religions

Special Issue Reprint

Worship and Faith Formation

Edited by
Hwarang Moon

mdpi.com/journal/religions

MDPI

Worship and Faith Formation

Worship and Faith Formation

Guest Editor

Hwarang Moon

Basel • Beijing • Wuhan • Barcelona • Belgrade • Novi Sad • Cluj • Manchester

Guest Editor
Hwarang Moon
Korea Theological Seminary
(Kosin University)
Cheonan
Republic of Korea

Editorial Office
MDPI AG
Grosspeteranlage 5
4052 Basel, Switzerland

This is a reprint of the Special Issue, published open access by the journal *Religions* (ISSN 2077-1444), freely accessible at: www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/UJTC9ZF1QJ.

For citation purposes, cite each article independently as indicated on the article page online and as indicated below:

Lastname, Firstname, Firstname Lastname, and Firstname Lastname. Article Title. *Journal Name* **Year**, *Volume Number*, Page Range.

ISBN 978-3-7258-4358-9 (Hbk)
ISBN 978-3-7258-4357-2 (PDF)
https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-7258-4357-2

Contents

About the Editor

Hwarang Moon

Hwarang Moon is Professor of Worship at Korea Theological Seminary (Kosin University) in South Korea. He has published extensively in international peer-reviewed journals, including *Theology Today*, *Studia Liturgica*, *Worship*, *The Christian Education Journal*, and *Religions*, where he also serves on the Editorial Board. He has also published in Brill's *International Journal of Asian Christianity*. His research focuses on liturgical theology in Reformed and global contexts, with particular attention to the formative power of worship and sacramental imagination.

He is the author of *Engraved upon the Heart: Liturgy's Impact on Faith Formation* (Wipf and Stock, 2015) and *Worship in Conversation* (Baylor University Press, 2025).

Preface

This volume, “Worship and Faith Formation: The Formative Power of Liturgy in Christian Life", is grounded in a deep conviction: that Christian worship is not merely something we perform, but something through which we are continually shaped, in body, in spirit, and in community. As the Guest Editor of the *Religions* Special Issue with the same title, I am pleased to present this collected print edition, which collates ten essays into a new arrangement that highlights the formative dimensions of worship across diverse traditions, practices, and perspectives.

While the original Editorial provided an overview of each contribution’s academic significance, this preface serves a distinct purpose. It is intended to guide the reader through the structure of this volume and briefly reflect on the theological imagination that shaped its design. The reprint unfolds in three parts, each highlighting a particular dimension of how worship forms Christian life.

Part I explores the theological and sacramental foundations of Christian formation. Through reflections on the Ten Commandments, baptism, and the Eucharist, these essays examine how normative elements of Christian worship have historically shaped ethical identity and communal belonging.

Part II moves into the realms of narrative, imagination, and affect. This section considers how symbols, stories, and creatively expressive language that evokes emotion and imagination function within worship to shape memory, desire, and belief.

Part III engages broader cultural and historical contexts. The essays in this section explore how worship responds to moments of disruption—such as pandemics, social shifts, or cultural tensions—and how liturgical practices adapt, resist, or renew communal identity in those moments.

As the editor, I arranged these contributions along a theological arc: from foundational commitments, to expressive forms, to contextual applications. I hope that this structure offers clarity and depth to readers—whether scholars, pastors, or worship leaders—who seek to reflect on the formative nature of worship.

I remain deeply grateful to all the contributors for their insight, creativity, and dedication to this project. May this volume invite fresh inquiry into the ways in which worship forms us—not only as individuals of faith, but as communities that are gathered, sustained, and sent by grace.

Hwarang Moon
Guest Editor

religions

MDPI

Editorial

Worship and Faith Formation: The Formative Power of Liturgy in Christian Life

Hwarang Moon

Korea Theological Seminary, Cheonan 31071, Republic of Korea; blauw100@daum.net

Christian communities in the 21st century are faced with the pressing challenge of forming and sustaining faith. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the place of worship has been both disrupted and rediscovered. Today, we are compelled to ask: *How does worship shape faith?*

The following Special issue of *Religions*, “Worship and Faith Formation”, is centered on this particular question. It seeks to deepen theological and liturgical reflection on how worship forms and sustains Christian faith, both individually and communally. All ten articles explore how the repetition and embodied practice of worship within the Christian tradition shape the believer’s identity, spirituality, and ethical life.

Across these articles, a common thread emerges: the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, and the sharing of the table all serve to activate communal memory and shape a shared ecclesial identity. From Paul’s Eucharistic exhortation to the Corinthian church, to Luke’s theology of the hospitable table, to the repeated use of the Ten Commandments in the Reformed tradition, this issue emphasizes that worship is not a static rite but a formative rhythm of life.

Some contributions also explore how worship mediates the intersection of boundary and inclusion within the faith community—reshaping the ethical sensibilities and postures of believers toward the other. These insights suggest that worship is not merely a burden from the past but a living space in which today’s communities are invited to participate and be formed anew.

Of course, this volume does not exhaust the discussion. Several key questions posed in the call for papers remain only partially addressed:

1. How does worship affect faith formation across different life stages and conditions—among children, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities?
2. How do music, praise, and sensory experience shape the cognitive, emotional, and moral worlds of believers?
3. What physical and psychological effects emerge through participation in worship, seen through the lens of neuroscience or psychology?
4. How does the digital transformation of worship in the post-pandemic era impact spiritual formation?

Thus, rather than offering a conclusion, this Special Issue opens new doors for multidisciplinary inquiry. To explore the theme of faith formation with integrity, liturgical studies must engage in creative and substantive dialogue with Christian education, practical theology, ethics, psychology, disability studies, and neuroscience.

May this Special Issue invite fresh reflection on worship across traditions and renew our understanding of worship not merely as something we *perform* but as something through which we are *formed*. I offer my deepest thanks to all contributors.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declare no conflict of interest.

religions

MDPI

Article

The Ten Commandments in Reformed Worship Traditions

Hwarang Moon

Korea Theological Seminary, Kosin University, Cheonan 31071, Republic of Korea; blauw100@daum.net

Abstract: This paper examines the role of the Ten Commandments in Christian worship and its influence on believers' spiritual and ethical formation. Although historically the use of the Commandments in public worship was limited, particularly outside Reformed traditions, they remain a powerful tool for moral reflection and spiritual discipline. By reciting, singing, or creatively incorporating the Commandments into worship, believers are invited to engage in continuous self-reflection and reaffirm their commitment to living according to God's will. This paper argues that, while not mandatory for every service, the regular use of the Ten Commandments provides essential moral guidance and helps shape the ethical identity of Christians, offering a framework for navigating relationships with God and others in a faithful, disciplined way.

Keywords: ten commandments; Christian worship; faith formation; liturgical theology; spiritual discipline; ethical identity

1. Introduction

The Ten Commandments remain not only valid but essential for Christians living in the 21st century. They continue to shape the foundation of one's faith and serve as a guide for maintaining beliefs in a rapidly changing world. However, in modern worship contexts, the Commandments are often perceived as burdensome, making the congregation feel constrained rather than spiritually uplifted. This tension has led to a diminished focus on the Ten Commandments in contemporary worship settings, particularly as churches seek to appeal to new believers with more dynamic and less solemn forms of worship. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for determining the place of the Ten Commandments in shaping Christian worship today.

