvinism, the primary action is always God’s” (Aune, “Liturgy & Theology: Part II,” 156).

144. Aune, “Liturgy & Theology: Part II,” 155.

145. Language preserves, in Ricoeur’s estimation, the orientation to transcendence that Rahner places at the heart of his anthropology; without language, we would be reduced to silence, but language gives a way to *unname* even as it names. Religious discourse, for its part, provides a link between theological discourse on God’s incomprehensibility and anthropological discourse on man’s transcendentality.

Contrary to that use of language which confirms the frontiers of our present knowledge, such use is rather unsettling, even dangerous, in its suggestion of a domain that lies beyond our reach. In metaphorical statements, "Language is raised to *ignorantia* to the extent that the horizon of the unexpressed, of the unsaid, is revealed as constitutive of the experience of language."¹⁴⁶ Ricoeur explains further that metaphor presents in miniature the dialectic between the apophatic and kataphatic, between our inability to communicate the incommunicable, and our impulse to nevertheless attempt so to do: "*Ignorantia* resides in this restless oscillation between *is* and *is not*. But this *ignorantia* is *docta*, to the extent that it is not a capitulation of language but an untiring and everlasting struggle with the problematic of language—a struggle to bring language to the threshold of silence."¹⁴⁷ In lieu of a kind of mysticism that would prescind from linguistic mediation,¹⁴⁸ then, Ricoeur recommends the arduous path of endeavouring to name God, despite the impossibility of adequately doing so. This is a way of expressing, I think, his profound appreciation of human finitude as a benign feature of our existence with which we must make peace; freedom—in this case the freedom to truly name God—is achieved from within a recognition of our limitations, rather than from a denial of them. To "struggle with the problematic of language" is, in this sense, an act of humility.¹⁴⁹

Now this struggle manifests itself in the Byzantine proclivity for combining, in a poetic register, the way of *affirmation* and the way of *negation*. I would propose, in fact, that this is the

146. Paul Ricoeur, "Response to Rahner," in *Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure*, ed. David Tracy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 128 Ricoeur would seem to have in mind such metaphorical statements as would be classified as "pupillary" by C.S. Lewis, i.e., such as serve as an index of realities to which we do not have independent, non-metaphorical access.

147. Ricoeur, "Response to Rahner," 128.

148. Ricoeur is resistant to religious experience, to the extent that this is taken as an ineffable phenomenon: "I have vigorously resisted the word 'experience' throughout my career, out of a distrust of immediacy, effusiveness, intuitionism: I always favoured, on the contrary, the mediation of language and scripture; this is even where my two affiliations confront one another" (*Critique and Conviction*, 139).

149. "The mediation of language preserves what Hegel calls, in the *Preface* to his *Phenomenology*, 'the seriousness, the pain and the patience and the work of the negative,' in spite of the temptation to yield to emotion, feeling, and sentiment. *Ignorantia* becomes *ignorantia* if it remains *docta*" (Ricoeur, "Response to Rahner," 128).

most distinctive feature of the idiom, and that it arguably owes its poetic force to the very intensity of verbal friction generated by prolixity *both* on the side of its metaphors and that of its disclaimers.¹⁵⁰ The “work” of liturgy is displayed, then, already on a linguistic level, by the prevention of a ready synthesis; we are presented, that is, with texts that simultaneously pour forth in accolades, and concede their very inadequacy. Equal resistance is shown to the view that God is utterly unknowable, as to its contrary, that our language is sufficient to its task, our understanding, to its object. The treatment of the GBW in Chapter 5 will exemplify this process in regard to a specific rite; in what remains here, we will treat it in more general fashion.

The Via Positiva

With respect to the way of affirmation also, Ricoeur provides orientation, by the manner in which he contrasts the various figures of God given in naming of him by the genres of Scripture.¹⁵¹ The contrariety between these figures (e.g., judge, liberator, hero) holds forth a literary analogue to the doctrine of God’s incomprehensibility which is “already presented by the mere clash of the opposed ways of speaking of God.” In this vein Ricoeur asks, rhetorically:

Is not this incomprehensibility presented to the extent that the name of God explodes the boundaries of each simple literary genre and keeps, so to speak, migrating from one kind of discourse to another? Not only the tension between different modes of discourse point toward the incomprehensibility of God, but the specific use of many of

150. I speak here of Byzantine liturgical language as it is given in translation into English. It is all but impossible to reproduce in English the Greek metres according to which Byzantine hymns were originally composed; even devices such as the acrostic, which are in principle transferrable from one language to another, typically make for awkward translations. Liturgical texts in English are usually rendered in prosody, regardless of their original metre, a tactic already employed when such were cast into Slavonic.

151. David Pellauer summarizes: “Revelation [for Ricoeur] is more an aspect of the world of the text conveyed by the interplay among the various forms of religious discourse than it is a comment on their author in the sense conveyed by theories of verbal inspiration that take a prophet’s speech as their controlling paradigm. Yet each originary form of religious discourse does name God, thereby giving rise to theological reflection and speculation, just as the symbol gives rise to thought. So the interpreter’s task is to discern what theology is implied by each of the various forms, then by their interrelations, and only then by some organizing perspective that partly stands over against them” (“Ricoeur and Religious Language,” 271).

them does also. It has been shown by exegetes that the proverbs, the parables, and other sayings of Jesus tend to become limit-expressions under the pressure of the paradoxes, hyperboles, and extravagance in narration. This too is *docta ignorantia*.¹⁵²

In similar fashion, we can observe in a general way that the Byzantine idiom revels in paradoxical attributions, whose cumulative effect is to depict God rather after the portraiture of a Picasso, as it were, than a van Eyck.

Here we can adduce Elizabeth Theokritoff's explication of the parameters within which Byzantine hymnography compasses biblical events: the meaning of a given feast emerges in the play of intertextuality as it is made to ricochet from one typology to another. Just as, for Ricoeur, the figure of God recedes behind the plethora of its disparate scriptural references, so the festal event (and concomitantly, its *dramatis personae*) "migrates" from one genre to another. Having indicated the breadth of allusions to be found, for instance, in the hymnography for Theophany, Theokritoff argues: "When these and similar texts are interwoven with the Gospel accounts, it is not in the first instance a matter of interpreting one scriptural text by another. It is primarily a matter of understanding not the written word but the actions of the incarnate Word, different aspects and levels of which are signified in various ways by Gospels, Epistles, Old Testament events and prophecies. This then has the *effect* that the Gospel account is interpreted in the light of other scriptural texts."¹⁵³

152. Ricoeur, "Response to Rahner," 129. Ricoeur has on several instances outlined his taxonomy of scriptural genres. He identifies eight basic forms of discourse that correspond to originary expressions of faith: narrative, prophetic, prescriptive, sapiential and hymnic forms in Old Testament; parables, proverbs, and eschatological sayings in the New; sometimes he also mentions apocalyptic, but not as originary, dependent as it is on the genres of prophecy and wisdom.

153. Elizabeth Theokritoff, "The Poet as Expositor in the Golden Age of Byzantine Hymnography and in the Experience of the Church," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 264. What the author neglects to mention is that not infrequently, in Byzantine hymnography, the event being interpreted typologically is not recounted in Scripture at all. In the case of Marian feasts, for example, it is indeed not a matter of understanding "the written word" as such but rather actions whose veracity is warranted by non-biblical texts, if not solely by the oral memory of the Church. November 21's commemoration of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple (an occasion whose narrative precedent is to be found in the non-canonical *Protoevangelion of James*) would be an instance of the former, her Dormition, of the latter—given that the earliest references to it in the sixth century are already hymnographic or

In other words, the hymnography provides a metaphorical lens through which to consider an object which in its pastness can never be given directly, nor even adequately represented by mere reportage; each allusion manifests—in Ricoeurian terms, both discovers *and* invents—an “as if” that in turn both advances the *via positiva* and causes it to disappear, so to speak, around yet another corner. In this respect, the kataphatic already implies the apophatic inasmuch as its polyphonicity resists conceptual circumscription. If Ricoeur sees the Kingdom of Heaven as the elusive referent of the New Testament, dodging capture on account of the obstacles thrown in its way by the Gospel’s limit-expressions, hymnography can analogously be regarded as rendering obscure the very figure of Christ himself, to the extent that it compels that figure to bushwhack through a typological thicket. As Theokritoff declares, “[B]y presenting Christology in a pictorial way through images from the Old and New Testaments, the hymns intimate mysteries which cannot be contained in formulae.”¹⁵⁴

Alternatively, one could lay stress on the way that the network of correspondences established by the hymnography enhances the intelligibility of the events inserted into it, in the vein of Northrop Frye’s *The Great Code*, which text makes evident, in Ricoeur’s estimation, the battery of intersignifications that obtains within and between the biblical books themselves. This inner coherence of Scripture’s field of reference, its “centripetal structure,” opens a space for the responding self to be drawn into the world of the text:

To the extent that one brackets the possible representation of real historical events, and therefore brackets the “centrifugal” movement of the text—a movement that prevails in argumentative language and still more in demonstrative language, which, in our culture, have covered over and suppressed metaphorical language—what is important

homiletic. One recalls here Ricoeur’s acknowledgment of the incorporation of near Eastern mythology in the biblical text: “Another Logos besides that of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic Scriptures has always come between believers and the living Word of their God....[thus] the words of Albert the Great: ‘Scripture grows with those who read it’” (“Experience and Language,” 134).

154. Theokritoff, op. cit., 273.

is neither the relation to nature, as in a book of cosmology, nor the relation to the actual unfolding of events, as in a book of history, but the power of the biblical text to arouse, in the listener and the reader, the desire to understand himself in terms of the “Great Code.”¹⁵⁵

Similarly, Theokritoff insists that the burden of hymnography is to invite those who hear and take it on their lips to participate in the mystery being celebrated. Rather than a mere exercise of the imagination, such is a matter of existential import: “[T]he texts also keep reminding us that through sacramental experience, our baptism and participation in the Eucharist, the scriptures are being fulfilled in us.”¹⁵⁶

For Ricoeur, however, there is a liability in emphasizing the imaginative unity of the Bible: namely, that the richness of its polyphony be reduced, one might say, to homophony, with the consequence that the unity of Scripture be misconstrued—and the scope of possibilities for the responding self, which we will examine in greater detail in Chapter 3. A like peril perhaps confronts any attempt to compel the hymnography of the liturgy to circumnavigate, as it were, the mystagogical globe; one must recall, in this respect, David Power’s insistence on the fact of rupture within and between liturgical traditions.¹⁵⁷

The *Via Negativa*

The negative way emerges not only as a function of following the way of affirmation, but is directly accessed by the apophatic terminology which intersects the kataphatic along the poetic route of Byzantine hymnography. In contrast, however, to the classic treatment of Pseudo-Dionysius, in which the *via negativa* is the preferred angle of approach, to move from the foothills of perception on to the mystic heights, liturgical texts tend to *begin* with apophasis and continue on with kataphasis. Thus, for instance, the first of three prolix prayers for the so-

155. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 137.

156. Theokritoff, op. cit., 273.

157. Power, op. cit., 144. I have explored this phenomenon in terms of the representation of marriage in the Byzantine liturgical tradition. See *Married Saints in the Orthodox Tradition* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2010).

called “Kneeling Vespers” of Pentecost Monday starts with God being acclaimed as at once “incorruptible, without beginning, invisible, incomprehensible, unsearchable, unchangeable, unsurpassable, immeasurable” —ostensibly, then, the one about whom nothing may be positively affirmed—and at one and same time, the one whose historic *magnalia* can and must be narrated and interpreted, of whom a corresponding cluster of particular actions ought to be requested and expected.¹⁵⁸ This same pattern is rehearsed in the Eucharistic prayer of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom¹⁵⁹ and in the GBW, where a paean to the *magnalia Dei* is prefaced by an apophatic appellation, excerpted from the Dionysian “On the Divine Names”: “O Trinity, transcendent in essence, in goodness and in divinity, O Almighty, invisible and incomprehensible, who watch over all...O Goodness of utter and unapproachable brilliance.”¹⁶⁰

We may observe that such a pattern recasts on a larger scale the relation of model and qualifier adumbrated above; an apophatic preface prevents—in both senses of the word—a facile comprehension of all that is subsequently posited of God. Thus liturgy preserves what Ricoeur calls, in a Hegelian term, the “pain and work of the negative”; it serves as a kind of meta-“limit-expression,” wherein multiple metaphors are multiply qualified, thus “maintain[ing] the incomprehensibility of God on the borderline between language and silence.”¹⁶¹

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158. The Liturgical Commission of the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great, trans. and ed., *Pentecostarion* (Uniontown, PA: The Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great, 1986), 365–67. This highlights what, in my opinion, is one of the problems with the method of Sallie McFague. Convinced, along with Pseudo-Dionysius, that all the Old Testament names of God are metaphorical, she does not countenance the possibility that God might, in virtue of the Incarnation, have transcended the metaphorical distance, and at the same time laid claim to it. Rather than assume that the naming of God in the Old Testament is arbitrary, its anthology of divine ascriptions the product of human machinations, ought we not to consider whether Jesus’ approbation of “Moses and the Prophets” as having duly spoken of him does not place their “names” in a distinct category?

159. “It is fitting and right to sing to You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, to worship You in every place of Your dominion: for You are God, beyond description, beyond understanding, invisible, incomprehensible, always-existing, always the same” (Most Reverend Joseph Raya and Baron José de Vinck, eds., *Byzantine Daily Worship* [Allendale, N.J.: Alleluia Press, 1969], 282).

160. Raya and de Vinck, op. cit., 599.

161. Ricoeur, “Response to Rahner,” S130.

Moreover, according to Karl Rahner's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas (to which Ricoeur is responding in this connection), our *ignorantia* with respect to God is to be understood not privatively, but as a positive indication of the ineffability of *our* own nature.¹⁶² The incomprehensibility of God expresses itself as an *excedere*, an excess; man must realize that his own self-realization involves a recognition of that which exceeds him, that that very thing (God) *is* his fulfillment. This word "excess," as we have observed, figures prominently also in Ricoeur's reflections, as a descriptor for the surplus of any symbol. Liturgical symbols (including their language) can thus be seen as blazing a trail, by means of multiple but qualified namings of God, through the excess surrounding not only God, but us as well. In other words, we too, being made in the image of God, are also veritable mysteries, never fully given, not even to ourselves.¹⁶³

And it is also in light of the clash of opposed ways of speaking of God, of its juxtaposition of models and qualifiers, that liturgy can be regarded as truly theology, in the sense that Ricoeur gives the word. In his response to Rahner, he suggests that theological discourse, as its own proper discourse, requires the kind of dialectical thinking that marks poetic speech generally, and religious discourse especially; to wit, the integration of the kataphatic and apophatic. Ricoeur lauds Thomas' solution to a perennial theological dilemma: "We could speak of God without any ambiguity if there were predicates common to him and to creatures. But this is not the case. Does that mean, then, that we can say nothing? Not at all; between sheer ambiguity and pure univocity, there is the analogical use of predicates."¹⁶⁴ Ricoeur identifies analogy as the key to theology as a second-order discourse; it parallels the

162. "If the affirmative synthesis in the thought of man always and inevitably relates a 'what' to a 'something' in unresolvable difference, then in the point of relation of the predicating statement, *esse* itself is always simultaneously affirmed as not comprehended, and therefore the incomprehensibility of God is operatively present. Despite every possible insight into the predicated 'what,' all of man's knowing is rooted in an incomprehensibility which is the likeness of the incomprehensibility of God and in which even now God always appears as the nameless One" (Karl Rahner S.J., "Thomas Aquinas on the Incomprehensibility of God," in *Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure*, ed. David Tracy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 115).

163. Rahner S.J., op. cit., 122.

164. Ricoeur, "Response to Rahner," 130.

use of metaphors and models in poetic discourse, limit-expressions in religious. It is clear, however, that liturgy is *also* theology, to the extent that it incorporates second-order reflection into the originary work of naming God that so fascinates Ricoeur.

Summary: Liturgy as Metaphor

The argument of this chapter has been that Ricoeur's theory of figurative language, particularly its treatment of the naming of God, offers an incisive perspective on the operations of liturgical discourse. But metaphoricity is, of course, *more* than a linguistic phenomenon, not only in virtue of the deep intimacy between language and life,¹⁶⁵ but also on account of the way in which actions themselves can be viewed as metaphorical, to the extent that their "utterance" involves a seeing-as (in liturgy, a "touching-as," "hearing-as," "smelling-as," etc.), that results in a transformed "being-as."¹⁶⁶ Following a Ricoeurian detour, we have reached the point of being able to endorse Mark Searle's bold assertion that the liturgical event as a whole has a metaphorical character.¹⁶⁷

Searle calls for the kind of rehabilitation of metaphor recommended by Ricoeur, in order to recover the power of liturgical language and gesture; these latter have suffered, in the former's estimation, a like assignment of ornamental or derivative status, by dint of an epistemology unappreciative of their irreducibility: "We are starting from the supposition that the role of liturgical language is not simply to convey supernatural 'facts,' but to engages us in relationship; and that the actions of the liturgy are not undertaken for the purpose of getting a

165. "In short, a good metaphor not only carries cognitive content but it also has an attitudinal import" (Mark Searle, "Liturgy as Metaphor," *Worship* 55, no. 2 [1981]: 111). It leads, in other words, to a fruitful way of living, which is its "verification" — in Ricoeur's terminology, the *validation* of the metaphorical wager.

166. This process presupposes the notion of truth as disclosure, treated above; what is disclosed in metaphor, according to Searle, exerts a force upon us that compels existential transformation: "The most powerful metaphors in human language are those which touch on areas of experience which clearly engage our own mystery, opening up for us the wonder and ambiguity of human existence....metaphor requires the engagement of those who would understand it...[it] requires an act of contemplation" (Searle, "Liturgy as Metaphor," 110). Such contemplation, in turn, binds us at the level of conviction: "Once inside, when a metaphor yields up its secret, it demands a second kind of commitment: that of loyalty to the insight offered" (Searle, "Liturgy as Metaphor," 111).

167. Searle, "Liturgy as Metaphor."

job done, so much as to constitute and express attitudes.”¹⁶⁸

Since the classical theory of metaphor as a superfluous trope has been rendered suspect, if not discredited altogether, Searle contends that a similar critique must be levelled at its liturgical counterpart, namely, the belief that the communications event of liturgy can be adequated in terms of instrumental causality¹⁶⁹:

The preoccupation with causality, rather than signification—the shift from seeing the sacraments as communications events to seeing them as causal operations—meant that the actual liturgical performance was not taken seriously as a source of understanding. Instead the Thomistic axiom, *significando causant*, was effectively cut in two and the first half promptly forgotten as causality was discussed without reference to the meaning inherent in the liturgical structure as a whole....In other words, the metaphor could be translated and, as the theologians showed in their commentaries, effectively dispensed with in favor of more conceptual statements.¹⁷⁰

Searle advocates, by contrast, an appropriation of the insights current in the social sciences that have challenged the positivism of received liturgical theology. Although not referring to Ricoeur,¹⁷¹ he nevertheless arrives at an analogous view of the polyvalence of language.¹⁷²

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168. Ibid., 102.

169. Searle blames Thomistic manual theology in this regard, alleging that it valorized real presence over epiphany; by an overemphasis on questions of the validity of matter/form, everything else was derogated as mere ceremony.

170. Searle, “Liturgy as Metaphor,” 103.

171. It is curious indeed that Searle does not advert to Ricoeur, especially in the context of such Ricoeuresque sentences as the following: “Reflection on the way metaphors allow themselves to be played out into a whole series of metaphors may also serve to remind us that it is properly the sentence rather than the word which is the true bearer of metaphorical meaning and that more often than not it is a whole opus, whether it be a poem or a novel or, indeed a liturgy, which carries the overarching metaphor within which a whole series of otherwise literal references will be enabled to function metaphorically in their turn” (Searle, “Liturgy as Metaphor,” 106–7).

An interesting contrast to the foregoing similarity, however, is that Searle considers metaphor to arise *from* perception, and pass through the imagination into discourse, whereas Ricoeur emphasizes how metaphors are *first* spoken, and then envisioned. Searle is following Ramsey, for whom the confrontation proffered by metaphor leads to “insight” rather than “knowledge”; the former is taken to be a gift, the latter, an object of mastery. Searle and Ricoeur both agree, however, that however metaphorical insight or disclosure is manifest, it constitutes a genuine mode of truth.

172. Citing Max Black and Philip Wheelwright, Searle argues that the erstwhile regnant positivist view of language

Furthermore, Searle suggests that metaphoricity can be usefully applied to the ritual elements of liturgical celebration. Such elements, inasmuch as they involve regarding/ffecting certain actions *as if* they were something other, inasmuch as they convey both “is” and “is not,” also are a species of metaphor. Again, without quoting Ricoeur, Searle points to a similar process, in describing what the former would call the “semantic impertinence” of ritual actions; such actions—which in Christian liturgy are often rooted in ordinary, quotidian practices such as washing and eating—are freighted with an import that defies measure. Thus Searle asserts, quoting P. Colin: “It is the very solemnity of the liturgical gesture which prompts us to look for the fullness of its meaning beyond its immediate significance—and that is why it is important to maintain this solemnity.”¹⁷³ That is to say, liturgical gestures carry what Ricoeur calls a “surplus of meaning,” to the extent that they are charged with a meaning that exceeds the conventional or “literal.” There is, according to Searle, a marked tension in liturgical symbols as in metaphors, since they risk, on the one hand, becoming too otherworldly, and thereby losing the power to signify metaphorically in virtue of the attenuation of a primary, literal meaning; and, on the other hand, becoming purely mundane, in inverse fashion also being rendered impotent.

One can claim, then, that liturgical symbols, taken as metaphors, are a mode of naming God—a sort of genre that is superadded to the various genres of liturgical speech. Symbols, as phenomena which “throw together,” bear a resemblance, one might say, to the revelation of the unnameable Name recounted in Ex. 3:14, to which episode Ricoeur repeatedly returns. I intend by this audacious claim merely that liturgical symbols share in the paradoxical process

has been displaced by a recognition of its symbolic cast. Wheelwright’s contraposes “steno-language” and “tensive language”—paralleling Ricoeur’s distinction between descriptive (ordinary) discourse and poetic discourse: “The shift in Western intellectual tradition...consists in the rejection of such a bias [one that privileges steno-language] and a recognition that whole areas of human experience can only be acknowledged through the legitimate use of tensive language, which expresses the constant outreach of the human mind and spirit beyond that which is already known and that which can be put into words already defined. The axiom of logical positivism, that statements incapable of empirical verification are a non-sense, has been replaced by the axiom that we know more than we can tell” (Searle, “Liturgy as Metaphor,” 105).

173. Searle, “Liturgy as Metaphor,” 118.

of manifesting that which eludes manifestation. They lay out “figures” of theophany, even as the scriptural and liturgical genres present figures of God himself.

We recall Ricoeur’s claim above that understanding oneself in front of the biblical text implies a breadth of application equal to the multidimensional character of its poetics, impinging on the cosmic, the ethical, and the political.¹⁷⁴ Given that the poetics of Scripture unfolds liturgically in tandem with ritual action, we may venture to extend his hermeneutic accordingly, asking whether liturgy does not effect, by its ritual, a mediation of the multidimensionality disclosed in the naming of God? Might not we well adapt Ricoeur’s aversion to the notion of the Kantian schema, by positing that the liturgy serves as a sort of schema for producing figures of the cosmic, ethical and political implications of authentic biblical understanding. Such figures—random examples from the Byzantine Rite might include the blessing of fruit at Transfiguration (cosmic), the collection of offerings for the poor at the vesperal rogation on feast days (ethical) and the Kiss of Peace in the Divine Liturgy (political)—which in their own way tend toward the “idolatry” of ritualism, receive constant *qualification* by, *inter alia*, the “(biblical) canon within the (liturgical) canon,” the counterexample of other liturgical traditions, and the iconoclastic critique of those outside the community. In this sense, the liturgy would be seen to serve as a performance—based on the liturgical “script”—of the Gospel, which mediates its realization in the theatre of life itself.¹⁷⁵

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174 Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 235

175 Kevin J. Vanhoozer makes drama the root metaphor for his recent systematic theology, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). In his estimation, Scripture itself is like a script, in which the divine playwright speaks through various characters and scenarios; nevertheless, Christian doctrine, in this connection, serves as the “director’s notes,” according to which the drama of Christian life is “performed,” i.e., lived out. It is not clear what the role of liturgy could be, following this analogy. It seems to me less confusing to portray the liturgy as the story within the story, the drama within the drama, wherein the plot of the latter is rehearsed. It is difficult to see how one can regard the disparate genres of Scripture as a unified “script.” Perhaps a more coherent model could obtain if one took, with Vanhoozer, salvation history as the drama, but made the Bible the “director’s notes,” liturgy the “rehearsal” (outside of which we are to still remain “in character”?). Doctrine or theology might remain as the expression of dramaturgy—the critical review of how the script (which includes Scripture, of course) is being interpreted.

One may ask whether Vanhoozer’s model does justice to the Incarnation? If one follows the adage of Pope St. Leo the Great, namely, that “what was visible in the life of the Redeemer has passed into the sacraments,” it seems that one may not simply see the Bible as the “script” for the divine drama, but must include the liturgy as the trace, to use

If the above claim holds good, then we must proceed to ask what sort of a self it is that finds itself summoned to respond to such figures. For Ricoeur has proposed that since the Bible is a polyphony, lacking a singular centre, one may query whether the self which responds to its call is not similarly “polycentric”;¹⁷⁶ if liturgy is analogously polyphonic, as we have sought to demonstrate hitherto, then we ought further to probe the shape of liturgical subjectivity—an inquiry to which we proceed in the next chapter.

Ricoeurian language, of God’s action. A text, that is, is not equal to transcribing the divine drama; both words and actions attest to the performance of God in history. This is a roundabout way of affirming the role of tradition, of which the liturgy is an integral expression; Vanhoozer’s neglect of such is the burden of Hans Boersma’s sympathetic but critical review, “On Baking Pumpkin Pie: Kevin Vanhoozer and Yves Congar on Tradition,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2007): 237–55.

176. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 143.

CHAPTER 3

"The Summoned Self"

Liturgical Subjectivity

In the present chapter we trace the shape of liturgical subjectivity, employing the template provided by Ricoeur in his later works, especially *Oneself as Another* and *The Course of Recognition*. The focus here will be on the nature of human capability itself, as fulfilled within a liturgical context; having reflected in last chapter on the polyphony of liturgical language and symbolism, we must now consider the kind of self that may respond to such "music." Our penultimate chapter will afford the opportunity to examine the way in which the capable subject experiences the configuration of memory through the work of liturgy. The burden of our fifth and final chapter will be to integrate the preceding analyses in an application of Ricoeur's manifold hermeneutic to a select rite, namely, the "Great Blessing of Water." It is perhaps worth reiterating at this juncture that this application with which we will conclude (in keeping with the title of this work) requires the theoretical prolegomena set forth in chapters one through four, inasmuch as Ricoeur's thought has only begun to be appropriated by liturgists, and thus must have its theological properties further divined.

Introduction: The Polyphonic Self

We concluded the last chapter with Ricoeur's reflections on whether the self summoned to respond to the polyphonic naming of God in Scripture, and by extension, in liturgy, is not susceptible of an analogous polycentricity. To recap: Ricoeur's seminal observation is that "God is named differently in the narration, where he is designated as supreme Agent; in the code of

prescriptions, where he is designated as source of the imperative; in the prophecy, where he is designated as divine I doubling the human I; in the wisdom, which searches for him as the meaning of the meaningful; and...in the hymn, which expresses in turn complaint and praise.”¹

To this taxonomy of biblical genres, recapitulated in liturgical discourse, we added the genre of liturgical poetry, drawing attention to its restless oscillation between kataphatic acclamation of the *magnalia Dei*, and apophatic avowal of the divine transcendence and the insufficiency of language in his regard. The kataphatic lens of such poetry is panoptic; as John McGuckin underscores, the Byzantines inherited from Semitic Christianity the principle that Scripture should be interpreted by means of Scripture, with the resultant commentary ultimately becoming a distinct liturgical genre in itself, namely the “midrashic hymn.” In such a text, “[T]he central biblical narrative being considered is turned over and over again, like a man examining a rare jewel, from related scriptural angles, so that in the end a veritable ‘Persian carpet’ of biblicisms emerges.”² Its apophatic lens, by contrast, employs an array of devices intended to confute the ready comprehension of God’s being and acting in the world: qualifiers appended to quotidian adjectives, the frequent use of paradoxical attributions and the direct citation of terminology drawn from philosophically-oriented discourse such as that of Pseudo-Dionysius, all contribute to thematizing the unknowability of God, itself already implicit in the kataphatic juxtaposition of competing imagery drawn from the Bible.

We indicated further how a liturgical analogue to Ricoeur’s notion of biblical polyphony obtains in the work of David Power; in the present connection, it worth adducing also the insights of Russian literary theorist Mikhael Bakhtin.³ For he too was taken with the

1. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 144.

2. John Anthony McGuckin, *Standing in God’s Holy Fire: The Byzantine Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 77–78.

3. According to Scott Holland, “[P]aul Ricoeur’s work in biblical hermeneutics confirms Bakhtin’s theory of intertextuality as it relates to the world of the biblical text. Ricoeur shows us that there is nothing pure or stable about the Bible; in fact, a variety of worlds exists in the biblical material” (Scott Holland, *How Do Stories Save Us? An Essay on the Question with the Theological Hermeneutics of David Tracy in View* [Louvain: Peeters, 2006], 102). He explains this theory as follows: “Bakhtin discovered the world of the text to be an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a fixed point of static meaning. For Bakhtin, every text represents a kind of dialogue among and between several

notion of “polyphony,” whose resonances he heard in the modern novel, particularly as crafted by Dostoevsky. Yet, according to Anthony Ugolnik, Bakhtin’s “dialogism” was actually inspired by his trinitarian, Orthodox faith, as experienced pre-eminently in the liturgy. In liturgy, the latter encountered not the “the single voice of ‘God’s proclamation,’” but rather “the multiple voices of a dialogic response”;⁴ this discovery parallels, as Ugolnik has it, Bakhtin’s distinction between the authorial bird’s-eye view typical of classical literature, and the linguistic complexity of the novel.⁵ As the former elsewhere explains: “Bakhtin concentrates upon a plurality of voices among characters—each of them continually shaping and altering perception among the others. Meaning, then, is perpetually in a state of becoming, ever straining toward but never achieving full realization, neither within the text nor without. Nor is the text self-contained: the reader, taking the paradigm of the dialogue from the text, engages the work and in receiving meaning enacts it in further dialogue continuing the process.”⁶

Ugolnik argues that Bakhtin’s liturgical sensibility funds his dialogical hermeneutic because liturgy serves as the theatre of “the divine dialogue that is the emblem of ‘reciprocal definition’”⁷—the place where God vouchsafes to speak us into being, as it were, and we, each

writings. Each text is an intersection of texts where writing other than the plain sense of the text can be identified and read. He writes, ‘Each word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.’ Bakhtin argued that all existence is dialogical in this sense and always in danger of being ‘monologized’ by authoritarian political, moral, or religious discourses and interpretations” (Holland, op. cit., 102).

4. Anthony Ugolnik, *The Illuminating Icon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 167–69.

5. Bakhtin’s outlook seems eminently consonant with Ricoeur’s; one sees in the following quote a marked parallel with the latter’s understanding of how configuration in the world of the text leads to refiguration in the world of the reader: “Textual liturgics is basic to [Bakhtin’s] insight. For one, the text is a product of many voices which the author selects and presents. Dialogue takes place within the novel, just as, theologically, there is an ‘inner economy’ to the Trinity. But dialogue also takes place between the readers and the text—just as, in the ‘outer economy’ of the Trinity, God is seen to engage us through the medium of the Word uttered toward us, God’s audience. The text is enacted, or realized, in the act of becoming, of continually engaging the other. That is the task to which the text calls us, and in that sense the text ‘transcends’ itself” (Anthony Ugolnik, “Textual Liturgics: Russian Orthodoxy and Recent Literary Criticism,” *Religion and Literature* 22, no. 2–3 [1990]: 143).

6. Anthony Ugolnik, “Textual Liturgics,” 142.

7. Anthony Ugolnik, *Illuminating Icon*, 169.

other. Liturgy proposes, on this view, a transformative “plural persona,” with respect to both its divine and human actants:

[T]he very purpose of liturgy is to celebrate and worship a pluralitive, or “Trinitarian” God. The emphasis upon Trinity is continual, and strong. The reciprocity of the three persons within Godhead is the element which fuses it into one. By the same order, the voices of Byzantine and Russian hymnography shift back and forth between first and third person. The contemplation upon God or upon a given saint causes one to break out, periodically, into the voice of the object of contemplation. Celebrants and worshippers may utter the voices of both saints and sinners, and utter the voice of God in response. Liturgy begets an internal discourse, then, which fractures the persona of those who celebrate it. It is vital to realize that liturgy does not, in this sense, have an “audience,” but only actors or a *dramatis personae*. Liturgy begets a collective vision of the self.⁸

I think we see here, *in nuce*, the relation between the Ricoeurian themes of polyphonic naming and selfhood, that this chapter will allow us to develop in greater detail. Where David Power assisted us in grasping the pertinence of this relation per the liturgical naming of God, Ugolnik’s interpretation of Bakhtin points us toward its ontological implications.⁹ I trust that calling upon such admittedly sundry reinforcements (including, indeed, the last chapter’s summons to C.S. Lewis) has not compromised the cause at hand; I have sought only to follow the example of Ricoeur who, as readers of him will be aware, never fails to honour those from whom he learns, in keeping with the dominical counsel: “[W]hoever is not against us is for

8. Anthony Ugolnik, “Textual Liturgics,” 138–39.

9. One hears echoes of Ricoeur’s *On Translation* in Bakhtin’s claim that “heteroglossia” or polyphony is representative of both language and consciousness generally: “Heteroglossia also is a model, in a sense, for how language and consciousness work. Each of us, after all, is a complex of many voices engaged in continual encounter” (Anthony Ugolnik, “Textual Liturgics,” 144).

us.”¹⁰

Oneself as Another

To mine the rich vein of Ricoeur’s reflections on selfhood, one can do no better than source *Oneself as Another* (henceforth *OAA*),¹¹ which can rightly lay claim to being his *magnum opus*: not in terms of its relative size, but in respect of its thematic comprehensiveness. Indeed, one may scarcely find threads of Ricoeur’s thought which are not in some fashion interwoven into the fabric of this book. Charles Regan confidently proclaims it his “most elegantly written, clearly organized, and closely argued work.”¹² Before quarrying there in earnest, however, it may be helpful to provide a conspectus and initial assessment of its pertinence to the present inquiry.

Synopsis

In the course of ten “studies,” a reworking of the better part of his 1986 Gifford Lectures, Ricoeur aspires to revisit the perennial and vexing problem of personal identity, and this, from multiple removes. The tripartite conceptual framework of the text includes a reflexive analysis of the term “self” in natural languages, as it operates both on the semantic and pragmatic planes; the polysemy of selfhood, as manifest in its denotation both of that which is reidentifiable as the same (*idem*), and that which expresses identity in difference (*ipse*); and finally, the correlation of selfhood and the other-than-self, articulated at three levels: the lived body, the Other as another person, and the enigma of conscience.¹³ As Regan observes: “The whole hermeneutic is led by the question, *who*: who speaks? who acts? who tells a story?

10. Mark 9:40 (NIV).

11. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*.

12. Charles E. Regan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and Work* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 74. In his “Philosophical Essay: Personal Identity” (73-99), the author provides a précis of *OAA*.

13. The somewhat technical philosophical fray into which Ricoeur jumps, in the initial studies, concerns the question of whether human action ought to be regarded, as Donald Davidson maintains, as an “event” in the world; if so, then the proper lens through which to view it is that of *what* such is, and *why*, i.e., *how* it comes about. Ricoeur is apprehensive at the loss of the human subject in this relation; he is adamant that action cannot be made equivalent to “event,” because the latter does not countenance a *who*.

and who is the subject of moral imputation?"¹⁴ In terms of the schema of *OAA*, studies one and two are based on the philosophy of language, three and four, on that of action (i.e., Anglo-American or "analytic" philosophy); five and six focus on personal identity proper, in terms of its relation to narrative; seven to nine treat the practical dialectic between the ethical and the moral, while the final study explores the ontology implied by the course of his studies.

John van den Hengel argues that the thrust of *OAA* is toward a contemporary rehabilitation of human subjectivity, in the wake of its critique at the hands of Nietzsche; although there can be no return to the erstwhile certainty of the Enlightenment, represented by the prestige and power accorded the *cogito* by Descartes, the Ricoeurian *via media* can restore to us a measure of epistemological confidence.¹⁵ As he explains: "The cultural crisis is not a crisis of methods but a crisis of the self-identity of the human. The ideological protagonists for Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another* are not the empiricists or the logical positivists but two traditions which in Ricoeur's terms either 'exalt' the subject too highly or 'humiliate' the subject to the point of its disappearance or death."¹⁶

Ricoeur will avoid the foundationalism of the former tradition by keeping the subject as the destination he aspires to attain, rather than the place from which he begins his journey: "Subjectivity or the appropriation of the self lies not at the origin of the human venture, but it is an endless task of understanding accomplished only after painful critiques of the self."¹⁷ Furthermore, the goal of this task, according to van den Hengel, is fundamentally *practical*; since the reflexive analyses lead, via a development of the notion of narrative identity, to specific modes of engagement in the ethical/moral realm, Ricoeur can be seen as revisiting the

14. Regan, op. cit., 75.

15. This theme is arguably a corollary of the contemporary loss of confidence in the power of language to truly name God. Ricoeur affirms language as a power of the capable subject; critique does not exhaust language, since it retains a surplus of meaning.

16. John van den Hengel, "Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* and Practical Theology," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 459–60.