The Ten Commandments are one of the core elements emphasized in the confessions of faith of Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Explanations of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer collectively constitute approximately one-third of the content in Reformed Confessions of Faith.[1] In the context of emphasizing doctrinal education, the prominent Reformers of the 16th century, Martin Luther and John Calvin, both stressed the importance of teaching the Ten Commandments. However, Calvin went a step further by incorporating the Ten Commandments into the order of worship, not merely for catechetical purposes but as a foundational liturgical element. This reflected his belief that the commandments should not only educate but also shape the worship experience itself, embedding them in the hearts of the congregation through regular liturgical practice. While Luther developed extensive preaching series on the commandments, which were primarily catechetical, Calvin's integration of the commandments into worship was more liturgical in nature, intending to make them a central part of the worship life of the church.[2]

In the 16th century Church of England, the order of worship in the Book of Common Prayer also designated the Ten Commandments as a crucial element in shaping the structure of Sunday worship. Furthermore, the church's architectural design also reflected a keen interest in the Commandments. There is a record specifying that the Ten Commandments were to be positioned on each face of the altar, which was located on the east wall of the parish churches, demonstrating the church's attention to the Commandments (Hütter 2005, p. 49).

However, looking across the entire history of the Christian Church, except for the pastoral scenes of the 16th century Reformers, the Ten Commandments do not seem to have been prominently featured as a regular part of the order of worship. Even in denominations claiming to carry on the spirit of the Reformation, such as Reformed and Presbyterian churches, as well as Lutheran churches, the incorporation of the Ten Commandments into worship has historically been inconsistent. In an era favoring contemporary worship that is more vibrant and welcoming than the solemnity of traditional worship formats, there seems to be little emphasis on elements like the Ten Commandments and prayers of confession, which serve to highlight our sins and prompt repentance.

It is my conviction that the Ten Commandments possess an ethical significance akin to a set of life instructions directly given by God to His people, transcending time and circumstances (Miller 2004, pp. 12–13). Therefore, the spirit of the Ten Commandments should not only guide the moral identity and life of faith but also hold a central place in worship. Incorporating the Commandments into worship serves as a continual reminder of God's covenant with His people, grounding the congregation in the foundational principles of faith. By engaging with the Ten Commandments in a liturgical setting, worshipers are invited to reflect on their ethical responsibilities before God, reinforcing the alignment of faith and practice in the Christian life. In the context of special environments like public worship, what meaning does the use of the Ten Commandments carry, and how can they be effectively employed?

In this article, I will examine the historical usage of the Ten Commandments within the context of Christian worship and subsequently investigate why its use has waned over time. Following this, I will explore a path to reinvigorating the use of the Ten Commandments in public worship from a liturgical theological perspective and aim to provide guidelines on how it can be effectively utilized in local church settings.

2. Historical Examination of the Use of the Ten Commandments

It cannot be definitively stated that the Ten Commandments were a regular part of worship in the early church due to the existence of diverse liturgical families during the early church period. While it is speculated that the Shema and the Ten Commandments might be used in synagogues during the 1st century, it seems unlikely that the Ten Commandments were used in the regular order of Christian worship (Dix 2009, pp. 36–47)[3] as the use of the Ten Commandments in churches gradually diverged from the traditional Jewish order. Though Christians of that time placed a strong emphasis on the importance of the Ten Commandments (Vokes 1968, p. 128), there was a concern that emphasizing the Ten Commandments as a part of God's Word could potentially overshadow other portions of the Scripture.[4]

While the Letter to the Corinthians by Clement from the 1st century reports an order of confession of sins and declaration of forgiveness in Christian worship, it is not explicitly clear whether the Ten Commandments were used during that time.[5] Although 2nd century church fathers, especially Polycarp, Theophilus, and Irenaeus, emphasized the importance of the Ten Commandments, there is no clear record indicating the use of the Ten Commandments in public worship.[6]

In 1503, Johann Ulrich Surgant of Basel (c. 1450–1503) advocated in his work, "*Pastoral Handbook*", the weekly recitation of the Ten Commandments (Deddens 1998a, pp. 15–19). In 1529 and 1535, Zwingli implemented the recitation of the Ten Commandments and the confession of sins after the sermon in the church regulations (Nagel 1970, p. 145). In 1533, Guillaume Farel included the recitation of the Ten Commandments, confession of sins, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed in the worship service after the sermon. Similarly, in 1535, Bullinger, following the sermon, included the recitation of the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed, following the confession of sins and the prayer of absolution (Gibson and Earngey 2018, pp. 201, 211, 218). Martin Bucer, who served in Strasbourg, guided the congregation to sing a short psalm or hymn after the prayer of confession and the declaration of absolution during the Sunday worship. Later, he directed the congregation to sing the Ten Commandments as a hymn (Deddens 1998a, p. 2).

Influenced by Martin Bucer, John Calvin also positioned the recitation of the Ten Commandments after the declaration of absolution in the Strasbourg liturgy in 1540. This arrangement was intended to approach the Ten Commandments not as a condition for salvation or as human merit (as in the third use of the law) but as a confession of the lives of those who have been saved and received grace (Maxwell 1936, p. 114). After each commandment, "*Kyrie eleison*" followed. However, when Calvin returned to Geneva and resumed his ministry, the "*Kyrie eleison*" was omitted from the worship service. Nevertheless, he continued the practice of reciting the Ten Commandments every Sunday morning (Bieritz 2004, p. 493).

In the next generation of the Protestant Reformation, the placement of the Ten Commandments changed. In 1554, Micronius, who served a congregation of exiles from the Netherlands in London, incorporated the Ten Commandments, confession of sins, and the declaration of forgiveness after the sermon and prayer (Gibson and Earngey 2018, p. 459). According to Petrus Dathenus's worship book, *Psalms of David* (1567), he placed the Ten Commandments before the confession of sins at the beginning of the worship service. This arrangement was intended to emphasize the foundation of realizing sin through the Ten Commandments (Polman 1998, pp. 111–12). Exactly, the intention was to reflect on one's inner self through the Ten Commandments and, based on that reflection, confess sins.

Although *The Westminster Directory for Public Worship* does not include the order of the Ten Commandments, later Puritan worship manuals in England and the Dutch Reformed worship services prominently feature the Ten Commandments in the worship sequence. In *A Book of the Form of Common Prayer* by John Waldegrave, published in London in 1584/5, the order after the sermon during Sunday morning worship includes the conclusion with the recitation of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Similarly, this pattern appears consistently in the Middelburg liturgies of the Dutch Reformed Church in the late 16th and early 17th centuries (1586, 1587, 1602) (Davies 1997, p. 263).

In *The Savoy Liturgy*, written by the Puritan minister Richard Baxter in 1661 in England, after the "Preparatory Prayer" seeking grace in worship, the recitation of the Ten Commandments by the ministers followed the confession of faith. Subsequently, the order included the confession of sins and the prayer of absolution (Thompson 1961, p. 381). Admittedly, all of these reformation liturgies gave considerable emphasis to the scriptural and preached Word. In that sense, the use of the Ten Commandments was consistent with the didactic and confessional approach to worship.

In the Anglican tradition, in 1552, *The Book of Common Prayer* featured the recitation of the Ten Commandments immediately following the beginning of worship, the Lord's Prayer, and the Prayer of Preparation. It was then followed by the confession of sins (Gibson and Earngey 2018, p. 347). In the 1559 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*, similar to the practice of Calvin and Bucer, the Ten Commandments were placed at the beginning part of the worship service. As the minister recited each commandment, the congregation responded, kneeling and asking for mercy (The Book of Common Prayer 1559, p. 248). In the revised second edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* in 1662, a similar practice was maintained, and the recitation of the Ten Commandments occurred every week during the Holy Communion service. In the proposed Liturgy of 1928, the Kyrie and a hymn based on the Ten Commandments were sung together (Maxwell 1936, p. 152).

Moving to the 20th century, it is notable that *The Alternative Service Book*, released in 1980, shifts the placement of the Ten Commandments within the order of the Holy Communion service. Sometimes, the Ten Commandments appear in a summary form, often expressing the love of God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37–40), but gradually the commandments are omitted from the worship service (*The Alternative Service Book 1980*, section 57, 80).

Let us check the Episcopal Church. In the 1892 edition of *The Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer in the United States*, the recitation of the Ten Commandments was practiced once a month on Sundays, and on other Sundays, it could be omitted. However, if it was omitted, the priest was required to say a summary of the law. In the 1979 edition, which presents both traditional and contemporary worship forms, the modern worship form omits the Ten Commandments, while the traditional form mentions the possibility of including a summary of the commandments (The American Book of Common Prayer 1979, p. 317).

In the 1958 edition of *The Service Book and Hymnal of the American Lutheran Church*, the Ten Commandments are presented merely as one of the eleven options suitable for the corporate confessions of sin remained. However, starting from the 1978 edition, mention of the Ten Commandments disappeared, while references to corporate confession of sin remained. Even the Lutheran Missouri Synod removed the mention of the Ten Commandments from its worship service in the 1941 edition (Hütter 2005, pp. 51–52).

3. Why the Use of the Ten Commandments in Public Worship Has Declined

Chronically and synchronically, there are various liturgical families. However, there is no officially documented position explicitly stating why some use the Ten Commandments while others do not. We can only cautiously speculate about the reasons behind such practices.

One possible reason for the decreasing use of the Ten Commandments in worship could be the perception that the Commandments themselves create a solemn and somber atmosphere. Who can stand confidently and joyfully before the Ten Commandments? Worshipers might feel a stronger sense of their inability to joyfully adhere to these commandments rather than a belief in their capacity to fully observe them. Moreover, there could be a fear that leading worship with too much of a legalistic atmosphere from the outset might make the worship rigid and inflexible, contributing to its gradual disappearance from the worship order.

Secondly, in churches that incorporate prayers of repentance and declarations of forgiveness as elements of worship, there may be a practical reason related to the overlapping nature of the Ten Commandments and the penitential aspects of worship. In other words, both the Ten Commandments and prayers of repentance have the potential to create a solemn atmosphere in worship and serve the function of prompting individuals to acknowledge their sins. Therefore, the consecutive arrangement of these elements might have been perceived as continuously emphasizing the awareness of sin.

In the case of John Calvin, he positioned the Ten Commandments after the prayer of confession and declaration of pardon. In this arrangement, the Ten Commandments were closely connected to the third use of the law, where the repentant individual commits to joyfully keeping these commandments (Burgess 2004, p. 85-87). However, in the post-Calvin era, the Dutch Reformed Church positioned the Ten Commandments before the prayer of confession. The reason behind this arrangement was that when individuals reflected upon the Ten Commandments first, they found the true contents of repentance: according to their logic, this, in turn, connected with the spirit of the prayer of confession (Deddens 1998b, pp. 375–76). However, as time passed, there was a growing perception that the nature of the Ten Commandments and the prayer of confession became similar, so the Ten Commandments exists as one option that was used for the prayer of repentance. In other words, the use of the Ten Commandments diminished.[7]

A third reason is closely related to the second one. Many Presbyterian and Reformed churches incorporate elements such as the Ten Commandments, the prayer of confession, the declaration of pardon, and the creed (Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed) at the beginning of their worship services. These churches particularly emphasize the importance of doctrine and creedal statements. In their worship and the formation of faith, the creed holds an indispensable role. Moreover, practices like the prayer of confession and declaration of pardon have deep roots in Western liturgical traditions. They are not only emphasized in these traditions but also have a close connection to the Reformed spirituality, where participants reflect on themselves and experience purification before engaging in the order of worship. As a result, many Reformed and Presbyterian churches found these elements to be crucial in their worship practices.

However, the presence of numerous elements at the beginning of the worship service simultaneously not only extends the duration of worship but may also make it monotonous and burdensome for the congregation. Pastors and congregants might have keenly felt the challenges of diminishing focus and energy among the worshippers before experiencing the core elements of worship, such as the Word and the sacrament of communion. Therefore, in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, there is a tendency for the Apostles' Creed or responsive reading to replace the position of the Ten Commandments. By doing so, these churches tried to maintain the whole running time of worship properly.

Fourthly, the contemporary church finds itself in a time characterized by a more ecumenical tendency than ever before and an anti-legalistic inclination (Hütter 2005, p. 53). After the 1960s, influenced by the Second Vatican Council's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the impact of liturgical movements, denominations worldwide not only understand each other better than ever but also, transcending denominational boundaries, are seeing a convergence in the forms and structures of worship (Senn 1997, p. 645).

Many churches are keenly interested in the worship practices of other growing or revitalized churches, seeking to either emulate or creatively incorporate elements of those worship forms into their existing worship structures. However, there is a practical interest in worship issues that often precedes theological considerations in each church. As a result, many denominations worldwide have shown increased interest not only in liturgical worship but also in contemporary worship. This mindset has influenced their worship structures, aiming to enhance accessibility to worship for contemporary individuals and aligning with a consumer-centric mindset among pastors and leaders. The desire to make church attendance easy for newcomers and not discomforting for existing members seems to be a prevailing consumer-centric mindset among pastors and leaders (Smith 2009, pp. 92–101). In such a context, the Ten Commandments find themselves in a situation where they may not be the preferred choice for many churches, particularly in terms of evangelistic dimensions and popular accessibility.

Fifthly, for churches that utilized the Ten Commandments during the communion service, there are cases where the reading of the Ten Commandments naturally disappeared as the frequency of communion decreased. A notable example is the Korean Methodist Church. The worship practices of early Korean Methodist churches were influenced by John Wesley's *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (Lim 2019, p. 184). Wesley's Sunday Service was itself a revision of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP), and his incorporation of the Ten Commandments in the liturgy followed the structure of this earlier liturgy. Among the communion services, the reading of the Ten Commandments was included (Wesley 1957, pp. 37–50). In the case of the Korean Methodist Church, until before 1930, communion services were held monthly. However, following a decrease in the frequency of communion in the Korean context, the use of the Ten Commandments naturally diminished (Kim 2008, pp. 214, 217).

In the sixth place, because in each denomination, the use of the Ten Commandments was not explicitly specified as an element of worship in the worship services book, church constitutions, or worship directory. Sometimes the Ten Commandments are presented as optional elements in worship, but the lack of clear guidance on where the Ten Commandments fit within the overall structure of worship may be why. This could be due to a lack of understanding of effective and appropriate ways to incorporate the Ten Commandments into worship without being tedious or irrelevant. In the case of Presbyterian and Reformed churches, which emphasize doctrine, there is an effort to study the detailed and profound meanings of the Ten Commandments through learning in classes or preaching. However, there is an underdeveloped state of research on how to implement this in liturgy and turn it into another opportunity for learning.

In fact, many churches in the current era often engage in worship planning that is centered around the unique identity and context of their individual congregations, rather than strictly adhering to the denominational book of worship or worship directory. In this situation, it becomes crucial to effectively explain why the Ten Commandments are necessary and beneficial, and how they can be meaningfully incorporated.