17. Ibid., 461.

theme of human action already salient in his earliest writings.¹⁸

Van den Hengel is particularly intrigued by Ricoeur's critique of the tendency in Ordinary Language Philosophy (viz. Speech-Act Theory) to make the use of the present-tense the standard by which action is measured; in Ricoeur's proposal to shift the emphasis to promissives and commissives, i.e., statements which express intentionality in terms of "I have the intention to..." rather than in terms of "I do or have done something intentionally," or "I do something with the intention that..."; in their future orientation, he finds an original way of construing the self that privileges its *capacity* for action:

With language the self projects itself into the future, committing the self to a future action in accordance with a word given in the present. Since this action is still future, it is not observable, it is not yet an event. In the present it is a speech-event, a word to be kept. In this expression of intentionality the focus falls fully upon the agent, the "Who?" of action. Since the commissive or promissive projects the self of the agent into an open future, the self emerges here in a context of action whereby, through the kept word (*la parole tenu*), the self attests to itself as a project and not as a possession. It is this projected self that is the touchstone of Ricoeur's reflections on the human self. In a similar manner, this projected action or initiative must be considered the paradigm of human action.¹⁹

The treatment of action in OAA thus serves as a roundabout approach—in Ricoeurian

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18. "In OAA he proposes that narrated action mediates the descriptive and prescriptive actions. The narrating of human action results in a *mimesis praxeos*, a configuration of human action in a temporal mode....Because the emplotment of human action is capable of describing the various possibilities of human action but also of displaying how actions are imputed to individuals and can become prescriptive, narrative is for Ricoeur like a propaedeutic to ethics" (van den Hengel, "OAA and Practical Theology," 463). One thinks here of Ricoeur's own summation of the connection between narrative and life, in "On Interpretation": "[T]he models of action elaborated by narrative fiction are models for redescribing the practical field in accordance with the narrative typology resulting from the work of the productive imagination. Because it is a world, the world of the text necessarily collides with the real world in order to 'remake' it, either by confirming it or by denying it" (*From Text to Action*, 6).

19. van den Hengel, "OAA and Practical Theology," 464–65.

vocabulary, a “detour” —allowing the author to compass the question of the self from a different elevation, a hitherto remote vantage point. Van den Hengel considers the terrain surveyed to be demarcated by borders common to practical theology. These include the primacy of praxis over theory, the role of the human subject as bearer of responsibility for action and the importance of narrative, and hence temporal, considerations.²⁰

It should be evident already from this synopsis that *OAA* has much to offer to liturgical theology, directed as the latter is to that “performance” of identity which for van den Hengel constitutes the substance, as it were, of Ricoeur’s non-substantialist ontology.²¹ Ricoeur finds this ontology in the “fragility of the kept word”—surely voiced with all tremulousness in the hall of liturgical remembrance and promise. It is there also that we find an effective consciousness of the historical, to the extent that liturgy situates its agents between past and future, in an eschatological “today.” Hence van den Hengel can affirm:

[R]icoeur’s refined approach to the human self can greatly help to deepen our understanding of the self shaped by the faithful word, the kept word, of God. The self that emerges in the hearing of God’s word is the self of faith, or, as Ricoeur has observed a number of times, the self of hope, the self that is given and configured in the promise of God’s fidelity....The self which emerges in the worship of God in the liturgy of the Church is a “sujet convoqué,” a self configured by a prophetic vocation. This self is not an isolated self but a self responding to a call within a community, or, to put it in

20. These borders are mapped through recourse to the “political theology” of Johannes Baptist Metz (van den Hengel, “*OAA and Practical Theology*,” 474–75).

21. “If Christian faith is itself an experience of life, theology, as understanding of faith, must retain a form which does not dissolve this factual experience” (van den Hengel, “*OAA and Practical Theology*,” 475). The author holds the Bible to exemplify a performativity in keeping with such experience, to the extent that it is narrative; if narrative configures action, the biblical narratives show forth a configuration of divine-human interaction: “This primacy of the biblical narrative with its figure of the divine-human interaction means that no amount of theological conceptualization should be allowed to erase this underlying theme. The term ‘practical’ as applied to theology would insist that the primary analogue is action rather than substantive identity or being” (van den Hengel, “*OAA and Practical Theology*,” 476).

other terms, a self “coram Deo” in the obedience of faith.²²

Given this assurance, let us proceed to consider the liturgical significance of several theses that emerge in *Oneself as Another*. In what follows, I would like to draw attention to the following themes: 1) the way in which selfhood is narratively mediated; 2) the various modalities of passivity identified by Ricoeur: one’s body, encounter with the Other, and the witness of one’s conscience; and 3) the notion of attestation. We shall examine each of these in turn.

Narrative Identity. Ricoeur has long advanced the view that it is in and through narrative that we negotiate the tension between our awareness of ourselves as both remaining who we have always been, and simultaneously, of ever becoming more and other than we were before.²³ Narrative manages, without resolving, the *aporias* between these aspects of personhood by showing how they are a function of our existence in time; narrative, that is, offers a means—indeed, for Ricoeur, *the* integral means—of understanding how personal identity actually coheres. This is so because changes of fortune in the course of a narrative confront a given character with the challenge of responding to new situations and committing to new possibilities. As a result, such a one “becomes other without losing personal identity, that is, it becomes itself without in some manner remaining the same.”²⁴ In consequence, it is appropriate to hold up narrative as a mirror of life itself, to admit that we grasp the multiplicity of reality in representing it narratively, since only by arranging the elements and sequencing the episodes of experience into a “personal history”—an act corresponding to the “synthesis of

22. van den Hengel, “OAA and Practical Theology,” 478.

23. David Klemm eloquently captures the importance of narrative to a hermeneutic view of the self: “For self-awareness to have content and therefore genuine meaning, the self must appropriate the expressions of its desire to be and effort to exist in the symbols, narratives, actions, and institutions that objectify it. Because for Ricoeur the symbolized self always precedes the “I think,” we live deeper than we think. Thinking is always attempting to catch up to itself by recovering the meaning of the self in its acts of existing, and the meaning of the self that posits its being in thinking is finite (but not yet fallen) freedom. For Ricoeur, the thinking “I” freely appropriates itself as freedom by deciphering its own expressions in the linguistic world around it” (“Philosophy and Kerygma: Ricoeur as Reader of the Bible,” in *Reading Ricoeur*, ed. David M. Kaplan [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008], 48).

24. van den Hengel, “OAA and Practical Theology,” 467.

the heterogeneous" by which narrative is composed—does human being, being incontrovertibly *temporal*, make any sense.²⁵

Therefore, it is axiomatic for the identity of the self to be perceived in the space betwixt continuity and change, between what Ricoeur in *OAA* terms identity qua "sameness" (*idem*), and qua "selfhood" (*ipse*). The former bespeaks identity as that which perdures, recognizing itself in its very permanence through time; the latter, as that which corresponds to the self as agent and patient of vicissitudes, in function of which it may pass through radical transformation. The helix formed by these two identities spins at the core of the non-substantialist ontology concluding *OAA*, an ontology predicated not on being-as-actuality but being-as-potentiality.

Ricoeur explicates the notions of *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity by construing them in tandem with those of "character" and "commitment." Character is equivalent to "the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized,"²⁶ commitment, to the fidelity of a person to a word spoken, to his or her self-regulation in the intersubjective realm of language. Character has its own history, produces its own plot, the impulse of "habit" precipitating a "set of acquired identifications."²⁷ He asserts further that "the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, *in* which the person or community recognizes itself. Recognizing oneself *in* contributes to recognizing

25 As Ricoeur explains in a sketch of the ideas fleshed out in *OAA* "To make a narrative of one's own life is, in a certain way, to posit a beginning, or several beginnings, a middle, with its highs and lows, and also an ending one has completed a course of study, a project, a book. There is a kind of apprenticeship of beginning and ending and of beginning and continuing whose model is essentially narrative. But unlike a closed literary narrative, life is open at both ends—whether we think of the obscurity of our birth, which sends us back to the jungle of our ancestors, or that something that is not an ending but an interruption, our death, which is a kind of violence" (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 309)

26 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 121

27 "The peripeteia, the changes and reversals of fortune, in a narrative, which threaten concordance, are made significant by the plot. And if we apply this to characters, something I did not do in my previous work [*Le Temps et le Narratif*], we recognize, I believe, in ourselves and in others this work of the plot. We might term this the 'emplotment of character.' There is thus not just an emplotment of actions, there is also an emplotment of characters. And an emplotted character is someone seeking his or her or its identity" (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 309)

oneself by.”²⁸ In other words, our actions, through force of repetition, result in the acquisition of dispositions funding but also delimiting the habits themselves.

Commitment, on the other hand, is open-ended, since the exigencies of keeping one’s word (e.g., fulfilling a promise) may involve the dramatic modification of one’s habits—a “losing one’s life in order to find it.” Ricoeur terms this trait “self-constancy,” and sees in it a phenomenon which “cannot be inscribed, as character was, within the dimension of something in general but solely within the dimension of ‘who?’”²⁹ That is to say, we cannot capture the interpersonal dynamism of commitment in the same terms as the *stasis* of character: what character deposits, as it were, commitment may erode.³⁰ Van den Hengel summarizes:

The self develops in a process, on the one hand, of actions that have “sedimented” themselves in what Ricoeur calls the human character. Here the self displays a consistency, a constancy, a substantive identity, which endures as something that can be identified again and again as being the same. On the other hand, he or she also undertakes actions which are innovative or initiatives. The human person is not only a settled self. At the level of ipseity the self’s authenticity consists in remaining truthful to the self by keeping a given word. The self is determined by actions which we have described above as commissives and promissives.³¹

According to Ricoeur, then, selfhood is subject to an *essential* indeterminacy. An apt analogy might reasonably be drawn with the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle: in certain pairs of properties, such as position and momentum, one may never apprehend *both* items

28. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 121.

29. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 123.

30. Think, for example, of the unpredictable life trajectory initiated by the mutual exchange of vows by marriage partners; while it is they who make the vows in the first instance, they are henceforth “made” by those vows, impelled to perform according to their prescriptions. Bridget Nichols sees in the exchange of wedding vows a exemplar of the notion of the “written performative.”

31. van den Hengel, “OAA and Practical Theology,” 467.

simultaneously. So too with respect to selfhood: the self as both *idem* and *ipse* can be postulated, but not grasped.

How may we apply the foregoing speculations to the matter at hand? Van den Hengel ventures that practical theology in the wake of OAA ought to be grounded in a new kind of ontotheology, *not* based on a classical substantialism but instead on activity and passivity, phenomena disclosed by a narrative interpretation of human subjectivity.³² Such an ontotheology “would seek to understand the substructure of human and Christian living as action. It is in relation to this, what Ricoeur calls prefiguration of action, that the Judaeo-Christian textual and living resources can be introduced in order that the Christian project can be realized. Its main thrust will be performance (not only ethics).”³³

Obviously, in such a light, liturgy attains a paramount importance, as the *sine qua non* act of genuine Christian identity. In and through the performance of liturgical narrative, the selfhood of its actants develops in respect of their capacity for activity and passivity.³⁴ The

32. Van den Hengel explains that for Ricoeur, only a non-substantialist concept of being can account for selfhood as *idem*, for the self as a projection into the future. This impels the latter to reread the grand ontological tradition in search of resources hitherto underexploited or repressed, which may fund such a concept of being. He discovers such in Aristotle’s treatment of action (*energeia*) and potency (*dynamis*) as modes of being which are amenable to the inclusion of otherness and passivity; reading Aristotle through the lens of Heidegger, Ricoeur nonetheless substitutes the Spinozan concept of *conatus* (“desire”) for the Heideggerian translation of *energeia* as “facticity.”

One wonders whether Ricoeur might have availed himself in this respect of the theological principle of *epektasis*, prominent in the Orthodox tradition, as illustrated in the thought of St. Gregory of Nyssa. This term denotes the human capacity, as created according to the *imago Dei*, for a continual and endless growth into God, a dynamic desire which never is sated because it is susceptible, by grace, of the infinite proportions of its object.

33. van den Hengel, “OAA and Practical Theology,” 477.

34. In liturgy, not only is a story rehearsed, but the participants are invited, compelled even, to appropriate the story as their own. The liturgy intends, to use the words of St. Augustine at the distribution of communion, that we “behold what [we] are and become what [we] see” (Homily LVII: “On the Holy Eucharist”). Is it not this sense of ontological vehemence that engenders the conflict between observation and participation? If one participates in a liturgy, does it not bring to light the impossibility of pure observation, to the extent that the act of being present already affects the phenomenon to be observed, and the observer him- or herself? Few people are reticent to play a new game, or again to read a book or watch a film recommended to them. But to *pray* in a tradition other than our own is always daunting, and often impossible, because such an act introduces elements into our personal history which challenge the consistency and coherence of our liturgical selfhood. The act of participation in a liturgy is already an incipient habit that affects the “character” pole of our identity. To enter into a liturgy, to cross the threshold of observation onto the floor of participation—as we suggest, a dubious distinction—is to subject one’s selfhood to the mediation of the story that will unfold. The liturgical self, (dis)possessed by the exigencies of narrative identity, is “neither the inflated self of the Enlightenment nor the dissolved self of poststructuralism; it is a hermeneutical self who, in religious terms, is fragile enough to be haunted by sin and substantial enough to be

mediation of narrativity is exercised liturgically not only in the actual stories proclaimed, but also in the narrative circuit of the ritual ensemble, where symbolism boomerangs, as it were, giving rise to thought which returns again to it. Therefore, while Ricoeur describes literature in general as a kind of laboratory wherein a person may experiment with discrete existential possibilities (“imaginative variations” on life), liturgy actually *embodies* narrative, renders story sacramental, arguably conveying thereby a qualitatively different ontological vehemence than the act of reading. As Nicholas Lash eloquently remarks, the liturgy epitomizes the performativity inherent in all genuine interpretation of the scriptural narrative: “Here, that interpretative performance in which all our life consists—all our suffering and care, compassion, celebration, struggle and obedience—is dramatically distilled, focussed, concentrated, rendered explicit. In this context, the principal forms of discourse are ‘practical’ (i.e., illocutionary): in praise, confession, petition, they seek to enact the meanings which they embody.”³⁵

“The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures”—and the Liturgy. The legitimacy of this application can be further discerned through recourse to the stated connection between the two Gifford Lectures omitted from *OAA* and the series as a whole. Ricoeur declares it be located at the level of “the ontology of action,” and explains: “Setting up a self through the mediation of the Scriptures and the application to oneself of the multiple figures of naming God happens at the level of our most fundamental capacity for action. It is the *homo capax*, capable man, who is interpellated and restored.”³⁶ We shall reserve our discussion of the last lecture for later, but here it is well to consider the way in which Ricoeur illustrates, in the penultimate, how “the entirely original configuration of the biblical scriptures can refigure the self,”³⁷ seeking in turn to grasp the liturgical implications of this process.

redeemable by grace” (Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 178).

35. Lash, op. cit., 46.

36. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 146n4.

37. Ricoeur, “The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures,” 205.

Ricoeur observes that the Scriptures can and have been interpreted in terms of the inner coherence of their field of reference, its “centripetal structure” — a feature he finds common to all great poetic texts. Following Northrop Frye (as quoted above in connection with Theokritoff’s discussion of Byzantine hymnography) he points to the Bible’s highly ramified network of correspondences, based on a duality of the paradisiac/apocalyptic and the demonic.³⁸ As impressive as this imaginative unity of the Bible proves, however, Ricoeur proposes that it does somewhat mute the polyphony represented by the variety of actual biblical genres. Yet, seemingly anticipating criticism that such a line of critique will ultimately lead to a *reductio ad absurdum* in which the biblical books are deemed overly discrete, he stakes a kind of middle ground between endless fragmentation according to genre, and typological homogenization, by dividing the text according to the traditional Jewish triad of Law, Prophets and Writings. What emerges, in turn, is a picture of a corollary, trine selfhood.

Beginning with the Law, Ricoeur observes that it is actually subdivided into legislation and story, genres which interpenetrate inasmuch as the giving of the Law, as narrative, receives its value from the necessity of apodictically establishing the origins of the Law: “Thus it can be said that the Law is a word or speech with regard to the origin of the call, the convocation, the injunction, but Scripture or writing inasmuch as the legislator has absented himself.”³⁹ But the security established by the narrative tradition, its assurance to Israel of being the chosen people, finds itself unexpectedly shaken in the prophetic tradition. This latter, in Ricoeur’s view, represents fragility: not only does the prophetic word intimate an historical distance and spiritual departure from that of the founding time and place, but it frequently announces itself as the harbinger of judgement and even destruction. Finally, the genre wisdom appears, at a certain altitude above both the Law and the Prophets, providing a somewhat atemporal perspective on the great questions of life and death, “articulating the

38. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 137.

39. Ibid., 141.

singularity of Israel together with the universality of cultures.”⁴⁰ Having established that God is named differently in the three genres of the Tanak (thereby revisiting the discussion in “Naming God” treated above in Chapter 2) Ricoeur perpend the kind of responding self they solicit. His conclusion? “[T]he triad of the call—Torah, Prophets, Wisdom—is answered, on the side of the self, by the triadic rhythm of a grounded identity, a fragmented identity, and an identity at once singular and universalized.”⁴¹ The corporate self secured by the Law, subsequently threatened by the Prophets, is ultimately taken out of itself, as it were, by Wisdom literature—“The Torah is addressed to a people, Wisdom to each individual.”⁴²

I think that this pattern allows us to stencil the shape of selfhood envisioned by the genres of the liturgy. While remanding a discussion of the specific form it assumes in the GBW to Chapter 5, we may here suggest the following parallels, based on the considerations with which we concluded the foregoing chapter. There we discerned in the liturgical idiom a dialectic between the apophatic and kataphatic in the hymns and prayers that enrich the catena of biblical genres incorporated into the rite through lectionary use. Firstly, the self addressed by the liturgy may certainly be termed, at one level, a grounded identity. As we shall see in more detail below, with respect to the liturgical experience of otherness, the self in worship is one that is addressed with exhortations such as “Peace be with all!”; “The blessing of the Lord be upon you”; and, perhaps most poignantly, “The servant of God [name] receives the most precious, most pure, body and blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, for the

40. Ibid., 143.

41. “Experience and Language,” 145. He elaborates: “The Torah, inasmuch as it is indivisibly law and narrative tradition, establishes what could be called the ethico-narrative identity of the people; and this identity is grounded in the security and the stability of a tradition. Prophecy, in turn, confronts this identity with the hazards of a strange and hostile history....Opposite an identity that could be called well grounded, one finds an identity destabilized by prophetic speech, against the background of an agonizing question: Hasn’t our God died with his people? It is to this serious question that Second Isaiah offered a passionate response; for it was necessary to call on the universality of a God of history and creation if one wanted to tear oneself away from the ghost of a vanquished God. As for the third form of Scripture, that of wisdom, it serves...as the hinge connecting historical singularity and universality” (144-145).

42. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 145.

forgiveness of sins and for life everlasting. Amen.”⁴³

Such utterances surely communicate the assurance of belonging to a chosen people, especially as this latter is accompanied by an elemental *action*, an enactment of Ricoeur’s “surplus of meaning,” if ever there were.⁴⁴ Here identity is built upon the *terra firma* of an event itself, not merely a textual record of an event. Nevertheless, the liturgy is also replete with the sort of critique Ricoeur associates with prophetic literature, corroding the very presumption it elsewhere strains to galvanize. Such “fragmentation” of liturgical subjectivity reaches its apogee in the Lenten hymnography,⁴⁵ but resounds throughout the year as well. The following texts are representative:

Stop the assaults of the demons, which are launched against me, O Lover of mankind, as they seek to put my lowly soul to death and to bring me down to destruction; bring their plans and plots each day by night and day to nothing and rescue me from them, Master; stop the raging tempest of life, deliver me from Gehenna and eternal darkness, I beg, O Christ, when you come with glory to judge the world as supremely good.

43. Peter Galadza, ed., *The Divine Liturgy: An Anthology for Worship* (Ottawa: Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies, 2004), 163.

44. In the rite of Holy Communion, there is not only a “return to the spoken word” on the part of the sacred text, but a veritable mutation of the word into gesture. For Ricoeur, the act of preaching—and, one may add, the liturgical celebration in which it is enconced—is more fundamental than textual inscription, since the latter serves only for a reconversion into word: “This is the impact of the fixation of liturgy, for in Christianity the liturgical kernel represents the Eucharist, as a kind of text that tells the story of the Last Supper, and it becomes a sacred text because it founds a sacred act, which is the Eucharist” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 71).

45. For example, the following troparia from the first ode of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete:

3. Having rivaled the first-created Adam by my transgression, I realize that I am stripped naked of God and of the everlasting kingdom and bliss through my sins (Genesis 3).

7. I have willfully incurred the guilt of Cain’s murder, since by invigorating my flesh I am the murderer of my soul’s awareness, and have warred against it by my evil deeds (Genesis 4:8).

9. Like Cain, we too, O wretched soul, have likewise offered to the Creator of all foul deeds, defective sacrifice and a useless life. Therefore we too are condemned (Genesis 4:5; Hebrews 11:4).

20. From my youth, O Christ, I have rejected Thy commandments. I have passed my whole life without caring or thinking as a slave of my passions. Therefore, O Savior, I cry to Thee: At least in the end save me.

21. I have squandered in profligacy my substance, O Savior, and I am barren of virtues and piety; but famished I cry: O Father of mercies, forestall and have compassion on me (Luke 15:13,17).

Accessed Dec. 1, 2009, <http://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/great-canon-fifth-week.html>.

When the books are opened on the day of your fearful coming, O Christ, and all are standing at the judgement seat and awaiting the sentence, as the fire flows before the tribunal and the trumpet loudly sounds, what shall I do, a wretch examined by my conscience and condemned to the unquenchable fire? I beg, therefore, to find release from my faults before the end, Christ my God, who grant the world your great mercy.

I weep bitterly and look downcast as I consider the fearful reckoning of accounts, for from my works I have not gained the beginnings of a small defence, wretch that I am. Therefore, before the hidden end of life overtakes me, before the sickle, before death, before judgement, before I am to embark on the paths to the unquenchable fire and the exterior darkness, where that worm is found that devours those who offend, I implore you, pure Lady, give me release from faults and great mercy.⁴⁶

Note the themes of being subject to judgement and punishment, on account of forces within (the sin of the hymnographer), but also without (diabolical intervention). Here, one sees a self subject to dissolution, which holds onto an eschatological hope: it is not a saved soul, as it were, but one that *may be* such. The consolation *given* in the Eucharist is here suspended as yet-to-be-given.

The fragmented identity represented by this contrast also obtains on a level of action, but in a converse motion to that of the grounded identity offered in the Eucharist, inasmuch as

46. From the stichera at Psalm 140, Tuesday Evening Vespers, Tone 5, accessed Dec. 1, 2009, http://www.anastasis.org.uk/weekday_vespers4.htm. As we will see below, the GBW invokes what in David Klemm's estimation is one of the guiding themes of Ricoeur's thought, namely the notion that freedom allows for evil, but is recuperated to a limited degree through the avowal of sinfulness ("the bound will that claims its freedom by admitting its personal responsibility for evil"). Klemm asserts: "It is important to understand that consciousness of fault as my own also sets in motion a temporal dynamism to the guilty conscience. In remorseful contemplation of the past, the guilty conscience recollects itself in repentance; yet in hopeful anticipation of the future, the penitent projects the possibility of regeneration, reconciliation, and redemption in eschatological fulfillment. Within these limits, humanity is 'the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite.' [FM, 221]" ("Philosophy and Kerygma," 56). To be sure, the apparent despair of the hymnography cited above is counterbalanced not only by the hope for mercy articulated intercalated between its laments, but also, as in the Psalms themselves, by the fact that one may yet speak to God: all is not lost so long as one retains the power to speak one's suffering.

the liturgical tradition countenances not simply narratives of exclusion, but also corresponding practices by which a self may be deprived of Holy Communion, on account of its own or another's determination of its fault. In such an instance, what is sung is also enacted—the hope for salvation acquires a corporeal “vehemence,” extirpated only by fasting, penance or, in certain cases, a dramatic alteration of lifestyle.

Finally, I would suggest that the liturgical analogue to Ricoeur's “identity at once singular and universalized,” the identity engendered by the genre of wisdom, is to be found by the very oscillation of kataphatic and apophatic terminology to which we referred in Chapter 2. The insertion of philosophical terminology into the liturgical idiom has the effect—as Ricoeur puts it with respect to the inclusion of Near Eastern mythological motifs in the Old Testament—of “another Logos...com[ing] between the believers and the living Word of their God.”⁴⁷ The singular identity affirmed in the Byzantine Divine Liturgy's ebullient hymn after Communion, “We have seen the true light. We have received the heavenly Spirit. We have found the true faith. We worship the undivided Trinity for having saved us,”⁴⁸ is thus compelled to confront the universality of the quest for the transcendent, whom the liturgy itself acknowledges to be utterly *other*.

We can perhaps descry this aspect of identity also in the practical field, when we consider that fact that the Byzantine tradition, in its ritual aspects, draws upon the same font of what Ricoeur calls “bound” symbolism: it too is destined to exploit the “renewing power of the sacred cosmos and the sacredness of vital nature,” since “only the incarnation of the ancient symbolism ceaselessly reinterpreted gives [the] word something to say, not only to our understanding and will but also to our imagination and our heart.”⁴⁹ Thus while the narrative invoked by the liturgy, and its particular ritual configuration, are demonstrably singular, yet its similitude, for instance, to the cult of a Hindu or Buddhist temple—which latter also employ

47. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 134.

48. Peter Galadza, *op. cit.*, 164.

49. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 67.

iconography, chant, incense, processions and prostrations, sacred aliments and even blessed water—surely betrays a recourse to the kind of originary experience to which metaphor ubiquitously adverts. This fact, furthermore, is arguably disclosive of an invidious “conflict of interpretations” in the history of the Church, taken as a corporate persona: whether one looks to the theological controversy surrounding the doctrine of the *analogia entis*, or the violent atavism of iconoclasm, must one not conclude that its identity has proven to be inescapably dialectical, in the manner proposed by Ricoeur, perennial efforts at synthesis notwithstanding?

The “Embodied Self”. Ricoeur, as we have seen, adopts the lens of narrative to gain perspective on the operations by which identity obtains as *selfhood* rather than *sameness*. Now *ipse* identity, as revealed in narrative, is perforated with the experience of passivity, since its characters are both *agents*, and the *patients* or sufferers of the actions of others. In *OAA*, three forms of passivity conspire to betray the presence of alterity in oneself, the first being one’s awareness of oneself as a “lived body,” which we have already broached in our endeavour to follow, into the practical field, the itinerary of the self responsive to the polyphony of liturgical discourse. Let us now examine the features of corporeality more closely.

It is clear that contemporary philosophy and theology have both undergone a “turn to the body,” as a segment or extension of the turn to language referred to above.⁵⁰ According to Dan Stiver, this widespread emphasis on embodiment has served as an effective challenge to the hegemony of what he calls a Cartesian “dualistic intellectualism.” It has been impelled by discoveries in the social sciences pertaining to the role of physiological processes in the act of learning, for example, as well as to the importance of unconscious thought and the degrees to

50. Ricoeur, indeed, describes it as the latter: “Two factors, I believe, have facilitated this surpassing of the linguistic turn: on the one hand, the recognition that discourse is an action; on the other hand, and in a contrary sense, the recognition that human action is speaking action. I have the impression that this is taken for granted today and that we are no longer caught in the quarrel between praxis and discourse. We know that every form of practice is discursive and that, conversely, practices are always articulated by norms, symbols, signs, not to speak of the unsaid (prejudices, for example), which is still a kind of discourse in action” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 305).

which it is subject to physical well-being or lack thereof.⁵¹ In theology, this emphasis has resulted rather from biblical studies' disenchantment with classical Hellenistic anthropology in favour of the allegedly more integrated and holistic Hebraic approach to personhood.

Alternatively, Scott Holland argues that ritual studies has played the role of *agent provocateur*, reminding theology and hermeneutics alike that narrative is corporeally rehearsed: "[E]very story, every text, happens *somewhere* and in *somebody* as well as *sometime*."⁵²

In any event, Ricoeur appears to have anticipated this trend in his early philosophy of the will, expressed in terms of the relationship between the "voluntary" and the "involuntary." As Stiver explains: "[Ricoeur] pointed out how tied to our decision making are bodily givens such as temperament, emotions, needs, and habits...The embodied and embedded nature of the self undergirds the entire hermeneutical project because it suggests that we ourselves are not transparent texts, whose meaning is to be read off univocally. We are more like a rich poetic text, full of allusions and depth. It is not just that others must interpret us, but we must interpret ourselves." The upshot of this is that selfhood "is a task and not a given. We cannot start from scratch, from pure mind or thought, or from a blank slate. We start too late—consciously that is. This approach is therefore a frontal assault on the modern and even premodern projects that often assume the clarity of the mind apart from the body, reason apart from emotions, and a conscious self apart from the unconscious."⁵³ Thus in the first instance, in the very immediacy of our own bodies, there is already an experience of alterity.

Now in one sense Ricoeur is merely recalling us to a former, forgotten way of doing things. The ascetical writings of the Fathers of the Church, for instance, offer abundant witness

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51. Scott Holland points to the work of Lakoff and Johnson (George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* [New York: Basic Books, 1999]), summarizing their conclusions as follows: "First, most thought is unconscious. Second, abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. The richness of life is found in the rule of metaphor. Third, the mind is inherently embodied. Thought requires a body—not in the trivial sense that we need a physical brain with which to think, but in the profound sense that the very structure of our thoughts comes from the nature of the body. The mind is inherently embodied" (Holland, *op. cit.*, 135).

52. Holland, *op. cit.*, 133.

53. Dan. R. Stiver, *op. cit.*, 164.

to the cloud of unknowing, so to speak, with which our bodies cloak our selfhood. Usually, this involves a chastening the body in the vein of the dominical admonishment, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,”⁵⁴ or the Pauline lament concerning the manoeuvres of a personified “sin” throughout the corporeal domain.⁵⁵ We certainly find in this patristic context a “wounded cogito,” humbled by its inability to master itself, dependent in consequence on the divine Other for its vindication and sustenance—a hermeneutic self which struggles to interpret dreams and visions, to discriminate between motives and causes, to configure its life to the narrative paradigm of Christomorphism, of “putting on Christ.” As George Maloney observes, with regard to Evagrius of Pontus, the ultimate aim of the ascetic life is “the ordering of the deep-seated emotions that brings about a state of interior wholeness and *becoming one’s true self*...[T]he human personality, the ego, resists the emergence of the natural self, which would, by human nature being according to the image and likeness of God himself, be exclusively involved in the contemplation of God but instead is taken up with the demands of the *false self* in its striving for self-gratification.”⁵⁶

The patristic legacy depicted by Maloney, however, has been obscured by the Enlightenment “exaltation of the cogito,” what Fergus Kerr terms the “self-conscious, and self-reliant, self-transparent and all-responsible individual which Descartes and Kant between them imposed upon modern philosophy.”⁵⁷ This latter self, independent and autonomous, has

54. Matt. 26:41 (KJV).

55. “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I....Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me....I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:15, 17-24 [KJV]).

56. George Maloney, ed., *Pilgrimage of the Heart: A Treasury of Eastern Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 21–22 [emphases mine].

57. Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), 5.

explained away the phantasms that menace the world of the Fathers, whose machinations render the acquisition of authentic selfhood so arduous and interminable a process. And yet it is the very plenipotentiary status of this discarnate self that has recently been called back into dispute.

Ricoeur is one of the key prosecutors: a first essay into the “absolutely irreducible signification of one’s own body” occurs in the second study of *OAA*, where an examination of identifying reference leads Ricoeur to consider the actualization of language in the event of interlocution between speaking subjects. It is not language that means, but speaking subjects who, “employing the resources of the sense and the reference of the statement in order to exchange their experiences in a situation of interlocution [are] put on stage by the discourse in act and, with the utterers in flesh and blood, *their* experience of the world, *their* irreplaceable perspective on the world.”⁵⁸ Here he points to the way that our corporeality inexorably delimits the conditions of selfhood.

We are bound, on this view, to the specificity of our speech acts; circumscribing the *meaning* of our statements is the fact of their having to be uttered in a *hic et nunc* which necessarily conditions them in a unique way; statements are subject to “anchoring,” suspended from “a unique center of perspective on the world.”⁵⁹ Ricoeur concludes that the embodied self is thus a conundrum, a mixed phenomenon: “[A]s one body among others, it constitutes a fragment of the experience of the world; as mine, it shares the status of the ‘I’ understood as the limiting reference point of the world....[T]he body is at once a fact belonging to the world and the organ of a subject that does not belong to the objects of which it speaks.”⁶⁰

In this connection, one may ask whether it is not significant that the Fathers of the Church devote so much time and energy to mystagogy, to teaching the faith on the basis of their congregation’s prior *experience* of it. Consider, for example, Cyril of Jerusalem, who

58. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 48.

59. *Ibid.*, 49.

60. *Ibid.*, 54–55.

explains to his neophytes, “I have long been wishing...to discourse to you concerning these spiritual and heavenly mysteries; but since I knew well that seeing is far more persuasive than hearing, I waited for the present season” —that is, the Paschal season inaugurated by the night in which Cyril’s listeners had been sacramentally initiated into the Church—“that finding you more open to the influence of my words from your present experience, I might lead you by the hand...[to] a table of the more perfect instructions.”⁶¹ It is perchance indicative of the philosophical acuity of patristic and medieval theologians—their awareness of the corporeal “anchoring” of the liturgical subject—that they indulge in the much-maligned allegorical interpretation of the liturgy. As Paul Bradshaw wryly remarks, apropos of the hermeneutical mutations to which liturgical history bears witness: “[I]t is probably inevitable, in spite of all that liturgists may do to resist it, that the desires of popular spirituality will always tend to draw liturgical practice towards a more pictorial representation of the mysteries of the faith.”⁶² Otherwise put, is it not the case that “all narratives must pass through the body—the hermeneutics of gesture”?⁶³

The “Interpersonal Self”. John Donne’s claim, “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main,”⁶⁴ could well have been uttered by Ricoeur in regard to that aspect of selfhood revealed in the reciprocity of language. Our linguistic self-expression is at once the most and the least idiosyncratic functions of personal identity: the most, because of the freedom to literally “speak *our* mind,” which attaches to our linguisticity; the least, because of the inexorable limitations attaching to language as a rule-bound and rigid structure, imposed on us apart from our consent. Stiver clarifies:

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61 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Oration 1 1*, accessed Aug 24, 2010, <http://www.monachos.net/content/patristics/patristictexts/651>

62 Paul Bradshaw, “The Use of the Bible in Liturgy: Some Historical Perspectives,” *Studia Liturgica* 22 (1992) 51–52

63 Holland, *op. cit.*, 134

64. John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and Death’s Duel With the Life of Dr John Donne* By Izaak Walton, preface by Andrew Motion, Vintage Spiritual Classics (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), xvii

The turn to language in the first place is already recognition that the meaning of the self lies in part outside the self. Language is a public phenomenon in which we express ourselves, refer to ourselves, and have others refer to us. We swim in language as fish swim in the sea, but we are not the sea. Language is in a sense given to us; it does not arise from us personally....[L]anguage is both a part of the larger tradition or horizon that is given to us before we are self-aware and the background with which we approach anything. In this sense, as Gadamer and Heidegger would say, language speaks us.⁶⁵

To speak to ourselves and to others, to speak about ourselves and others—such acts are explicit indications of selfhood, for we know ourselves as the persons represented in and through language. As detailed above, Ricoeur points to the sense of obligation attaching to the giving of a promise, the imperative to act in accordance with one's word inasmuch as such a word is in a certain sense a veritable extension of oneself: "Keeping one's word does appear to stand as a challenge to time, a denial of change: even if my desire were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, 'I will hold firm'....The properly ethical justification of the promise suffices of itself, a justification which can be derived from the obligation to safeguard the institution of language and to respond to the trust that the other places in my faithfulness."⁶⁶

Liturgy, of course, is shot through with this kind of performative language, language which *accomplishes* something rather than, or at least in addition to, *describing* something. There is, for instance, the significant if overlooked assumption of the first person plural by those who participate in a celebration. The self is clearly decentred in its identification with a collective persona, a "we" which places the worshipper in relation with others both present and absent (e.g., the dead or those absent in body but present to the memory of the community) and with

65. Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 168.

66. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 124.

the Other addressed as God, not to say the constellation of other “Others,” such as Mary, the angels and the saints. To paraphrase St. Paul, we might say that “we who are many, are one body, for we all share in the one story.”⁶⁷ The character trait common to the variety of people who show up for a liturgy is precisely the common intention, or at least willingness, to allow themselves to be interpreted by the story which will be communally enacted presently. And the choice to refrain from engagement in the liturgy is itself a narrative choice, establishing a different trajectory whose outcome, no less than that of the fully conscious, actively participating worshipper, cannot be anticipated. Neither course of (in)action can be fully scouted. As Ricoeur queries, “When I interpret myself in terms of a life story, am I all three [i.e., ‘author, narrator and character’] at once...? Narrator and character, perhaps, but of a life of which, unlike the creatures of fiction, I am not the author but at most...the coauthor.” After all, “[I]n our experience the life history of each of us is caught up in the histories of others...Can one then still speak of the narrative unity of life?”⁶⁸ The answer, for Ricoeur, seems to be that one can indeed, but only from within an interpersonal perspective.

We depend, therefore, on reciprocity. Take the dialogical structure of liturgy, with its formal requirement for the clergy and people to collaborate, for example, in the act of blessing: the priest requires the assent of the people’s “Amen” for the ratification of the blessing offered. Or again, in the *Sursum Corda* dialogue introducing the eucharistic prayer in all the classical Rites, neither role may be assumed by the other; rather, clergy and congregation must together animate the conversation which will generate their common identity as the laity, the “people of God.” Each self requires the confirmation of another for its own fulfillment; each requires, to use Ricoeur’s term, another’s “solicitude.”