4. The Necessity for the Use of the Ten Commandments: From the Perspectives of Ritual Studies and Faith Formation

I am not insisting that the use of the Ten Commandments is absolutely necessary within the context of worship services or that it must be consistently positioned in a fixed manner in the liturgy of the church. However, from both the perspectives of ritual theology and faith formation, the use of the Ten Commandments can provide significant benefits. Liturgically, their inclusion offers worshipers a structured reflection on their ethical responsibilities before God. By incorporating the commandments into worship, the congregation is continually reminded of the moral framework that guides their lives, which not only shapes their faith but also enriches the worship experience itself.

When worshippers participate in the ritual order of the Ten Commandments, they acknowledge and confess these commandments together with fellow believers during the worship service. It signifies that participants do not reject these commandments but position their moral selves within the structure and content of the commandments. Of course, if an individual opposes these commandments, they may choose to keep silent or to leave. However, standing together and opening one's mouth to sing or recite the commandments during the worship order becomes a public act indicating that, at least at that moment, the individual does not oppose these commandments and recognizes them as God's Word and command (Rappaport 1999, pp. 107, 111, 118, 120, 121).

Reciting or singing the Ten Commandments can be considered a form of verbal expression. According to Louis Marie Chauvet, language not only serves as a simple conveyance of information but also establishes a symbolic order. Through this, social relationships and the expectations of the speaker are constructed. The proclamation of God's word through the Ten Commandments goes beyond merely providing information or instruction to people. Instead, it leads believers into the redemptive narrative that intertwines with life, connecting them to the new life of a Christian (Chauvet 1995, pp. 84–85, 92–95).

Above all, the message of the Ten Commandments demands a decision within the individual's spirit. Not only the preaching message but also each element of worship carries significance in the life of the believer. In particular, the Ten Commandments instruct the saints on how God's people are to live out their faith in relationship with God and their neighbors (Douma 1996, p. 381). Similarly, the Beatitudes, as presented by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, complement this by offering a vision of the attitudes and behaviors that reflect the kingdom of God. Together, the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes provide a holistic guide for Christian life, where the Commandments emphasize moral boundaries and duties, while the Beatitudes inspire a spirit of humility, mercy, and righteousness. While singing or reciting the Commandments, individuals become aware of themselves standing before God's message. Sometimes, they reflect on their failure to live according to the Commandments, and at other times, they resolve to live according to these teachings. If this sequence is experienced repeatedly, it becomes a kind of training in faith for the saints, shaping both their moral and spiritual lives.[8]

It becomes a means of training to engrave God's commandments on both the body and the mind. Of course, this decision can sometimes lead to discouragement in the life of faith as individuals may not fully adhere to the law in their lives. Due to human frailty and shortcomings, there may be instances of violating God's commandments, and at times, individuals may experience frustration and stagnation. However, the use of the Decalogue as a ritual practice can bring significant benefits to the formation of individual and communal faith.

First and foremost, as individuals are reminded repeatedly of the Ten Commandments, they come to realize that God demands that our confession of faith should translate into a lifelong practice. Why is the repetition of God's commandments necessary? It signifies that the Commandments are not merely about intellectual understanding but about living them out in the context of our earthly lives. Particularly, this ritual enacted in worship teaches that to truly worship God, we must reflect on our own hearts and lives and be prepared as worshippers. In other words, as Willimon and Hauerwas have stated, it is about realizing that our salvation is a present continuous tense simultaneously with a future perfect tense (Hauerwas and Willimon 1999, p. 20).

Above all, through the observance of the order of the Ten Commandments in worship, believers come to realize who they are and to whose possession they belong. They reexamine their relationship with God, scrutinizing whether they genuinely love their neighbors with the right spirit. Furthermore, they become aware of the need to live in response to the current cultural trend where the absoluteness of ethics and morals is becoming relative. In other words, Christian worship possesses a countercultural characteristic and signifies the need to steadfastly raise its voice even amidst the changing cultural landscape (Hauerwas and Willimon 1999, p. 18).

However, it is crucial to note that the Ten Commandments are not merely an element of individual decisions and commitments but also occur within the context of the worship community's pledge and declaration. Individuals standing before the Ten Commandments realize their inability to fulfill the demands of the Law on their own, and at times, they may fall into despair. However, through the communal act conducted with one voice and action by the worship community, individuals come to understand that they are not living out their faith alone but are walking the path of this leader with fellow believers and the multitude of witnesses, gaining spiritual strength in the process.

Lastly, it is important to highlight the educational function of worship practice. Believers not only learn the Ten Commandments within the catechism class but also, through various ways of practicing the Ten Commandments within the worship, can come to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Commandments. While ritual practices themselves are not a direct means of learning, worship does have educational effects (Moon 2015, pp. 69–73). People learn through action. The repetition of such practices sets the standard of understanding, guiding individuals into a more comprehensive and profound world of comprehension. One-time practices of the Ten Commandments may not enable individuals to master the fundamental meaning and the biblical and theological content inherent within them. However, through repetitive practices within Sunday worship, people can come to a broader and deeper understanding of God's will. Especially if the Ten Commandments are occasionally recited, meditated upon, sung, or creatively utilized, it can have an effect that awakens and vivifies hearts rather than resulting in a dullness due to the familiarity of the ritual (Moon 2015, pp. 230–42).[9]

5. Practical Guidelines and Consideration

It was a common convention to place the Ten Commandments at the beginning of worship. This practice likely conveyed the idea of reflecting on oneself before the commandments of God and participating in the subsequent worship order as a righteous worshiper. Therefore, in some worship traditions, the Ten Commandments were often positioned in the introductory part of the worship, particularly relating to the prayer of confession. It was common for a leader to recite them or for the congregation to engage in the reading together.

There is, however, no strict necessity to always place the order of worship with the Ten Commandments at the beginning. There are traditions that place the order of the Ten Commandments at the start of the communion service. In cases without communion, connecting the confession of the Ten Commandments after hearing the sermon could serve as an active confession and participation of the saints, committing to live according to the Word and commandments. Especially before the benediction, following the sermon and offering, it could also be used as a commitment to implement God's Word in life during the concluding part of the worship (Kuyper 2009, pp. 131–35).[10]

Kenneth Baker adds a practical order of worship that includes the Ten Commandments along with detailed explanations. After the sermon, the congregation rises together to utilize the Ten Commandments as a response to the sermon and a commitment to life. By incorporating hymns before and after this sequence, he aims to deeply engrain the Word in the hearts of the saints.

In addition, "*The Worship Sourcebook*", which is well-received in Reformed denominations such as the CRC and RCA in the United States, includes excellent examples in the "Law" chapter where leaders and congregants can responsively engage with God's commandments using various patterns. It not only utilizes the actual text containing the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17 but also incorporates passages such as Proverbs 3:5–6, Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:37–40, Romans 12:1–3, Ephesians 4:21–25, Colossians 3:1–4, Philippians 2:1–4, and others. It also incorporates sections on the Ten Commandments explained in the Heidelberg Catechism, emphasizing the Reformed traditions and allowing for responsive readings during worship. The key is to use diverse patterns and passages to prevent modern audiences from becoming easily bored.

It is not necessary to recite the Ten Commandments in the same format every time. If it is repeated in exactly the same way, the congregation may find it monotonous, and it could become an empty ritual, which cannot evoke a sincere response. As seen in the precedent set by John Calvin, there are times when singing the Ten Commandments can have a significant impact on the congregation. Song lyrics accompanied by melodies can have a powerful effect on the formation of faith (Saliers 1997, p. 180).

In Korea, there is a common hymn used by all denominations, and the hymn, "*Lord's Prayer*", composed by A. H. Malotte, included in it has been frequently used in Korean worship services, exerting a significant influence. Similarly, if a well-crafted hymn based on the Ten Commandments is composed and sung in public worship, I believe it could greatly enhance accessibility and engagement with the Ten Commandments across various churches.

In the hymnals of various denominations in the United States, you can find good examples of hymns based on the Ten Commandments. For instance, in the CRC's hymnals such as "*Psalter Hymnal*" and "*Lift up Your Hearts*", as well as in the PCA's hymnal "*Rejoice in the Lord*", there are hymns dedicated to the Ten Commandments. It is impressive how these hymns have prepared to be widely sung by people living in this era. If more works surpassing these examples emerge, they could significantly enhance the utility and accessibility of incorporating the Ten Commandments in worship.

6. Conclusions

To this point, I have argued the importance of using the Ten Commandments in worship as a norm for the lives of Christians and a central teaching of Christian ethics. I have discussed why incorporating the Ten Commandments into worship is crucial and how it can have an impact on the formation of the believers' faith.

While examining the history of worship, both chronologically and synchronically, it became evident that the use of the Ten Commandments was not actively prevalent within public worship in the past. The Ten Commandments found significance as a worship element in *The Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*, resonating with the spirit of the Reformation, particularly through Reformers like John Calvin and Martin Bucer. Additionally, some congregations within the Dutch Reformed tradition, influenced by 16th century Reformers, incorporated the Ten Commandments into their worship. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the use of the Ten Commandments in the worship of the entire Christian community was, without a doubt, a minority practice rather than a widespread one.

Moreover, for pastors and believers living in the 21st century, the use of the Ten Commandments in worship can extend the duration of the service. At times, it is accompanied by prayers of repentance, contributing to a somber and weighty atmosphere in worship. This can be perceived as a burdensome element for new believers. However, incorporating the Ten Commandments into public worship may prove to be highly beneficial for the spiritual formation of believers.

Above all, when examined from a liturgical theology and ritual studies perspective, the use of the Ten Commandments saturates the hearts and moral selves of the believers who gather in public assembly within the structure and framework of the Commandments. Each commandment proclaimed, recited, and responded to through song may prompt self-reflection in the hearts of believers and call for moral commitments. However, as this paper has discussed, the mere repetition of the Decalogue without deeper reflection may lead to disengagement. Thus, it is essential to approach the Ten Commandments with renewed understanding to maintain their profound impact within worship.

In essence, the use of the Ten Commandments in worship becomes a training of faith inscribed in both body and mind. However, to truly harness the spiritual and ethical potential of the Ten Commandments, it is essential to approach them with a renewed understanding that speaks to contemporary moral dilemmas and the complexities of modern life.

This study has explored how the Ten Commandments have historically shaped worship, but their relevance extends far beyond liturgical settings. When applied thoughtfully, the commandments may guide believers in addressing the ethical challenges of today's world, offering not only a reminder of God's enduring moral laws but also a framework for navigating new societal and cultural issues.

In conclusion, the enduring significance of the Ten Commandments lies not only in their traditional role within worship but also in their ability to shape the moral and ethical identity of believers. By integrating the Decalogue into both public worship and personal spiritual practice, we may foster a deeper connection to faith and a shared sense of identity within the Christian community, helping believers to live out their faith in response to the challenges of contemporary life.

Through this integration, the Ten Commandments remain a vital element in both the spiritual formation of individuals and the collective identity of the Christian church, serving as a timeless guide in a rapidly changing world.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The article has no new data.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

1. You can find these explanations in the Heidelberg Catechism, Westminster Shorter Catechism, and Westminster Larger Catechism. In the first three chapters of John Calvin's, "*Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536)*", the topics of The Apostle's Creed, The Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer are addressed.
2. Martin Luther highly valued the Ten Commandments. He said, "This much is certain: those who know the Ten Commandments perfectly know the entire Scriptures". (Luther 2000, p. 382). He argued that not only the Ten Commandments but also the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed serve as crucial pillars supporting the Christian faith. Luther emphasized the importance of teaching these through preaching and instruction. (Luther 1964, 53:64–65). However, in Luther's liturgies, the Ten Commandments were not used as part of the order of worship.
3. Furthermore, studies such as those by Bard Thompson, as well as Jasper and Cuming, indicate that the Ten Commandments were not featured in early liturgical practices.
4. https://www.michaelspotts.com/blog/2016/7/1/the-use-of-the-decalogue-in-worship (accessed on 31 August 2024)
5. https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm (accessed on 31 August 2024)
6. See note 4.
7. This phenomenon can be found in various denominations. In *The Christian Reformed Church Service Book* (1981), the Ten Commandments exist as one option among several Scripture readings. Subsequent synod minutes from 1996 to 2012 do not contain any discussions about the Ten Commandments as part of the worship order.

[8] John Calvin says through prayer, God "may exercise us." Calvin, Institutes, III.xx. 3. The Ten Commandments can similarly become a crucial element in training individual faith.

[9] Regarding the matter of habituation and sensitization by the repetition of liturgical practice, see (Moon 2021).

[10] (Baker 1995). Abraham Kuyper, a prominent theologian of the Dutch Reformed Church, also positioned the Ten Commandments after his sermon just before the benediction, in the latter part of the service. He argued that using the Ten Commandments right before leaving the church was the most appropriate way for people to remember and apply them in living obedient lives to God with a grateful mind in the world.

References

Baker, Kenneth. 1995. God's Pattern for Life: The Ten Commandments: A Service of Rededication. *Reformed Worship*. Available online: https://www.reformedworship.org/article/december-1995/gods-pattern-life-ten-commandments-service-rededication (accessed on 31 August 2024).

Bieritz, Karl Heinlich. 2004. *Liturgik*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Burgess, John. 2004. Reformed Explication of the Ten Commandments. In *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness*. Edited by William P. Brown. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, pp. 78–99.

Chauvet, Louis-Marie. 1995. *Symbol and Sacrament*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Davies, Horton. 1997. *The Worship of the English Puritan*. Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria.

Deddens, Karel. 1998a. A Missing Link in Reformed Liturgy 1. *Clarion* 37: 15–19.

Deddens, Karel. 1998b. A Missing Link in Reformed Liturgy 4. *Clarion* 37: 375–76.

Dix, Dom G. 2009. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. New York: Continuum.

Douma, Jochem. 1996. *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*. Translated by N. Kloosterman. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing Company.

Gibson, Jonathan, and Mark Earngey, eds. 2018. *Reformed Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*. Greensboro: New Growth Press.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and William Willimon. 1999. *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Hütter, Reinhard. 2005. The Ten Commandments as a Mirror of Sin(s): Anglican Decline-Lutheran Eclipse. *Pro Ecclesia* 14: 46–57. [CrossRef]

Kim, Youngtae. 2008. Study on the Formation Process of Sunday Worship in the Early Korean Methodist Church. *The Gospel and Praxis* 18: 191–223.

Kuyper, Abraham. 2009. *Our Worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Lim, Won Taek. 2019. The Worship of Korean Churches and the Use of the Ten Commandments. *The Gospel and Praxis* 53: 165–92. [CrossRef]

Luther, Martin. 1964. *Luther's Works*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, vol. 53.

Luther, Martin. 2000. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Maxwell, William. 1936. *A History of Christian Worship: An Outline of Its Development and Forms*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Miller, Patrick D. 2004. *Divine Command and Beyond: The Ethics of the Commandments*. Edited by William P. Brown. The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness. Louisville: John Knox Press, pp. 12–13.

Moon, Hwarang. 2015. *Engraved upon the Heart*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.