Ricoeur suggests that the very act of presenting oneself to another, of being available (*disponible*) by saying “Here I am!”, is already a movement towards that responsibility or

67. Cf. I Cor. 10:17.

68. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 160, 161.

commitment through which we come to know ourselves—even as we abandon ourselves to the potential transformations ensuing upon such a commitment.⁶⁹ The portentousness of this act comes to light in the various figures of the “summoned self” Ricoeur traces in the biblical record.⁷⁰ If we examine in turn the analogues of “Here I am!” articulated by the liturgy, we find a fragile web of personhood stretched between them. For the liturgical “we” boasts a herculean measure of confidence in, and commitment to, God, one whose exigencies are not readily sustained by the individual self upon its exit from the sacred precinct. Indeed, it is not uncommon for those who have entered most intensively into the life of the liturgy to find themselves undergoing a “dark night of the soul,” wherein the question “Who am I?” is aggravated to the point of being an apophatic “crucible of [the] nothingness of identity.”⁷¹

The self is dispossessed by the liturgy, therefore, even as it is possessed, for it is brought to the point of ever beginning again. The liturgical self is a *suspended* self dependent not only on the mercy of God, but on the supplications of all those present who implore said mercy. What Ricoeur sees in the “puzzling cases” of literary fiction, which expose the “tormenting question ‘Who am I?’,” surely also redounds in the diffidence of the liturgical subject:

“Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?” The gap between the question which engulfs the narrative imagination and the answer of the subject who has been made responsible by the expectation of the other becomes the secret break at the very heart of commitment. This secret break is what makes the modesty of self-constancy differ from the Stoic pride of rigid self-consistency....What is suggested...by the narrative imagination is a dialectic of ownership and of dispossession, of care and of carefreeness, of self-affirmation and of self-effacement.⁷²

69. Ibid., 165.

70. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 262–78.

71. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 166.

72. Ibid., 168.

In the idiom of liturgy, this dialectic translates into the soul-searching, even angst-ridden, interrogation: “Who am I, that I may dare to ‘be counted worthy of becoming [a partaker] of Your most pure Body and your precious blood’?”;⁷³ or, “Who am I, that I may do so ‘not unto judgment or condemnation, but unto life everlasting’?”⁷⁴ The answer, of course, is given by the temerity embedded within the rite itself: “Holy things for the holy (ones)!” cries the priest before communion in the Byzantine Eucharist. The liturgy allows us to testify to ourselves and to others, that we have indeed been made worthy, that mercy has been outpoured, that grace has been bestowed. It is to this experience of truth as testimony that we will turn momentarily.

The Liturgical Subject: Divine or Human?

Before doing so, however, it is worth perusing Joyce Ann Zimmerman’s sketch of the pertinence of *OAA* to liturgical subjectivity, which in its own way may be designated a “puzzling case” with respect to personal identity. Citing the criteria by which liturgy is defined in the teaching of the Catholic magisterium—a public action, carried out by a unified body, differentiated in ministry, with the full, conscious, active participation of all the faithful—she argues that Ricoeur’s probative concern with the question of “Who?” invites application to the issue of who, exactly, ought to be deemed the subject of liturgical action. She insists that the answer, notwithstanding common opinion, is far from obvious; is it Christ, for example, or the priest, or the assembly? Liturgical texts, after all, evince a multiplicity of subjects (through indicators of identifying reference); that is, not only are different actants identified in the rubrics (priest, deacon, people, etc.) but, as we saw above in Ugolnik’s treatment of Bakhtin, the liturgical idiom readily mixes and matches pronouns, placing said actants now in the role of suppliant—itsself divisible into instances of first person plural and singular (with the latter divisible again into instances where one’s own soul is addressed, rather than someone else)—now that of narrator, now that of God himself. Zimmerman wonders, therefore, if and how a

73. Hymn after Communion, from the Byzantine Rite’s “Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts.”

74. Peter Galadza, op. cit., 449.

liturgical rite may yet be comprehended as a unitary action: "I propose the following thesis: the liturgical assembly can be understood to be the subject of liturgy if we take 'liturgical assembly' as a single referent with two predicates (God and liturgical ministers). This thesis sets two tasks before us: to account for all the actants uncovered by the indicators and to show how these indicators are differing predicates for the one referent, the liturgical assembly."⁷⁵

Zimmerman thus proposes that there is one, single subject of liturgy, one "liturgical person" who constitutes, in the terminology of Strawson cited in *OAA*, a "basic particular." She continues her outline of this intriguing concept as follows: "Liturgy obviously unfolds as an action of various interlocutors, even though the speaker(s) and one(s) spoken to may change as the ritual progresses. But there is an interconnectedness (subjectivity) that suggests none of the interlocutors acts independently of the others. The 'I' of liturgy, then, can be assimilated to both God and the liturgical ministers at the same time."⁷⁶ Forasmuch as the power to act liturgically resides in the assembly as a whole, as a corporate subject, its ministers are simply a predicate, without significance apart from the former. Zimmerman quotes Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* to the effect that because the Church subsists not only as the People of God, but also as the People in God, one can duly regard liturgy as an action attributable at once to God *and* to human beings. It becomes, in consequence, the fundamental locus of identifying reference in the Church; the liturgical assembly is not simply a gathering of people to *do* something extraneous, but the means whereby what the Church *is*, its essence, is divulged: "The most concrete expression of Church comes from the most basic of its actions: interconnectedness (intersubjectivity) with one another and God in the act of worship. Any other notion of church (for example, as institution) derives meaning only from this fundamental identity."⁷⁷

75. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, "Liturgical Assembly: Who is the Subject of Liturgy?" *Liturgical Ministry* 3 (Spring 1994): 47.

76. *Ibid.*, 48.

77. Zimmerman, "Liturgical Assembly," 51. This assertion reminds one not only the emphasis of Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Marian and Johannine dimensions of the Church, as preceding the Petrine, but also, more recently, Pope Benedict XVI's aphorism, "the Church subsists as liturgy and in the liturgy." Evocatively, Zimmerman proposes that liturgy, in virtue of its narrative structure, can be what Ricoeur calls a "bearer of hope." If, following

It seems to me that Zimmerman has pointed us in the right direction, but that the course needs to be altered somewhat to attain its desired end. By analogy with the Trinity, one might posit a singularity of personhood with multiple predicates: God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But to propone *tout court* that the “I” of the liturgical subject, represented by the assembly, is predicable of God and the liturgical ministers, is potentially problematic.⁷⁸ For on the one hand, it appears to connote a pantheism, or panentheism, in virtue of which God becomes immanent to the liturgical action without remaining also transcendent to it. In point of fact, for all its alternation of *dramatis personae*, the liturgy presumes an orientation toward an unrepresentable beyond. The most powerful semiotic marker of this is demonstrably cosmic orientation itself, by which the worshipping community intentionally turns to face not itself, but out onto the eastern horizon; this horizon serves to symbolize the bestowal and withdrawal of divine presence that Ricoeur locates in Exodus 3:14’s concession of a name that is, in fact, not a name. Orientation functions, I would say, as a kind of physical correlate to the apophatic language by which the liturgy represents sublimity of God: that to which the assembly looks in facing east is, paradoxically, an eschatological reality only visible to the mind’s eye. One must, accordingly, maintain God to *not* be the agent of liturgy, in this sense; he is rather the one before whose presence-in-absence, so to speak, the action of the rite is carried out. To stretch the theatrical metaphor: if multiple persons are predicable of the dramatic subject we know as “the cast,” there is yet an audience elsewhere—even if invisible in the darkness beyond the

his reading of Augustine, the present-of-the-future is held in the present-of-the-present, then liturgy as present action can be the effective means whereby the eschatological destiny of the Church is already disclosed—even, we might add, “remembered,” given the summons of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

78. Also problematic is Zimmerman’s interesting suggestion that it is the continuity of liturgical tradition that provides said assembly with the assurance of being *liturgical* in nature. One may ask, however, whether Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative identity as *ipse*, characterized as this is by change rather than continuity, is not more apt. For the Church’s liturgical practice has certainly varied throughout its history; while there is indeed a fidelity to a commissive, namely to “do this in memory of me,” one does not find identity as *idem*, since there has always been variety within and between Rites. Indeed, it is arguably a lack of appreciation for *ipse* identity, and an insistence on its *idem* dimension, that has caused the Churches to prove so intolerant of one another, on so many an occasion. That is, the idea that the Church has always worshipped according to a specific liturgical form has led to a triumphalism by which many an “other” has been anathematized.

light of the stage—to which such persons “face” (following the Greek etymology of *persona* [*prôsoûpon*]).

But Zimmerman’s position does invites us, on the other hand, to do justice to the doctrine that the liturgy is truly, in another sense, the work of God himself. The Byzantine Rite, after all, begins with the diaconal exhortation: “It is time for the *Lord* to act.”⁷⁹ In this respect, a trinitarian theology becomes imperative; it is by attributing agency to Christ specifically, rather than God generically, that we may follow Zimmerman’s lead in positing divine and human predicates for the subject constituted by the liturgical assembly. It befits the ecclesiological emphasis of the author, as well, inasmuch as the Church is traditionally said to be the Body of Christ; the liturgy, the joint work of the whole Christ, Body and Head. It follows, moreover, upon the semiosis referred to above, since Byzantine rubrics also prescribe that the assembly turn inward at times (for greetings, blessings, readings and the distribution of Communion, *inter alia*) in order to experience itself, one might say, as “another.”

May we dare to go even further and intimate that Ricoeur’s description of the experience of passivity may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the life of the Trinity itself, as manifest in the narrative identity articulated in the liturgy? We keep good company in speculating thus, for Ricoeurian adept David Klemm insists that the philosopher would have us treat not an abstract *idea* of God but rather the actual figure traced by the Scriptures—the palimpsest, we might say, of divine agency: “For Ricoeur, these biblical texts represent the concrete existence, the linguistic embodiment of the idea of God. In other words, ‘the God-referent’ of biblical texts appears (exists) in and through the texts themselves such that the ‘I’ can respond to the God-referent of biblical texts precisely in the concrete act of understanding and interpreting the texts themselves.”⁸⁰ Let us then try to draw a liturgical parallel to Klemm’s

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79. Peter Galadza notes that even the renowned Alexander Schmemmann was wont to mistranslate this suggestive text, taken *in toto* from Psalm 118:126 (LXX). See “Schmemmann Between Fagerberg and Reality: Towards an Agenda for Byzantine Christian Pastoral Liturgy,” *Bollettino Della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 4 (2007): 23.

80. Klemm, *op. cit.*, 60.

draft, formulated as a variation upon his “biblical thinking.”

How do we construe the idea of God in the biblical text? Following a template derived from the anthropology of Ricoeur’s *Fallible Man*, Klemm constructs his model of divine being as the confluence of three principles: universal essence, particular embodiment and absolute individuality. He avers that “only this idea of God can account for the infinity and eternity of God along with the concrete appearance of God.”⁸¹ I intend, however, remaining within the sphere of *OAA*, to contour the divine protagonist active in liturgy along the lines of Ricoeur’s non-substantialist ontology. Since he argues, according to van den Hengel, that “we cannot think of agency as a power without taking account of the other or of suffering action (passion),”⁸² how might our thought of God as liturgical agent require a concomitant consideration of divine passivity?

We recall van den Hengel’s resumé of the threefold experience of passivity informing Ricoeur’s ontology: 1) the otherness of one’s own body that mediates between one’s self and the world; 2) the otherness of the other than self, neither another “I,” as in Husserl, nor a totally other, as in Levinas, but the self of reciprocity or dialogue (“I know the other be another self in the ethical response that the other enjoins on me. In this sense, the self is responsibility to and by the other”);⁸³ and 3) the otherness subsisting in one’s conscience, an irreducible testimony of the self to itself. Might we in consequence, adhering equally to this schema as to the classical trinitarian *datum*, propose the following analogues: 1) that the incarnate, ascended Christ fulfills a corporeal mediation between the divine selfhood and the world; 2) that the Church, in turn, embodies the other than self—to whom God extends, on the Orthodox understanding, the reciprocity not merely of dialogue, but of divinization; and 3) that the Holy Spirit abides as the ineffable voice of divine conscience, that “primary power through which the self attests to

81. *Ibid.*, 61.

82. van den Hengel, “*OAA* and Practical Theology,” 468.

83. van den Hengel, “*OAA* and Practical Theology,” 468.

itself"?⁸⁴

Prior to appraising how liturgy exhibits this paradigm, it bears repeating that the frequent use of apophatic appellations would undoubtedly appear to favour a non-substantialist ontology: God cannot per se be known as *being*. And yet the *magnalia Dei*, the mighty *acts* of God, can indeed be attested and acclaimed. Moreover, the supplications of the liturgy's manifold litanies bespeak the divine action as potency and not simply actuality, articulating an expectation that he will *continue* to act in keeping with the "history" of his character. Taking up Ricoeur's modes of passivity in sequence, we can propose first that the Eucharist brings into relief the corporeal mediation of divine selfhood vis-à-vis the world. Not, of course, that sacramental presence, as an enigma meriting the designation "limit-experience," can be assimilated *stricto sensu* to Ricoeur's "lived body." As Klemm admits, "In strict conceptual terms, limit-experiences are impossible experiences; they cannot be conceived because they arise outside the limits of thought. But, religiously speaking, limit-experiences are necessary experiences; they give actual content and power to the meanings of biblical [viz., liturgical] texts."⁸⁵ He describes limit experiences as being essentially the experience of eternity in time, of the resolution of dialectics that remain theoretically aporetic. One cannot, by definition, adequately *think* limit-experiences, if one can nevertheless attest to them by recourse to limit-expressions.⁸⁶

84. Ibid., 468–69.

85. Klemm, op. cit., 65.

86. For Klemm, one must reckon with the power of the Bible to open up a space for encounter with God which can be surveyed, but not bordered, by means of philosophical terminology. It is irrational, on this view, to deny that there are phenomena which are essentially non-rational. Ambiguities remain, however, as to whether this hermeneutic ultimately equates to an apologia for *all* religious texts; is not the limit-expression/limit-experience dynamic also to be found in the religious reading of the Qur'an or Vedas, for example, which like Scripture "intend the infinite source and goal of any possible mode of being because they possess a reference to God within them"? ("Philosophy and Kerygma," 62). These texts also initiate a refiguration of life in their reading communities based on the figures of the ineffable represented therein. If the Bible does not hold a monopoly on limit-expressions, therefore, theology must presumably honour the testimony to limit-experience issuing from other quarters. The question that then arises is the following: does the specificity of the limit-expression determine the content of its corollary experience, or does the same experience surge forth from diverse sources? And how, indeed, is the affair to be arbitrated?

In Louis Marie Chauvet's estimation, the traditional conceptual account of sacramental presence (i.e., transubstantiation) must actually be repudiated as a "philosophical monstrosity" — terminology borrowed from Ricoeur's analysis of original sin. Presence cannot be thought of substantively, he argues, but only in a narrative framework of remembrance and expectation or, we might add, in the present consideration, of action and potency: of what divine agency has accomplished and promised henceforth to fulfill. The suspension of the Eucharist between the double *parousia* "reminds us that, from the point of view of ancient tradition, of which liturgy continues to let us hear the echo, the category of 'memory' is far more important than that of 'presence,' and that, from the properly Christian point of view, the second asks to be understood from the first."⁸⁷

Chauvet's narrative account of the Eucharist, moreover, insists upon the fact that the body of Christ is only given as presence *for* others, that is, for the sake of communion. Sacramental presence, paradoxically, is a phenomenon enacted and suffered; the body of Christ is given to be broken and received. Surprisingly, he even sees the reification of the Eucharist, in its reservation and adoration, as imploding the static ontology it might at first be thought to imply. This is so, because the very incongruity between the particularity and givenness of the Eucharist and the one of whom it is said to be the body preserves its liminality as the "symbolic expression of this 'always greater' or rather of this 'always more other' which the apophatic tradition has attempted to express on the theoretical level by affecting its affirmations on God by a negative petitioner of super-eminence."⁸⁸ As we shall see in Chapter 5, this insight has ramifications also for how one may appreciate the kind of sacramentality to which the GBW attests.

87. Louis-Marie Chauvet, "The Broken Bread as Theological Figure of Eucharistic Presence," in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context*, ed. L. Boeve and L. Leijssen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 253. There can never be a complete synthesis, moreover, of these categories: "Would not the keeping of a distance between the confession of faith and the result of phenomenological mediation be in fact the condition for the eucharist not to become an idol?" (Chauvet, *op. cit.*, 256).

88. Chauvet, *op. cit.*, 257.

Secondly, if the Eucharist may be plausibly categorized in terms of a Ricoeurian understanding of the body, as an initial sign of the alterity within divine selfhood, the fact that, as Chauvet argues, it is offered to us in *dialogue* connotes the solicitude by which Ricoeur marks alterity's second remove. For after all, the one given in the Eucharist is not only acclaimed as the *Word*, but is encountered as a partner in the liturgical conversation: one who speaks, and is spoken to. And this conversation is itself predicated on that of the Scriptures, as the witness to the communication of the divine self with the world. In the inscription of dialogue in the Scriptures, restored to "living speech" in liturgy, we find exemplified that passivity of the self which Ricoeur insists is ubiquitous on the linguistic plane, inasmuch as "every participant [in the speech situation] is affected by the speech addressed to him or her." He explains: "[T]he self-designation of the agent of action appear[s] to be inseparable from the ascription by another, who designates me in the accusative as the author of my actions. In this exchange between ascription in the second person and self-designation, one can say that the reflexive recovery of this being-affected by the ascription pronounced by others is intertwined with the intimate ascription of action to oneself."⁸⁹ Is not an intuition of this ontological significance of language represented by the esteem with which Orthodox theology regards Mary, as the one whose *fiat* in some sense *affected* God, by effecting the Incarnation? Or to return to Ricoeur's cherished Exodus pericope: to what extent may one say that the revelation of the Name illustrates the divine agency suffering to be questioned, being compelled to designate itself by the address of another?

To apply this to liturgy, it is as though the very condescension by which, according to Scripture, God deigns to speak with humanity—upon which possibility liturgy as prayer, as communication with God, is predicated—affects all parties concerned. And one may go further, resuming Ugolnik's treatment of Bakhtin above, where he stressed the fragmentation of persona in liturgical speech, on which account self-designation by the worshippers

89. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 329.

frequently involves ascription to themselves of the very words of God.⁹⁰ Just as in the Eucharist the body of Christ suffers assimilation to the bodies of others, so in the liturgical idiom, the words of God are transferred to another. To the objection that the fluidity of self-designation symptomatic of the liturgical idiom is a purely rhetorical phenomenon, without ontological contours, we may adduce Ricoeur's contention that through the imaginative variations on ascription afforded by fiction—in this instance, poetic/religious discourse—the self returns to the practical field transformed: "It thus appears that the affection of the self by the other than self finds in fiction a privileged milieu for thought experiments that cannot be eclipsed by the 'real' relations of interlocution and interaction. Quite the opposite, the reception of works of fiction contributes to the imaginary and symbolic constitution of the actual exchanges of words and actions. Being-affected in the fictive mode is therefore incorporated into the self's being-affected in the 'real' mode."⁹¹

Finally, with regard to Ricoeur's third mode of passivity, that of conscience, we mused whether it would be appropriate to view divine selfhood as patient to such an analogue in the other of the Holy Spirit. That is, can we view the Holy Spirit as in some sense the conscience of God? Briefly, we may note that such a relation suits Ricoeur's description of conscience as, on the one hand, irreducible, and, on the other, something that manifests itself in and through the otherness of others. It is displayed obliquely, that is, as an attestation to the self elicited by the experience of another.⁹² Do we perhaps meet something similar in the frequency with which the Spirit is said to bear witness? It is even given for humanity to prompt the Spirit in its intercession with God—fulfilling the dual roles Ricoeur assigns the conscience of attestation

90. Anthony Ugnolnik, "Textual Liturgics," 138–39.

91. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 330. David Klemm explains this dynamic, in discussing how biblical reading transforms the reader: the naming of God inverts the normal pattern of reading, since instead of my interpreting him, he ends up interpreting me. What I feel in the process, moreover, also bears upon how I act *post factum*, since metaphor effects both affective and cognitive disclosure: "In the act of appropriating the specifically metaphorical level of meaning—in which the 'I' claims the emergent meaning as its own and is restructured affectively accordingly—the real possibility for a positive change of heart appears" ("Philosophy and Kerygma," 64).

92. See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 351–55.

and injunction—thereby inserting a moment of reflection, we might say, into the divine agency: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”⁹³

It would be hazardous to continue much further along this vector of speculation, whose purpose has only been to indicate a potential application of Ricoeur’s thought to the matter of liturgical subjectivity. As St. Gregory of Nazianzus’s caveat has it: “Not to everyone, my friends, does it belong to philosophize about; not to everyone; the Subject is not so cheap and low.”⁹⁴ Yet perhaps it has not been an altogether inappropriate excursus, insofar as the liturgical idiom’s naming of God, and imputation of agency to him, does beg the question of the selfhood of the same; if the specificity of religious discourse is to be discerned in the ontological vehemence of its naming of God, the question surely arises as to the identity of the one in whose image, according to the biblical testimony, humanity is made. It is to this notion of testimony or attestation, as a mode of truth, that we now turn.

Truth as Attestation

According to Ricoeur, as has by now become evident, we come to a knowledge of ourselves, and indeed of all things, by following the “long route” of signs and symbols, metaphors and narratives. There is no *a priori* grasping of truth—although there is an intuitive guess in its regard—but only the arduous path of the imaginative exploration of, and eventual ontological validation of, possible worlds.⁹⁵ This dual sense of *description* of a world of

93. Romans 8:26-27 (KJV).

94. First Theological Oration, § III, in *The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus*, eds. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7: 1894), 25.

95. While postmodern philosophy is often accused of fomenting a dangerous “perspectivism” with regard to truth claims, Stiver argues that this is in fact not the case. Rather, the idea that the only alternative to a total knowledge is utter relativism, is itself a *modern* and not a *postmodern* assumption. Postmodernism instead presumes that agreement on truth can be obtained, but never comprehensively or definitively: never with an objectivity that is not subjectively situated. Contemporary truth-claims thus operate in a different mode than their modern predecessors in that they pass *through* traditions rather than *around* them. See Dan. R. Stiver, *op. cit.*, 211–12.

meaning, and *subscription* to it in the form of a corresponding way of life is conveyed by the notion of truth as “attestation.” Stiver explains that for Ricoeur “symbols are lacking apart from some affirmation that concretizes them. In other words, apart from a witness, someone to embody the symbols and something about which the witness testifies, symbols lack ‘historical density.’”⁹⁶

It is through only attestation therefore, rather than through a process of argumentation capable of establishing its own veracity, that certain claims to truth obtain. This is, I think, an elaboration of what is at one level a matter of common sense, namely, that whereas one’s syllogisms may be in order, they require a premise upon which to treat, which premise itself cannot be established syllogistically. Ricoeur observes in this respect:

To my mind, attestation defines the sort of certainty that hermeneutics may claim, not only with respect to the epistemic exaltation of the cogito in Descartes, but also with respect to its humiliation in Nietzsche and his successors. Attestation may appear to require less than one and more than the other...Attestation presents itself first, in fact, as a kind of belief. But it is not a doxic belief, in the sense in which *doxa* (belief) has less standing than *episteme* (science, or better, knowledge). Whereas doxic belief is implied in the grammar of “I believe-that,” attestation belongs to the grammar of “I believe-in.” It thus links up with testimony, as the etymology reminds us, inasmuch as it is in the speech of the one giving testimony that one believes.⁹⁷

What is germane here with respect to liturgy, is that while the primary meaning of *doxa*, as Ricoeur indicates, is such knowledge as is less than secure, mere “opinion,” it has a secondary connotation of knowledge held in common by others regarding oneself, i.e., one’s reputation or glory, as explicated in our discussion of Jaroslav Pelikan’s commentary on the matter in

96. Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 197.

97. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

Chapter 1. Recall that the infinitive *doxazein* was shown to denote not only “to hold an opinion,” but also “to glorify.” I would broach the possibility, therefore, that the doxological knowledge afforded by liturgy constitutes the kind of truth eligible for the designation “attestation,” given its adoption of the “the grammar of ‘I believe-in.’” For the Nicene Creed—recited in the Eucharist of all the classical Rites—invites one to express belief “*in* one God, the Father Almighty...*in* one Lord Jesus Christ...*in* the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life...[and] *in* one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church,” a belief warranted by the testimony of the saints whose very lives bear the burden of its consequences.

According to van den Hengel, Ricoeur is attempting in *OAA* a reinterpretation of Aristotle’s modes of being, “being-true” and “being-false,” with attestation falling under the sign of the former, “suspicion,” of the latter.⁹⁸ Concurring with the correspondence just mentioned between attestation and the testimony furnished in and by the Creed, van den Hengel expounds: “Against the deconstructionists Ricoeur maintains that, despite the lack of an absolute guarantee of truth, there is a confidence—an unverifiable confidence—in the self, in what the self says, and in what the self believes it can do. The self, in other words, exists as a belief, as a ‘*fiancee*,’ as an assurance of truthfulness. Ricoeur calls it a ‘*mode aléthique*,’ a truthful mode, which expresses not so much ‘I believe that...’ but, as in the creedal formula, ‘I believe in...’”⁹⁹

Further light is shed on the operations of this “truthful mode” in the rumination of Jean Ladrière that there is a peculiar relationship between the illocutionary force of the creedal affirmation “I believe” and the truth-value of the propositions to which it is directed. Truth in this context is, in one sense, *recognized* (as evidence which imposes itself on the believer) but also, in another, *constituted* by the very fact of being professed, because “the evidence which

98. “But in attestation the self expresses the assurance that, in spite of suspicion, meaning and the self are possible. Truth here is not necessarily verifiable truth. Attestation is the self in its commitment to the world. Attestation is the self as Care” (van den Hengel, “*OAA* and Practical Theology,” 471).

99. van den Hengel, “*OAA* and Practical Theology,” 471.

intervenes here is a kind of visibility accessible only to the act of faith, as connoting at the same time an intervention of our faculty of understanding and an intervention of the will, which brings into this complex act that moment of decision by virtue of which, precisely, what was at first sight the simple presentation of a possibility becomes the self-manifestation of a reality.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, the person enunciating the Creed is both describing and subscribing, processes inseparable if not indistinguishable, because an authentic description of the credal datum cannot but involve a corollary subscription, after the fashion of St. Thomas’s acclamation to the risen Christ: “My Lord and my God!”¹⁰¹

The epistemological quandary to which Ladrière draws our attention is effectively that while propositions can be said to be true if and when they correspond to facts, the latter are ever subject to interpretation. Reality does not divide without remainder into language, we might say. One remembers in this connection Nietzsche’s famous aphorism, “There are no facts, only interpretations,” mirrored in the sober assessment of David Novak: “At the ontological level, both philosophy and theology are universal inasmuch as they both make assertions about the entire cosmos. Both are also particular inasmuch as they both stem from the constructions of cosmic reality by particular cultures, cultures that locate their origins in revelation given to them. Each then is universal in principle, but particular in fact.”¹⁰²

Ladrière continues, arguing that because the propositions of the Creed are not of the empirical order and hence cannot be referred to by a demonstrative gesture,¹⁰³ the one confessing the Creed contributes to the meaning of the propositions by the interpretation he or she gives them, determining in consequence the respective function of the notion of truth:

100. Jean Ladrière, “Meaning and Truth in Theology,” in *The Linguistic Turn and Contemporary Theology: Essays on the Theme with an Introduction by Michael J. Scanlon*, ed. George Kilcourse, Current Issues in Theology 2 (Macon, GA: Catholic Theological Society of America, 1987), 9.

101. John 20:28 (NRSV).

102. David Novak, “,” in *Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2005), 232.

103. We noted above C.S. Lewis’ observation that all but the most mundane uses of language depend upon metaphor, and hence are not subject to literal demonstration.

"Thus the truth which is recognized is, so to speak, an active truth, which transforms the existential condition of the speaker who proclaims it. As what is described in the very process of that transformation, it can be said that the meaning, in this context, is its own actualization, the becoming of its truth, and that its truth is its fulfillment: it is in the measure in which the meaning of what is proclaimed becomes effectively active in the life of faith that it receives its truth."¹⁰⁴

One realizes immediately, however, that such a way of casting the matter augurs the plague of relativism, not to say nihilism. The obvious rejoinder is whether it does not perforce reduce the act of faith into a beneficent delusion—from which the better part of humanity suffers in its adhesion to multitudinous, contradictory religious propositions. And yet it is not readily apparent how one might serve a logical, if not moral, riposte to Ladrière: surely he is correct in insisting that empirical verifiability cannot suffice for matters that by their very nature abide either wholly on another level, or straddle the divide between the perceptible and the imperceptible.

We are thus thrown back, it seems, upon the "fact" of manifestation—and the truth it conjures through the workings of the imagination. As the author has it, truth in matters religious ultimately, inexorably, links up with testimony: "In the last analysis, the ultimate criterion of truth, in general, must be an experience in which what is said is recognized as expressing adequately something which is manifest. The last foundation of truth is a manifestation."¹⁰⁵ True, faith originates in an event, but this event must be mediated to present faith by the testimony of others, which must exert an appeal, exercise an attraction, upon those it would persuade. Nonetheless, as Ladrière skillfully shows (in a manner reminiscent of the inversion performed by Ricoeur in "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics"),¹⁰⁶ the specificity of the Christian testimony offers what we might call a sort of

104. Ladrière, *op. cit.*, 11.

105. *Ibid.*

106. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 89–104.

shock-therapy to those laid low by the malaise of hermeneutical melancholy. To wit: because Christ, uniquely, calls *himself* “the truth,” he is disclosed as the foundation of all other truth-claims; his testimony is not to an extrinsic reality but to rather to himself and, therefore, our use of the such terms as “truth, and “word,” rather than serving as the basis for an analogy in which Christ is taken as “Truth” and “Word,” finds itself unexpectedly bollixed. *Our* use instead is discovered to be a participation in *his* reality; he constitutes the referent of our analogies.

Does such a contention amount to fideism? Is one left without room for autonomous rational inquiry? Ladrière will not go so far, acknowledging only the primacy of the discourse of faith, with which second-order discourse must reckon as best as it can. The latter cannot get a foothold above the former, as it were, but must follow *pari passu*. Its claims are subject to perennial contestation and revision forasmuch as “a categorical scheme is never the ultimate truth.” Here the author quotes the Whiteheadian dictum, “Every philosophy, in its turn, will be deposed,”¹⁰⁷ but one might also aptly cite C.S. Lewis’s remonstrance: “[W]e have no abiding city even in philosophy: all passes, except the Word.”¹⁰⁸ However feasible in principle it might be to abstract and systematize the object of faith, it is never disclosed in its actuality save in the first-order testimony of/to revelation—a testimony which always already compels a corresponding existential stance.¹⁰⁹ And it is the power of this stance to sustain the self, its attestation to what van den Hengel calls the “unverifiable confidence...in what the self says, and in what the self believes it can do,” that renders it so formidable.

107. Ladrière, op. cit., 15.

108. C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume 2*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), 176.

109. We should add, however, that for Ladrière, even the descriptive language of theology has ontological vehemence, to the extent that constative utterances themselves have illocutionary force and therefore imply a commitment on the part of the utterer: there is no pure distinction between such utterances and obviously performative utterances because since assertions imply the existential commitment, “I believe this.” He writes, “And so it appears that in the case of the most simple statement, as well in the cases of overt self-implications, there is some form of implication of the subject, who compromises himself, so to speak, by the way in which he interprets the state of affairs to which his assertion refers. The speaker is not neutral with respect to the situation which he describes.” (Ladrière, op. cit., 3).

We shall return to this theme presently, in our treatment below of the self's recognition of its own capacities. Here, however, it is appropriate to single out the intimate relation between "attestation" and the testimony offered by the martyr, which Ricoeur evaluates in his most important work on testimony prior to *OAA*, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," declaring: "This engagement, this risk assumed by the witness, reflects on testimony itself which, in turn, signifies something other than a simple narration of things seen. Testimony is also the engagement of a pure heart and an engagement to the death."¹¹⁰ Testimony at its limit, therefore, both includes and surpasses narrative, since the martyr gives a self-effacing witness, by his or her death, to the "narration of things seen."¹¹¹ And yet this witness is itself subsequently transmitted pre-eminently through narrative inscription. That is, we typically adjudicate a martyr's testimony—if not occupying the place of first-hand witnesses—by rehearsing it through our own narratives *about* him or her. Now Ricoeur portrays testimony as marked by irreducibility: although we can and must contest any narrative set forth with universal intent, we cannot for all that get behind it or render it univocal. To the contrary, it must be confronted, if challenged, in all its particularity. This resumes the issue of biblical polyphony, treated in Chapter 2, since examples of testimony such as biblical prophecy possess increased *gravitas* in respect of their claim to proceed from a divine initiative. There it is primarily God who bears witness, the prophet in turn appropriating the divine testimony by doubling its first-person ascription.

Like the narratives of the martyrs, the narratives of the liturgy invite a judgement for or against the validity, the authenticity, of their claims. Like the narratives of biblical prophecy, the stakes are high because the liturgy claims to be fundamentally the action of God himself,

110. Ricoeur, *On Biblical Interpretation*, 130.

111. Possibly because of Ricoeur's wish to make *OAA* an autonomous philosophical discourse, there is no reprise there of this important theme. Van den Hengel remarks, apropos of the specificity of the religious witness: "Attestation links the witness and the conviction: it is the self enjoined and challenged to be the bearer of a promise or hope. But philosophy cannot cross the broad ditch from the idea of the absolute to the investment of a moment of history with an absolute character. Christian theology does" (van den Hengel, "OAA and Practical Theology," 474).

the work of the whole Christ, *caput et membra*. We ourselves give witness by acceding, or not, to the divine testimony. It is important here that Ricoeur, in his endeavour to explain, never explains *away*: “[He] takes great care not to reduce that which is beyond the self, pre-eminently God, to a possession of the self. In this sense, he does not shy away at all from saying that when God is encountered, the encounter is mediated *by* the imagination, but this does not mean that the meaning of God *is* the imagination—or even that texts about God are produced solely by the imagination.”¹¹² Similarly, there is no guarantee that the liturgical celebration by which we attest to the divine witness is not duplicitous; it is only proved authentic by a life steadfast in its appropriation of the truth to which it ritually subscribes. At stake is a wager contingent upon an eschatological outcome.

Finally, it is worth adverting to the apparition of what Stiver deems a *passé*, modernist *Zeitgeist*, in the stark contrast painted by Ricoeur between the potential subjectivity of attestation (expressed in the grammar of “I believe-that”) and the putatively objective knowledge of science. Postmodernity, according to the former, is marked rather by the protestation that science itself is not an edifice supported by what Ricoeur calls “self-founding knowledge,” but rather by the scaffolding of particular prejudices whose validity is also hermeneutical. We encountered a like phantom in Chapter 2, in the course of our rumination on the facticity of metaphorical reference; there Ricoeur made a similar distinction as here, positing a sharp contrast between first- and second-order discourse, the former being in his parlance an index to the actual world of manipulable things treated by scientific inquiry, the latter, to the non-ostensive, but nonetheless real, realm of our ownmost possibilities.¹¹³ Stiver

112. Dan. R. Stiver, *op. cit.*, 217.

113. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 222. Klemm neatly summarizes Ricoeur’s claim: “Literary or poetic texts overturn the reference of descriptive texts to an actual world and manifest in its place a possible world as a redescription of the actual world. They do so through the metaphorical process at the level of the text: the “is not” of the literal meaning evokes an “is like” of figurative meaning, which projects a network of meaningful connections— a “world of the text”— as the horizon for a possible “mode of being.” In other words, through the metaphorical process the poetic text is a model of the imagination that has the capacity to redescribe reality in the mode of possibility through semantic innovation” (Klemm, *op. cit.*, 62).

thus alleges that “Ricoeur seems to appeal to what we might call a pre-Kuhnian understanding of science (in honor of Thomas Kuhn’s hermeneutical turn in the 1960s, seeing the sciences as interpretive and shaped by history and context much like the humanities). Kuhn has been followed in large part by contemporary philosophy of science....[This argues that] science is situated in history, is constructed, involves the imagination along with metaphorical models, is socially embedded, and is affected by power and ideology.”¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, this “blind spot” acts only to augment the value of Ricoeur’s estimation of attestation, as again with respect to metaphor. Testimony, which may be validated, but not verified in an absolute sense, is now accorded jurisdiction throughout the domain of knowledge. While holding a quasi-empirical stake on experience—van den Hengel notes such truth is not, in Ricoeur’s judgement, psychological but rather epistemological¹¹⁵—it is yet vulnerable to critique, and in the end must be substantiated by action: “Attestation is not totally clear, always faces the restriction of suspicion, and allows for the expansion of a surplus of meaning. It never escapes the conflict of interpretation but is a risk, backed by one’s life, looking forward to vindication in hope.”¹¹⁶

The Role of Recognition

To review our itinerary thus far: Ricoeur argues for a notion of a corporally situated self, narratively mediated, intrinsically communitarian, validating its authenticity through claims to truth which it is prepared to actualize through suffering. It is a self which confesses, as it were: “*Spero ut intelligam.*” My own position has been that the shape of this personal identity is deeply congruent with that presupposed by, and proposed within, the liturgical *Gestalt*.

In the remainder of this chapter I would like to canvass Ricoeur’s inquiry into the phenomenon of recognition, since it serves as a central node for the interface of his

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114. Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 225.

115. van den Hengel, “OAA and Practical Theology,” 471.

116. Dan. R. Stiver, op. cit., 205.

determinations concerning selfhood and attestation, whence they can be effectively channelled toward a liturgical application. He describes his course, starting from a discovery of the rich polysemy of the verb “to recognize” (especially the contrast between its active and passive forms), as “the passage from recognition-identification, where the thinking subject claims to master meaning, to mutual recognition, where the subject places him- or herself under the tutelage of a relationship of reciprocity, in passing through self-recognition in the variety of capacities that modulate one’s ability to act, one’s ‘agency.’”¹¹⁷

We catch a glimpse of the liturgical horizon onto which this passage opens when Ricoeur, endeavouring to locate mutual recognition elsewhere than in the “struggle for recognition” (haunted as this ever is by the spectre of violence), calls attention to two interrelated occurrences which eschew this struggle, namely, “states of peace” and “gift exchanges.” Of the first he asserts, “The thesis I want to argue for can be summed up as follows: The alternative to the idea of struggle in the process of mutual recognition is to be sought in peaceful experiences of mutual recognition, based on symbolic mediations as exempt from the juridical as from the commercial order of exchange.”¹¹⁸ In Western culture, Ricoeur proceeds, the supreme state of peace is that connoted by the biblically- and theologically-contoured term *agape*, expressing as this does the mystery of the *gift*.¹¹⁹ It is in the state of peace generated in and through the “paradox of the gift and the gift in return,” therefore, that one can discern within the “struggle” for mutual recognition an inherently *benevolent* motivation.