Moon, Hwarang. 2021. The Influence of Liturgy on Human Memory: From the Perspective of Neuroscience. *Studia Liturgica* 51: 230–42. [CrossRef]

Nagel, D. William. 1970. *Geschichte des Christlichen Gottesdienstes*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Polman, Bert. 1998. A History of Worship in the Christian Reformed Church. In *The Psalter Hymnal Handbook*. Edited by Emily Brink and Bert Polman. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, pp. 109–19.

Rappaport, Roy. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saliers, Don E. 1997. Singing Our Lives. In *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. Edited by Dorothy C. Bass. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 179–93.

Senn, Frank C. 1997. *Christian Liturgy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Smith, James K. A. 2009. *Desiring the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

The American Book of Common Prayer. 1979. New York: Episcopal Church.

The Book of Common Prayer. 1559. London: John Murray.

Thompson, Bard. 1961. *Liturgies of the Western Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Vokes, F. E. 1968. The Ten Commandments in the New Testament and in First Century Judaism. *Studia Evangelica* 5: 146–54.

Wesley, John. 1957. *The Wesley Orders of Common Prayer*. Nashville: Board of Education of the Methodist Church.

religions

MDPI

Article

The Role of Baptism in Christian Identity Formation

Michael D. O'Neil

Morling College, Perth (Vose) Campus, Bentley, WA 6102, Australia; michaelo@morling.edu.au

Abstract: The construction of one's identity in late modernity is sometimes viewed as a project of the autonomous self in which one's identity may shift or change over the course of one's existence and development. For the Christian, however, one's identity is both a divine gift, and a task of ecclesial formation, and for both the gift and the task, Christian baptism is fundamental. Baptism represents the death of the self and its rebirth in Christ, a decisive breach with the life that has gone before. Baptism establishes a new identity, a new affiliation, a new mode of living, and a new life orientation, direction, and purpose. This paper explores the role of baptism in the formation of Christian identity, finding that Christian identity is both extrinsic to the self and yet also an identity into which we are called and into which we may continually grow. The essay proceeds in three sections. It begins with a survey of recent philosophical reflection on the concept of identity, continues by reflecting on the nature of Christian baptism in dialogue with this reflection, and concludes by considering in practical terms how baptism functions in the process of conversion–initiation toward the formation of mature Christian identity.

Keywords: identity; Christian identity; Christian formation; baptism; conversion–initiation; Social Identity Theory

1. Introduction

Pressed by the Roman proconsul to repent, to deny Christ, and to swear instead in Caesar's name, and so pretend "not to know who and what I am", Polycarp, bishop of ancient Smyrna, answered, "hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian". His bold confession expresses the weight of a life lived in worship and service of Jesus Christ: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"[1]

Not every believer in Jesus Christ either then or now is called upon to assert and defend their Christian identity in martyrdom, as Polycarp did. Nevertheless, although the martyrs' fate might not be ours, their faith and conviction must be (Sittser 2007, p. 48). The martyrs chose Jesus Christ—above self, family, and security, above Rome, and above life itself. Their martyrdom was a consequence of their commitment and witness rather than a quest, a death-wish, a heroic spirituality, or a theology of self-sacrifice. For Gerald Sittser, martyrdom is foundational to Christian spirituality because it highlights what is distinctive and essential in Christian faith: the sole lordship of Jesus Christ, and the utter truthfulness of his gospel (Sittser 2007, pp. 28, 47). The point is not to die a martyr's death—unless we find we are called to that—but to live a martyr's life as a witness to Christ (Sittser 2007, p. 31). Such a challenge, however, requires the inculcation and nurture of the kind of Christian identity we see displayed in Polycarp's witness, whose confession indicated a congruence between his internal self-concept and its public expression, his Christian identity sufficiently robust to hold him steady in the face of public denunciation, and the likelihood of excruciating death.

It is unlikely that anyone could write a definitive text on Christian identity formation applicable in all cases.[2] The reasons are simple. First, such formation will necessarily vary to some degree from Christian to Christian in accordance with their context and experience; and second, even if certain common patterns of experience in formation are discernible, the work of the Holy Spirit in each person's life resists the imposition of a one-size-fits-all approach to such formation. Thus, my aim in this essay is modest; I explore the relation between baptism and personal identity, and argue that this practice has a central role to play in the formation of a distinctively Christian identity. I approach my task in three stages. Given the prominence and somewhat fractious discussion of the concept of identity in popular discourse, I begin by surveying recent reflection on the nature of identity to establish the context and some parameters for thought about Christian identity. Next, I suggest some of the ways in which Christian baptism both addresses and challenges the issues emerging in the initial survey. Finally, I consider practical implications of the discussion for Christian formation in a congregational context.

2. What Is Identity?

The notion of identity is complex. In their review of perspectives garnered from recent research, Crawford and Rossiter suggest that one's sense of identity is shaped through a dynamic interplay of no fewer than five centres of influence, including popular culture, distinctive ethnic and/or religious heritage, national identification, personal needs, interests, and ambitions, and family and adolescent friendship groups.[3] They list twenty-one 'components' or 'dimensions' of personal identity, including such things as one's name, gender, sexual identity, core values and moral code, age, dress, work, and so on (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, pp. 92–94). The list is not intended to be exhaustive. They note multiple and sometimes incompatible psychological theories of identity and identity formation, all of which propose that the construct is fundamental for understanding a person, their motivations, and behaviour (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, pp. 106–14). Crawford and Rossiter define personal identity as a "working hypothesis of the self ... a process in which individuals draw on both internal and cultural resources for their self-understanding and self-expression" (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, pp. 116, 124). The idea that one's identity is a 'working hypothesis of the self' does not mean that one's identity is entirely malleable or at the whim of the individual subject. They contend, rather, that one's identity is relatively permanent and stable, but also open to gradual modification across the life cycle, resulting from new experiences or other inputs. The integration of ideas, beliefs, values, and images is used as a resource to make sense of one's life and experiences, and to shape one's self-expression. The authors also insist that identity formation must be concerned not merely with *process* but must include both process and content (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, pp. 113–14). The distinction is important, they argue, because identity may be more, or less, healthy. Their argument is with educationalists who suggest that "Education should therefore not aim at identity-development or identity-formation, but at rational autonomy, independence and responsibility, the capacity to make informed choices or at personhood".[4] In this view, it is not the role of others to hand on a particular cultural identity, especially to children, teenagers, and young adults. If cultural or religious traditions are to be considered at all, it is not to instil the cultural or religious identity in the learner, but to provide a range of possible materials that a person may or may not adopt "in their own idiosyncratic personal quest for meaning and identity". Crawford and Rossiter are concerned not merely with the epistemological presuppositions underlying this approach, but also with the idea that identity is somehow morally neutral (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, pp. 122–24).

While the general principle of being respectful of all identities is an important one, this democratic ideal has limits protected by law—we should not be equally tolerant of identities that clearly compromise the rights and freedoms of other people. This principle is also important when examining relationships between identity and violence (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, p. 119).

Identity formation has moral content and should in principle be open to moral evaluation.

Finally, a mature identity maintains a relatively harmonious balance between internal/personal and external/cultural identity resources, while being based primarily on internal resources such as beliefs, values, and commitments. A person may indeed find support and reference points for their identity in their external relationships and cultural resources but not be so dependent on external affirmation that their own autonomy is compromised. A person with a strong sense of personal identity has not adopted their identity in an unreflective manner but has chosen it for themselves and increasingly identified with it in their own self-understanding and expression (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, pp. 121, 125; see also pp. 93–94).