Now liturgy arguably qualifies as the consummation, in the Christian tradition, of this peace-inducing, ceremonial gift exchange. The principal service in all the classical Rites of the Church is of course the great “thanksgiving” wherein, in a triple exchange, bread and wine, the

117. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 248.

118. *Ibid.*, 219.

119. “The paradox of the gift and the gift in return will constitute in this regard the polemical site par excellence where the unilateralness of *agape* will be able to exercise its critical function with regard to a logic of reciprocity that transcends the discrete acts of individuals in the situation of an exchange of gifts. In this way the ground will be cleared for an interpretation of the mutuality of the gift founded on the idea of symbolic recognition” (Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 219–20).

fruits of the divine munificence in creation, are themselves presented as gifts to God from whom they are subsequently pneumatically received back as the gift of God's own self—only to be offered again in sacrifice, ultimately to be shared by all as the gift of communion in the divine life. Other services, however, also emulate this paradigm to varying degrees, inasmuch as they embody a sacrifice of praise, an offering of thanksgiving, in response to the myriad gift of life.

Recognition, Reading, Ritual

A backward reading of *The Course of Recognition*, that is, one beginning with *mutual recognition*, is encouraged by Ricoeur himself in the conclusion to the work, where he seeks to reintegrate his analyses of recognition back into a general discussion of alterity. "In a word, the figures of alterity are innumerable on the plane of mutual recognition," he writes, although he has chosen to privilege the manner in which the "struggle for recognition"—the fact of "social competition" between people compelled to justify their standing within the "plurality of cities or worlds" they inhabit—can end in a truce through the reconciliation fomented by occasions of "shared generosity."¹²⁰

Given that Ricoeur views the struggle for recognition as preceding the mutual recognition induced by the exchange of gifts, it may be pertinent to adduce Martin Blanchard's complaint, namely that Ricoeur falls into the "commonplace error of situating the hermeneutical understanding of interacting selves before the communicative moment."¹²¹ As evidence of this misdemeanor he tenders Ricoeur's decision to treat the theme of "the capable human being" prior to that of "making space for the other." What I retain from Blanchard is that there does seem to be no particular reason why the ceremonial exchange of gifts must be perceived as a truce, a momentary pause within the battle, rather than as an originary state.

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120. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 251.

121. Martin Blanchard, "Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (Review)," *Ethics* 117, no. 2 (January 2007): 375.

In point of fact, according to Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart, the biblical vision is distinguished precisely by a primordial gratuitousness, displayed in the act of creation and fulfilled in a disposition of welcome: “an openness before glory, a willingness to orient one’s will toward the light of being, and to receive the world as gift, in response to which the most fully ‘adequate’ discourse of truth is worship, prayer, and rejoicing.”¹²² In other words, if the state of peace linked by Ricoeur with the economy of the gift may, sociologically speaking, not infrequently be purchased only at the price of conflict, there are surely figures of mutuality in which struggle has not played such a role. If the extravagant hospitality offered to a stranger in many traditional cultures is an eloquent witness in this respect, so too is that extended by liturgy, in its sharing of the divine welcome. For there the exchange of gifts is the normative rather than exceptional event. Not that mutual recognition is, or ever could be, guaranteed by liturgical action, as if its very gratuitousness could be controlled, but rather that in liturgy, as in hospitality, mutuality is a presupposition rather than a conclusion. In entering a liturgical assembly, for example, one is *ipso facto* addressed as a member of a community, alternatively greeted, exhorted and blessed in the second person, and invited to add one’s own voice to the responses enunciated in the first person. Liturgical action presents itself phenomenologically, in the words of Ricoeur, as belonging to that form of “non-commercial reciprocity marked by what is without price.”¹²³

Moreover, because Orthodox tradition holds the liturgy to be in fact the very work of God himself, acting in and through those who celebrate, there is additional reason to associate it with Ricoeur’s invocation of *agape* as the figure *par excellence* of the exchange of gifts, a figure he says is better spoken of as “a response to a call coming from the generosity of the first gift.”¹²⁴ As in the Johannine admission, “We love because he first loved us”¹²⁵ so also the work

122. Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 132.

123. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 251.

124. *Ibid.*, 243.

125. 1 John 4:19 (NAB).

of the liturgy is, from a theological perspective, pure gift. At the risk of sounding abstruse, it is the gift of being enabled to efficaciously integrate one's own giving into the divine self-donation.¹²⁶ Tradition names this latter *perichoresis*, an ineffably mutual "interweaving dance" of love, which is said, paradoxically, to characterize the unfathomable inner life of the Trinity. As Hart opines, "The Christian understanding of God as Trinity, without need of the world even for his determination as difference, relatedness, or manifestation, for the first time confronted Western thought with a genuine discourse of transcendence...The event of being, for beings, is a gift in an absolute sense, into whose mysteries no *scala naturae* by itself grants us proper entry."¹²⁷

Liturgical Attestation and the Capacity for God

Let us turn to the phase of self-recognition. In what ways does the liturgy allow for everyone to, in Ricoeur's words, "receive the full assurance of his or her identity, thanks to the recognition by others of each person's range of capacities"?¹²⁸ For it is terms of capacities for action, or agency, that Ricoeur locates the fruition of self-recognition, specifically in terms of the attestation by the individual that he or she is the author of his or her own actions. I follow here Ricoeur's review of these capacities in the conclusion of his text, where he is keen to respect the manner in which each capacity is simultaneously reflexive and oriented toward alterity. In brief, they include the capacity to speak, to act and to narrate, i.e., to attribute to oneself one's actions and thereby assume responsibility for them. He reserves his choice reflections, however, for the capacities of remembering and promising, which "have the virtue of revealing the temporal dimension of each of the powers considered." Memory allows for an extension of oneself into the past, promising, into the future, and both faculties carry the

126. Thus the Byzantine Rite Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts boldly exclaims, "[You] have *revealed* to us the service of this liturgy" (Raya and de Vinck, op. cit., 381).

127. Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 130–31.

128. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 250.

connotation of alterity: memories solicit the corroboration of another, while promising implies “standing before another person.”¹²⁹

In the liturgical context, do we not invoke an additional capacity—or better, a *metacapacity*—transformative of those itemized by Ricoeur in a manner analogous to how root metaphors, on his reckoning, “assemble” other metaphors and “scatter” them again at a higher level?¹³⁰ For the “capable human being” is showcased there as one who is *capax Dei*, “capable of God.” Indeed, for Alexander Schmemmann, the primary definition for humankind ought not to be *homo sapiens* or *homo faber*, their merit notwithstanding, but rather *homo adorans*. Why? Because the preternatural vocation of the human person is first and foremost doxological, encompassing the blessing of God on behalf of the world, the world, on behalf of God.¹³¹ This art of benediction, iconified in the liturgy, sounds a call to become capable of God, to speak to him, to act in his presence, to remember his mighty deeds and to promise to live in the light of them.¹³²

The liturgical actant is thus rendered a species of Ricoeur’s “summoned subject,” i.e., a self “constituted and defined by its position as respondent to propositions of meaning issuing

129. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 254. As van den Hengel clarifies, in a piece on OAA also apposite to the present consideration: “[Ricoeur] insists that the speaker of a language and the agent of action both make a commitment to the real that takes them beyond themselves. In a constative proposition a speaker affirms, ‘This is so.’ Similarly, in a promissive proposition an agent commits, ‘This I will do.’ This is the ‘ontological vehemence’ of the speaker or agent. The speaker and the agent make an affirmation not only about reality and about the world of action but also about a mode of existence of the self. This mode of existence of the self Ricoeur names ‘attestation’” (“Can There be a Science of Human Action?” in *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity*, ed. Richard A. Cohen and James L. Marsh [Albany: State University of New York, 2002], 87).

130. “[Root metaphors] have the power to bring together the partial metaphors borrowed from the diverse fields of our experience and thereby to assure them a kind of equilibrium. On the other hand, they have the ability to engender a conceptual diversity, I mean, an unlimited number of potential interpretations at a conceptual level” (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 64).

131. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

132. Apposite here is van den Hengel’s assessment of Ricoeur’s view of the religious dimension of the human condition: “For Ricoeur, religion is at heart the regeneration of the capacity of the human. It is his conviction that religion’s primary power is to remedy or liberate human capacity, that is, the originary goodness of the human. He knows only too well that because of the density and opaqueness of this liberation, religion achieves this only symbolically and promises it only eschatologically, that is, in fragments. In other words, the exploration of the language of evil and the Naming of God ultimately become a practical exploration of the capacity of the human as agent and patient. This is very helpful to the theologian, who has only too frequently struggled to create an adequate link between the transcendent and the human” (“Naming the Unspeakable,” 265).

from the symbolic network [of the tradition].”¹³³ This subject imputes to him- or herself a personal responsibility for what is attested in common—a responsibility that is exercised at once to others and to the Other inasmuch as to take onto one’s lips and into one’s hands the words and gestures of the rite is to entertain the respective ethical demands that may ensue. Liturgical celebration likewise induces an augmentation of both memory and promising: what emerges is the imperative to retrieve for one’s own the memories of the community ensconced in the rite, as also to appropriate the promises ritually uttered.

Although the liturgical attestation leading to self-recognition as a “summoned subject” does not actually correspond to any one of the three biblical/hagiographical figures selected by Ricoeur in his final Gifford lecture on that theme,¹³⁴ another candidate may yet qualify. In liturgy the subject-in-community is summoned not on the plane of the Old Testament prophet, mandated to communicate a divine message; nor that of the New Testament disciple, called to the *imitatio Christi*; nor yet that of St. Augustine, inspired to hearken to the voice of the “inner teacher.” Instead, the summons is one shared by all of the cosmos and more, by the unseen host of angels and saints, a *doxological* summons to “not conceal God’s benevolence.” Such a call resounds continuously throughout the book of Psalms and, as we shall see below, is deployed in full force throughout the GBW.

Assymetry in the Course of Liturgical Recognition

To conclude this chapter, I would like to enter into Ricoeur’s discussion of the assymetry abiding at the heart of recognition. He is quick to caution that his privileged occasion, the exchange of gifts, belies an essential asymmetry between its protagonists—one which must not be forgotten, lest the paradox of the gift be reduced to an economy of *quid pro quo* in which the personhood of giver and receiver alike is effaced. That is to say, there is a uniqueness in every exchange of gifts which is inscrutable, insofar as the moment itself is

133. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 262.

134. *Ibid.*, 262–78.

unrepeatable *sui generis*, resistant to insertion into a *system*. In Ricoeur's words, "Forgetting this asymmetry, thanks to the success of analyses of mutual recognition, would constitute the ultimate misrecognition at the very heart of actual experiences of recognition."¹³⁵ He elucidates this as follows:

Admitting the threat that lies in forgetting this dissymmetry first calls attention to the irreplaceable character of each of the partners in the exchange. The one is not the other. We exchange gifts but not places. The second benefit of this admission is that it protects mutuality against the pitfalls of a fusional union, whether in love, friendship, or fraternity on a communal or cosmopolitan scale. A just distance is maintained at the heart of mutuality, a just distance that integrates respect into intimacy.¹³⁶

Now the temptation to forget this asymmetry is poignantly countered in a liturgical context by the very absence, as it were, of the Other with whom the exchange of gifts, and hence mutual recognition, is supposed to occur. For of course the face, freighted by Lévinas with the very task of revealing the otherness of the Other, cannot be beheld. Rather, all that is unveiled, after the pattern of Moses on Mt. Sinai, is the glory, the *shekinah*, of the Lord, and this from behind. Moreover, this glory itself, altogether gratuitous and sublime—a "limit-experience," as we advanced above—may only be accessed, if not undergone in person, through the testimony of another. Proof of life, so to speak, concerning the existence of the absent Other, is granted only in the words and actions of the rite, factoring in the legacy of the Scriptures while exceeding it: horizontally, by the inclusion of other literary genres (hymns, litanies, prayers, blessings) proper to the liturgical tradition; and vertically, by the conversion of all of the textual traces into a ritual medium addressed to the whole person.

135. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 261.

136. *Ibid.*, 263.

As for the integrating of respect into intimacy, if it is perhaps a condition with which the mystic may dispense, in the rapture of ecstasy, it nonetheless finds ample ratification within the liturgy. For the articulation of distance in the liturgical idiom is, paradoxically, the precondition for any expression of intimacy. That is to say, it is in the very naming of God as radically Other that a space opens up for a metaphorical approach. Recall in this connection our discussion in Chapter 2 of the dialectic between the apophatic and kataphatic typical of Byzantine hymnography. There we uncovered that the Byzantine liturgical idiom revels in the frequent invocation of paradoxical attributions, juxtaposing florid embellishments of episodes either laconically recounted in the Bible or lifted *in toto* from extra-biblical literature, with a speculative “naming” of God not easily reconcilable to the way of affirmation.

Here we may add that the liturgical subject encounters scandal not only in the naming of God, but in the manner in which space and time are impossibly collapsed in the liturgy, with past being recognized as present, the events in question, as occurring in the “today” (*sémeron*) of the celebration *hic et nunc*. This applies analogously on a spatial plane, with the river, lake or seaside before which the congregation gathers, in the GBW, becoming in virtue of the prototypical Jordan River a fluid *axis mundi*. In this connection, therefore, the operation of recognition-identification is, one may say, brought to the brink, in a subjective movement paralleling the objective dialectic of kataphasis and apophasis promoted by the rite. As mutual recognition within the liturgy involves the striving for mutuality with the invisible; and self-attestation calls for a recognition of capacities ordinarily felt to be mute if not absent; so with regard to the very faculties of sense as these apprehend time, space and matter, the course of liturgical recognition is ultimately one that runs inexorably toward the Ricoeurian “limit experience.”

In regard to the phenomenon of misrecognition, Ricoeur speaks of the need to come to terms with “the fallibility of the credit given to the appearance of what is perceived, which

Merleau-Ponty called a kind of faith or primordial opinion."¹³⁷ Given the polysemy of *doxa*, explained above, can one perhaps identify this phenomenological "faith" as subterraneously joined to what we might call a *doxological* risk? Ricoeur asserts that the course of recognition involves the risk that one will misrecognize something, thereby misrecognize oneself and others and hence experience "self-deception." Recognition, then, remains a humble enterprise, it would seem, unable to attain to a totalizing perspective free of doubt. To combat the "threat of failure," the "fear of error," Ricoeur counsels an "acceptance of a kind of companionship with misunderstanding, which goes with the ambiguities of an incomplete, open-ended life world."¹³⁸ He indicates subsequently the manner in which the very power to act that enables self-recognition labours under the shadow of incapacity, of limitations and liabilities. Speech suffers from being found inadequate to the task of articulating experience; memory, from forgetfulness; promising, from perjury.

For a theology of the liturgy, however, such a conclusion is felicitous, for it preserves a space for what the Christian tradition has called grace. One only and ever employs, for example, the blessed matter of the GBW in faith, at the risk of taking it for something it is not, with the "fear of being mistaken" ready at the door. Liturgy fosters the acceptance of an "open-ended life world" because it lays forth the world as always *more* than we can grasp. There is no mastery of the meaning of the Eucharist, or of any sacrament or sacramental, such as holy water, but only an *aporia*, traversed in the wager of a Ricoeurian surplus of meaning, itself only validated in respect of the "narrative unity of a life." The wager is, in sum, that by following the course of the liturgy, one will ultimately come to a place of mutual recognition with the one who, in the words of the GBW, "while remaining boundless, without beginning and beyond all words, deigned to come down upon earth, to assume the likeness of a servant, and to become like man."¹³⁹

137. Ibid., 256.

138. Ibid., 256–57.

139. Raya and de Vinck, op. cit., 601.

In this chapter we have examined the various dimensions of liturgical subjectivity, after having treated the question of liturgical language in our second chapter. To complete our hermeneutical toolbox we turn next to a consideration of the liturgical process itself; with that in hand, we will be able to finally attempt a Ricoeurian interpretation of the rite to which have hitherto only been able to refer in passing.

CHAPTER 4

“Today You Have Appeared to the World”

Liturgical Time, Narrative, Memory and History

In this chapter we elaborate a Ricoeurian approach to the question of the ritual process at work in liturgy. Specifically, through an investigation of his magisterial antepenultimate work, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (henceforth, *MHF*),¹ we demonstrate the complexity of apprehending the various dynamics implied by the liturgical act, construed as a quintessential form of “remembering.” In order to bring into relief certain elements of *MHF* that will prove germane to our intended liturgical application, I would like to advert to a current debate in liturgical theology that would appear to have wide-ranging hermeneutical repercussions. In this we hopefully are not far from the approach of Ricoeur himself, who similarly—for example, in his rehearsal of recent conversations in Ordinary Language Philosophy in the opening studies of *OAA*—seeks to root his own reflections in a intellectually hospitable climate. Of course, the reader will have to judge whether the debate described herewith is, in point of fact, favourable to the Ricoeurian intervention I propose.

In a two-part article in *Worship* (introduced summarily near the end of Chapter 2), Lutheran theologian Michael Aune argues that the contributions of a particular generation of scholarly luminaries—namely, Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanaugh, David Fagerberg

1. Ricoeur, *MHF*.

and Gordon Lathrop—have expired, leaving the task of propounding an authentic liturgical theology to be taken up afresh by a new cohort employing a different methodology. The essence of Aune's argument is that "a new generation is about to unfold that will take seriously the fruits of *historical research* [and] be more explicitly theological as well."² The meaning of this latter challenge, according to the author, is the "recovering [of] a deepened awareness of the divine initiative in the church's worship," while that of the former is taken to be straightforward. But is it indeed? Is the recommendation that a discipline be "more historical...in its content and character" as unequivocal as it at first appears?

MHF demonstrates why this question would likely be answered in the negative by Ricoeur; where Aune steps lightly, from the positing of historical fact to an understanding of its contemporary pertinence, Ricoeur perceives a perilous leap over a precipitous hermeneutical crevasse, itself resulting from the inherent fault lines of the mnemonic and historiographical operations. These fault lines, exposed in *MHF* through successive phenomenological, epistemological and ontological analyses, disrupt the conceptual stability of such theories as would move too quickly from the "since" or "because" of the assumed past to the "therefore" of the present. As we shall see, the irony of Aune's call for greater scholarly attention to be paid to "recent historical research" is that it ignores recent research into the very *nature* of the historical, such as that conducted in the present volume by Ricoeur.

It is my suspicion that this latter interrogation is necessary to chasten the hubris of a facile historicism, by which I mean the obverse of what Robert Taft calls a "great contemporary illusion...that one can construct a liturgical theology without a profound knowledge of the liturgical tradition."³ This contrary illusion, perhaps equally detrimental, is that of a total grasp of history upon which one presumes to critique a tradition from above, rather than from within. No doubt Aune is prudent to ask of the next generation of liturgical scholars a

2. Aune, "Liturgy & Theology: Part I," 47.

3. Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West*, x.

“rethinking of how we regard the liturgy-theology relationship,” of the meaning of the *lex orandi, lex credendi* topos. We shall see if *MHF* may not offer some of the requisite tools

Memory, History, Forgetting is surely Ricoeur’s densest and most complex work, and that which solicits the greatest amount of propaedeutic reading in both classical and recent philosophical literature.⁴ As Michael Johnson opines, “Ricoeur tracks the traces of memory into the labyrinths of the human mind and the archive of human history. In the end, however, he is in pursuit of an enigma that eludes capture. If the reader sometimes may feel frustrated in the attempt to pin down the ultimate import of Ricoeur’s reflections in their full range, then perhaps that is the nature of the case.”⁵ In the present consideration, I would like to provide a cursory analysis of several of *MHF*’s themes and reflect upon their potential implications for the “rethinking” called for by Aune. The triadic structure of *MHF* lends itself well to being treated in like manner, and I will thus proceed to explore the text in terms of its successive phenomenological, epistemological and hermeneutical-ontological moments.

The Dialectics of Memory

In the first chapter of *MHF* Ricoeur sets forth a taxonomy for the phenomenon of memory, drawing upon the categories posited by Aristotle and Plato. His ordering proceeds in pairs of opposites. Thus, for example, the functioning of memory is differentiated in its passive mode, as something suffered (*mnēmē*) from its active mode, as the effort of recollection (*anamnēsis*); memories themselves may be fictive, a representation (*eīdolon*) of a *phantasma*, or

4 Donald Marshall’s consideration is that “it would be premature to ‘review,’ still less to judge a book that addresses as many complex problems and carries through as subtle an argumentation as this one. I have read through it carefully, but time and study are needed for its insights to sink in, to weave themselves into one’s way of thinking—or rather one’s whole spiritual comportment. One must expect that much of what he says will initially elude one’s grasp” (“*Memory, History, Forgetting* [Book Review],” *Christianity and Literature* 56, no. 2 [2007]: 373). One may hope for the eventual emergence of a companion anthology, such as those published in the wake of *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*, which will mine this text’s rich and varied veins of argumentation. See, for example, Joy Morny, ed., *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative: Context and Contestation* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997) and Richard A. Cohen and James L. Marsh, eds., *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), respectively.

5 Michael Johnson, “*Memory, History, Forgetting* (Review Article),” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 112.

correspond to the reality (*tupos*) of which they are a faithful image (*eikōn*). The interrogation proffered of such texts as the *Sophist*, *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus* serves to probe memory taken as a replacement for that which is now absent. In what sense does a representation participate in the reality of its other? How does that which is past continue to exist in memory? How is it recovered after being lost?

Memory is further distinguished by Ricoeur into the power at work in the act of remembering (*la mémoire*), and the object of the act (*le souvenir*). Finally, we can note the bifurcation of *la mémoire* into the notions of “habit-memory” and “recall-memory”: the former designates memories which have been incorporated into our present such that we are not conscious of their origin in the past, e.g., techniques that are retained on a subconscious level and operative in our action; the latter, the distinct events which become lodged in our memory through the impression they make upon us (these are available to be summoned up by the imagination as representations). All the pairs of opposites presented by Ricoeur help place in view the multifariousness of the phenomenon of memory latent in ordinary, pre-reflective experience.

Reflexivity vs. Worldliness

I would like to privilege the final set of polarities introduced by Ricoeur in his phenomenological sketch of memory. He observes that memory oscillates between the poles of “reflexivity” and “worldliness,” resulting in a subtle dialectic between our interior witness to the past and the inscription of the past in the world. Thus, “one does not simply remember oneself, seeing, experiencing, learning; rather one recalls the situations in the world in which one has seen, experienced, learned. These situations imply one’s own body and the bodies of others, lived space, and, finally, the horizon of the world and worlds, within which something has occurred.”⁶ This physical dimension of mnemonic phenomena can be expressed by the category of “corporeal memory,” that capacity for the body to archive its experiences for

6. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 41.

subsequent evocation or recollection by “secondary memory,” in which process they may become narrativized and move along the spectrum from the worldly to the reflexive pole.

The exercise of corporeal memory is vividly manifest, according to Ricoeur, in our memory of *places*; an experience is contiguous with its environment, to the extent that the former impresses itself upon us in the particularity of the latter: “it is not by chance that we say of what occurred that it took place.”⁷ In other words, we remember events by reference to location, which becomes in consequence a species of “inscription” wherein the record of the past is attested, “whereas memories transmitted only along the oral path fly away as do the words themselves.”⁸ Ricoeur explicitly connects the memory of places to the enactment of ritual commemorations, civic and religious, but does not develop his reflection further at this point, beyond voicing a series of questions in regard to the “nature of the space and of the time in which these festive figures of memory unfold.”⁹ In this relation Ricoeur demonstrates further his awareness of the full rotation implied in the linguistic turn, namely, a corollary turn to the body itself. Already in *OAA* with its thematizing of the “lived body,” Ricoeur shows himself conversant with the philosophical trend displayed, for example, in Lakoff and Johnson’s *Philosophy in the Flesh*.¹⁰

Holy Memories, Holy Places

As an example of how Ricoeur’s development of “corporeal memory” in *MHF* is relevant to our current enterprise, we may consider the way in which memory (re)attached to place through liturgical commemoration in the fourth century historicizing of Jerusalem’s holy places. Robert Taft suggests that it was only natural for “pilgrims to go where Jesus did or said this or that, preferably on the anniversary of the event.”¹¹ On the other hand, he acknowledges that the realism characteristic of the hermeneutical style of the Antiochian tradition played its

7. Ibid., 36.

8. Ibid., 41.

9. Ibid., 43.

10. Lakoff and Johnson, op. cit.

11. Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 24.

part; this is brought into relief by its contrast with the “dehistoricizing, spiritualizing propensity in heortology [i.e., theology of the liturgical year]” of the Alexandrian tradition.

If indeed the establishment of the holy places was a normal development, it was nevertheless controversial. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony argues that while pilgrimage was very common in late antiquity, it was often regarded with ambivalence; moreover, pilgrimage to the Holy Land *per se*, rather than to local sites hallowed by a respective Church’s saints, evoked a particularly mixed reaction from theologians and church leaders. At issue was the merit of “early sacred journeying to encounter the divine versus interior journeying to an inner space”:¹² the extent to which, we may say, spiritual anamnesis benefitted, for its mnemonic efficacy, from a spatial correlate.

Now as Taft notes above, the commemorations to which Egeria, *inter alia*, testifies, expressed a devotional interest in *both* days and places. If indeed the establishment of the holy places was to be expected, it is interesting that it appears to have taken a long time—almost four centuries—to obtain, and then, only in the face of criticism. Of course, Jerusalem was to a certain extent inaccessible, in respect of the destruction suffered in the wake of the first Jewish-Roman war in A.D. 70, and the city’s conversion into Aelia Capitolina. Yet, Bethlehem, Bethany, Nazareth and a host of other sites that were to become perduring shrines might well have permitted an incipient sacralization; as is clear from Bitton-Ashkelony’s discussion of the pilgrimage experience of St. Gregory of Nyssa, the eventual rise in popularity of Jerusalem as the place of Christ’s death embraced also those locales associated with his earthly life.¹³ Read in light of Taft’s assertion that the early Christians “were intensely concerned to establish the exact chronology of Jesus’ death,”¹⁴ one is struck by the contrast between the nascent preoccupation with a *temporal* orientation toward the Passion and the absence of a equivalent,

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¹² Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage (Berkeley University of California Press, 2005), 4

¹³ *Ibid* , 51.

¹⁴ Robert F Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 17

contemporaneous concern for its *localization*. It perhaps begs the question of whether Ricoeur is correct in his hypothesis that the insertion of memory into calendrical time occurs in parallel to its spatial sedimentation.

In any event, for Ricoeur, “the articulation of phenomenological space and time onto cosmological space and time” is ultimately a function of the mnemonic need to resist the encroachment of forgetfulness.”¹⁵ Was it the fear of amnesia then that led the Church of the fourth century to exploit its imperial status by focussing the commemoration of specific events in the life of Christ in locations that seemingly had hitherto been regarded, as it were, as neither here nor there? The prescience which tradition accords St. Helen in respect of her erection of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre/Anastasis is displayed in the popularity enjoyed—and inter-confessional rivalry suffered—by this alleged place of Christ’s burial/resurrection down through the centuries and into our own day. Whether or not the miracles verifying the identity of this place—as recounted in the hagiography of St. Helen¹⁶—“actually” occurred is a moot point, inasmuch as the belief of Orthodox in its authenticity is perennially rejuvenated, to their satisfaction if not necessarily to others’, by the well-documented miracle of the “holy fire” at the celebration of Pascha on the Julian calendar.¹⁷ This phenomenon dramatically illustrates what Ricoeur calls the insertion of commemoration within the context of worldliness. That is, the Anastasis exhibits the conversion of a memory into a place which, through continuity of liturgical commemoration is then experienced as a proof of the veracity of the event originally memorialized.

And yet the value of the fixation of this holy place *par excellence* does not ultimately mitigate the consequences of the “strong dehistoricizing of the Pasch (and of all liturgy, for that matter)” that, as Taft noted above, marked the Alexandrian tradition. This tradition’s “decided

15. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 44.

16. Cf. Isaac E. Lambertsen, trans., *The Menaion of the Orthodox Church: Volume IX, May* (Liberty, TN: St. John of Kronstadt Press, 1996), 177–85.

17. Thomas A. Idinopulos, “Holy Fire in Jerusalem,” *Christian Century* 99 (No. 12, Ap 7 1982): 407–9.

attenuation of the importance of Salvation History as history," wherein "the salvific *event* becomes a *type*, a symbol of an interior, spiritual reality,"¹⁸ is actually reproduced by the inscription of the commemoration of the Anastasis in the liturgical hymnography of the Byzantine Rite. The third "Anatolian" sticheron of Tone 3, originally composed to be sung in the Sunday Vigil at the Anastasis, and now sung every eighth week at Saturday evening Vespers in Byzantine-Rite churches, declares: "As we the unworthy *stand at your tomb which received life*, we offer a hymn of glory to your ineffable compassion, Christ our God."

Such is the Ricoeurian "surplus of meaning" in this sort of poetic text, that there can be no warrant for contesting those who would now take it to refer to the altar of the church in which the rite is being celebrated, as a *symbol* of the tomb of Christ. The tomb itself, as an actual, putatively historical location, has been poetically spiritualized *de novo*, in a re-diffusion of that meaning erstwhile concentrated in the specificity of a site of memory of which it was nevertheless—as is apparent in the kerygma of the New Testament—originally independent. In other words, the theological significance of the tomb has been handed down as mediated through the specificity of a given place, as if liturgical memory could not obtain apart from a physical reference point.

Many other examples of this kind of ritual occurrence in the Byzantine Rite could be adduced, most obviously the hymnography composed to celebrate the universal exaltation of the True Cross (September 14), or that which fêtes the myrrh-streaming relics or tombs of saints, or wonder-working icons; or again that which presents those at prayer as inhabitants of a given city or congregants of a given church. The process by which certain propers for the liturgical services became widely adopted in the Byzantine Rite, outside of the context in which they were written does not, therefore, seem to have in the least been hindered by their ostensive reference to unique circumstances; in Ricoeurian terms, the "world in front of the text" has not depended upon the "world behind [it]." Have such references even been noticed

18. Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 18.

in the course of liturgical history? Given how adept Byzantine Christians have proven at elaborating spiritual interpretations for even the most utilitarian of liturgical actions and items, as the genre of liturgical commentaries bears witness, one would not be surprised at a negative reply. And the typological interpretation of the Scriptures common in the patristic period would seem to favour the constant re-deployment of meaning even within specifically ecclesiastical compositions.

The *Ars Memoriae* and Liturgical *Paideia*

Chapter 2 of *MHF* offers a “pragmatic” approach to the phenomenon of memory intended to complement the “cognitive” approach taken in the first chapter. As we saw above, this approach was already anticipated in the first chapter. Here Ricoeur’s interest lies in the way in which memory “exercises” itself in the “search” to remember; in *anamnēsis*, the cognitive and pragmatic overlap, for although the culmination of the process is mental recognition, the process itself is characterized by practical effort.

This very combination of cognitive and pragmatic operations, termed by Ricoeur *remémoration*, is exhibited in the techniques of memorization, the *ars memoriae*, which enable a mastery of knowledge and skills such that a subject is not required to constantly re-learn the requisites of a given action. Memorization is indeed a form of the habit-memory, except that the habits concerned are acquired intentionally rather than through simple repetition. The vulnerability of memory, however, as that which can be manipulated through memorization, casts a shadow of equivocation over its reliability; Ricoeur thus devotes much of this chapter to an exploration of the notion of the abuse of memory, which will lay the ground for his later reflections on the credibility of testimony, itself the basis of claims to historical truth: “The ultimate stakes of the investigation that follows concern the fate of the desire for faithfulness that we have seen linked to the intention of memory as the guardian of the depth of time and of temporal distance. In what way, with respect to these stakes, are the vicissitudes of the

exercise of memory likely to affect memory's ambition to be truthful?"¹⁹

Paideia

What is key in this chapter, with respect to liturgical theology, is the notion of *paideia*—including but not limited to the notion of education—which Ricoeur presents as the transmission by ancients to the next generation of the founding works of their common culture. In a society where *paideia* operates effectively, "[F]or each generation, the learning process...can dispense with the exhausting effort to reacquire everything each time all over again."²⁰ Ricoeur cites the memorization of the catechism as a model of this operation, alongside that of the acquisition of language, as well as the preservation of art forms like dance and music whose *savoir-faire*, while passing through a manner of textual inscription, is only fulfilled in corporeal enactment. Such arts "require of their practitioners a laborious training of the memory, based upon a stubborn and patient repetition, until an execution, at once faithful and innovative, is obtained, one in which the prior labor is forgotten under the appearance of a happy improvisation."²¹

Ricoeur does not consider in this connection his earlier reference to civic and religious rituals, but they would seem most apposite. Such rites depend, of course, upon a proper functioning of tradition, of an accurate handing over from one generation to the next of the ritual patrimony; while being textually referenced, rites are by nature fundamentally performative, a species of those actions executed on the basis of a structured work, such as a libretto or score.²² One can speak of learning the language of a liturgy, but this metaphor does not bring into relief those aspects of worship that correspond rather to corporeal memory: its choreographic, musical and dramatic aspects, all of which invite the application of a specific *paideia*.

19. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 57.

20. *Ibid.*, 60.

21. *Ibid.*, 61.

22. *Ibid.*

That there is, however, a mutuality to liturgical *paideia*, namely, a ritualization of memory that—like a remora upon a shark—rides along with the memorization of ritual, is strikingly displayed in a poignant anecdote from the life of Walter Ciszek, S.J. This priest, interred by the Soviets from 1941-61 on the charge of being a Vatican spy, is a testament to the vitality of an *ars memoriae*. While imprisoned for five years in Moscow, he suffered extensive, excruciating periods of solitary confinement. He recounts how he maintained psychological stability by a purely mental performance of the liturgy.²³ Even when transferred to a prison camp, and able to enjoy the company of other human beings, Ciszek found that both he and others would risk whatever was necessary for the sake of the Divine Liturgy, with only the barest essentials to orient their memory: “We said Mass in drafty storage sheds, or huddled in mud and slush in the corner of a building site foundation of an underground. The intensity of devotion of both priests and prisoners made up for everything; there were no altars, candles, bells, flowers, music, snow-white linens, stained glass of the warmth that even the simplest parish church could offer....The realization of what was happening on the board, box or stone used in place of an altar penetrated deep into the soul.”²⁴ Such was the power of this experience, according to Ciszek, that despite their constant malnutrition and hunger the prisoners would observe the then-standard eucharistic fast from midnight onwards, even to the end of the following day, if only to be able to receive Communion.

The dialectic between interiorization and exteriorization evident in the above episodes relates in turn to the question of the nexus between the liturgical action and its inscription. One sees, for example, an indication of the primacy of memorization. A rite which has been

23. :“After breakfast, I would say the Mass by heart—that is, I would say all the prayers, for of course I had no way actually to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. I said the Angelus morning, noon, and night as the Kremlin clock tolled the hours over Red Square a few blocks from Lubianka Street. At noon, I would make an examination of conscience... I would make another *examen* before going to bed at night, and also prepare the points for my next morning’s meditation. Each afternoon, I said three rosaries—one in Polish, one in Latin, and one in Russian—as a substitute for my breviary” (Walter Ciszek, S.J. and S.J. Flaherty, Daniel, *He Leadeth Me* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973], 59).

24. Ciszek and Flaherty, op. cit., 139.

internalized, which requires little or no aid of texts, would seem to possess perform a greater degree of intimacy and intensity, to be more full, conscious and actual. If the *quid* of prayer is stored in memory, either as representations to be recalled or skills to be engaged out of habit-memory, is it not uniquely integrated into the very identity of the worshipper? It is not readily apparent to what degree the memory of the Church, upon which liturgy as a form of *anamnēsis* draws, is conserved through texts, and to what degree it subsists rather in the performative tradition in which texts function as aids to that “integrated memory” which Ricoeur, following Pierre Nora, calls “always actual, a living tie to the eternal present.”

Collective Memory and Personal Identity

The question of the extent to which a memory must be exteriorized to be perpetuated, and the mode of its exteriorization, impinges not only on the dialectic operative in the liturgy between the oral and the written, but also on that which obtains between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. Given that the present work focusses on the Byzantine tradition, we may duly refer in this connection to that cynosure of twentieth-century Orthodox theology, Vladimir Lossky. In a well-known essay on Mariology, he explains that the Orthodox Church does not discourse about the Mother of God at length, in terms of a formal *lex credendi*, i.e., by promulgating doctrine through an ecumenical council; rather, it holds as definitive only the teaching of the Council of Ephesus (431) that Mary is to be called “Theotokos.” Lossky writes:

Dogma and devotion] are inseparable in the consciousness of the Church...the Christological dogma of the *Theotokos* taken *in abstracto*, apart from the vital connection between it and the devotion paid by the Church to the Mother of God, would not be enough to justify the unique position, above all created beings, assigned to the Queen of Heaven, to whom the Orthodox liturgy ascribes “the glory which is appropriate to God” (*he Theoprepes doxa*). It is therefore impossible to separate dogmatic data, in the strict sense, from the data of the Church’s *cultus*, in a theological exposition of the doctrine about

the Mother of God. Here dogma should throw light on devotion, bringing it into contact with the fundamental truths of our faith; whereas devotion should enrich dogma with the Church's living experience [emphasis mine].²⁵

He proceeds to equate the Church's tradition with the "holy memory" of those who hear and keep the revealed word. This memory is a criterion of *identity*, a source of the selfhood of the Church; it is *memory* that justifies the Church's commemoration of Mary after a fashion which Lossky admits to be not evidently warranted by Scripture (understood as the documentary basis of Christian theology). There is, moreover, a polemical shade to this remembering; Ricoeur identifies the potential of a given memory to protect those by whom it is recalled, "in the confrontation with others, felt to be a threat."²⁶ Memory is fragile: susceptible to ideology, it is always on the cusp of being manipulated one way or another, and in turn forming or deforming identity. Certainly the rhetorical antagonists of Lossky include those Christians who reject the veneration of Mary outright; for Lossky they are thereby rejecting the Tradition of the Church and violating her memory. What is perhaps less expected is that he remains equally exercised by those who seek to establish Mariology elsewhere than in the inner sanctum of communal, liturgical memory, viz. in the external arena of authoritatively-posed doctrine.

Proceeding even further, however, Lossky asserts not only that Marian devotion is the legitimate expression of Holy Tradition, but that Mary's own life serves as the paradigm of *anamnēsis*: "'But Mary kept all these things pondering them in her heart' (Luke 2:19, 51). She who gave birth to God in the flesh kept in her memory all the testimonies to the divinity of her Son. We could say that we have here a personification of the Church's Tradition before the Church was."²⁷ At this point we stand far removed from Aune's suspicion of the notion that liturgy founds belief, with which we began the chapter. While he does well to critique a

25. Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1974), 196.

26. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 81.

27. Lossky, *op. cit.*, 199.

cavalier use of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, innocent of the complexities attendant upon the historical dialectic between praying and believing, he continually approaches the matter, hermeneutically speaking, from without. That is, he treats Schmemmann's synchronic recourse to the liturgy—and those who follow after him—as insufficiently historical, perhaps because the former does not share in that same history; what for Schmemmann is the subjective memory of the Church, for Aune is an objective datum. Approaching a tradition as an archive rather than as an element of one's own personal and communal identity may of course yield a wealth of insights; this is why, after all, documentary history is written. But such cannot presume to replace the qualitatively different, existential engagement with the past that is memory: the past as lived from *within*. Indeed as we shall see, according to Ricoeur, the former depends greatly upon the latter.

Ricoeur concludes Part I of *MHF* with a reflection on the work of Maurice Halbwachs. The point which I wish to retain here, apropos of the perspective of Lossky adumbrated above, is the idea that memory is fundamentally tied to community: "to remember, we need others."²⁸ We do not exercise memory alone, that is, but rather by situating ourselves within a social and spatial context; from childhood, argues Halbwachs, our memories are bound up with other people and places, and this gives mnemonic primacy to an external chain of references over internal recollection. Ricoeur proposes, in addition, a mediating function, assumed by one's close relations, between the larger social reality of other people and the individual ego.²⁹

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28. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 120.

29. It would perhaps be important to explore further the analogy between the role of close relations, "those who approve of my existence and whose existence I approve of in the reciprocity and equality of esteem," and that of the Church constituted as a community of liturgical "attestation." Ricoeur declares, "What I expect from my close relations is that they approve of what I attest: that I am able to speak, act, recount, impute to myself the responsibility for my actions....I include among my close relations those who disapprove of my actions, but not of my existence" (Ricoeur, *MHF*, 132). One could, in this vein, probe the role of the "domestic church" as mediating between the individual and the "family of God." Given that the family acts as the primary organ of the formation of children's identity generally, laying the groundwork for the way in which they will, in adulthood, appropriate for themselves the collective memory of larger social units, how does family life interpret to children the phenomenon of the Church, which latter presents itself as subsisting in typological relation to the family?

The Historiographical Operation: Testimony vs. Schematization

Part II of *MHF* is devoted to an examination of historiography, as submitted to three distinct, but not necessarily successive, phases: the documentary, the explanatory and the representative. The *leitmotif* of this part is culled from Plato's *Phaedrus*, viz. the myth of the origin of writing: the phenomenon of inscription, inasmuch as it operates as an "antidote" to the frailty of memory, doubles as a poison, for it contaminates memory's originary trustworthiness with an element of doubt. The need for writing suggests the unreliability of memory, and engenders, in Ricoeur's interpretation, an opposition between the mnemonic and the historiographical.

Now Ricoeur sees the act of interpretation characterizing all three phases of historiography, contrary to a view which might regard historians as simply offering their interpretations of facts. The documentary phase begins with the phenomenon of archives, which transcribe the irreducible core of history, namely *testimony*, typically expressed in the phrase "I was there." Testimony in the first instance refers to a lived time and space which has not yet been schematized by scientific discourse. It adheres to the unique self-designation of the witness, deriving its validity from "the reality of the past thing and the presence of the narrator at the place of its occurrence." This self-designation is marked, in turn, by a "triple deictic...the first-person singular, the past tense of the verb, and the mention of there in relation to here."³⁰

Schematization follows testimony, through geography and cartography as concerns space, and historiography as concerns time. In being assimilated to the categories of these disciplines, however, what was experienced as visceral becomes virtual, with memory losing immediacy and suffering reification. Ricoeur goes on to suggest that this process involves, on the spatial plane, a structuring akin to the narrativization employed on the temporal plane. Thus memory is transformed into history both through chronological operations, which the

30. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 164.

latter shares with fiction, as well as through the physical orientation effected by reference to inhabited space, itself determined in respect of architectural construction. Ricoeur's essential point, presaged in the first section of *MHF*, is that "narrated time" and "constructed space" parallel one another: "To the dialectic of lived space, geometrical space, and inhabited space corresponds a similar dialectic of lived time, cosmic time and historical time. To the critical moment of localization within the order of space corresponds that of dating within the order of time."³¹ We shall see in Chapter 5 that this dialectic is operative in the respective way that the GBW establishes the place of its celebration as "the Jordan," the time, as the moment of Christ's baptism.

The Crisis of Testimony: Experiences "At the Limits"

Ricoeur is preoccupied throughout *MHF* with the question of experiences "at the limits," of which the Holocaust/Shoah serves as the *cause célèbre*. Such experiences engender a "crisis of testimony," defying ready transcription from lived memory to historical record, because they beg the possibility of an appropriate and accurate mode of representation. One might quote in this connection the proverb that "truth is stranger than fiction." The Shoah, for Ricoeur, exceeds "the ordinary, limited capacities for reception" of those who would seek to make sense of it. The "shared comprehension" between the members of a society, "built on the basis of a sense of human resemblance at the level of situations, feelings, thoughts, and actions" is confuted in the face of "an inhumanity with no common measure with the experience of the average person."³² Testimony in this context encounters a crisis because it demands by its very nature to be received by another; to witness to something is to witness to someone. Ricoeur sees here a reverse of the dilemma faced centuries earlier by Lorenzo Valla, the Renaissance humanist who proved the fraudulence of the *Donation of Constantine*. Where Valla struggled against an excess of credulity, seeking to insinuate in his audience a salubrious element of

31. *Ibid.*, 153.

32. *Ibid.*, 175.

doubt, the one who would recount the *Shoah* must overcome “incredulity and the will to forget” on the part of his contemporaries.

It seems to me that one is not far, in appreciating the strictures imposed upon those who would textually compass the scope of the Holocaust, from grasping the main problem of liturgical hermeneutics, to wit, how one may appropriate the marvellous events commemorated by liturgy which—whether the Theophany celebrated by the GBW or the resurrection from the dead of a man who is God—do not correspond to the ordinary experience of those who celebrate a liturgical rite. Do not “incredulity and the will to forget” threaten the memory of the *magnalia Dei* which Christian worship attempts to preserve through a manifold deployment of poetic and aesthetic resources? This deployment is surely vulnerable to what Ricoeur (following Saul Friedlander), in reference again to the Holocaust, calls an “exhaustion in our culture of the available forms of representation for giving readability and visibility to the event,” while simultaneously responding to “a request, a demand to be spoken of, represented, arising from the very heart of the event.”³³ Is not this dichotomy, the juxtaposition of apophatic and kataphatic limits, that which impels, on the one hand, the mutation and multiplication of forms of worship that has given the Church’s liturgy its history; and on the other, the atavism within this same history of iconoclastic movements, and as well as the perennial presence of mystical currents eschewing corporate prayer all together in favour of silence and solitude?

Historiographical Representation and the Imagination

There is thus a potent creative element at work in historiography. One cannot avoid the use of the imagination in construing history, since to interpret the past is to emulate the process by which people ever interpret the present. Unlike the natural sciences, whose object is such phenomena as are reiterable and homogeneous, history takes as its object particulars, which

33. Ibid., 255.

only fit together on the basis of the narrative templates composed by an historian. Hence Ricoeur can muse:

Does the historian...not mime in a creative way the interpretive gesture by which those who make history attempt to understand themselves and their world? This hypothesis is particularly plausible for a pragmatic conception of historiography that tries not to separate representations from the practices by which social agents set up the social bond and include multiple identities within it. If so, there would indeed be a mimetic relation between the operation of representing as the moment of doing history, and the represented object as the moment of making history.³⁴

Following Louis Mink, but drawing on his previous work in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur argues that historical explanation involves a synthetic, configuring act of emplotment. The process by which disparate events are collected into a meaningful whole, however, is ambivalent, since to a certain degree the singularity of each event is levelled by its co-ordination with the others included in the plot: "If the event is a fragment of a narrative, it depends on the outcome of the narrative, and there is no underlying, basic event that escapes narrativization."³⁵ This is so because inscription is ever already a mediation between the "as it actually happened" and our *perception* of the same. Representation involves an evocation of an absent past through substitution; the substituted object, in turn, tends to efface the prototype and ultimately replace it. Inasmuch as historical representations function as verbal images of the past, they paradoxically obscure that which they purport to illumine.³⁶

34. Ibid., 229.

35. Ibid., 242.

36. This analysis dovetails with the work of Hayden White regarding the shared rhetorical quality of history and fiction. Ricoeur applauds the general tenor of White's argument to the end that history and fiction are both fictive from the perspective of their mutual exploitation of the "deep structures of the imagination." A typology of these structures suggests that the very form of a story—beginning, middle, end—has an explanatory effect, communicating a sense of order and coherence. Thus again, "the contours of the story prevail over the distinct meanings of the events recounted" (*MHF*, 240). Consequently, the force of argument in historiography obtains through persuasion rather than logical demonstration. The "truth" of history, that is, cannot be said to present itself according to a strict

The problem emerges clearly in the perennial conflict between different versions of ostensibly the same event; there is no way to purge an event of its narrative context such that it could be accessed free of interpretation. History can nonetheless be distinguished from fiction, but not by any aspect immanent to the text itself; rather, it is the intentionality of the work—in the case of the former, its “claim to truth,” in the latter, “the voluntary suspension of disbelief”—which is decisive. Common sense tells us that these two intentions are discrete, but since the means by which each is fulfilled are common, the spectre of dissimulation can never be put to rest completely. It forever roams the philosophy of history. Indeed, “it would be futile to seek a direct tie between the narrative form and the events as they actually occurred; the tie can only be indirect by way of explanation and, short of this, by way of the documentary phase, which refers back in turn to testimony and the trust placed in the word of another.”³⁷

We perhaps find in this sober conclusion the substance of an affirmation of the account of sacral history afforded by liturgy; it is not at all evident that one *can* get around the narrative form of an event, as conveyed by its liturgical representation. Surely it is due the honour of representing the communal testimony to the past—indeed, to the present as well. To the skepticism of Hayden White, who sees history as inexorably suffering an ideological subterfuge, Ricoeur contrasts the work of Carlo Ginzburg, characterized as it is by a pleading on behalf of the merit of testimony as that which intends “historical reality.” Prior to the work of inscription by which an historian schematizes the past, there is the immediacy of the lived experience, preserved in memory and existentially warranted, that remains irreducible. This lived experience brings into relief the role of the community: “It is the citizen as much as the historian who is summoned by the event. And he is summoned at the level of his participation

model of correspondence. Rather, the emplotment operative in historical narrative aligns with the various genres of literature, such as romance, tragedy, comedy or satire, and this in turn highlights the ineluctable ideological bias of the historian. For White there can be no stable perspective, no non-relative discourse; all narratives maintain an opacity with regard to the reality they claim to transcribe.

37. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 244.

in collective memory before which the historian is called upon to give an account.”³⁸ This summons is particularly acute in the case of those dramatic events which Ricoeur terms “at the limits.” Inasmuch as the events commemorated by the liturgy can be considered also as “limit-experiences,” it would seem that the ritual process that serves for the preservation of the Church’s collective memory must similarly constitute, in some sense, a final court of appeal.

Ontology: “The Historicization of Human Experience”

Before returning to the debate in the liturgical theology with which we began this chapter, we must give mercurial treatment also to Part III of *MHF*, where Ricoeur ferrets out the existential implications of his historiographical inquiry: “On the side of ontology, hermeneutics assigns itself the task of exploring the presuppositions that can be termed existential...in the sense that they structure the characteristic manner of existing, of being in the world, of that being that each of us is. They concern in the first place the insurmountable historical condition of that being.”³⁹

History vs. Histories

The first presupposition to be unpacked is that of the verisimilitude generated by the very concept of history as a “metacategory” that is indivisible. The term “history” is ambivalent, for Ricoeur, inasmuch as it designates both “the collective singular comprising a series of events and the ensemble of discourses pronounced regarding this collective singular.”⁴⁰ By contrast, Ricoeur notes the growing awareness already in the nineteenth century of the irreducible pluralism of human experiential data, and the impossibility of

38. Ibid., 242.

39. Ibid., 283–84.

40. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 298. An uncritical use of the term “history” fosters a temporal naïveté, a perception that the past recounted is the past *tout court*. The particularly modern expression of this naïveté is the drive to unify all discrete memories in an all-encompassing world history, of which humanity is the “total object” as well as the “unique subject.” In this modern view, engendered by the Enlightenment, humanity is seen to progress from what is lower to what is higher, from the local to universal, in a constant evolution whereby reason outstrips religion as the determining factor of the present and future. Furthermore, “the idea of progress is not confined to suggesting an *a priori* superiority of the future—or, more precisely, of things to come—over things of the past. The idea of novelty attached to that of modernity...implies at the minimum a depreciation of earlier times struck with obsolescence, at the maximum a denial amounting to a rupture” (*MHF*, 302).

obtaining a neutral vantage point from which one could write a cosmopolitan history without belonging to, and thus being formed by, the history of a particular community. (We recall here David Power's emphasis in Chapter 2 on the siren call of meta-narrative, and the resistance offered to it by an awareness of narrative rupture).⁴¹

To be sure, such skepticism did not in and of itself fragment the received, unitary vision of human history, since even according to Christian *Heilsgeschichte*, or "salvation history"—as formulated by German theologians from the eighteenth century on—the future is held to contain the fulfillment of the past and the present. Nonetheless, the seeds of an ideological pluralism grew up in the twentieth century into an all out historical relativism, or "historicization of human experience." The philosophical consequence of this is that one is seemingly left with nowhere to stand:

The idea of a plurality of viewpoints, once stripped of any overview, is proposed as the antidogmatic view par excellence. But the question then arises whether the thesis affirming the relativity of every assertion does not self-destruct through self-reference....One can wonder if the idea of truth, but also the ideas of the good and the just, can be radically historicized without disappearing. The relativity resulting from the temporalization of history can nourish for a while the charge of ideology addressed by a protagonist to an adversary—in the form of the peremptory question, "Where are you speaking from?"—but it finally turns against the one making it and becomes internalized as a paralyzing suspicion.⁴²

One theological response to the *Weltanschauung* delineated above is to prescind from historicization by reasserting the ultimately transcendent character of Tradition. Orthodox theologian Andrew Louth, for example, queries, "Is the development of doctrine a valid

41. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 302.

42. *Ibid.*, 304.

category for Orthodox theology?"⁴³ Given the standard equivalence drawn by Orthodoxy between "correct doctrine" and "correct worship," referred to above, it is not surprising that his essay comes around to evaluating the development at issue in the light of liturgical considerations. The essay begins, however, with a brief genealogy of historicization that synchronizes with that of Ricoeur; the former's burden, however, is to demonstrate that Orthodoxy does not share in this intellectual pedigree, located as it historically has been outside "the West." While the Orthodox Church has learned from the Western experience, and even offered creative re-interpretations of certain movements—such as the co-opting of the Romantics' ideal of "organic life" by the Slavophil movement in its theology of *sobornost* ("catholicity" or more colloquially, "togetherness")—it has generally rejected "a sense of critical distance" vis-à-vis the past. And this is so, Louth explains, because for Orthodoxy the past, in the persons of the Fathers of the Church, is the font from which we must drink; "we do not stand over against the Fathers; we come to them to learn from them."⁴⁴ The presumption ought to be, in fact, that we will never know as much as or more than the Fathers, given the paucity of our sources.⁴⁵

Asking rhetorically, however, how one is to know who is a "Holy Father," Louth comes to the crux of his argument: "The Fathers are *our* Fathers, because we are their children. Behind this assertion lies faith in the Holy Spirit's guiding of the Church through the tradition of the Fathers and the Councils....The Holy Spirit is manifest through his residing with us—it is in the community of the Church, in the sacramental community, that the Spirit is revealed."⁴⁶ Since this is so, we should look, says Louth, to the manifest continuity of the Church's liturgical

43 Andrew Louth, "Is Development of Doctrine a Valid Category for Orthodox Theology?" in *Orthodoxy and Western Culture: A Collection of Essays Honoring Jaroslav Pelikan on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Valerie Hotchkiss and Patrick Henry (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 45–63.

44 *Ibid.*, 55.

45 One may, of course, question the legitimacy of this assumption. Does it not put into question the *raison d'être* of the historical enterprise?

46 Louth, "Development of Doctrine," 58.

tradition as that which gives direction to the theological enterprise.⁴⁷ And doing so, we may well employ historical methods. “Historical theology is, if you like, a way of refreshing, or revitalizing, the *memory* of the Church.” Such a memory, a “living memory,” is the burden of the last section of *MHF* that we will examine.

The Living Memory

In the second chapter of Part III, Ricoeur clarifies how one is to avoid the “paralyzing suspicion” that the historicization of memory casts over the philosophy of history. The way to sail in safety past the Charybdis of historical relativism and the Scylla of ideological fundamentalism is to keep both perils within one’s peripheral vision:

To be sure, in the conditions of retrospection common to memory and to history the conflict remains undecidable. But we know why this is so, once the relation of the past to the present of the historian is set against the backdrop of the great dialectic that mixes resolute anticipation, the repetition of the past, and present concern. Framed in this way, the *history of memory* and the *historicization of memory* can confront one another in an open dialectic that preserves them from the passage to the limit, from that *hubris*, that would result from, on the one hand, history’s claim to reduce memory to one of its objects, and on the other hand, the claim of the collective memory to subjugate history by means of the abuses of memory that [commemorations]...can turn into.⁴⁸

Memory and history are thus symbiotic; the life of the latter is nourished by the former, which it in turn conditions by a subtle process whereby description becomes prescription. Memory is ineluctably reshaped by the “cultural forms” of thematization and inscription which it spawns.

47. Louth refers to St. Basil’s *On the Holy Spirit*, and its inventory of the Church’s “unwritten traditions [which] are liturgical—the use of the sign of the cross, facing east for prayer, the epiclesis in the Eucharist, blessing of water for baptism and oil for unction [and] the Trinitarian doxology” (Louth, “Development of Doctrine,” 58).

48. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 392–93.

Drawing again on Maurice Halbwachs, Ricoeur observes that it is through an initiation process that one is tutored in a “collective memory,” the public narrative of a given community.⁴⁹

For the purposes of liturgical considerations, the most pertinent discussion in this section of *MHF* is that treating *Zakhor* by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. This book “provid[es] access to a universal problem through the exception constituted by the singularity of Jewish existence.”⁵⁰ This problem, as we have seen, is the resistance of memory to the pretensions of history. Ricoeur cites Halbwach’s insight that the beginning of history is in a certain sense contingent upon the end of tradition; in any event, the distancing of the historian alters memory, “consolidates it, corrects it, displaces it, contexts it, interrupts it, destroys it.”⁵¹ The reason why the Jewish people stands out is that, at least until the Enlightenment, it preserved a “memory charged with meaning but not with historiographical meaning.” Important here is the fact that the Jewish memory was written, i.e., it is not a case of oral tradition opposed to inscription; rather, the practice of historiography, of the “writing of history,” simply did not imply the critical distance and detachment that is often associated with the term. The whole Jewish people understood itself to be “summoned” to remember God and his dealings with their fathers. This remembering, in turn, was not regarded as an obligation to preserve a chronicle of events—and this, for Ricoeur, is the Hebraic distinctive vis-à-vis the Greek notion of history—but to protect the *meaning* of the past. Where historiography in the critical sense of the word is regnant, meaning may well be absent, since secular history fails to do justice to the Jewish conviction concerning divine providence, that is, to their perception of the continuing

49. While this is originally assimilated cognitively, as something coming from the outside, through social “familiarization” it is gradually adopted as the mnemonic matrix for one’s own experiences: through the “phenomenon of transgenerational memory,” there obtains a “transition from learned history to living memory” (*MHF*, 394). A key attribute of “living memory” is its sense of continuity, versus the “periodization proper to historical knowledge—a discontinuity that underscores the past as over and done with, no longer in existence.” Alternatively, one can consider this in terms of the preoccupation of written history with difference and oppositions (albeit ones which it typically presumes to reconcile in a unitary narrative), versus the assurance of living or collective memory, namely that it dwells within a continuum which it is equally obliged to extend, irrespective of the degree of comprehensiveness possessed by the latter.

50. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 397.

51. *Ibid.*, 398.

role of God as a protagonist in the affairs of the world. Ricoeur explains: "The vertical relation between the living eternity of the divine plan and the temporal vicissitudes of the chosen people, which was the very principle of the biblical and Talmudic meaning of history, cedes its place to a horizontal relation of causal connections and validations by history of all the strong convictions of the tradition. More than others, pious Jews resent the 'burden of history.'"⁵²

I think that this "burden of history" clearly weighs upon the shoulders of the Church as well, at least in the persons of her liturgists. Maxwell E. Johnson's recent appraisal of the current condition of *Liturgiewissenschaft* brings this into relief. In contrast to Vatican II's confident distinction "between what the Council Fathers saw as 'unchanging' and 'divinely instituted' and, therefore, 'irreformable' in liturgy," and what was susceptible of being altered, Johnson queries whether such categories can hold up under scholarly scrutiny. Contemporary research challenges the idea, that is, that there is or ever has been a normativity in the worship of the Church which could be attributed to divine authority, and hence irreducible to historicization. Thus, says Johnson, "when someone like Geoffrey Wainwright states that 'rather than present experience being allowed to hold sway over the inherited tradition'...I want to ask immediately, 'which inherited tradition and from which church in that 'tradition.'"⁵³

Treating in succession the thought of Gordon Lathrop, James White and Paul Bradshaw, Johnson explores the models offered by each for simultaneously attending responsibly to historical criticism and preserving a viable liturgical theology for the praying Church. While not wishing to examine in detail each model here, we can summarize as follows: for Lathrop, it is the historic *ordo* observed in the classical, first-millennial rites that is determinative for the present; for White, it is a given assembly's own experience of authenticity and efficacy in their worship, idiosyncrasy being part of what he considers the kaleidoscope of both the historical and contemporary practice of liturgy; and for Bradshaw, it is somewhere in between Lathrop

52. Ibid., 400.

53. Maxwell E. Johnson, "Can we Avoid Relativism in Worship? Liturgical Norms in the Light of Contemporary Scholarship," *Worship* 74, no. 2 (2000): 136.

and White—a conscientiously historical orientation that remains attuned to the polysemy of all rites, given their pastoral *Sitz im Leben*. Johnson ultimately resists the notion that liturgists be reduced to the work of cataloguing the past, avoiding judgment of the present and recommendations for the future. All is *not* relative in the liturgical tradition and thus one must take up the theological task of prescription, since “what appears to be at stake is the very identity and liturgical self-expression of classic orthodox Christianity itself.”⁵⁴

With Johnson’s conclusion we rejoin Ricoeur’s aforementioned concern at the potential suppression of the true, good and just at the hands of historicization, and Yerushalmi’s apprehension over its eclipse of the originary memory of the divine presence. Let us revisit in this connection the essay of Michael Aune with which we began the chapter. To recap: we observed that Aune criticizes Alexander Schmemmann for privileging the received liturgical tradition of the Church (i.e., the Byzantine Rite) as a source for theology; this is taken by the former to indicate a disregard for history.⁵⁵ In turn, Aune calls to account the work of David Fagerberg for adducing the patristic genre of liturgical commentaries in his argumentation on behalf of the liturgical tradition as “*theologia prima*.”⁵⁶ And shortly thereafter, he criticizes

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54. Maxwell E. Johnson, op. cit., 55. One wonders here if liturgical history must serve as history *for* those who are possessors of Yerushalmi’s “living memory”? Ought not a canonical historiography, which endeavours to inscribe “collective memory” for the sake of its transmission from one generation to the next, to be assisted rather than subverted by a critical historiography? To adapt two of Ricoeur’s favoured terms, must not “critique” serve as the handmaiden of “conviction”? This is certainly not to cast aspersions on the value of critique; Taft insists that “if our understanding of liturgy is to advance, we too must constantly seek to bend and negate our frameworks, create new systems that will yield new understanding. I am convinced that one cannot do this while ignoring history.” Ricoeur would concur with this, and his own *oeuvre* displays a remarkable facility with numerous scholarly methodologies, the genealogy of which he is ever careful to trace. Nonetheless, the “our” in Taft’s comment is significant: while excavating the past, Taft intends to speak to a community whose solicitude for the welfare of the Church’s liturgy he presumes—a community which regards its history, that is to say “tradition,” as “a genetic vision of the present” (*Beyond East and West*, 153).

55. Thus Aune states: “The problem [with Schmemmann’s vision of liturgy and of liturgical theology] is this—the sort of unity and synthesis in theology, worship, and life that Schmemmann believed to be exemplified in the patristic period simply did not exist....What we do know is that variant traditions live alongside one another” (Aune, “Liturgy & Theology: Part I,” 51–52).

56. “[Fagerberg’s] use of liturgical commentaries does not mean that this genre is objective in its point of view. Rather, they are an insider’s ‘take’ on the experience of the faith of the church as this experience is found in the church’s actual liturgical celebrations. As such they are *particular*, not universal” (“Liturgy & Theology: Part I,” 55). Aune’s dismissal of classical liturgical commentaries like that of St. Germanos of Constantinople, on the charge that such represent the views of an “insider” is somewhat baffling, given that Aune throughout his article reprimands the

Gordon Lathrop for the exact opposite: deducing the subsistence of a universal *ordo* within the various liturgical traditions of the Church, and deriving from it a liturgical theology.⁵⁷

Aune is effectively caught in the very historiographical knot that Ricoeur's *MHF* attempts meticulously to untangle. Keen, on the one hand, to preserve the "claim to truth" of liturgiology, and disturbed by "an inordinate emphasis," in the contemporary study of liturgy, "on what we *think* liturgy means rather than on historical evidence," Aune seeks to give pride of place to what "we know" on the basis of the most recently ripened "fruits of historical research." Fearful, on the other hand, of a perceived trend toward the de-theologizing of the study of liturgy, its co-optation by a focus on human agency, he insists upon a hermeneutical stance which would have as its *sine qua non* a pre-eminent regard for the prevenient action of God in the liturgy.⁵⁸ As we will see momentarily, the GBW illustrates this tension between the

status quo of liturgical theology, supposedly the result of the "Schmemmann-Kavanaugh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line[s]" hegemony, for not grasping "the centrality of Christ, and thus God's activity in liturgy," for not seeing it "as an event of the divine, grace-filled initiative of God" ("Liturgy & Theology: Part I," 64, 65)—surely the liturgical bias of an insider, if ever there were one!

57. Aune, "Liturgy & Theology: Part I," 58. Lathrop is insufficiently "historical" because he disregards particularity in favour of universality, and Fagerberg so because he disregards universality in favour of particularity! Aune's critique seems to assume an all-encompassing perspective which affords an easy discrimination between what pertains to the whole and what to the part. Schmemmann, for his part, was certainly well aware of the existence of variant traditions in the patristic period and beyond. But this is the point: there *were* sundry Rites, but there were sundry *Rites*. In other words, a unified ritual expression of Christian worship did obtain in the different geographic regions of the Church (Robert Taft explains that unification in the liturgical families of the first millennium, from the Peace of Constantine on, was "centripetal," leading to greater standardization among families" [*Beyond East and West*, 160]). Moreover, the Byzantine Rite to which Schmemmann constantly refers increased its influence far and wide throughout the first millennium and nearly monopolized the conversion of Slavs from around the turn of the first millennium on; finally, it is today the liturgy of over four hundred million people, for whom it indeed serves as a "synthesis in theology, worship and life." Thus Schmemmann would appear, *pace* Aune, to be on *terra firma* in basing his theology on this rite, clearly an expression of the "living memory" discussed above.

58. "In my judgment, the greater need in liturgical theology is not for an *ecclesiology*—liturgical or otherwise...but rather for a *theology* which, by implication, is a way of speaking of God by speaking to God. For some traditions such as Lutheranism or Calvinism, the primary action is always God's. Moreover, the question of where the emphasis is to be placed has always been, at least until the past generation, an important part of Lutheran theology. To shift the emphasis toward "church" and/or "assembly" can leave one vulnerable or susceptible to a different kind of theology where God no longer appears to be the initiator of the action of worship" ("Liturgy & Theology: Part II," 156–57). Ironically, having excoriated the four liturgical theologians mentioned above for allegedly pre-determining the meaning of liturgy apart from the witness of history, Aune concludes by doing the exact same thing, only in this instance it is the Lutheran *Weltanschauung* which is to govern the interrogation of the liturgy's historical "*Bausteine*." What is fascinating, moreover, is that the "building blocks" selected for examination, and put forward as evidence in favour of what Aune deems to be a characteristic hermeneutic of his own confession, *are all drawn from Eastern sources* (Byzantine, Ethiopian and Armenian). It is hard to not regard this approach as tendentiousness: one cannot critique

traditional interpretation of a rite, and the interpretation proposed by a critical history: the question it frames is that of who, exactly, is addressed by the prayers of the rite, and who, in consequence, *is* the author of its action. If not a matter of displacing divine agency for human, it yet concerns the representation of the Trinity, the revelation of whom is paramount among the received meanings of the rite.

Schmemmann for attempting to elaborate a theology on the basis of the received Byzantine tradition; or Fagerberg, for consulting a classical Byzantine liturgical commentary like that of Germanus; or Lathrop, for discerning an *ordo* amidst the classical liturgical families, and in the same breath proof-text an eclectic set of liturgical sources, all drawn from the *textus receptus* of their respective traditions, to highlight the salience of a given theological principle espoused by a heterogeneous confession.

CHAPTER 5

Manifestation and Proclamation

Analysis of the “Great Blessing of Water”

In this chapter we finally endeavour to apply the insights acquired from our reading of Ricoeur to the interpretation of a particular liturgical rite, namely, the Byzantine-Rite “Great Blessing of Water” (GBW), to which we have hitherto referred only obliquely. Beginning with a brief description and historical introduction to the service, we proceed by analyzing it according to the threefold schema proposed in our first chapter, and developed in chapters two to four, treating in turn its metaphors and symbols, its models of subjectivity, and finally, its dynamics of ritual transformation, understood as the manifold configuration of memory.

Historical Overview

Having spoken at length in the last chapter concerning the importance of the dialectic between the critical history of an event and its interpretation, it behooves us to consult the comprehensive historical-critical study of the GBW recently conducted by Nicholas Denysenko¹ as a hermeneutical dialogue partner. What follows here is a resumé of the salient findings of his research.

Since the oldest extant Byzantine liturgical manuscript, Codex Barberini 336 (reflecting the cathedral usage of Constantinople),² dates only from the second half of the eighth century,

1 Denysenko, op cit.

2. Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, eds , *L'Euclologio Barberini Gr 336, Second Edition*, BELS (Rome Edizioni liturgiche, 2000)

Denysenko concedes the prehistory of the rite to be obscure. To mitigate the lack of explicit liturgical sources, however, he adduces the witness of several church fathers, and of select saints' *vitae*; the import of these is that from at least the fourth century, if not earlier, Christians commemorated the Baptism of Christ by blessing water and reserving it for domestic consumption and sprinkling. A key witness in this respect is St. John Chrysostom (387), whose *Homily on the Baptism of Christ* testifies to the practice: water was kept for the remainder of the year or longer, even up to three years, during which period it allegedly retained its purity and freshness. Epiphanius of Salamis (403) corroborates the account of Chrysostom. The sources clearly exhibit a faith in the miraculous, beneficent properties of such water, accruing from the liturgically-mediated sanctification of the Jordan by Christ. Denysenko notes further that the theme of light prominent in the received rite reflects the original unity of Christmas and Epiphany, and draws attention to the longstanding typology between the wood by which Moses sweetened the waters of Meribah (Ex. 17:1-20), and the Cross by which Christ does/did likewise unto the Theophany water.

Denysenko arranges the history of the actual GBW rite proper into three stages, through recourse to over thirty extant euchologies and *typika* (*ordines*) representing the breadth of the Byzantine tradition. In Stage One (eighth-tenth centuries), the majority of the ritual components are variable across the sources, with only the four principal presidential prayers achieving stability in all.³ Readings, for example, vary in number, content and position in the rite, as do hymnography and gesture. Important to our reflections below is the fact that the early texts show the rite to have been celebrated at a courtyard fountain or other contained

3. Namely, "Lord Jesus Christ," "Great Are You" (with varying prologue, if any), "Incline Your Ear"—all still present in the rite—and the following, supplemental "courtyard prayer," absent from it: "God our God, who in the days of Moses changed the bitter water into sweet for the people, and healed the dangerous waters by salt in the days of Elisha, and sanctified the streams of the Jordan by your unblemished manifestation, now yourself, master, sanctify this water, and make it a spring of blessing, the healing of passions, the sanctification of dwellings, a protection from all visible and invisible attack for all who draw from it and partake of it. For yours is the dominion, and yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, of the Father."

water source,⁴ whereas its prehistory favours live water—a dialectic that will abide in the rite down to the present day.

Stage Two (eleventh-thirteenth centuries) is marked by the influence of the Constantinopolitan Studite and Palestinian Sabaitic monastic traditions, displayed in the proliferation of hymnography at the opening of the service, for instance, and a tendency toward detailed rubrical specifications. For their part, the readings remain in a state of flux with respect to number and content, but are now consistently found near the beginning of the service, rather than at the end, as in stage one. Since it does not appear in the monastic *typika* which dominate this stage, the received prologue to the “Great Are You” prayer is posited to be of cathedral provenance. Finally, a salient gesture, rare in the sources of Stage One, comes now to be widespread, namely, the plunging of the Cross into the blessed waters to the singing of a festal hymn.

In Stage Three (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) several additions and enrichments obtain, including the reappearance of elements from stage one absent in stage two—illustrative in the author’s view of Robert Taft’s “law of the paradox of the periphery,” according to which churches on the margins of a given territory (in the Byzantine Rite, Magna Grecia would be exemplary) retain older usages where their respective liturgical centre undergoes development. From the perspective of this stage, Denysenko can affirm the office to be “most likely a collection of materials created by anonymous authors and collated into a cohesive whole,” despite the occasional attribution of certain elements to prominent churchmen, notably St. Basil and St. Germanus of Constantinople.⁵ He concludes:

Collectively, the three stages constitute a snapshot into the life of a liturgical office that continues to develop. The office has multiple variants particular to local communities in Stage One, and even though certain elements become prevalent in most Euchologia by

4. Denysenko, op. cit., 46, 48.

5. Ibid., 84–85.

Stage Two, the ritual is not settled by Stage Three, but appears to represent a continued attempt to sort out the order for the celebration of the office. Only additional research into the history and provenance of the sources examined here can begin the process of acquiring definitive data to answer these questions....The only certain conclusion is that the core prayers of the office are very stable, while accompanying components like hymnody, gestures and their accompanying texts, and secondary prayers tend to vary from one source to the next.⁶

The additional research envisaged by the author includes an investigation of the particular sources used by the sixteenth-century Venetian publishers whose novel, printed editions of Byzantine liturgical books were principally responsible for the actual fixation of the *textus receptus*, as well as a clarification of how and why the Greek and Slavic recensions came to be discrete (the latter lacking the former's prologue to the "Great Are You" prayer, as well as its stipulation that the blessing be celebrated not only on the eve of the feast but also on the day itself).⁷ Among the three prayers which remain stable throughout the entire history of the GBW, as charted by Denysenko ("Lord Jesus Christ," "Great Are You" and "Incline Your Ear"), he identifies the second as the longest and most important, singling it out in consequence for an in-depth analysis. Deriving from a prayer presumably originating in the rite of baptism, with which it remains identical to a large degree, "Great Are You" can be seen, following the pioneering work of Miguel Arranz, to exhibit the classic, tripartite structure of Antiochene anaphoras. Although the customary initial dialogue (i.e., the *Sursum Corda*) of such is completely missing, and the *Sanctus* ostensibly so, yet there is a clear movement from doxology to anamnesis to epiclesis; moreover, the angelic worship to which the eucharistic *Sanctus* bears explicit witness is invoked obliquely in the "Great Are You" prayer, which also employs apophatic terminology—another integral feature of the Antiochene liturgical idiom. In

6. Ibid., 88.

7. Ibid., 221.

Denysenko's estimation, the prayer thematically encapsulates the significance of the rite as a whole:

Five themes from the "Great are You" prayer define the ultimate purpose of celebrating the sanctification of the waters. First, the prayer primarily addresses Christ and employs language that draws upon the commemoration of the feast as its main source. Second, the image of angelic worship is evoked to the worship of the Son of God as the initiator of the action, and the assembly joins the angels in glorifying him. Third, the work is interpreted as an act of the Holy Trinity, with each person of the Trinity acting in a particular way revealed by the story of the feast. Fourth, creation both participates in the divine activity, and is also illuminated. Fifth, the feast frequently interprets the gifts granted to the participants through baptismal motifs.⁸

The coherence implied in this thematic synthesis evinces the author's contention that it is certainly possible to identify a consistent theology in the GBW, notwithstanding the plurivocity intrinsic to the rite in virtue of its composite authorship.⁹

We will have occasion to return to Denysenko's work in the course of our Ricoeurian interpretation of the GBW. This resumé may be drawn to a close by rehearsing the theological claim advanced for the importance of the rite. It is said to be an effective recapitulation of baptism, a reminder and renewal for its participants of a sacramental event they may have forgotten, whose commission they may have neglected. The author muses that virtually the same graces may be sought of both baptism and the GBW,¹⁰ unwittingly affirming the

8. Ibid., 120.

9. One may suggest here that Ricoeur's dialectic between selfhood as *idem* and as *ipse* may also be applicable to the "identity" of a liturgical office. For despite positing a thematic coherence to the GBW, Denysenko acknowledges that its formal unity derives from editors compiling and rearranging elements to suit the practical exigencies of actual celebration. Is not the rite's identity then to be found in its potentiality for *action/passion*? The GBW's history, that is, witnesses a diversity of recensions, and hence only a modicum of *idem* identity; nevertheless, there is *ipse* identity, in the potentiality/actuality of communities blessing water and being blessed by it.