Another psychological approach, Social Identity Theory (SIT), proposes that identity is shaped by an individual's participation in particular social groups. Social identity is understood as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership".[5] This definition notes the *personal* rather than corporate nature of this identity, and includes three discrete aspects: the cognitive awareness that one belongs to the group, an evaluative component that such belonging carries positive or negative value connotations, and a corresponding emotional component in which the individual may experience a range of emotional responses with respect to their own group, and towards others who stand in certain relations to it (Esler 2014, p. 17). At the heart of SIT lies an explanation of the tendency for the members of one group to compare their group to other groups, in order to achieve positive distinctiveness in relation to them (Esler 2014, p. 28).

Initiated originally by Henri Tajfel in 1978, SIT was concerned with understanding intergroup relations and conflict. Tajfel's experience of surviving the Second World War because his German captors considered him a French rather than a Polish Jew—that is, they 'categorised' him as a member of a 'group'—provided grounds for the rejection of a reductionist tendency in social psychology which considered all group interactions as 'essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals' (Esler 2014, pp. 15–16; see also Hogg 2018).

> The extraordinary discovery made by Tajfel and his colleagues, and repeated often in subsequent studies, was that the mere fact of 'social categorization', of being included in a group, led to intergroup behaviour that discriminated (via the distribution of rewards and penalties) against the outgroup and favoured the ingroup. (Esler 2014, p. 14; See also Tajfel et al. 1971, p. 172)

Some who followed Tajfel generated subsidiary theories, deepening and extending his original insights. Whereas SIT primarily explored intergroup relations and the propensity of groups to differentiate on the basis of positive comparative social identity, Tajfel's student and later collaborator John Turner, developed what he called Self-Categorisation Theory: an explanation of how a collection of individuals come to perceive and define themselves and to act as a single unit, feeling, thinking, and self-aware as a collective entity (Esler 2014, p. 24). Two processes facilitate this transition. First, individuals *self-categorise*; they become aware that they have greater affinity with some people or social category than others, thereby internalising preformed culturally available information ("I am a girl", or, "I am Catholic"). When two or more persons in a given situation share a common self-categorisation, they tend to form a group. Second, the members of the group *depersonalise,* which Turner and his associates define as 'self-stereotyping'; their self-concept is conditioned by their group membership. They tend to view themselves not merely as individuals but as exemplars of the particular social category to which they belong. Depersonalisation does not connote the loss of personal identity, nor the submergence of the self in the group. Rather, depersonalization allows the individual to *gain* identity, to live and act in accordance with broader social and cultural similarities and differences built up in human cultures over time. It indicates a shift from a personal to a social level of identity—a concept of central importance. Membership of the group must become *salient* in the person's self-concept—"cognitively prepotent in self-perception to act as the immediate influence on perception and behaviour" (Esler 2014, pp. 24–25). An important aspect of salience is the psychological ingroup ties, the "emotional merging of self with others", by which group members gain a sense of attachment to and belonging with others in the group (Cameron 2004, p. 242).

Social Identity Complexity Theory, another development pioneered by Sonia Roccas and Marilynn B. Brewer, attempts to overcome a problem identified in SIT; persons belong to multiple groups simultaneously, thus generating multiple dimensions of identity. For example, a person may be white, English, female, a lawyer, a Cambridge University graduate, a member of the local tennis club, and a mother (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 88). Where significant overlap between ingroups is perceived (for example, "to be Thai is to be Buddhist"), identity complexity is reduced. Where, however, ingroups are non-converging ("I am Thai, and a Christian"), identity and social representation become more complex (Roccas and Brewer 2002, pp. 89–90). Roccas and Brewer provide four models to map social representation in complex situations. Persons may identify solely with (i) the *intersection* of their primary ingroups ("I am a Thai-Christian") regarding non-Christian Thais or Christians in general as an outgroup. Or one identity might (ii) *dominate* or even subsume the other, or a person may (iii) *compartmentalise* their social representations according to their context. Finally, they may (iv) *merge* both identities under the umbrella of an overarching or more encompassing identity ascription ("I am a Thai-Christian living and working in the United States: I am an *American* Thai-Christian").[6] Identity complexity is deepened by a range of additional social, personal, and situation factors such as overall social complexity, the motivational needs or personal values someone holds, the distinctiveness of the groups one belongs to, or the threats perhaps faced by the groups (Roccas and Brewer 2002, pp. 95–99).

SIT researchers note that a distinctive feature of group conformity concerns the role of group norms, those "regularities in attitudes and behavior that characterize a social group and differentiate it from other social groups". Group norms distinguish this group from another, provide order, predictability, and shared standards for appropriate behaviour, thus helping to enhance and maintain group identity.[7] Groups assist new members integrate when leaders especially, as well as other group members, embody the prototypical characteristics of the group (Esler 2014, p. 34). They also assist new members by offering social support and need satisfaction (Esler 2014, p. 26). Such norms may include patterns of beliefs. New members to a group are helped most when a group's norms, values, and beliefs are held confidently because they are considered true and as such are central to the group's life and decision making (Esler 2014, p. 35).

When social identity is salient, the members will align themselves with group norms, they will have been provided with a common perspective on reality, they will be motivated to coordinate their behaviour around group norms, and they will work collaboratively to further their collective self-interest (Esler 2014, p. 34).

Approaching the topic from a philosophical rather than psychological perspective, Francis Fukuyama has argued that the root of the quest for identity lies in Plato's 'third part of the soul', in *thymos*, which he describes as the cry for recognition and dignity. By grounding this quest in the soul, Fukuyama makes it a permanent aspect of human nature, an innate desire. For Plato, *thymos* was not evenly distributed but accrued to those who risked their lives for the public good, that is, the city guardians and warriors (Fukuyama 2018, pp. 18, 20–21). In modernity, however, Romanticism valorised the solitary individual in the depths of whose being lay their authentic self, their true identity, unacknowledged and even at odds with the surrounding society that demands conformity to its standards, rules, and authorities. In the twentieth century, this concept morphed from a merely personal quest into a political and social agenda, so that by 1992, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy could argue that liberty entails "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life" (Fukuyama 2018, p. 55). Since then, the quest for one's own identity has extended to become a personal, political, and moral imperative; an individual's self-actualisation has a higher value than the requirements of the broader society (Fukuyama 2018, p. 93). In the therapeutic culture that arose and flowered in the twentieth century, one's happiness was understood as dependent upon one's self-esteem, and one's self-esteem was a by-product of public recognition (Fukuyama 2018, p. 100).