10. "The blessings received from drawing and partaking correspond to those received at Baptism. Participants use the water for growth in the spiritual life, leading to the rejection of sin, which explains the language of the healing of passions and purification of soul and body. Divine activity penetrates into participants' homes, as the water is used

erstwhile practice of administering the former during the celebration of Theophany.¹¹ In this vein, he also proposes the sharp differentiation between *sacraments* and *sacramentals*, characteristic of systematic theology, to be both artificial and counterproductive: “The example of the Theophany blessing of waters suggests that an encounter with God and the reception of sanctification are not limited to a prescribed number of sacraments, but can occur in a variety of liturgical celebrations. This warrants a spirit of openness in speaking about defining sacramentality and suggests the importance of recovering a patristic understanding of what constitutes a sacramental event.”¹²

“We Do Not Conceal Your Benevolence”: Naming God in the GBW

With Denysenko as a dialogue partner, we can proceed in our hermeneutical analysis of the GBW. Recall that in Chapter 2 we explored Ricoeur’s approach to the naming of God in Scripture and its corollary use of metaphor, elaborating upon its general implications for liturgical theology. Let us now attend to the specificity of the world opened up by the GBW, treating in turn its Christological orientation, the spectrum of “namings” displayed in its various genres and its construal of theodicy.

“You Are Our God”

The most conspicuous feature of the naming of God in the GBW is its preponderantly Christological orientation—comparatively rare in the Byzantine liturgical corpus, according to Denysenko.¹³ He opines that it actually serves to challenge the status quo of Orthodox systematic theology,¹⁴ which typically designates liturgical prayer as properly addressed to the

to sanctify daily life, and has the versatility to be used for expedient purposes” (Denysenko, op. cit., 160).

11. See Denysenko, op. cit., 161–68.

12. Denysenko, op. cit., 227–28.

13. Ibid., 6.

14. Denysenko adduces the work of Boris Bobrinskoy as representative (*The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999]). Bobrinskoy argues that in Eastern trinitarian theology the Father is the only cause of the Trinity, and thus the proper addressee of liturgical prayer. Only the Father is rightfully invoked, in an epiclesis, to send forth the Spirit. This view is contradicted by Denysenko’s analysis of the GBW’s “Great Are You” prayer; he establishes that certainly in its current form, it is most plausibly seen as addressed to Christ—Orthodox systematic theology notwithstanding. Bobrinskoy’s evidence, then, does not fit his conclusion; he may be confused by the fact that the prayer preceding the

Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit; particularly unusual is the form of epiclesis by which Christ, rather than the Father, is supplicated to send the Spirit: "For the Byzantine tradition, the possibility that an entire liturgical office addresses prayer to Christ, and invokes Christ to send the Holy Spirit, suggests a liturgical theology that challenges this monarchical priority of Trinitarian theology."¹⁵ Denysenko later acknowledges there to be ambiguity in regard to the addressee of the rite's core prayer ("Great Are You"), which has been alternatively taken to invoke the Father—the result, in his estimation, of a collusion between the composite authorship of the rite and said "monarchical priority."

Now Ricoeur's understanding of polyphony would seem apropos in this connection. For if, on the one hand, the GBW's "diverse contents suggest that it could have been a living euchological text, with one or more authors contributing to its content,"¹⁶ this diversity has nevertheless been susceptible of homogenization, given the strictures of Orthodox trinitarian and sacramental theology. Denysenko counsels, therefore, a rehabilitation of the peculiar Christological orientation of the rite, allowing that it issues a constructive challenge to the received understanding; in place of an *a priori*, univocal understanding of the operations of liturgical prayer, he advocates the value of the alternative framework permitted by the text's equivocity. We shall explore this framework further below, when discussing the modes of subjectivity licensed by the GBW. Here it suffices to submit that such equivocity serves to exemplify Ricoeur's "surplus of meaning." That is, where historical-critical inquiry rightly endeavours to reconstruct the original form(s) of the rite, a hermeneutical consideration duly listens for the polyphony voiced in the received text, thereby vindicating its potential enrichment of the communication in question.

"Great Are You" in the rite of baptism—a private prayer of apology on the part of the priest—is addressed to the Father.

15. Denysenko, *op. cit.*, 9.

16. *Ibid.*, 104.

This polyphony is in fact more momentous than might at first appear, for the Christological interpretation entails a metaphorical “seeing as,” by which the divine initiative acclaimed in the rite’s Old Testament allusions is assimilated to Christ, i.e., by which the “God” referent becomes predicable of Jesus, in precisely the fashion which Ricoeur, ironically, disavows (“I will not hesitate to say that I resist with all my strength the displacement of the accent from God to Jesus Christ, which would be the equivalent of substituting one naming for another”).¹⁷ Denysenko explains that such allusions, which he terms “anamnetic doxologies,” do not mention the Father, and are thus “difficult to interpret, as they can refer to the divine initiative of either the Father or the Son.”¹⁸ On the Christological reading, the Son may be efficaciously supplicated to sanctify the water because he is taken to be the self-same God “who in the days of Noë drowned sin through the water of the flood....who through Moses freed the Hebrew race from the slavery of Pharaoh through the sea....who split open the rock in the desert, and waters rushed out and torrents flooded down, and [who] satisfied your thirsty people....who through Elias turned Israel from the error of Baal.” Thus do the “anamnetic doxologies” attribute to Christ the typological water-related miracles of the Old Testament.

Now this may, on the one hand, simply indicate the person of Christ to be so intimately associated with that of the Father, that the acts of the latter may be idiomatically predicated of the former; this is indeed how Denysenko concludes the matter: “The allusions to Old Testament paradigms also demonstrate the activity of the Father in acts of divine salvation. The Father is not absent from the Church’s prayer, nor is he explicitly invoked, and this could be due to the assumption that Christ is never separated from his Father. The unicity of this prayer’s language occurs in the connection between events in which Christ acted and petitions for him to act again. Thus, the Theophany office emphasizes invoking Christ while perhaps assuming the Father’s divine authorship of all salvation.”¹⁹ Such an assumption, moreover,

17. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 230.

18. Denysenko, *op. cit.*, 157.

19. *Ibid.*, 157–58.

would not be out of step with the classical Trinitarian teaching of the Eastern Church, in which the three persons of the Trinity are said to have a common will and a common energy, or power of operation.

On the other hand, as mentioned in Chapter 2, it has been suggested that Byzantine Christology is crypto-Monophysite,²⁰ in its thrust to promote the deity of Christ unwittingly obscuring the full stature of his humanity and blurring the distinction between his person and that of the Father. The GBW exhibits, I think, this venerable pattern. For Jaroslav Pelikan observes that according to Tertullian, already at the turn of the third century, the Christian faithful were inclined to resist overdistinction in the nature of God and his acts toward the world, preferring to err on the side of glorifying Christ in excess—to “clai[m] the titles of God and Lord for Christ without qualification”²¹—rather than risk denying him rightful glory, or worse, jeopardizing his divinity.

In this respect, the liturgical idiom is arguably only exploiting the continuity between the Old and New Testaments established in the early church by a tandem use of the term “Lord” (*kyrios*): in the Septuagint’s reference to Yahweh, and the New Testament’s designation of Christ. By calling Christ “*kyrios*,” that is, all the divine attributes and actions associated with that title in the Old Testament perforce redound upon him; not only is he seen to be one with the God of Israel, but the God of Israel is now seen to be one with him, to indeed, in a pre-incarnate form, *be* him. The language of Scripture would thus seem to have conspired with the determinations of dogmatic theology, as expressed in the decrees of the early ecumenical councils, to “Christify” the Old Testament, providing approbation for ambiguity of the kind Denysenko discerns in the “Great Are You” prayer— although, as mentioned above, he considers this affair to actually result from a situation of multiple authorship. Of course, it is debatable whether or not one is dealing here with a hermeneutical *felix culpa*.

20. Peter Galadza, “Canadian UC Worship,” 256n14.

21. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 177.

“Sing to the Name of the Lord”

Set within this broader dialectic between, in Ricoeur’s terms, the “poem of God” and the “poem of Christ,” how do the respective genres of the GBW cause the naming of God to “migrate”? The processional hymn of the GBW melds a phrase from Psalm 28:3 (LXX) with a gloss on Is. 11:2, immediately establishing a narrative setting: “The voice of the Lord upon the waters cries out, saying, ‘Come all of you, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, of Christ who has appeared.’” This opening text offers an interesting variation upon the primacy Ricoeur accords to narrative as indicative of “God’s imprint [being] in history before being in speech. Speech comes second inasmuch as it confesses the trace of God in the event.”²² For whereas biblical narrative recounts the operations of divine agency in the *past*, the hymn in question acclaims it as occurring in the *present*: the voice of the Lord *is* calling out.

Ricoeur does acknowledge this phenomenon to an extent, in his consideration of the time of the hymn—which given his biblical frame of reference he terms the “time of the psalms”—as that which envelops all other modes of temporality: “This time is that of today *and* everyday....It is the privilege of worship to reactualize salvation, to reiterate the creation, to remember the exodus and the entry into the promised land, to renew the proclamation of the law, and to repeat the promises.”²³ Note, however, that he regards the psalms as celebrating, by means of the vivid present tense, *past* events; the past is called to mind via the use of the present.

In our liturgical hymn, by contrast, what is described does not correspond to a particular biblical event; there is no instance in Scripture of God calling out over the waters, “Come all of you...” Instead, one is faced with the prospect of either a gnomic affirmation, namely, that water categorically carries the resonance of the divine voice, or more plausibly,

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22. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 225.

23. *Ibid.*, 179.

the claim that in the moment of the liturgy, the specific waters before which the congregation is gathered bear witness to said exhortation on God's part. In the latter case, a metaphorical injunction is again imposed: the worshippers are beckoned to a "seeing-as," or better, a "hearing-as," in which the sound of water is taken to convey the words actually uttered by the cantors, if not indeed by themselves. Implicitly commended here, in my opinion, is what we in Chapter Two called "truth as manifestation." If one does take the statement as constative, i.e., *not* as one whose illocutionary force is to constitute the very thing articulated—tantamount to considering the voice of God to speak merely in *our* own performing of the liturgical text "over" the respective font or body of water—then the worshippers are invited to verily encounter the "waters" as disclosing a word that, paradoxically, cannot be articulated save by the ancillary work of language.

Ricoeur captures this concept deftly: "[A] symbolism is operative only if its structure is interpreted...And in this sense, any functioning of a symbolism requires a minimal hermeneutics. Yet this linguistic articulation does not suppress but rather presupposes what I have called the adherence of the symbolism that seems to me to characterize the sacred universe....The sacredness of nature shows itself in symbolically saying itself. And the showing founds the saying, not vice versa. Its sacrality is immediate or it does not exist."²⁴ We shall return to this below, in considering the "bound symbolism" of water. We shall also remand until later a discussion of the second and third of the opening stichera. In the present connection, I wish simply to evince how the rite begins by adverting to truth as manifestation, to a "showing" that founds a corollary "saying."

After the opening hymns come three readings from Isaiah. The liturgical *Sitz im Leben* of these readings conditions the import of their naming of God, since the eschatological "world in front of the text" would appear to be realized in an immediate, albeit partial way, by the rite itself. When the text declares, for example, that "[God] himself will come down and save

24. Ibid., 54.

us...there will be a spring of water for the thirsty land," the respective condescension is readily equated to the grand narrative of the Incarnation whose protagonist, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, identifies himself as the Saviour, the Living Water whose consumption will forever quench thirst. And yet this is still to circle within what Ricoeur calls the centripetal movement of the biblical text; aside from the fruitful intertextuality reaped by such a messianic interpretation of the prophecy, the more obvious and fecund reference is to the tangible water about to be blessed. Yet the Great Litany will invite the superaddition of this very interpretation, by its own allusion to the Gospel parallel: "For this water to become water springing up to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord."

Strikingly absent from all three readings from Isaiah is any hint of the threat which Ricoeur often associates with the prophetic genre. Recall that in the penultimate Gifford Lecture he presented it as the occasion of a "fragmented identity."²⁵ Nevertheless, Ricoeur is also well aware of the transition within prophetic literature from, we may say, "critique to conviction": passing through the denunciations of an Amos,²⁶ Scripture inexorably courses toward the consolations of an Isaiah, complimented by Ricoeur for his "eschatology [which] liberates a potential of hope, beyond the closure of the established [i.e., narrative] tradition."²⁷ Now if we follow the Ricoeurian account of the influence exercised upon this tradition by prophecy, to wit, that its temporal dialectic casts the founding narrative as incomplete—"the promise contained in the tradition itself now appears as not saturated by prior accomplishments"—we gain a new perspective on the baptismal narrative already announced

25. Ricoeur, "Experience and Language," 145.

26. "[T]he [narrative] tradition also looks toward the future. In founding the identity of the people, it projects itself toward the future in the form of an unprovable confidence in a security that cannot fail. But it is precisely this assurance, transformed into a possession, that the prophet Amos denounces when he proclaims vehemently that the Day of Yahweh will not be a day of joy but one of terror and mourning. Hence it is in relation to this illusory projection of the tradition about the future that the prophet takes his stand. And he does so in opposing to this fallacious assurance the true reading of the present situation. It is in this sense that we can say the first temporal structure of prophecy is not foresight but the irruption of real history, or, to put in another way, the confrontation of an ideological use of the tradition with a truthful discernment of historical actuality" (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 174).

27. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 176.

in the opening hymns of the GBW. Forasmuch as one may designate this narrative as the liturgical analogue of the Torah to which Ricoeur's discussion of biblical time refers, its orbit within the "gravitational space" of the succeeding prophecies of Isaiah causes it to similarly acquire a new temporal meaning: where the narrative structures the baptism of Christ as a *completed* action, the prophetic readings float the possibility that it is unfinished, yet to be fulfilled in a future event inaugurated truly, if not definitively, by the rite to unfold. Ricoeur asserts that "[t]he past"—in this instance, the singular event of Christ's baptism—"is not simply exhausted...rather, it leaves behind a storehouse of inexhaustible potentialities. *But it requires prophecy and its eschatology to open this initial surplus of meaning that, so to speak, lies dreaming in the traditional narrative.*"²⁸

It is surely apparent that the surplus of meaning borne by the baptismal narrative requires for its harvest an extraordinary interpretative labour; no dominical injunction, like those to baptize or celebrate the Eucharist, sanctions the GBW; nor does any other New Testament text even countenance such a rite. One may, therefore, be forgiven for presuming Christ's baptism to have reached fulfillment in his Passion and, by extension, the sacrament of baptism by which humanity is made to share therein. Only in the light of the prophetic text, interpreted synchronically in the context of the liturgy, does one glimpse the ritual world in front of the Gospel text, even as it is given to the rite's opening hymn to deploy the virtuality of the cosmic symbolism conveyed by the creature of water.

Not only are the prophecies harbingers, moreover, of the narrative's potential, but they function to ground the scaffolding of action undergirding a liturgical hermeneutic. For does not the entire rite ostensibly qualify as a perlocutionary effect of the third reading: "Thus says the Lord: Draw out water with gladness from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day, Sing to the Lord and cry out his name. Proclaim among the Nations his glorious deeds, remind them that his name has been exalted. Sing to the name of the Lord, for he has done great

28. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 176 (emphasis mine).

things. Proclaim these in all the earth. Exult and be glad, you that dwell in Sion, because the Holy One of Israel has been exalted in the midst of her"?²⁹ Is it not here in the GBW itself that the Lord is vividly hailed in song; that he is offered praise and thanksgiving for his great deeds; that the Holy One is experienced in the midst of the faithful, who will "draw out water with gladness," as the litany prescribes, "for every suitable purpose"? Interestingly, this third reading from Isaiah is the first to receive any historical documentation, as far as the GBW is concerned, in the fifth-eighth century Georgian lectionary.³⁰

Moving on, we observe that the Epistle serves willingly to enshrine the typological method, as if to literally defend the licity of applying the preceding lections to the actions soon to follow. Fortuitously, Ricoeur actually happens to argue that the kind of "creative repetition" dominating restorationist prophecies like Isaiah presages the use of typology exemplified in this text: "[T]he early church will turn this procedure [i.e., "creative repetition"] into a hermeneutic and find in it the basic structures of its typological reading of the Old Testament. This development authorizes us to speak...of an interpretation of the New in terms of the Old already at work in the Old Testament."³¹ Our text has St. Paul assert the Children of Israel to have been "baptized" into Moses, to have imbibed "the same spiritual drink" as the Corinthians themselves: "For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them. Now the rock was Christ." The person of Christ is thus projected back upon the sacred history of the Hebrews, such that they are portrayed as having sojourned with the trinitarian God without having known him as such. Not only does this text, therefore, endorse a typological correspondence between the quaffing of old and that with which the rite will conclude, but it anticipates the ascription to Christ of other Old Testament water-related miracles which the "Great Are You" prayer will condone, as related above.

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29. Is. 12:3-6 (Translation of the LXX by Ephrem Lash, as found in the Appendix below).

30. Denysenko, op. cit., 32.

31. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 175-76.

We are remiss to not have mentioned the brief psalm response (*prokeimenon*) preceding the Epistle. Identical to that sung in the baptismal liturgy, a sacrament known from ancient times as “enlightenment” (*photismos*), its appropriateness follows from the Septuagint version of the text: “The Lord is my enlightenment and my Saviour. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”³² Notice here that in addition to rendering “enlightenment” for the Hebrew “light,” the Septuagint also differs in its choice of “saviour” over “salvation,” and “defender” over “stronghold,” illustrating the Septuagint Psalter’s preference for personal rather than impersonal appellations for God. We recall that for Ricoeur, a Psalm text like this is a capital instance of the kerygmatic language of the Bible, appreciable in its recourse to metaphor only by comparison to the poetic language to which it is akin.³³ And yet, the preference at issue seems rather to betray a certain discomfort with metaphor, the insertion perhaps of “another Logos”³⁴ (the philosophical scruples of a nascent ontotheology?) into the “seeing as” produced by the sacred word.

Such a dialectic in the naming of God would actually seem to obtain throughout the GBW in the space between its respective treatment of light and of water: the former, as mentioned above, being counted a theme as persistent as the latter, in Denysenko’s assessment of the rite’s historical variants. In the Great Litany, for example, amid a series of petitions for exceptional graces to be bestowed on, in and through the water to be blessed, stands out a request for the “enlightenment of knowledge and true religion through the visitation of the Holy Spirit,” the naming of God being thereby projected onto spheres as ethereal as epistemology and ethics, as tactile as the ritual consumption, indeed “communion” of water.³⁵ This symbolic contrast between the immateriality of light, and the materiality of water will

32. Ps. 26:1 (Translation of the LXX by Ephrem Lash, as found in the Appendix below).

33. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 136.

34. Ibid., 134.

35. Denysenko highlights the use of the term “communion” in the GBW’s litany, the ritual drawing of water bearing already in the Greek the eucharistic resonance of “a privilege of receiving a share in something that is given” (Denysenko, op. cit., 159).

recur elsewhere in the service, notably in the festal kontakion and the concluding idiomelon.³⁶ It shall also prove significant in our evaluation of the soteriology of the GBW below.

The Psalm verses sung at the Alleluia following the Epistle likewise welcome a metaphorical entry, the first ("The voice of the Lord is upon the waters") repeating the adversion of the rite's opening hymn to its aquatic setting; the second ("The God of glory thundered upon the waters"), also excerpted verbatim from the LXX Psalter, functioning by dint of its past tense as a narrative preface to the baptismal account about to be proclaimed. The sway in the biblical text's tenses reiterates the temporal oscillation already introduced at the beginning of the service in the third of the opening hymns: "As a man, Christ King, you *came* to the river, and in your goodness you *hasten* to accept the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner."³⁷

Next we have the Gospel, the laconic, Markan account of Christ's baptism.³⁸ Perhaps the most salient aspect of the text is its obvious brevity, particularly arresting given the amplitude of the gloss inscribed upon it by the liturgy. We will attend to its interpretation

36. Respectively, "Today you have appeared to the inhabited world; and your light, O Lord, has been marked upon us; who with knowledge sing your praise. You have come, you have appeared, the unapproachable Light" and "Let us the faithful praise the greatness of God's dispensation concerning us. For in our transgression he, alone clean and undefiled, becoming man, is cleansed in Jordan, sanctifying me and the waters, and crushing the heads of the dragons on the waters. Let us therefore draw water with gladness, brethren. For the grace of the Spirit is being given invisibly to those who draw with faith by Christ, God and the Saviour of our souls."

37. It goes without saying that the English quoted here reflects the nuances of the Greek.

38. Especially germane to the imminent action of the rite is the reference in the text to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ as he comes up out of the water. The invocation of the Holy Spirit, or *epiclesis*, is a persistent feature of Eastern sacramental rites; it is through the Holy Spirit that things of this world realize their potential to serve as loci for the encounter with the ineffable God.

As we see in the general intentions, or Great Litany, which follow the Gospel, there are several petitions invoking a descent of the Spirit analogous to that experienced by Christ in his baptism and, *mutatis mutandis*, to that rehearsed in the Eucharist: "For this water to be sanctified by the power and operation and visitation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord. For there to come down upon these waters the cleansing operation of the Trinity beyond all being, let us pray to the Lord. For there to be given them the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan, let us pray to the Lord." The text supplicates, unreservedly and unashamedly, that the matter lying before the community, the quotidian creature of water, itself the substance most necessary to physical life on the planet, become the place wherein God will salvifically act. It does so with a naïve sacramental realism, adhering to the scriptural paradigm according to which water repeatedly occasions hierophany.

momentarily, in our discussion below of the soteriology embraced by the GBW, and return to it again in our historiographical determinations near the end of the chapter.

Finally, we must recover, in this present analysis of the naming of God by the rite, the potent dialectic of apophasis and kataphasis, treated at length in Chapter 2. The epic prologue to the central prayer of the GBW, “Great Are You,” commences with an address to the “Trinity beyond all being, beyond all goodness, beyond all godhead, all-powerful, all-vigilant, invisible, incomprehensible; Creator of the spiritual beings and rational natures, innate goodness, unapproachable Light that enlightens everyone coming into the world.” The first three phrases, taken verbatim from the opening lines of *The Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius³⁹—a treatise consecrated to a kind of theological “work of the negative”—intone a note of *docta ignorantia* that reverberates like an *ostinato* under the ensuing paean to the acts wrought by God in history. That is, with the rite already having spoken in rhapsodic terms (through the preceding hymns, readings and prayers) of God as revealed, the prologue disclaims any mastery of meaning. If the multiple namings in the preceding genres already caused a certain “migration” of God’s name, in their rapid juxtaposition of multiple figures, the present prayer explicitly thematizes the unknowability of God, speculatively qualifying such figures as metaphorical.

Yet the metaphors are not, to use C.S. Lewis’s term, “magistral,” but rather “pupillary”; the insertion of apophatic terminology does not reduce that of the kataphatic, but makes it mean *more*, serving as a qualifier that pushes us not *outside* of metaphorical speech but deeper into it. For as Gorazd Kocijančič neatly puts it:

The main philosophical characteristic of ecclesiastical apophaticism is the knowledge that the real apophasis (i.e., the real negation of our words and thoughts because of the otherness of the Other, the real openness for the mystery) is only that one which does

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39. Curiously, Denysenko makes no mention of this connection.

not prescribe [what] should “be” and what “not”[The] apophaticism of the Church, contrary to the (post)atheistic thematisation of mystery, thus demands *in the name of philosophical reasoning* not only apophasis, the negation of everything which could be said and thought about Mystery, but also the negation of negation...i.e., *the possibility of cataphasis as the free self-communication of Mystery*.⁴⁰

This recalls Ricoeur’s insistence that the labour of language, its struggling through metaphor toward silence, is a duty which must not be abdicated by a pre-emptive mystical retreat.

In this sense, the audacity of this prayer, first asseverating an adherence to the divine transcendence, and immediately thereafter bubbling forth in acclamations to its immanence exhibits how the prolixity of the kataphatic is not the contrary of the terseness of the apophatic, but its necessary consequence and complement; admitting that “no word is adequate to sing the praise of your wonders,” one must nevertheless defy limitations in stammering forth, lest the wonders not be known at all. The paradox is particularly acute given the fact that the apophatic terminology is employed not only in the first lines of the prologue, addressed to the Trinity as a singular, ineffable entity, but also in the subsequent naming of Christ as him who “being God uncircumscribed, without beginning and inexpressible, came upon earth, taking the form of a servant.” As with the assimilation of the naming of Christ to the naming of God in the Old Testament, discussed above, there is here an extravagance of denomination—the kind of Ricoeurian “reorientation by disorientation” to which we will return below.

“Crushing the Heads of the Dragons on the Waters”

We turn now to the central prayer of the GBW, “Great Are You.” This text confesses Christ to be the agent of creation, the artisan of the cosmos, to whom it, along with the spiritual powers of heaven, needs must render obeisance. Having descended to earth in the

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40 Gorazd Kocjančič, “He Who is and Being On the Postmodern Relevance of Eastern Christian Apophaticism,” in *The Christian East Its Institutions and Thought*, ed Robert F Taft SJ (Rome. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 251, 1996), 646–47.

“compassion of [his] mercy” he “sanctified the streams of Jordan by sending down from heaven [his] All-Holy Spirit and [he] smashed the heads of the dragons that lurked there.”⁴¹ In this line of the prayer we encounter a surprising, seemingly incoherent and misplaced allusion to Psalm 73:12-15 (LXX), wherein God is depicted—in imagery borrowed from Near Eastern mythology—as having established the world by vanquishing a preternatural sea-monster. I would propose, however, that this allusion is the unexpected key to the soteriology of the rite. Why? Consider that the GBW, *prima facie*, lacks any reference to the Paschal Mystery; conspicuous by its absence is any indication of the Passion or the Resurrection. Only the gesture of plunging the Cross into the waters at the conclusion of the service is connotative, if not denotative, in this respect.⁴² Does the GBW then propound what Kevin Vanhoozer calls a “pristine soteriological model,” before which the “myth of penal substitution” ought to recede?⁴³

The matter is, I would venture, profoundly dialectical; let us see if Ricoeur can help us discern, as it were, the arc of the pendulum. We find appropriate tools for the task in his determinations concerning the naming of evil,⁴⁴ which serves, according to van den Hengel, as one of the “twin goads” to his life work—alongside the naming of God.⁴⁵ Now Ricoeur argues

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41 While attending to the theme of creation in the GBW (its revelation in the liturgy as beautiful, transfigured by Theophany) Denysenko does not offer any treatment of its remarkable dragon motif. This motif is potentially an important node whereby sacramental theology may intersect with theodicy. Certainly, in the wake of the tsunami of December 2003, and indeed of any water-related disaster, affirmation of the beauty of creation cannot proceed apart from consideration of its proclivity to sponsor unmitigated disaster. On this theme, see the poignant ruminations of David Bentley Hart in *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005).

42 “In conclusion, the plunging of the cross constitutes a symbolic action allowing a multivalence of interpretation which ultimately refers to God’s salvation of his people in the continuum of history. Christ’s historic entrance into the Jordan remains the paradigmatic action that sanctifies the waters, as illustrated by a variety of liturgical prayers and hymns. As the epiclesis requests that Christ would come forward again, the plunging of the cross can also be understood as an action that completes the Christological trajectory of the blessing of the waters, as the cross conveys the presence of Christ himself. The plunging of the cross became the symbolic ritual expressing Christ’s historical entrance into the Jordan, a tangible epicletic action completing the anamnesis of the Jordan event” (Denysenko, *op cit*, 212–13).

43 Vanhoozer, *op cit*, 381. The author refers to Ricoeur’s commentary on this “myth” in *The Symbolism of Evil*.

44 See “Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” in *Figuring the Sacred*, 249–61.

45 van den Hengel, “Naming the Unspeakable,” 244.

that evil, approached speculatively, leads to an aporia: it cannot be thought in rational terms adequate to our experience. Indeed, it is an enigma that calls into question reason's very requirement of logical coherence, i.e., that propositions be submitted to the rules of non-contradiction and systematic totalization.⁴⁶ Part of the challenge is that we seem unable to avoid placing within the common category of evil, phenomena as heterogeneous as sin, suffering and death.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the genre of theodicy, which aspires to such a comprehensive taxonomy, has had a prolific career. Speculative discourse on evil knows no dearth.⁴⁸ For Ricoeur, however, its successes are Pyrrhic; genuine gain is afforded rather by those less ambitious genres preceding theodicy, in particular, myth (which narrates evil, typically in terms of a given cosmology); wisdom (which reflects on how and why evil affects me personally); and gnosis (which dualistically posits its necessity—thereby appreciating the sheer magnitude of evil—if also renouncing upon its contestation).

Such genres compel us to think *more*, by thinking *differently*. Ricoeur singles out wisdom as being particularly productive in this regard—"one of the possible paths by which thought, action, and feeling may venture forth together"⁴⁹—but we meet another, I think, in the myth of evil sustained by the liturgy. For although the doctrine of God proffered by the GBW is perforated by speculative thought (as displayed by the rite's apophatic un/naming of him), the respective treatment of evil does appear to abide on the purely mythical level. True, something of an exception may obtain in the priest's apology, embedded within the prologue to "Great Are You"; recognizing his sinfulness, he makes the following request: "May my supplication

46. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 249.

47. "However, evil as wrongdoing and evil as suffering belong to two heterogeneous categories, that of blame and that of lament....whereas blame makes culprits of us, lament reveals us as victims." Blame, that is, reflects culpability on our part; lament, that we undergo suffering. Yet Ricoeur concedes that it is part of the mystery of evil that we do encounter these two phenomena to be inextricably bound together: "This strange experience of passivity, at the very heart of evildoing, makes us feel ourselves to be victims in the very act that makes us guilty" (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 250).

48. Theodicy, by Ricoeur's definition, requires three univocal propositions (God is omnipotent; God is good; evil exists), an apologetic goal and a logically coherent method. Its legacy matures in "ontotheology," but expires to the extent that it can never garner sufficient proof of the ultimate triumph of good.

49. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 260.

for the people here present be acceptable, so that my offenses may not prevent the Holy Spirit from being present here; but permit me now without condemnation to cry out to you.” For the most part, however, evil is located in the *extrinsic* power of dragons: a cosmic, rather than moral, etiology.⁵⁰

But how does myth actually *amplify* thought? Ricoeur explains: “The realm of myth...is a vast field of experimentation, or even of playing with hypotheses in the most varied and the most fantastic forms....The counterpart of this tremendous contribution of mythical thought to speculation on evil is that one is ceaselessly brought back to the question of origin: From whence comes evil?”⁵¹ By its narrative of Christ conquering the dragons, accordingly, the liturgy can be seen to *prevent* us in our thinking about evil, and this in both senses of the word: it “goes before” us, expressing our sense of evil being somehow, mysteriously, always and already there;⁵² but it also “obstructs” our attempts at discursive circumscription. But is this not rather to reduce the scope for thinking through evil, than broaden it? To justify our contention, we must integrate Ricoeur’s pertinent exegetical inquiry on the first chapter of Genesis.⁵³

By way of introduction, however, let us recall that for Orthodox theology, as represented by Alexander Schmemmann, the blessing of the waters constitutes a type of spiritual cosmogony: “The waters of creation, darkened and polluted by the fall, which had become the very symbol of death and demonic oppression, now revealed as the waters of Jordan, as the beginning of recreation and salvation. The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, who ‘moved on the

50. Ricoeur cites Augustine’s redefinition of evil, as a negation or absence of the good, as portentous: “The most important corollary of this negating of the substantiality of evil is that the confession of evil grounds an exclusively moral vision of evil. If the question *Unde malum?* loses all ontological meaning, the question that replaces it—*Unde malum faciamus?* (From whence comes wrongdoing?)—shifts the problem of evil into the sphere of action, of willing, of free will” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 253). The doctrine of original sin is the price to pay for this rationalization, according to Ricoeur, one that he finds exorbitant; sin is seen as not simply preceding, but corrupting us all. Nevertheless, it testifies persuasively to the ineluctable fact of evil’s provenience.

51. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 251.

52. “[O]ne fundamental aspect of the experience of evil [is] the both individual and communal sense of human impotence in the face of the demonic power of evil already there, long before any bad initiative may be assigned to some deliberate intention” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 254).

53. “On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1-2:4a” in *Figuring the Sacred*, 129–43.

face of the waters' in the beginning, descends again on them; and they—and through them the world—are revealed to be that which they were meant and created to be: the life of man as communion with God. The time of salvation begins again."⁵⁴ Schmemmann's lyricism belies a dichotomy exposed by Ricoeur's text, to wit, the commingling in the Old Testament of two contrary models of creation. The earlier, adopted from Near Eastern mythology, consists in the divine conquest over the dragon(s) (Leviathan, Rahab), cited in Psalm 73:13-14 (LXX)⁵⁵—to which the GBW clearly alludes. The later, distinctively Hebraic model, is that of a divine wind hovering over the waters, and the ensuing *fiat lux*. In short, there is witness to both creation by *deed* and by *word*, with the latter process incorporating, without assimilating, the former: "Gen. 1 is continuous with Psalms 89 and 74. And so understood, the thought process at work in such a creation narrative consists in linking the archaic form of the myth, foreign to the faith of Israel, to the history of salvation specific to the Hebraic theological world."⁵⁶

Noteworthy here is the fact that the pagan model involves not only action, but *conflict*, while the Hebraic seems to infer a gratuitousness in creation. I would like to propose that the GBW preserves this tension in a dialectic between the symbolism of water and that of light, introduced above. Water and light, respectively, can there be seen to represent the two creations by deed (act proper) and word (speech-act). How so? On the one hand, the rite emphasizes Christ's victory over the dragons as the consummation of his baptism, the event whose salvific repercussions are felt in the sanctification of the waters transmitted to participants in and by the GBW. On the other hand, there is a definite soteriological theme of light and the disclosure of a concomitant *knowledge*, proclaimed, *inter alia*, in the Kontakion: "Today you have appeared to the inhabited world; and your light, O Lord, has been marked

54 Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 47

55. See also Psalm 88 9 (Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007])

56 Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 131

upon us, who with knowledge sing your praise. You have come, you have appeared, the unapproachable Light.”⁵⁷

The rite thus exhibits its salvation/creation drama as a rehearsal of Genesis, but one which distends the action element in the biblical text; where the latter combines a hovering over the abyss with a speaking into the void, the former revivifies the ancient motif of God engaging as a warrior in the battle against primordial, preternatural foes, inserting it into the sequence. This complex liturgical dialectic, or rather trialectic, flows from the *narrative* of the Spirit descending upon the Son, and on us (reflected, respectively, in the Gospel itself and the litany’s petition, “For us to be enlightened with the enlightenment of knowledge and true religion through the visitation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord”); through the *epiclesis* of the Spirit upon the water; to the *re-enactment* of Christ’s marine combat in the plunging of the Cross. Similarly, the “Lord Jesus Christ” prayer passes effortlessly from rational illumination to sacramental sprinkling,⁵⁸ a movement anticipated also in the very identification of baptism as enlightenment, to which the Prokeimenon alludes.⁵⁹

One must, in consequence, qualify the gratuitousness of the cosmos assumed by Hart in respect of the Genesis narrative, to which we referred in Chapter 3, as also Denysenko’s claim

57 The troparion of the feast also reflects this emphasis, making no mention whatsoever of a sanctification of the waters, much less privileging such as the axial meaning of Christ’s baptism “As you were baptised in the Jordan, Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, for the voice of the Father bore witness to you, naming you the Beloved Son, and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the sureness of the word Christ God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to you”

58 “Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son, who are in the bosom of the Father, true God, source of life and immortality, *Light from Light, who came into the world to enlighten it, flood our mind with light by your Holy Spirit* and accept us as we bring you praise and thanksgiving for your wondrous mighty works from every age As we celebrate the memory of this divine Mystery, we entreat you, Master, lover of mankind *Sprinkle on us, your unworthy servants, cleansing water, in accordance with your divine promise, the gift of your compassion, that the request of us sinners over this water may become acceptable by your goodness and that through it your blessing to be granted to us and to all your faithful people, to the glory of your holy, venerated Name*”

59 Similarly, Denysenko draws attention to the combination of symbolism in the variant chant sung historically during the plunging of the Cross, “Great Is the Cross That Shined” (Denysenko, op cit, 205) Denysenko also notes the confluence of fire and water in the epiphany to Elijah on Mt Carmel, with which the “anamnetic doxologies” conclude We may add that the idea of Jesus as the Light, going down into the darkness of the waters, is undoubtedly also symbolized by the immersion of candles into the waters (in some recensions) during the recital of “Therefore, O King, lover of mankind, be present now too through the visitation of your Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water”

that the GBW reveals creation as beautiful.⁶⁰ While it is true that the rite's thematizing of light is generally harmonious with such strains, the bellicose history of the waters sounds a note of dissonance— responding, as it were, to Ricoeur's appraisal of evil as an unresolvable enigma. The joy of creation displayed in the GBW is tempered by the sobriety of the redemption it presumes.

The soteriology of the rite, therefore, *does* herald the Paschal Mystery, but in a mythical idiom resistant to conversion into another. The Jordan River, while doubtfully having, or having had, any lurking leviathans, serves, in virtue of its metaphorical dragons, unto a "seeing-as" of the ultimately unrepresentable mystery of evil; the GBW shows the waters of death, the monster of sin, the chaos of the Fall, to recede before the ineffable "being-as" engendered by Christ on the Cross. As Pope Benedict XVI argues, summarizing patristic insights, the baptism of Christ is rightly to be grasped as an anticipation of the Passion, his re-emergence, of the resurrection; his baptism is a kind of death, and vice-versa.⁶¹ "The Eastern Church has further developed and deepened this understanding of Jesus' Baptism in her liturgy and in her theology of icons. She sees a deep connection between the content of the feast of Epiphany...and Easter. She sees Jesus' remark to John that 'it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness' (Mk. 3:15) as the anticipation of his prayer to the Father in Gethsemane: 'My Father...not as I will, as thou wilt' (Mt. 26:39)."⁶² The icon of Theophany, he explains, further illustrates the connection to Pascha, inasmuch as the baptismal pool is customarily made to resemble a watery cave, corresponding in the iconographical canon to Hades.⁶³

60. Denysenko, op. cit., 131.

61. "He inaugurated his public activity by stepping into the place of sinners. His inaugural gesture is an anticipation of the Cross. He is, as it were, the true Jonah who said to the crew of the ship, 'Take me and throw me into the sea' (Jon. 1:12). The whole significance of Jesus' Baptism, the fact that he bears 'all righteousness,' first comes to light on the Cross: The Baptism is an acceptance of death for the sins of humanity, and the voice that calls out 'This is my beloved Son' over the baptismal waters is an anticipatory reference to the Resurrection. This also explains why, in his own discourses, Jesus uses the word *baptism* to refer to his death (cf. Mk. 10:38; Lk. 12:50)" (Joseph Ratzinger [Pope Benedict XVI], *Jesus of Nazareth* [New York: Doubleday, 2007], 18).

62. Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), op. cit., 19.

63. Pope Benedict also suggests there to be a parallel between the hymnography prescribed for the days leading up to Theophany, and that for the latter days of Holy Week, although he unfortunately does not give any specific

In sum, the liturgy arguably promotes the kind of “broken dialectic” with which Ricoeur gratefully credits Karl Barth; evil is annihilated by Christ, if still found to be resurgent in us—as the suggestive apology of the priest in the GBW admits—insinuating itself into our own intentions and actions. Evil, in the liturgy, is not simply the *privatio boni* of St. Augustine but an active principle,⁶⁴ set in confrontation with the figure of Christ. And as Ricoeur asserts: “This ‘christological turn’ given to the problem of evil is one of the paradigmatic ways of thinking more about evil by thinking differently.”⁶⁵ Moreover, such thinking more is not, as we shall see below, a mere matter of cogitation. The “wisdom” of the rite entails a programme of acting against the evil whose inexorable defeat has been vouchsafed by the liturgy. As van den Hengel declares: “The ‘issue’ of the myths is to be found in the promise of an ending to the ‘reign’ of evil. Hence, the good is pronounced, proclaimed, as more originary than evil...In other words, fault or evil is paradoxically at the same time a crucial experience of the sacred. Evil is experienced as a threat to the bond with the sacred. The myths of evil do not reveal the heart of darkness except through an even stronger hope of an end to evil and suffering.”⁶⁶

“The Nature of Waters Is Made Holy”

We have indicated that Ricoeur distinguishes between symbol and metaphor based on the physicality of the former, and its corollary capacity to be “bound” to an array of meanings primordially disclosed upon the cosmos itself, if nonetheless rendered articulate by language. That is to say, he understands the operation of symbols to yield a meaning congruent with a definite *quid*, inherent in the symbol, inchoate though it may be. According to Ricoeur, therefore, things do not mean whatever we wish them to, although they submit, as it were, to

examples or cite sources. Certainly, one discovers a welter of references to atonement, to cleansing of sin and deliverance from the curse of Adam, in the prefestive hymns of Theophany, along with a consistent avowal of the renewal of human (and cosmic) nature it portends. Accessed Aug. 24. 2010, <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/jan-int.htm>.

64. Ricoeur appreciates that for Barth evil is “not just a nothingness of deficiency and privation, but one of corruption and destruction. In this way we do justice to the protest of suffering humanity that refuses to allow itself to be included within the cycle of moral evil in terms of the doctrine of retribution, or even to allow itself to be enrolled under the banner of providence, another name for the goodness of creation” (*Figuring the Sacred*, 257).

65. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 257.

66. van den Hengel, “Naming the Unspeakable,” 259–60.

our wishes, to the extent they are able. He situates this dialectic between the poles of “manifestation” and “proclamation”: the former term denotes the Eliadean assertion of nature’s essentially hierophanic character, the latter, the complementary movement of linguistic interpretation which reflects upon natural hierophany, making it susceptible of symbolism proper, that is, of being “thrown together” with significations of one sort or another. Thus, “Symbols come to language only to the extent that the elements of the world themselves become transparent, that is, when they allow the transcendent to appear through them. This ‘bound’ characteristic of symbolism—its adherence—makes all the difference between a symbol and a metaphor. A metaphor is a free invention of discourse, whereas a symbol is bound to the configurations of the cosmos.”⁶⁷

Germane to the present inquiry is Ricoeur’s concentration upon the symbolism of water. Water is seen to exemplify the drama of the cosmos, its “principal function [being] to evoke the universal source of potentialities from wherein existence emerges as both real and experienced. Through this power of water...nature speaks of the depth from which its order has emerged and toward which chaos it may always return.”⁶⁸ Now this “power of water,” for Ricoeur, is not simply a function of its awesomeness as a natural phenomenon, on what we might call the “far side” of its linguistic symbolization; rather, what we say about water in story, the *persona* it acquires in our narratives, gains *gravitas* through the actual use of water, in manageable forms, in religious ritual.

Thus, on the “near side” of the symbol, there is a renewed contact, albeit structured and controlled, with that which originally gave rise to the symbol. So Ricoeur observes that “the element becomes once again immediately meaningful” through “rituals of immersion, emersion, ablution, libation, baptism, and so on.”⁶⁹ Manifestation is thus combined with proclamation: “Water symbolizes something virtual or potential, but we are the ones who

67. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 53.

68. *Ibid.*, 52.

69. *Ibid.*, 54.

speak of virtuality and potentiality, yet it is the epiphanies of water itself that 'bind' this discourse about virtuality, potentiality, the unformed, chaos."⁷⁰ In fact, not only does water inspire a plethora of particular symbols, mediated by narratives and rites, but the sum of its symbolic "life" is greater than the parts, such that the water-ness, as it were, requires a hermeneutical response: "We may also say that the innumerable particular revelations related to water form a system capable of integrating them and that this structuring and totalizing character, which the word 'symbolism' itself suggests, brings into play a labour of language."⁷¹

Now this hypothesis is well substantiated by the Byzantine liturgical tradition,⁷² in which the blessing of water, pre-eminently in the GBW, operates as the *sine qua non* of all blessings; holy water is the medium whereby persons and objects are blessed, such that the variegation of blessings find their *fons et origo*, literally, in the "system" condensed within the rite for the blessing of water.⁷³ That water—as exemplified in the catena of blessings—readily lends itself to establishing a "system," is confirmed by the fact that while it is true, as Ricoeur says, that "any functioning of a symbolism requires a minimal hermeneutics," it is also true that once interpreted, a symbolism such as that of water seems capable of effectively functioning on its own: the various blessings in which holy water is used do not themselves rehearse the symbolism of the latter, but simply assume and invoke it. Explication is given in the blessing of water itself, and elsewhere indirectly secured.

70. Ibid., 53.

71. Ibid., 54.

72. It is worth mentioning that this has traditionally also been the case in the West. For a critical comparison of the traditional Roman Rite and post-Vatican II forms for the blessing of water, see Dominic E. Serra, "The Blessing of Baptismal Water at the Paschal Vigil: Ancient Texts and Modern Revisions," *Worship* 64, no. 2 (March 1990): 142–56 and Alex Stock, "The Blessing of the Font in the Roman Liturgy," in *Blessing and Power* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1985), 43–52.

73. Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov remarks, apropos the comprehensiveness of this blessing: "Man needs the communion with holy water in order to receive communion with the Holy Spirit, in order to receive the Jordan blessing. In this is contained the power of deification, the union of the divine and creaturely essences, divine condescension and the human reception of God. And not only does man himself receive this water in communion, but he also sanctifies with it his entire life, his dwelling, his garments, and all his things, in order to repulse the assault of foes visible and invisible." Intriguingly, he also attests that "those who partake of the holy water of the Epiphany remark that it usually preserves its taste and freshness for a long period of time" (*Churchly Joy: Orthodox Devotions for the Church Year*, trans. Boris Jakim [Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008], 54).

We can recall in this connection the discussion in Chapter 2 of Mark Searle's notion of liturgy as metaphor. Searle argued that liturgical metaphors also become dead when the metaphorical tension between the "is" and "is not" is effaced, either by an insufficient or an excessive stylization of the symbol in question; the metaphoricity of bread as the body of Christ, for example, requires both that bread be real bread, but also that it be handled and spoken of in such a way as to disclose its liturgical status as other or more than a quotidian reality. Liturgy must strike a balance, that is, between grounding its symbols in common human experience, and effectively deploying them as vehicles of that which transcends such experience.⁷⁴ Lamenting the historical eclipse of axial liturgical symbols, Searle muses: "Paradoxically, the very reverence which their disclosure-potential inspired has resulted in the collapsing of the tension upon which their communicative effectiveness depended...Only when there is enough water to allow baptism to recover its original contact with drowning and death will its claim to be the sacrament of life grip us as something more than a tired cliché."⁷⁵

Searle's insights challenge the facility with which we might accept Ricoeur's consideration of the operation of a symbolism such as that of water. The GBW dramatically illustrates the difficulty of preserving an equilibrium between the literal and the otherworldly—in Ricoeur's terms, between the boundedness of a symbol and its thematization for and by us. For, on the one hand, an instance of Searle's "attenuation of sacramental signs" (by which they "lose their metaphorical potential to point beyond themselves"⁷⁶) would appear to be occasioned by the prescription that, on the eve of Theophany, the entire rite be conducted around an ordinary, manipulable container of water, *inside* the church building; thus

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74. "Thus we have to be attentive to preserving both terms of the metaphor *and* the logical gap between them. If the gap closes and one meaning assumes the other meaning into itself, we are back to literal statements and prosaic actions. At that point, they have either become totally secularized, or else they have become mere stenonyms for otherworldly realities. While the Church has always been conscious of the danger of secularization, she has not always recognized that the opposite tendency is equally damaging to the disclosure-function of liturgical words and actions" (Searle, "Liturgy as Metaphor," 119).

75. Searle, "Liturgy as Metaphor," 117–18.

76. *Ibid.*, 108.

domesticated, this water is nevertheless made to bear the full weight of cosmic imagery unfurled by the ritual text, readily appreciable in an uncircumscribed outdoor setting, where the sun, moon, trees *et alia* are visible, and the vastness of nature can impress itself unfettered. Since the water to be blessed is to be taken *as* the Jordan River, does an indoor celebration perhaps mute the symbolism of water—drowning and death, for Searle, potentiality and chaos, for Ricoeur—and with it, the welter of metaphors with which it is laden?

On the other hand, if such an indoor celebration appears resistant to Ricoeur's account of the prefiguration of the symbolism of water, and indeed, to its configuration in the liturgical rite by means of a panoply of paradisaal prophecies and numinous narratives, it is yet perfectly suited to the refiguration countenanced by the rite, to wit, that the blessed water will serve for a "cleansing of souls and bodies for all those who draw from it with faith and who partake of it." Naturally, people do not drink salt water, although it is customary in certain locales to celebrate the GBW oceanside. Similarly, even where fresh water is concerned, it is frequently not potable—and the ephemerality of river water, for instance, begs the very question of distinguishing the blessed water as such. In point of fact, even the outdoor celebration of the GBW, conducted on the day of the feast itself, not infrequently involves a simultaneous blessing of a portable container of water, erected adjacent to the natural body of water where the service takes place.

I think we can regard this discrepancy as indicative of the *aporia* between the moments of Ricoeur's narrative arc. If he is correct with respect to his estimation of the natural symbolism of water, that it is already "bound" to a catena of significations in virtue of its properties and role within the cosmos, one wonders to what extent this primordial symbolism is susceptible of metaphorical mutation. I would even venture to suggest that the blessing of water is analogous to the giving/withdrawing of the Name in that topos of Ricoeurian exegesis, Exodus 3:14; on the one hand, the holy water is given, mastered—like ontotheology, as it were—by its very circumscription in the font: the blessing is *here*, as opposed to *there*. On the

other hand, as the blessing of an outdoor body of water makes evident, the same blessing can be viewed as incorrigibly elusive. Where, after all, is the blessed water of a river that has been blessed? It is gone, but with the blessing or without? Does one return to a place of blessing upon leaving and returning to said river, or does the blessing depart with me, inasmuch as it obtains, to begin with, in *my* outlook, *my* “representation” —to use the language of Owen Barfield.⁷⁷

“Let Us Therefore Draw Water with Gladness”

The foregoing consideration encapsulates what I would call the liturgical dialectic of the cosmic and the domestic; just as God, according to Ricoeur, recedes behind the plethora of figures by which he is depicted in Scripture, compelling an implicit entry upon the threshold of unknowability that the apophaticism of speculative discourse will render explicit, so the sacramental “metaphor” of holy water “names” the divine presence in a polyphonic manner, such that it is both localized and diffuse. The selfsame blessing, given subsequently or simultaneously to *both* a reified quantity *and* an undefinable mass of water challenges the very intelligibility of sacramental presence. If the blessing is *here*, how can it be *there*? If *everywhere*, how is it not then *nowhere*, or at least superfluous? If the purport of blessing is said rather to consist in a species of Bultmannian existential decision, rather than an objective transformation of the world, one faces the same critique Ricoeur addresses to those who would, in that vein, demythologize the Scriptures. To accept the facticity of the Incarnation and balk at sacramental realism is surely to swallow the proverbial camel while straining at the gnat.

As David Power argues, however, the sacramental imagination of Christianity originally distinguished itself, vis-à-vis its pagan counterparts, by an unexpected restraint. Power claims that what is original in Christianity is the surprising transition from the cosmic to the domestic; in the faith of those following in the footsteps of the humble, kenotic Christ, he finds justification for an aversion to grandiose, cosmogonic rites: “There is a ritual

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77. Barfield, op. cit.

distinctiveness in Christian sacrament that puts the focus on domestic rites, not on festive or cosmic ones, however much these are appropriated or respected. It is this which gives the particular sense of being in time that is proper to the memorial of Christ. There is ritual transfer from sacrifice, rites of passage, cosmic rites, indeed from the whole language of cosmic identity, to the loaf and the cup, to the tub of water, to the jar of oil, shared in daily living.”⁷⁸

Is a service such as the GBW then to be viewed as a metastasis from the healthy quotidianness of Christian practice? In its naturalistic orientation, its “mythical projection, offering the vision of a well ordered universe where all falls under divine providence and plan,”⁷⁹ does it not sublate the *petit récit* of the Gospel in favour of another grand narrative? One may respond that a dialectical sacramentology will perforce need to allow for the cosmic alongside the domestic, respecting thereby the divinity of Christ as well as his humanity, his twofold identity as Pantocrator and Suffering Servant. Only thus would it correspond to the veritable challenge of a genuine Christology—in Ricoeur’s estimation, one which duly adheres to the imperative to link the naming of God in the Old Testament to the proclamation of Christ in the New.

“Your Light, O Lord, Has Been Marked Upon Us”: Personal Identity in the GBW

A Ritual Hermeneutics of the Self

We argued in Chapter 1 that despite a common criticism of hermeneutics—namely, that it does not do justice to the performative dimension brought into relief by ritual studies—Ricoeur’s recent thought makes ample room for both narrative and ritual, and indeed, for interweaving them. Ronald Grimes was cited as an exemplar of the ritual studies school, which takes exception to a text-based approach to phenomena: “Without a keenly developed ritual-dramatic sense our narratives are at best intellectual ideals and at worst sources of heteronomously imposed, introjected images....If we are serious about overcoming [the

78. Power, op. cit., 145.

79. Ibid.

Enlightenment's spirit/matter dualism], we must 1) learn to perceive narrating in relation to enacting, 2) not sever temporality from spatiality, and 3) discern the spatial and ritual possibilities of narrative."⁸⁰

As we discovered in Chapter 3, however, Ricoeur's *OAA* evades this species of criticism by construing the primary object of hermeneutics as the human person, the self, whose interpretation requires a detour through pragmatics as well as semantics. This route arrives at the development of practices, targets for the aim of a "good life." If Ricoeur does not here elaborate the role of ritual *per se*, his focus on the role of action, both in the prefiguring of narrative (for example, his discussion of the "constitutive rules" by which practices are recognized) and in its refiguring, or ethical appropriation, yet facilitates a narrative-ritual integration.

A liturgical approach to the questions of selfhood highlights this complementarity: the narrative configured in the GBW finds its ritual fulfillment in the practices of the domestic context, as the Great Litany petitions: "For this water to become a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, for healing of soul and body and for every suitable purpose, let us pray to the Lord. For those who draw from it and take from it for the sanctification of their homes, let us pray to the Lord." The contradistinction between narrative and ritual posited by Grimes only obtains if one maintains an *a priori* separation between the two, which if not untenable, is certainly unnecessary. The GBW presents rather their interdependence, not least because the form and content of the rite are to a great extent common to the rite of baptism, which serves at once to refer both to a singular sacramental act as well as, by force of metonymy, to the totality of Christian faith as a baptismal vocation.

One relives, or better, recapitulates his or her baptism, in the course of the GBW, by first hearing the prophetic narrative, in which the self is encountered as a "summoned self"; by assisting in the configuration of the hoped-for theophany through the exercise of the

80. Ronald L. Grimes, "Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer," *Journal of Religion* 66, no. 1 (January 1986): 8,15.

productive imagination in tandem with one's corporeal participation in the rite; by performing a response to this call in ritually consuming the blessed water; and, finally, by transforming one's daily existence through a continuous appropriation of the water concluded in the rite, namely, that in seeking God's blessing in the sacramental mode in which it has been vouchsafed, one will continue to receive its refigurative power.

The Summoned Subject of the GBW: Psalmist or Thaumaturge?

Now in Chapter 3 we only explored the general features of a liturgical analogue to Ricoeur's notion of the "summoned subject," a figure he elaborated through recourse to biblical and hagiographical figures. We found there that the liturgy presented the self as *capax Dei*, able to recognize itself as susceptible of a *doxological* vocation to bless God. How then does this obtain in the GBW? The rite issues a particular kind of summons, inviting the congregants to process outside to a natural body of water, before which to remember Christ's baptism (and all the great works of God which, according to the GBW, it crowns), and bind themselves to the diffusion, through the medium of the blessed water, of the meaning communicated in this event.

The liturgical idiom revels in exploiting for this purpose what Ricoeur calls "the support and renewing power of the sacred cosmos"; it is in being placed before the grandeur of the natural world that the panegyric enjoined by the following prayer speaks, as Ricoeur writes, "not only to our understanding and will but also to our imagination and our heart; in short, to the whole human being." Consider the following:⁸¹

All the spiritual Powers tremble before you. The sun sings your praise, the moon glorifies you, the stars entreat you, the light obeys you, the deeps tremble before you, the springs are your servants. You stretched out the heavens on the waters; you walled in the sea with sand; you poured out the air for breathing. Angelic Powers minister to

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81. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 67.

you. The choirs of the Archangels worship you. The many-eyed Cherubim and the six-winged Seraphim as they stand and fly around you hide their faces in fear of your unapproachable glory.

The doxological summons issued here corresponds best, I submit, to the biblical figure who witnesses an epiphany. While an epiphany is frequently unanticipated by the party concerned, the advent of an ecstatic "I-Thou" encounter (e.g., Moses' encounter at the Burning Bush), there are also instances of another sort. In Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18), for example, the protagonist ritualizes in *anticipation* of an epiphany, calling the people to sacrifice in order that God may be made known. Indeed, the "anamnetic doxologies" following the "Great Are You" prayer put forward this very incident as a prototype of what is transpiring in the rite at hand ("And give to [this water] the grace of redemption...[For] You are our God, who through Elias turned Israel from the error of Baal").

In a similar vein, there emerges in the fourth of the opening hymns a New Testament analogue to the summoned self represented in the figure of Elijah: "At the voice of the one crying in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord', you came, Lord, having taken the form of a servant, asking for Baptism, though you did not know sin...The Forerunner trembled and cried out, saying, 'How will the lamp enlighten the Light? The servant place his hand on the Master? Saviour, who take away the sin of the world, make me and the waters holy.'" The Forerunner is here enjoined by Christ to allow the theophany, which the liturgical action will disclose at his hands, to take place—personal unworthiness and lack of comprehension notwithstanding. Participants in the GBW in turn recapitulate this summons by inviting Christ, as it were, to be baptized anew in the waters before which they are gathered. The subject modelled on St. John the Baptist—according to Christ, the Elijah who was to come—is one who evangelizes,

exhorting all to draw near and behold the mystery, but also addresses itself to the divine person who will be the true agent of the manifestation to be wrought in the rite.⁸²

The summoned self of the GBW is thus caught up in the Ricoeurian dialectic between proclamation and manifestation referred to above, and which we explored earlier in the chapter under the soteriological signs of word and deed, light and water. For the anamnesis of Christ's baptism is expressed both in a doxological summons to *proclaim* the narrative, and in a sacramental throwing down of the gauntlet: a charge to *manifest* it in practices which, in van den Hengel's words, "reorient human action in response to the excess, disproportion or extravagance of the Naming of God."⁸³ If the *memory* is textual, i.e., enshrined in the account of the baptism given in the Gospel and recited in the course of the Great Blessing, the *remembering*, is ritual, both in terms of the aural/oral character of the encounter with the textually inscribed memory, as well as in the sacral reiteration of action.

Ricoeur argues, in regard to the figure of the inner teacher elaborated by Augustine, that it is grafted onto what philosophy has recognized as the natural faculty of the human person: "[T]hrough the conscience, the self bears witness to its ownmost power of being before measuring and in order to measure the inadequation of its actions to its most profound being. In this sense, we can note the neutral character of the phenomenon of conscience as regards its religious interpretation."⁸⁴ Conscience is thus already serviceable in its own right, but fortified by the scriptural figures welded onto it. Similarly, might we propose that conscience also bears witness to an inchoate aptitude for gratitude? A ritual stem onto which liturgy, as a trellis for the religious response budding forth in the obedient "'I hear' where the superiority of the

82. "Contextually, the 'Great are You' prayer...constitutes the apogee of the entire liturgical office, and directly addresses Christ as the author, initiator and chief celebrant of the liturgical event. The language of the prayer understands the unfolding of the event and the grace it bestows as an act of the entire Holy Trinity, with the Father bearing witness to Christ as the divine son of God, and the Holy Spirit manifesting Christ" (Denysenko, op. cit., 151–52).

83. van den Hengel, "From Text to Action," 132.

84. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 271.

call—by which we mean its position as Most High—is recognized, avowed, confessed,”⁸⁵ serves to graft both a doxological calling and a sacramental capability?

The Self as Another

Denysenko proposes the GBW as underwriting an alternative view of the trinitarian economy, one which takes the body’s dialogue with Christ as head as point of departure. Christ as mediator implies two dialogues, he explains: one with the Father, another with Church; the Church, on this view, ought to enjoy the freedom to address Christ in liturgical prayer.⁸⁶ We can develop the implications of this claim further by asking if Christ’s identity is not thereby seen to be constituted by a Ricoeurian solicitude of the other. It is in the naming of him by the Father, and the showing effected by the descent of the Spirit, that he is recognized as Christ. As Denysenko states: “[T]he Father bears witness to the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ and Son through his Baptism in the Jordan, while the Holy Spirit confirms the authenticity of the revelation by revealing Jesus’ true identity.”⁸⁷ Analogously, in the intracorporeal dialogue of Christ and the Church, is there not a sense in which we too are only recognized, revealed in our true identity, in virtue of our being named and shown by the rite to be *in* Christ? Dare we go so far as to suggest that Christ also knows himself truly in virtue of our solicitude?

Thus Denysenko’s assessment of the unique Christological orientation of the GBW— he is “the author, initiator and chief celebrant of the liturgical event”⁸⁸—appears to dovetail with Ricoeur’s determinations concerning selfhood, for we recall from Chapter 3 that the self knows alterity both in its experience of others and its own body, as well as in its interior colloquy with conscience. The liturgical subject then, adapting Zimmerman’s account of its dual predication, can be regarded as experiencing, in the GBW, the opportunity to encounter God as self, *and* as

85. Ricoeur, “Experience and Language,” 128–29.

86. Denysenko, *op. cit.*, 225.

87. *Ibid.*, 141.

88. *Ibid.*, 151–52.

another: in the measure that the assembly speaks to *God* in Christ, it speaks to one who can never be but altogether Other; in the measure, however, that it speaks to God in *Christ*, it speaks to one connatural with itself—a dialogue, as Denysenko has it, of the body with the head. And yet, even in this dialogue, there is the aporia of alterity, since the body suffers under the threat of a distension from its head; the priest must pray—with no assurance being given either way—for his sins to not impede the coming of the Holy Spirit, i.e., the power of life sustaining the body and head, so to speak, as one organism.⁸⁹

This threat also parallels the moment of Ricoeur's "fragmented identity," to the extent that it affects the union of the assembly with Christ, and its corollary capacity for addressing God. What the baptismal narrative grounds, in its account of the victory of Christ over the evil represented by the dragons in the water, suffers a definite, if subtle rebuke, in the admission of interior forces which cannot be so readily or permanently vanquished. Passivity accompanies the very recognition by the liturgical subject of its power, in Christ, over extrinsic evil, betraying its simultaneous vulnerability to an intrinsic evil which may even divide it from itself, splitting head from body, as it were. In turn, the identity which passes through the waters is universalized, to the extent that the fullness of blessings is made available to it, albeit in hope; it is yet singularized, by the arduous task of rendering their potentiality into actuality. Like the blessed water itself, the ontology of the liturgical subject of the GBW obtains not in the *state* of being blessed, but rather in a continual *dynamic* of blessing corresponding to Ricoeur's *ipse* identity: to the faithful keeping of the ritual word, namely, an injunction to refigure the world by the *use* of the matter: "for cleansing of souls and bodies, for healing of passions, for sanctification of homes, for every suitable purpose."

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89. One may easily miss the consistent tone of supplication in the prayers of the liturgy, which continually hold forth the possibility of being unfulfilled: "Incline your ear and hear us, Lord, who accepted to be baptised in Jordan and to sanctify the waters, and bless us all, who signify our calling as servants by the bending of our necks. And count us worthy to be filled with your sanctification through the partaking and sprinkling of this water. And let it be for us, Lord, for healing of soul and body."

**“Today Things on High Keep Festival With Those Below”: Remembrance of Time
and Place in the GBW**

What are the dynamics of ritual transformation generated by the GBW with respect to liturgy taken as remembering? To ascertain this it will be helpful to set forth in brief a general theory of how blessings “work” —informed, of course, by the thought of Ricoeur developed hitherto— and to zone in thereafter on the specific operations triggered by the GBW.

Blessing as Manifestation and Proclamation

At its best, Orthodox theology would insist that blessings express the liturgical vocation of humanity, succinctly expressed in Schmemmann’s term *homo adorans*, mentioned above. For Schmemmann, this is an identity which in fact brings together *homo sapiens* and *homo faber*, for we adore God by offering back to him the gifts he has offered to us: “God blesses everything He creates, and, in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation...The unique position of man in the universe that he alone is to bless God for the food and the life he receives from Him. He alone is to respond to God’s blessing with his blessing.”⁹⁰ This capacity for “both receiving the world from God and offering it to God,” according to Schmemmann, was impaired by the Fall but restored through the Incarnation. Humanity’s vocation, that is, has been reclaimed, and this is represented and celebrated in the commerce of blessings transacted in the sacramental economy. But in what exactly does “blessing” consist?

Elena Velkovska contends that the “Eucharistic blessing,” the *anaphora*, “is the paradigm and model of every blessing.”⁹¹ This assertion is indeed confirmed, as we saw above,

90. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14–15.

91. Elena Velkova Velkovska, “Blessings in the East,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies, Volume IV: Sacraments and Sacramentals*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungo (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 383. According to the author, blessings other than the Eucharist itself, however, do not appear in the liturgical tradition until the end of the fourth century. For the early Christians, the Eucharist seems to have represented the blessing of quotidian reality *par excellence*. Even today, in both the Eastern and Western rites, many blessings are imparted within the Eucharistic context, celebrated “like an appendix” —or in some cases, a prefix—to the Liturgy. Velkovska observes that while some of the blessing-prayers in current Byzantine-Rite usage are ancient, going back to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, most are from the medieval Byzantine period or even later. The use of holy water as the ritual action accompanying

by Denysenko's historical analysis of the GBW, the most popular of Byzantine blessings, and most integrated into the Church Year:⁹² it is structured as an *anaphora*, and its *epiclesis* employs the same language as that of the Eucharist. Alongside the use of *eulogein* to denote blessing, Velkovska notes the frequency of the term *hagiadzein*, "to sanctify." These are to a great degree interchangeable, as Denysenko again concurs, although according to her, the former term is preponderant in the blessing of persons. Velkovska concludes that as a result of the frequent use of unintelligible sacral idioms, and the emphasis on sacerdotal mediation, in contemporary Eastern Christianity "the meaning of blessing is in fact twisted into a kind of magico-ritual consecration."⁹³ We can note that this is particularly ironic given that one of the short, alternate blessings for water prays that through the blessed water the faithful will obtain "freedom from superstition"!⁹⁴

There is something of a dialectic at work in this ambivalence, I would venture, corresponding to that included in the title of this chapter, Ricoeur's "manifestation" and "proclamation." For on the one hand, to bless (*eulogein*) is to proclaim, to "speak well" of something/someone: a hermeneutical act, as Schmemmann indicates above in his association of blessing with naming. On the other hand, to sanctify (*hagiadzein*) is more than verbal, implying

blessings is common, yet an even more ubiquitous action is the sign of the cross, made by the hand of the priest, with or without the actual use of a hand-cross. The cross-blessing originated in the Divine Liturgy, apparently, and became a standard, even constitutive part of all blessings.

92. Certain other blessings have become part and parcel of a given feast's observance, such as the blessing of candles on the feast of the Encounter (Feb. 2); palms/pussy-willows on Flowery (Palm) Sunday; first-fruits at Transfiguration (Aug. 6); or flowers and herbs on the Dormition (Aug. 15). Aside from these notable instances, however, many blessings remain buried in the depths of larger collections, until some competent authority decides to insert them into a given edition of such pastoral hand-books as are more frequently used on the ground. These in turn, depending on the particular Church and even eparchy, contain different prayers, and different versions of the same kind of blessing, which evince what is the *de facto lex orandi* of an actual community. This practice, in turn, is not so out of keeping with the way in which the liturgical tradition has evolved, with given prayers being composed, used and discarded or replaced over time, and others remaining on the books long after they cease to be actually employed due to the obviation of the practical need which originally occasioned them.

While the Roman Rite regards the *Book of Blessings* to be an integral part of the Liturgy itself, i.e., not a para-liturgical devotional resource, it is not clear whether the Eastern tradition is similarly susceptible of such distinctions. In the absence of a central organ responsible for the codification of blessings, it is difficult to say if and when a given blessing may be considered normative for the Byzantine Rite.

93. Velkovska, op. cit., 389.

94. Joseph Haggag, trans., *Byzantine Melkite: Euchologion* (Newton, MA: Eparchy of Newton, 1999), 145.

a ritual transformation or at least a consecration or setting apart. Now if in Greek, “to bless” has a primarily oral connotation, in our own tongue it would seem rather to connote *action*. The Anglo-Saxon root of the English is *bledsian*, or *bloedsian*, that is, “to redden with blood.”⁹⁵ If we take etymology seriously—as Ricoeur is wont to do—then we find ourselves brought back to the treatment of evil above, specifically, the role of conflict in Christ’s own sanctification of the waters. The battle with the dragons rehearsed there is only intelligible, as Pope Benedict suggests, in terms of the Passion in which Christ, paradoxically, will have his *own* blood shed—rather than that of his aquatic foes. Our term for blessing, then, felicitously connotes the role of sacrifice portended in the GBW: it is only by the Cross, reddened with blood, that the waters, and we too, can be either “spoken well” of or “made holy.”⁹⁶ If we go further, and place the root of “to bless” in conjunction with that positive state of mind and body conveyed by the blood-redness in the word *sanguine* (“cheerfully confident; optimistic”), we find confirmed that integral consequence of blessing, as envisaged by the GBW: *health* of body and soul.

95. “The verb bless comes from Old English *blēdsian*, *blēdsian*, *blētsian*, ‘to bless, wish happiness, consecrate.’ Although the Old English verb has no cognates in any other Germanic language, it can be shown to derive from the Germanic noun *blōdan*, ‘blood.’ *Blēdsian* therefore literally means ‘to consecrate with blood, sprinkle with blood.’ The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, the early Germanic migrants to Britain, used *blēdsian* for their pagan sacrifices. After they converted to Christianity, *blēdsian* acquired new meanings as a result of its use in translations of the Latin Bible, but it kept its pagan Germanic senses as well” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* [Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004], Dec. 15, 2009, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/bless>).

96. For Christian tradition, it is the *blood* of Christ which is the life of the world: “For through Christ God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). To bless—to “redden with blood”—in this connection to apply the blood of Christ; the GBW announces obliquely, in this respect, the confluence of blood and water pouring forth from Christ’s side the Cross. To build on the speculations of Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov, the GBW celebrates the latent glory of the earth which has received Christ’s life-blood into herself, and has been unwittingly transformed as a result: “The idea that Christ’s sacrificial blood which...flowed out of His side belongs to and abides in our world is further elucidated...with reference to the mystery of the whole of human life, the whole of human history, with reference to ‘liturgy’ (the common work)—both inside the temple and outside the temple, the liturgy of the world....

But Christ’s power abides in humankind also naturally, immanently, by the very fact of the Incarnation, through the adoption by Him of human nature and the abiding in the world of this humanity in the blood and water that flowed out of Christ’s side. If, after Christ’s coming into the world, ‘the great Pan died’ and all of nature changed, having become a participant in Christ’s humanity, then humanity too changed, precisely in its naturalness” (Sergei Bulgakov, *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim [Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1997], 50, 56–57).

Blessing as Sacramental Narrative

Perhaps Ricoeur's treatment of "narrative identity" can help us further relate the dual roles of speaking and acting connoted by blessing. If, as Reiner Kaczynski observes, "Through the sanctifying action of blessings, material things, both those that are natural and those that are the product of human work, are interpreted for human beings in their connection with the saving event of creation and redemption,"⁹⁷ it is yet an interpretation mediated by a text, ritually enacted and suffered by those same human beings. Ricoeur's narrative arc commends itself here. A prefiguration of blessing obtains in the very appreciation of material things that prompts their original presentation for blessing—we bless that which is already, in some sense, spoken of as good. Cultures the world over share a gratitude for the yield of the earth and its skillful transformation through human ingenuity, whether in the hospitality of the table, or the esteem for craftsmanship; surely they also share an awe of nature, and an inclination to dwell in harmony with it.

The liturgy in turn invites a configuration of this quasi-sacramental behaviour: the mythos of a blessing subsumes the activity associated with the object, event or person at-hand into a theological plot. The imaginative variation upon life conjured by the rite's metaphorical "seeing-as" discloses a new way of being-in-the-world, those participating being challenged to see said object, event or person as if it were now, in consequence of the blessing, changed in some respect. The "ontological vehemence" of this process obtains inasmuch as the challenge is issued not simply to the imagination, but to the senses, to the will; one is charged to act in accordance with the "seeing-as."

The quality of the consequent response constitutes the moment of refiguration. One cannot have access to the blessing otherwise than in the blessing itself; it retains an irreducibility, a hermeneutic uniqueness proper to the existential implication of each

97. Reiner Kaczynski, "Blessings in Rome and the Non-Roman West," in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies, Vol. IV: Sacraments and Sacramentals*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 395.

participant in it. In this, it does not differ from the general gamut of events which may be highly significant in the life of a given person; in one sense, blessings are not dissimilar in their operation from other customs or ceremonies, or from a participation in artistic performance of whatever kind.

What may be distinctive, however, is the manner in which blessings contribute profoundly to what Ricoeur, following Alisdair MacIntyre, calls the “narrative unity of a life.” If it is true, as Ricoeur claims, that life is in fact narrated, and only thus, lived, then blessings perhaps may be seen to provide a privileged moment of narrative mediation wherein the life of Christ, with its “soteriological vehemence,” so to speak, is retold in our own “acting and doing” — wherein our own life is rendered poetic, a human *mimesis* of the divine *praxis*.⁹⁸ In the evocative tag of Pope St. Leo the Great, “Our Redeemer's visible presence has passed into the sacraments,”⁹⁹ we find a basis for considering blessings, inasmuch as they approximate the sacraments, a form of sacramental narrative. Writ large, the narrative so reprised includes the doings of the pre-Incarnate Logos in the Old Testament, duly celebrated in the GBW.

If “our Redeemer's visible presence” is taken to comprise his self-implication in the ordinary affairs of those whom he encountered, it becomes understandable that the liturgical tradition should provide blessings for all manner of daily needs. Christ's blessing of particular events, objects or persons, is less significant than the fact that he lived an incarnate life. If

98. The *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996) summarizes well this sacramental *Weltanschauung* in “The Creation as Sacrament”: “The sacraments thus communicate, above all, the mysteries of Christ, which means all that he accomplished on earth to carry out the plan hidden from ages past in God who created the universe (cf. Eph. 3:9- 11) ‘to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth’ (Eph. 1:10), and render us ‘holy and without blemish before him in love’ (Eph. 1:4-5). The mysteries of Christ are communicated to us through visible signs. The sacraments are, therefore, the place in which created things are assumed in order to give thanks to God and thus reach the fullness of their meaning. The economy of divine grace dispensed to mankind is accomplished by deeds and words (cf. Acts 1:1), increasing the value of the ‘cosmic elements’: the human body above all; then water, oil, bread, and wine [etc.] Such elements are taken up by the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit, recapitulated by him and entrusted to the Church as instruments of salvific sacramentality. In fact, the grace of the Holy Spirit makes use of these for the redemption and sanctification of mankind and the cosmos (cf. Rom. 8:16-25) and for rendering the Father worship that is worthy. It is in this context that the liturgical gestures and benedictions acquire all their meaning” (§41).

99. Sermon LXXIII, “On the Ascension.”

“what has not been assumed, has not been redeemed,”¹⁰⁰ moreover, then the Church's manifold blessings actually testify to a belief that in Christ, God has redeemed the full ambit of human “being-in-the-world.” The Church then honours this by endeavouring to bless all that is possibly “blessable” — and this is an on-going enterprise, as the blessings for modern objects like cars and airplanes makes clear. As Anscar Chupungo states, in summarizing Catholic magisterial teaching: “There is hardly any proper use of material things that cannot be directed toward sanctification and the praise of God.”¹⁰¹

But such is the narrative shape of experience that our “proper use of material things” seems to require an emplotted reference, a paradigmatic episode in accordance with which our present scenario can be configured. If the Incarnation, taken *au sense large*, can be seen as the necessary and sufficient dogmatic cause for blessings, the liturgy yet tends to refract it through *petit récits*, specific episodes in the life of Christ deemed to presage whatever blessing is to be conducted. In their absence, the liturgy mines the Old Testament, even apocryphal literature, for suitable precedents, its claim to a divine disclosure here and now being legitimated by a sort of theological casuistry.¹⁰²

As we saw in Chapter 4, however, this is potentially problematic to the extent that the narrative referent of a given rite may be historically dubious. Inasmuch as Christianity is ostensibly obligated to take historicity seriously,¹⁰³ the following question arises: in what

100. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letter 101*.

101. Anscar J. Chupungco, “Sacraments and Sacramentals,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies, Vol. IV: Sacraments and Sacramentals*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), xxiii.

102. Thus we see, for example, in the blessing of travellers, an *anamnesis* of “God, the true and living Way, who accompanied your servants Joseph and Tobias on their way and who sailed with your holy disciples and apostles in the ship”; in that of a new house, of “God our Saviour [who] willed to enter the house of Zaccheus for his salvation and the salvation of all who were in the house”; and in that of a car, of the “Lord our God, [who] travel on the wings of the wind [and] sent your servant Elijah a fiery chariot as a means of conveyance” (Haggard, *op. cit.*, 144, 147–48). The God who was present to these personages in their own unique situations is summoned to manifest his presence anew to participants in the blessing, that the latter may experience the same combination of temporal and spiritual welfare. In this way, the biblical events are taught and celebrated simultaneously, worshippers educated (“lead out”) to exercise, through implication in the rite, the very faith they profess.

103. In the vein of the Pauline admonition: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:17, NKJV).

regard ought one to hold narratives, such as those drawn from apocryphal sources, whose historicity does not seem to be worth the wager of the Resurrection itself? Do they occasion a second naïveté, the imperative to recover meaning merely from the text/rite, rather than from the event at issue? Ought their narrative reference to be omitted, as a possible “abuse” of memory, and only the doxological component retained? After all, the tradition knows prayers which exhibit only a modicum of narrative concern, which privilege the world “in front of” the text, rather than behind it.¹⁰⁴ If so, does one subject such prayers to contemporary historiographical consensus, or rather, does one honour the “living memory” represented by generations of believers whose history can only be known from within?

For on the one hand, it is arguable that to treat as veracious, events which one actually only regards as parables at best, subtly undermines the necessary if somewhat fluid distinction between fiction, representing what Ricoeur terms “the conditions of possibility,” and history,

104. The blessing of an icon, for example, is extant in several versions. In one, we have the account of Christ's sending a handkerchief, with which he wiped his face, to King Abgar in Edessa; the so-called “Made without Hands” is interpreted as a warrant for the Church's own making and veneration of icons. In another, the referent is Moses' “sketch[ing] a picture of a Cherub in the holy Tent,” an action taken to have identical ramifications. One episode, therefore, is apocryphal, and the other canonical. Does it really matter? A third version of the prayer actually includes both incidents in a veritable string of precedents.

The common “Prayer for the Blessing of Fleshmeat on the Holy and Great Sunday of Pascha” (St. Tikhon's Monastery, trans., *The Great Book of Needs, Volume II: The Sanctification of the Temple and Other Ecclesiastical and Liturgical Blessings* [South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1988], 336) displays a similar indifference to the genres invoked in the service of narrative reference. Here, rolled into a compound precedent, are the “ram which the faithful Abraham brought unto Thee...the lamb which Abel offered unto Thee as a whole-offering[and] the fatted calf which Thou didst command to be slain for the Thy prodigal son when he returned again unto Thee.” The prayer appears oblivious to the imprudence of imputing a like historicity to such a motley crew of personages. Presented thus as equally valid precedents for the present blessing of meat, the prayer gives the impression that there actually was a particular prodigal son who returned to God, on whose behalf a fatted calf was slain.

Incidentally, there is a further, *theological* problem with this prayer, namely, that Christians offer something like ham or sausages for the remission of sins. For if its precedent is the sacrifice of animals offered in worship, then arguably the only appropriate fulfillment of such a type is the Lamb of God himself, slain for the world, and the Christian faithful inasmuch as they, in Christ, are living sacrifices. Indeed, the references to Abraham and Abel's offerings in the traditional Roman *canon missae*, are given as foreshadowing Calvary. Do we not then trivialize their import by making them also foreshadowings of the Easter indulgence in meat? A more egregious example of this type of symbol-mongering occurs in the “Prayer for the Sacrifice of Bulls” in *Codex Barberini 336*, in which phraseology like “you have commanded us sinful and unworthy servants to make sacrifices to you, of our dumb animals and birds, on behalf of our sins...as a ransom for the exchange of life,” indicates that the blessing has lost sight of the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New, the eclipse of the bloody sacrifice by the bloodless offering of the Eucharist.

"the conditions of actuality."¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, Ricoeur has enabled us to see, in light of his understanding of metaphor and its role in all narrative, that there is no unmediated access to the events of the past, and that in certain instances, the very incredulity which might naturally arise in response to a singularity of a given event almost *requires* a flouting of historiographical modesty.

The "Poetics of Love"

Where, indeed, does the narrative configuration of the GBW stand in this respect? For there is in fact an extravagance in its emplotment bearing an affinity with Christ's parables, as understood by Ricoeur. Hyperbolic language is employed not only in respect of the creature of water being blessed, but also of meaning of the episode upon which the ritual action is predicated, effecting a Ricoeurian "reorientation by disorientation." Both the liturgical celebration as a whole, and its perpetuation in the blessed water, are made to bear an almost insupportable weight of eschatological scandal. The limits of sight are transgressed by the boldness of faith, in its expectation of divine superabundance, of a currency in keeping with the "economy of the gift" exceeding our rational grasp. The most common element in nature is here made to convey the significance of an utterly singular event, known not externally through the "history-like" record of the Gospels, so much as in the internal remembrance deployed in the schematization of the rite.

The rite requests, for instance, that God "give to [this water] the grace of redemption and the blessing of Jordan [and] make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, an averting of diseases, unapproachable by hostile powers, filled with angelic strength." Hearing these petitions, one might well wonder why water so blessed is not

105. An insouciance to this distinction would perhaps constitute one ground for considering a given blessing aberrant. An "aberrant blessing" would be one which compromised the Christian story at large, which promoted episodes or ideas not in keeping with the drift of the plot, as it were; which thwarted its fundamental configuration; which threatened such reference points as establish the narrative coherence of the story, and thus the "narrative unity" of the Christian life inasmuch as it aspires to rehearse the Christian *recit*, to be a personal "appropriation" of it.

even more assiduously employed by the faithful than it already is; why indeed, after at least sixteen centuries of celebration, the inordinate benefits of assisting at this rite have not commended themselves definitively. In other words, one might well request some evidence of the singularity to which the blessed water allegedly testifies.

The answer to this question, or rather, response to this suspicion, is to recognize the mystery represented by the GBW to be intelligible exclusively according to Ricoeur's "poetics of love." As he explains: "The discourse of love is initially a discourse of praise, where in praising, one rejoices over the view of one object set above all the other objects of one's concern." In this discourse "key words undergo amplifications of meanings, unexpected assimilations, hitherto unseen interconnections, which cannot be reduced to a single meaning."¹⁰⁶ Thus, the act of blessing, taken as an act of love, an incarnate discourse by the Word who became flesh, ought by rights to be irreducible to empirical proofs, or to the evacuation of meaning contained in a univocal explanation of the import of a rite. It cannot be understood, in the sense of being conceptually analyzed, but only reciprocated.

To be fair, however, the rite itself does provide, in the narrative elements of the prayers themselves, a rehearsal of the historic *magnalia Dei* which allegedly justify the present liturgical action; but these actions are similarly subject to the criterion of attestation, by which, as Ladrière explained in Chapter 3, the one receiving the testimony to them becomes implicated therein. The baptism of Christ, in this sense, does not abide on a plane distinct from the multitude of events said to occur in the "today" of the celebration; having already occurred in the past, their truth is not such as can remain there, but follows the inverse perspective associated with Orthodox iconography by drawing *us* out, confuting the normativity of our distinction of then and now, there and here. It ought not to surprise then, if we can hear, in an uninterrupted sequence, of the creation of the world and the theophanies of the Old Testament, alongside Christ's kenotic *exitus* from the Father forth into the world.

106. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 317.

And yet it is, of course, the baptism of Christ in the Jordan which towers in significance, according to the rite:

The Jordan turned back...seeing him drowning the death from disobedience, the goad of error and the bond of Hell in Jordan and granting the Baptism of salvation to the world....For you could not bear, Master, in the compassion of your mercy to watch the human race being tyrannised by the devil, but you came and saved us. You sanctified the streams of Jordan by sending down from heaven your All-holy Spirit and you smashed the heads of the dragons that lurked there.

The rhetoric exhibited here surely illustrates that property of love which, according to Ricoeur, tends to extol one thing over all others: the baptism of Christ becomes in the GBW the divine *chef d'oeuvre*, serving as a metonym, as discussed above, for Christ's death and resurrection—and all it means. And yet, as the saying goes, love is blind: the myopia in the soteriological vision of the rite makes it dependent on the guidance of another narrative which cannot itself be comprehended *within* the celebration, even as its protagonist exceeds the bounds of proper description and ascription. It is as if the GBW points to its own contingency in the very attempt to attach all possible meanings to itself.

But the liturgical labour is not therefore in vain, since it would be all too easy to fail to transmit to future generations the unbelievable truth of the past—in this instance, the genuine import of Christ's baptism. Ironically then, as suggested above, literary transgression of the historical genre through fiction may actually be necessary on occasion, in order to render due justice to the history, one of whose purposes is "to realize our debt to the past." As Richard Kearney comments, on Ricoeur's consideration of the matter: "[Narrative has] the responsibility to refigure certain events of deep ethical intensity that conventional historiography might be tempted to overlook in favour of a so-called objective explanation of

things...The refigurative act of standing for the past provides us with a 'figure' to experience and think about, to both feel and reflect upon."¹⁰⁷

If we compare the brevity of the Markan account of the baptism of Christ, taken here as the equivalent of the "objective explanation of things," with the rhetoric of the GBW, we find the liturgy attempting to fulfill a debt, striving to communicate to all generations the depths of the mystery—hidden beneath the waters, as it were—of an event which the Gospel treats in a rather straightforward way. Thus the GBW can aspire, on the one hand, to be equal to the event it treats: "We acknowledge your grace, we proclaim your mercy, we do not conceal your benevolence"; and, on the other, admits its utter failure to do so: "No tongue is adequate to sing the praises of your wonders." This paradoxical confession flows from a sense of the event as a limit-experience. As van den Hengel summarizes with regard to Ricoeur's discussion of the Holocaust, applicable also, *mutatis mutandis*, to our concern here: "Limit-events and limit-experiences force us toward the outer edges of, or even beyond, language. It is no wonder, therefore, that, as a limit-event, the Shoah [viz. the baptism of Christ] tests the capacity of representation. What the figurative forms must achieve is what representation cannot achieve: to make a singular claim of truth. No realist novel, no naturalist history, is up to it. It requires the idea of the exemplarity of the singular....What is at work here, according to Ricoeur, is a moral singularity of an absolutely incomparable event."¹⁰⁸ When van den Hengel speaks of us being forced beyond language one thinks of the way in which the GBW by its very nature directs the participants *forward*, by its exhortation to refigure their lives through the manifold use of the blessed water; the only way to honour the past is by the effort to put one's testimony into practice.

Yet one may ask: is the simulacrum enthroned by such representation not a kind of usurper? After all, we must remember Kearney's caveat: "The deployment of novelistic

107. Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2004), 101, 103.

108. van den Hengel, "Naming the Unspeakable," 261.

techniques by historians to place some past event or personage vividly before the reader's mind...[serves as] a way of making things visible *as if* they were present. The danger is, of course, that the figural 'as if' might collapse into a literal belief, so that we would no longer merely 'see as' but make the mistake of believing we are actually seeing." Indeed, this is the crux of the matter. For it must be admitted that liturgy in this respect *increases* the transgression. The "hallucination of presence" is the very spell the rite endeavours to conjure;¹⁰⁹ by its pneumatic invocations (e.g., "Therefore, O King, lover of mankind, be present now too through the visitation of your Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water") it seeks to push the imagination to its limit—over the cliff, one might say. Whereas Kearney posits narrative's "double responsibility: to the past as present, and to the past as past,"¹¹⁰ the liturgy begs the very question of their distinction in its realized eschatology.

The Transfiguration of Time and Space

Consider in this connection the effacement of temporal distinction perpetuated by the use of "today," ubiquitous in Byzantine liturgical texts and recurring no less than twenty-two times in the GBW.¹¹¹ By this adverb, an event of the past is announced as present to the assembly in and through its own celebration; the baptism of Christ, inasmuch as it constitutes an episode in the personal history of one transcending the limits of time and space, is

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109. In discussing Ricoeur's view of the naming of evil, van den Hengel explains: "The incapacity of language is overtaken by the opaqueness of the event. What is left is a feeling before an event in which language is at first silenced....Before [such events at the limits], Ricoeur admits, one experiences a crisis of testimony because the experience is so extremely strange. And until the strangeness is appropriated it cannot be received" ("Naming the Unspeakable," 262). For Ricoeur, *feelings* "nourish and educate" the lamentation and complaint occasioned by the experience of evil.

But applying this consideration to the subject matter of liturgy, one gains an appreciation, one has a rationale here, again by means of inversion, for grasping why the celebration of Christian mysteries has drawn upon the full range of aesthetic resources in a given culture; the "feeling" elicited by the experience of transcendence similarly nourishes and educates the response of faith, and assists in its appropriation. One cannot without consequence dispense, therefore, with the ritual "externals" whose extravagance—in the Byzantine Rite, gold vestments, incense, continual singing etc.—serve for a "reorientation by disorientation" toward the strangeness of the festal event at issue.

110. Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, 100.

111. Denysenko asserts that these "poetic 'todays'" truly "reflect the collective imagination of multiple authors over the course of several centuries, and many Euchologia seem to have embraced verses from different sources without organizing them in a particular order" ("Blessing of Water," 177). The *textus receptus*, as a result, represents only one possible combination of such verses, and not the most comprehensive.

submitted as susceptible of *anamnesis*, of a ritual calling to mind that renders the worshippers, through the working of the Holy Spirit, efficaciously contemporaneous to it. This process, epitomized in the diaconal address commencing the Byzantine Eucharist, referred to above (“It is time for the Lord to act”), is predicated on the possibility of an authentic, if sacramental, encounter with those things historically accomplished by Christ.

Liturgical celebration can be seen, therefore, to devolve around a certain inversion of both the idiom of testimony and the process by which it is schematized, as explicated in chapter four. Liturgical testimony, as exemplified in the language of Byzantine festal hymnography, exhibits a contrasting deictic: the use of the first-person plural, the present tense of the verb and the emphasis on “here” versus “there,” indeed a rhetorical assimilation of “there” to “here.” Thus, the following can be sung: “For in the preceding feast we saw you as a babe, but in the present one we see you full and perfect man... For today the moment of the feast is here for us and the choir of saints assembles here with us, and Angels keep festival with mortals....Today the streams of Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord.”¹¹² Actually, as noted above in our treatment of the GBW’s naming of God, the verb tenses of the hymnography oscillate between past and present, promoting a contraction of the temporal distance between the liturgical “testimony” and the referent to which it adverts.

The schematization of place also plays a critical role in the revivification of an “I was there.” We can observe in the GBW a centrifugal dynamic by which “geometrical space” becomes “lived,” by being ritually inhabited. The procession from the church to a given body of water spatializes the festal narrative of Christ going forth to baptism; the blessing of the water renders it a physical metaphor for the Jordan River, which water is then dispersed into the homes of the faithful. In the domestic milieu, by being employed for blessing, it functions both to further integrate lived space into the sacral topography spreading outward from the body of water blessed, and to incorporate lived time into the narrative of salvation. Finally, the

¹¹². See Appendix below.

place where the rite occurs, converted through the blessing into an object, namely “holy water,” develops an ontological contour, as this object is sprinkled or drunk as sacramental, mediating prayer for the welfare of oneself and others. And this entire sequence would seem to be predicated conceptually on the evangelist’s testimony to the actuality of Christ’s baptism, which it seeks to foment anew in the hearts and minds (and bodies) of those who assist in the rite.

One sees in the dynamic of the “Great Blessing of Water,” in fact, an utter reversal of Ricoeur’s “transition from living memory to the ‘extrinsic’ positing of historical knowledge,”¹¹³ as it ordinarily obtains in the historiographical movement from testimony to document; the liturgy is ordered rather to what we might call, to coin a neologism, an “abscription” of the witness conserved in the liturgical archives. What is remarkable, though perhaps no more so than other instances in Christian heortology, is the way in which such a rich and complex catena of liturgical practice and religious devotion can hang upon such a thin Scriptural thread, namely the laconic account of the baptism of Christ in the Gospels.

113. Ricoeur, *MHF*, 153.

CONCLUSION

From Symbolism to Hermeneutics

Inspired by Paul Ricoeur's well-known aphorism, "The symbol gives rise to thought," this dissertation has engaged the symbolic manifold of the Byzantine Rite, and specifically its "Great Blessing of Water," by means of Ricoeur's own hermeneutical philosophy. It has been an exercise in liturgical theology, taken as (liturgical) faith seeking understanding, whose viability was assured by the range of the theological-philosophical conversation already underway in the Ricoeurian foyer; whose originality has lain in the distinctiveness of the Byzantine tradition, here welcomed into said conversation for the first time; and whose relevance, as a contribution to knowledge, obtains in the dialectical manner in which Ricoeur's thought and the liturgical phenomenon at issue have *both* received a surplus of meaning, in virtue of being interpreted in respect of each other.

Chapter 1 entertained the question "Why Ricoeur?" by reflecting on the imperative for liturgical theology to engage with contemporary philosophy; by examining and evaluating the use of Ricoeur by liturgists working out of the Western tradition (Joyce Ann Zimmerman and Bridget Nichols); considering the larger debate that such use has occasioned, especially vis-à-vis the methodology of ritual studies; and finally, by listening to what Ricoeurian scholars, and Ricoeur himself, have had to say in regard to the potential of liturgy to serve as a site of hermeneutical inquiry. We concluded that a liturgical hermeneutic informed by Ricoeur would profit from a triple thematic orientation, encompassing ritual symbolism, as represented pre-

eminently in the metaphorical cast of its linguistic idiom; ritual selfhood, to wit, the form of subjectivity presumed and produced by the liturgical context; and ritual transformation, taken as a shorthand for liturgy's deployment of specific mnemonic operations.

In Chapter 2, we investigated Ricoeur's treatment of the polyphonic "naming" of God, as a paragon of the metaphoricity of poetic discourse; we then developed a liturgical analogue to it, with reference especially to C.S. Lewis, David Power and Graham Ward. This discussion enabled us to affirm the distinctiveness of liturgical naming, as an idiom inclusive of models and qualifiers, of kataphasis and apophasis, whose dialectic is intensified in virtue of the liturgy's denomination of the divine on not only a linguistic, but also a ritual, plane. We concluded that the subjectivity countenanced by the liturgical naming of God merited designation as a form of Ricoeur's "summoned self," one manifesting a corresponding polyphony.

Ricoeur's understanding of subjectivity, and its application to a liturgical context, were the burden of Chapter 3. To mine the rich vein of his reflections, we delved into his celebrated *Oneself as Another* (OAA), guided in our explorations by the hand of John van den Hengel. His assessment of the import of this work for practical theology at large informed our canvassing of its themes and concepts for insight into the features of liturgical selfhood. We were also aided in this task by considering further the work of Joyce Ann Zimmerman. What emerged was a corroboration of Ricoeur's threefold account of otherness, namely, that of the lived body, other persons and the testimony of conscience, with respect to the liturgical actants, both human and divine. This led us to a reflection on the notion of truth as *attestation*, and in turn, to its connection to *recognition*; we suggested that liturgy attests to the self's portentous recognition of itself as *capax Dei*, "summoned" to a doxological vocation.

Chapter 4 saw us probe Ricoeur's monumental *Memory, History, Forgetting*, in order to uncover the dynamics endemic to liturgy as a form of embodied remembering. We situated our exploration within a current debate among liturgical theologians, concerning the vital question

of how critical historiography impinges upon the communally-sanctioned, theological interpretation of the past, a question brought into relief by liturgy's recourse to fictional devices in the commemoration of salvation history. Adapting Ricoeur's apologia for the "limit-experience" represented by the Shoah, we argued that the miraculous events celebrated in liturgy exhibit an analogous, if obverse singularity: the transmission of their truth, paradoxically, depends upon the service rendered by the productive imagination.

Finally, in Chapter 5, we drew upon the multiple tools in our Ricoeurian tool-kit to unpack the Byzantine-Rite "Great Blessing of Water." In attending to its naming of God, we found striking examples of polyphonicity: in the ambiguity of divine addressee, whether God the Father or Christ; in the combination of apophatic and kataphatic discourse; and in the soteriological dialectics presented by the GBW's contrasting narratives of (re)creation, with their respective testimony to the roles of rational word and conflictual deed and invocation of the differentiated symbolism of light and water. Subsequently, in our determinations on the form of subjectivity engendered by the rite, we found a unique "summoned self" constituted by the call to bless, an action discovered to have both verbal and sacrificial connotations. Such a call, we ventured, could exploit our natural faculty for gratitude, after the manner in which, for Ricoeur, conscience is galvanized by fusion with a range of biblical/hagiographical figures. Thirdly, we plotted the narrative arc extending through blessings in general, and attempted to follow the particular trajectory co-ordinated by the temporal configuration and spatial schematization of the GBW. In sum, we have sought to demonstrate how the diverse resources offered by Ricoeur can assist in responding to the contemporary crisis of meaning which Romano Guardini, at the inception of our work, saw as typified in the manifestation and proclamation of God that constitutes the liturgical act.

It is striking that Ricoeur uses the metaphor of travel to describe the work of interpretation, presenting his hermeneutical philosophy as a "long route" through the landscape of symbols, an indirect, narrative itinerary to the hidden reaches of personal

identity, ultimately seen to be otherwise inaccessible. This metaphor corresponds to the *élan* of the GBW, in which the procession of clergy and faithful set forth from the relative safety and security of the church proper, toward the wilds of the water, where to seek for the God at once known and unknown. Their exitus images the perennial human quest for Theophany, itself an apt characterization for the journey theology must make out of the precincts of its natural home, into the turbulence of the philosophical stream, there to cast forth the Cross of Christ and witness him conquering the dragons that lay therein.

Appendix: The Text of the “Great Blessing of Water”

After the Prayer behind the Ambo, we go out to the Font, the Priest going ahead with lights and incense, and we chant the following Idiomels in Tone 8, during which the Church and people are censed. (By Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem).

The voice of the Lord upon the waters cries out, saying, ‘Come all of you, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, of Christ who has appeared’. (x3)

Today the nature of the waters is made holy, and Jordan is parted and holds back the flow of its waters as it sees the Master washing himself. (x2)

As man, Christ King, you came to the river, and in your goodness you hasten to accept the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner, on account of our sins, O Lover of mankind. (x2)

Glory. Both now. Same Tone.

At the voice of the one crying in the desert, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’, you came, Lord, having taken the form of a servant, asking for Baptism, though you did not know sin. The waters saw you and were afraid. The Forerunner trembled and cried out, saying, ‘How will the lamp enlighten the Light? The servant place his hand on the Master? Saviour, who take away the sin of the world, make me and the waters holy.’

And immediately the Readings.

The Reading is from the Prophecy of Isaias. [35,1-10]

Thus says the Lord: Thirsty desert rejoice, let the desert exult and flower like a lily. And the deserts of Jordan will flower and be overgrown and exult. And the glory of Lebanon has been given to it and the honour of Carmel. And my people will see the glory of the Lord and the majesty of God. Be strong, enfeebled hands and palsied knees. Give comfort and say to the faint-hearted, ‘Be strong and do not fear. See, our God is giving judgement and will give it. He himself will come and save us.

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will hear. Then the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of stammerers will speak clearly, because water has broken out in the desert and a channel in a thirsty land. And the waterless land will become pools and there will be a spring of water for the thirsty land. There will be joy of birds there, folds for flocks and reed beds and pools. And there will be a pure way there, and it will be called a holy way, and no one unclean may pass along it. There will be no unclean way there. But the scattered will walk upon it and not go astray. There will be no lion there, nor will any evil wild beasts go up on it or be found there. But the redeemed and gathered by the Lord will walk on it. And they will return and come to Sion with joy and exultation, and everlasting joy will be upon their head. And on their head praise and exultation and joy will possess them. Pain, grief and sighing have fled away.

The Reading is from the Prophecy of Isaias.[55,1-13]

Thus says the Lord: You that thirst, go for water. And as many of you as have no money, make your way and buy. And eat and drink wine and fat without money and price. Why do you spend money on what is not food, and toil for what does not satisfy? Hear me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in good things. Give heed with your ears and follow in my ways. Listen to me and your soul will live among good things. And I will make an eternal Covenant with you, the sure mercies of David. See, I have given him as a testimony among the Nations, a ruler and commander among the Nations. See, Nations who do not know you will call upon you, and peoples who are not acquainted with you will take refuge with you, for the sake of the Lord your God and the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you. Seek the Lord, and when you find him, call upon him. But when he comes near you, let the impious abandon his

ways and a lawless man his plans. And return to the Lord and you will find mercy, and cry out, for he will abundantly forgive your sins.

For my plans are not like your plans, nor are my ways like your ways, says the Lord. But as far as heaven is from earth, so far is my way from your ways and your thoughts from my mind. For as rain or snow comes down from heaven and does not return until it has saturated the earth and it brings forth and sprouts and gives seed to the sower and bread for food, so will my word be. Whatever comes out of my mouth will not return to me empty, until everything that I wished has been fulfilled. And I will make my ways and my commands prosper. You will go out with gladness and be taught with joy. For the mountains and hills will leap up, welcoming you with joy, and all the trees of the field will clap with their branches. And instead of brambles cypress will come up, and instead of nettles myrtle will come up. And there shall be for the Lord a name and an everlasting sign, and it will not fail.

The Reading is from the Prophecy of Isaias.[12,3-6]

Thus says the Lord: Draw out water with gladness from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day, Sing to the Lord and cry out his name. Proclaim among the Nations his glorious deeds, remind them that his name has been exalted. Sing to the name of the Lord, for he has done great things. Proclaim these in all the earth. Exult and be glad, you that dwell in Sion, because the Holy One of Israel has been exalted in the midst of her.

Then the Prokeimenon in Tone 3. [Psalm 26]

The Lord is my enlightenment and my Saviour. Whom shall I fear?

Verse: The Lord is the defender of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?

The Reading is from the 1st Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. [10,1-4]

Brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant of how our Fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea. And they were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. And they all ate the same spiritual food. And they all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them. Now the rock was Christ.

Alleluia. Tone 4. [Psalm 28,3]

Verse 1: The voice of the Lord is upon the waters.

Verse 2: The God of glory thundered upon the waters.

The Reading is from the holy Gospel according to Mark.[1,9-11]

At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And immediately as he was coming up from the water, he saw the heavens being parted and the Spirit like a dove coming down upon him. And there was a voice from heaven, You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

And the Deacon at once begins the Litany of Peace. While this is being said by the Deacon, the Priest says the prayer Lord Jesus Christ... quietly. [If there is no Deacon, the Priest reads this prayer during the reading of the Prophecies]

Deacon: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy. And so after each petition.

Deacon: For the peace from on high and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.

For the peace of the whole world, for the welfare of the holy Churches of God, and for the union of all, let us pray to the Lord.

For this holy house, and for those who enter it with faith, reverence and the fear of God, let us pray to the Lord.

[For all devout and Orthodox Christians, let us pray to the Lord.]

For our Archbishop N., for the honoured order of presbyters, for the diaconate in Christ, for all the clergy and the people, let us pray to the Lord.

For [our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth, the Royal Family, her Government, and] all in authority, let us pray to the Lord.

For this city [Or this holy monastery], for every [monastery] city, town and village, and for the faithful who dwell in them, let us pray to the Lord.

For favourable weather, an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and temperate seasons, let us pray to the Lord.

For those who travel by land, air or water, for the sick, the suffering, for those in captivity, and for their safety and salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

For this water to be sanctified by the power and operation and visitation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

For there to come down upon these waters the cleansing operation of the Trinity beyond all being, let us pray to the Lord.

For there to be given them the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan, let us pray to the Lord.

For us to be enlightened with the enlightenment of knowledge and true religion through the visitation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

For this water to become a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, for healing of soul and body and for every suitable purpose, let us pray to the Lord.

For this water to become water springing up to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord.

For this water to be shown to be an averting of every assault of visible and invisible enemies, let us pray to the Lord.

For those who draw from it and take from it for the sanctification of their homes, let us pray to the Lord.

For it to be for cleansing of souls and bodies for all those who draw from it with faith and who partake of it, let us pray to the Lord.

For us to be counted worthy to be filled with sanctification through communion of these waters by the invisible manifestation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

For the Lord God to hear the voice of supplication of us sinners and have mercy on us, let us pray to the Lord.

For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger and constraint, let us pray to the Lord.

Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by your grace.

Commemorating our all-holy, pure, most blessed and glorious Lady, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, with all the Saints, let us entrust ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.

The Priest reads the following prayer in a low voice.

Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son, who are in the bosom of the Father, true God, source of life and immortality, Light from Light, who came into the world to enlighten it, flood our mind with light by your Holy Spirit and accept us as we bring you praise and thanksgiving for your wondrous mighty works from every age, and for your saving dispensation in these last times. By it you clothe yourself in our weak and beggared matter and coming down to the measure of our servitude, King of all, you accepted also to be baptised in the Jordan by the hand of a servant, so that, having sanctified the nature of the waters, you, the sinless one, might make a way for our rebirth through water and Spirit and re-establish us in our original freedom.

As we celebrate the memory of this divine Mystery, we entreat you, Master, lover of mankind: Sprinkle on us, your unworthy servants, cleansing water, in accordance with your divine promise, the gift of your compassion, that the request of us sinners over this water may become acceptable by your goodness and that through it your blessing to be

granted to us and to all your faithful people, to the glory of your holy, venerated Name. For to you belong all glory, honour and worship, with your Father who is without beginning, with you all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

And having said the Amen to himself, when the Deacon has finished the Litany, the Priest begins this Prayer in a loud voice [the first part only on day of the Feast itself]

A Composition of Patriarch Sophronios of Jerusalem.

Trinity beyond all being, beyond all goodness, beyond all godhead, all-powerful, all-vigilant, invisible, incomprehensible; Creator of the spiritual beings and rational natures, innate goodness, unapproachable Light that enlightens everyone coming into the world, shine also in me your unworthy servant. Enlighten the eyes of my mind that I may dare to sing the praise of your measureless benevolence and power. May my supplication for the people here present be acceptable, so that my offences may not prevent the Holy Spirit from being present here; but permit me now without condemnation to cry out to you and say, Master, lover of mankind, beyond all goodness, Almighty, eternal King. We glorify you, the Creator and Fashioner of the universe. We glorify you, only-begotten Son of God, without father from your Mother, without mother from your Father. For in the preceding feast we saw you as a babe, but in the present one we see you full and perfect man, our God, made manifest as perfect God from perfect God.

For today the moment of the feast is here for us and the choir of saints assembles here with us, and Angels keep festival with mortals. Today the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dwelt upon the waters. Today the Sun that never sets has dawned and the world is made radiant with the light of the Lord. Today the Moon with its radiant

beams sheds light on the world. Today the stars formed of light make the inhabited world lovely with the brightness of their splendour. Today the clouds rain down from heaven the shower of justice for mankind. Today the Uncreated by his own will accepts the laying on of hands by his own creature. Today the Prophet and Forerunner draws near, but stands by with fear seeing God's condescension towards us. Today the streams of Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord. Today all creation is watered by mystical streams. Today the failings of mankind are being washed away by the waters of Jordan. Today Paradise is opened for mortals and the Sun of justice shines down on us. Today the bitter water as once for Moses' people is changed to sweetness by the presence of the Lord. Today we have been delivered from the ancient grief, and saved as the new Israel. Today we have been redeemed from darkness and are filled with radiance by the light of the knowledge of God. Today the gloomy fog of the world is cleansed by the manifestation of our God. Today all creation shines with light from on high. Today error has been destroyed and the coming of the Master makes for us a way of salvation. Today things on high keep festival with those below, and those below commune with those on high. Today the sacred and triumphant festal assembly of the Orthodox exults. Today the Master hastens towards baptism, that he may lead humanity to the heights. Today the One who does not bow bows down to his own servant, that he may free us from servitude. Today we have purchased the Kingdom of heaven, for the Kingdom of the Lord will have no end. Today earth and sea share the joy of the world, and the world has been filled with gladness.

The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and were afraid. The Jordan turned back when it saw the fire of the godhead descending in bodily form and entering it. The Jordan turned back as it contemplated the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, descending and flying about you. The Jordan turned back as it saw the Invisible made visible, the

Creator made flesh, the Master in the form of a servant. The Jordan turned back and the mountains leapt as they saw God in the flesh, and the clouds uttered their voice, marvelling at what had come to pass, seeing Light from Light, true God from true God, the Master's festival today in Jordan; seeing him drowning the death from disobedience, the goad of error and the bond of Hell in Jordan and granting the Baptism of salvation to the world. Therefore I too, a sinner and your unworthy servant, recount the greatness of your wonders and, seized with fear, in compunction cry out to you:

After completing this, he says in a more powerful voice,

Great are you, O Lord, and wonderful your works, and no word is adequate to sing the praise of your wonders (x3). [People: Glory to you, Lord, glory to you!]

For by your own will you brought the universe from non-existence into being, you hold creation together by your might, and by your providence you direct the world. You composed creation from four elements; with four seasons you crowned the circle of the year. All the spiritual Powers tremble before you. The sun sings your praise, the moon glorifies you, the stars entreat you, the light obeys you, the deeps tremble before you, the springs are your servants. You stretched out the heavens on the waters; you walled in the sea with sand; you poured out the air for breathing. Angelic Powers minister to you. The choirs of the Archangels worship you. The many-eyed Cherubim and the six-winged Seraphim as they stand and fly around you hide their faces in fear of your unapproachable glory. For you, being God uncircumscribed, without beginning and inexpressible, came upon earth, taking the form of a servant, being found in the likeness of mortals. For you could not bear, Master, in the compassion of your mercy to watch the human race being tyrannised by the devil, but you came and saved us. We acknowledge your grace, we proclaim your mercy, we do not conceal your

benevolence. You freed the generations of our race. You sanctified a virgin womb by your birth. All creation sang your praise when you appeared. For you are our God who appeared on earth and lived among mortals. You sanctified the streams of Jordan by sending down from heaven your All-holy Spirit and you smashed the heads of the dragons that lurked there.

Therefore, O King, lover of mankind, be present now too through the visitation of your Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water. (x3)

And give to it the grace of redemption and the blessing of Jordan. Make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a deliverance from sins, an averting of diseases, unapproachable by hostile powers, filled with angelic strength. That all who draw from it and partake of it may have it for cleansing of souls and bodies, for healing of passions, for sanctification of homes, for every suitable purpose. For you are our God, who through water and Spirit renewed our nature made old by sin. You are our God, who in the days of Noë drowned sin through the water of the flood. You are our God, who through Moses freed the Hebrew race from the slavery of Pharaoh through the sea. You are our God who split open the rock in the desert, and waters rushed out and torrents flooded down, and you satisfied your thirsty people. You are our God, who through Elias turned Israel from the error of Baal.

And now, Master, do you yourself sanctify this water by your Holy Spirit. (x3)

Give to all who partake of it sanctification, blessing, cleansing, health.

And save, Lord, our faithful Rulers [our Sovereign Lady Queen Elisabeth]. (x3) [The triple form of this petition is a relic of the imperial liturgy of Agia Sophia in Constantinople before 1453.]

And guard them [her] under your protection in peace. Subdue beneath their [her] feet every foe and enemy. Grant them [her] all their [her] requests that are for salvation and eternal life.

Remember, Lord, our Archbishop N., the whole order of Presbyters, the Diaconate in Christ, every rank of the clergy, the people here present and our brethren who with good reason are absent, and have mercy on us in accordance with your great mercy. So that through elements and through Angels and through mortals and through things visible and through things unseen, your all-holy name may be glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

Priest: Peace to all.

People: And to your spirit.

Deacon: Let us bow our heads to the Lord.

People: To you, O Lord.

And the Priest says the Prayer in a low voice,

Incline your ear and hear us, Lord, who accepted to be baptised in Jordan and to sanctify the waters, and bless us all, who signify our calling as servants by the bending of our necks. And count us worthy to be filled with your sanctification through the partaking and sprinkling of this water. And let it be for us, Lord, for healing of soul and body.

Aloud

For you are the sanctification of our souls and bodies, and to you we give glory, thanksgiving and worship, with your Father who is without beginning, and your All-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

And the Priest immediately, blessing the waters in the figure of the Cross, immerses the precious Cross, plunging it upright into the water and lifting it out again, chanting the following Troparion in Tone 1. The Priest once and the Choirs once each.

As you were baptised in the Jordan, Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, for the voice of the Father bore witness to you, naming you the Beloved Son; and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the sureness of the word. Christ God, who appeared and enlightened the world, glory to you.

[Both the Typikon of the Monastery of Dionysiou and that of the Church of Cyprus prescribe that the Kontakion be sung after the singing of the Apolytikion.

Kontakion. Tone 4. Model Melody.

Today you have appeared to the inhabited world; and your light, O Lord, has been marked upon us; who with knowledge sing your praise. You have come, you have appeared, the unapproachable Light.

When the feast falls on a Monday and the first blessing takes place on Sunday, then the Kontakion of the Forefeast is sung.

Kontakion. Tone 4. Today you have appeared.

Today the Lord has come to the streams of Jordan, and cries aloud to John: Do not be afraid to baptise me; for I have come to save Adam the First-formed.]

And he sprinkles all the People with the water. They drink from the water.

As we enter the Church we chant the following Idiomel in Tone 6.

Let us the faithful praise the greatness of God's dispensation concerning us. For in our transgression he, alone clean and undefiled, becoming man, is cleansed in Jordan, sanctifying me and the waters, and crushing the heads of the dragons on the waters. Let us therefore draw water with gladness, brethren. For the grace of the Spirit is being given invisibly to those who draw with faith by Christ, God and the Saviour of our souls.

Then Blessed be the name of the Lord as usual and then the Psalm [33], I will bless the Lord at all times. And the broken fragments [Antidoron] are distributed.

Then the full Dismissal.

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