Another philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, speaks of identity as having both an objective and a subjective dimension. Objectively, identities are labels assigned to us by others based on generally observable characteristics interpreted through a set of culturally prescribed categories (Appiah 2018, p. 5). The most basic of these labels, for example, is whether one is recognized ('labelled') at birth as either a boy or a girl. But many other labels might be applied over the course of one's life such as *Italian* (nationality), *working-class* (class), *Goth* (youth sub-culture), *Muslim* (religion), *black* (colour), *Asian* (race), *lesbian* (sexuality), *Republican* (political affiliation), *indigenous* (heritage), *champion* (achievement), or *ex-con* (social status). Such labels provide a sense of where and how one fits—or does not fit—within the social world, as well as indications of how one is expected to think and behave. Identity ascriptions may also be used by others as an indication of how they may or should treat the one who bears the identity (Appiah 2018, pp. 8–12). An identity, however, cannot arbitrarily be imposed upon another, but must be accepted, identified with, and acted upon: the subjective dimension of identity. Further, says Appiah, identity is always plural, and the shape of one's identity can also be contoured by one's other identities; the idea of intersectionality applies to every person (Appiah 2018, pp. 17–20). At the base of the labels and stereotypes that constitute identity ascriptions is the idea that these labels describe 'things of the same kind', some underlying reality or 'essence' that gives a person their true nature and so constitutes their identity (Appiah 2018, pp. 21, 25–29). This, for Appiah, is *The Lie that Binds* and the reason he has written his book, arguing that the way in which contemporary culture thinks of identity must be rethought. Whether the issue is religion, nationality, race, class, or culture, Appiah rejects a purist approach that seeks an illusory essence or singular interpretation for an identity ascription: "people have supposed that an identity that survives through time and across space must be underwritten by some larger, shared commonality; an essence that all the instances share. But that is simply a mistake" (Appiah 2018, p. 199; cf. pp. xvi, 29, 113–22). Identities are grounded not in essence but existence:

> The existentialists were right: existence precedes essence; we are before we are anything in particular. But the fact that identities come without essences does not mean they come without entanglements. And the fact that they need interpreting and negotiating does not mean that each of us can do with them whatever we will. For these labels belong to communities; they are a social possession. (Appiah 2018, p. 217)

Rather than being grounded in an illusory essence, identities are communal, historically conditioned, and can be understood and maintained by means of narrative rather than essence (Appiah 2018, pp. 65, 199). Essentialism, he insists, is a conceptual error underwriting a moral error which leaves us divided and alienated from other human beings, isolated and confined (Appiah 2018, p. 218). Appiah argues that there is only one identity which ultimately should bind all people: our common humanity, though held with a cosmopolitan ethos that is willing and able to accept that there are in fact myriad ways in which human persons can live out this common, universal identity.[8]

A surprising voice in this discussion is that of Stan Grant, a prominent Australian journalist, writer, and a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. In his 2019 book *Australia Day*, Grant speaks of the "crazy mix of DNA that makes me who I am", writing that he has "come to be suspicious of that word, identity" (Grant 2019a, pp. 53–54).

> I am an Australian—yet my history tells me that my sense of citizenship and belonging is fragile and fraught. I belong to a nation; I belong to family and a people and yet I am an individual free to determine for myself who and what I wish to be. . . . Yet the freedom to choose was taken from me when Australia had already settled on what I was: black, a half-caste, an outcast; I was not born

> into Australia. My identity was already determined and I have spent a lifetime working my way free. (Grant 2019a, p. 54)

Grant's comment illustrates those features identified by Fukuyama and Appiah. Finding himself ascribed an objective identity by others—one which constrained, isolated, and to some degree at least, determined his existence—Grant fought for recognition, for a self-chosen, liberating identity. Born to a white mother and an indigenous father, he nonetheless takes an acerbic view toward the idea of identity, referring to it as a 'poisonous new faith' (Grant 2019b, p. 91), a 'prison-house of our imaginations' (Grant 2019b, p. 58), something that binds rather than liberates, for the expectations of identity are soul-eroding, stultifying, and 'annihilating' (Grant 2019b, pp. 43, 57). One cannot be free, one cannot love, if one capitulates to the contemporary demands of 'identity'. "How easily [identity] morphs into tyranny" (Grant 2019b, p. 26)!

> Enough of the toxic, political imperative of identity—the identity warriors can have that; I am done with it. Identity, even with the best of intentions, falls too easily into the hands of petty tyrants—those identity police who monitor our words and actions, trolling social media to keep people in their lanes, telling us who qualifies. . . . Identity carves us up and sets us against each other. (Grant 2019b, pp. 83–84)

It is evident that Grant is speaking about the demands of contemporary identity politics, and he does so with reference to both the left and the right of the political spectrum. He has in view, similar to Appiah, the acceptance or imposition of a 'singular' identity. His reaction derives from his own experience as an indigenous Australian who is constantly asked to tick a box affirming that he is (or is not) an 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander'. To tick the box, however, is to deny his grandmother. If his son ticks the box he must erase, as it were, his mother. "It confirms what I have come to believe is true: identity—exclusive identity—has no space for love" (Grant 2019b, p. 28).

One of the more important voices in contemporary reflection on identity is that of Charles Taylor, whose life's work has been that of excavation, an endeavour to uncover the sources and character of the contemporary self. In part one of *Sources of the Self*, "Identity and the Good", Taylor argues for a 'transcendental' grounding of human identity, noting that the conditions of human personhood are that persons are situated in a moral context, in community, and in time. With respect to the first of these conditions, Taylor insists that identity is axiological. The self is set and exists in a pre-existing and pre-ordered moral 'space' in which questions are put to the agent about what is good, valued, worthy, etc. One's identity is shaped by one's answers to these questions.

> To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. (Taylor 1989, p. 27; cf. 77–78)

Likewise, one's identity is shaped by belonging to a linguistic community in which language shapes our apprehension of ourselves in the context of others and the world. To be a 'self' is to be embedded in a (transcendent) 'web of interlocution'—dialogue and conversation—that defines us as persons. This remains true even if one experiences a decisive shift in their sense of identity: "Even the most independent identity cannot step outside of the human condition: they still elaborate their new identity and perspective by means of language and in webs of interlocution" (Taylor 1989, p. 37). One's identity is shaped, thirdly, by the teleological nature of the moral space within which human life is situated. Taylor explains that one's life in its totality and wholeness is oriented or pivoted toward the Good as they perceive and affirm it. This is a matter of allegiance to the Good, of *more* or *less* conformity to or apprehension of this Good. Just what this Good will be is connected "in a complex way with our being *moved* by it" (Taylor 1989, p. 73, original emphasis). Further, one's life is also set in direction of the Good, a firm, settled direction and commitment in which we are *becoming* or *moving* or *going*. This twofold orientation toward the Good helps us make sense of our life by constituting our identity in terms of a narrative or quest that unifies our sense of self through time (Taylor 1989, pp. 41–48).

> I have been arguing that in order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good, which means some sense of qualitative discrimination, of the incomparably higher. Now we see that this sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story. But this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*. (Taylor 1989, p. 47; original emphasis)

Taylor's argument in this section of his book is based on a form of moral phenomenology, an attempt to give a 'Best Account' that makes sense of human life and the choices we make (Taylor 1989, pp. 58–59). Moral phenomenology refers to the lived experience of the human agent in which certain moral intuitions are inescapable, as is the language used to describe them. Taylor contends that this lived experience points inexorably to the three 'transcendental conditions' he has posited as necessary for a sense of personal identity that makes sense of one's life and experience. One must be oriented toward the Good, however it is perceived, if one is to be a self 'with an identity' (Taylor 1989, p. 68).

Turning to contemporary conceptions of the Western self, Taylor finds at the heart of modern secularity an 'exclusive humanism', a view of personal and social life—a 'social imaginary'—in which the idea of God is not necessary as an explanatory tool for understanding life, the world, and the cosmos, and in which, therefore, the highest Good has to do with the nature and pursuit of human flourishing; there is no higher goal nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing (Taylor 2007, pp. 15–19). A 'social imaginary' is the "way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc". It is that "common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 2007, pp. 171–72). Further, according to Taylor, we live in 'an age of authenticity' in which "each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority" (Taylor 2007, p. 475). This is also an age of public and mutual 'display' where fashions, commodities, and so on become opportunities and vehicles of individual expression and 'the self-definition of identity'—even if that identity is not so much autonomous as linked to a broader cultural identity shared by perhaps millions of others (Taylor 2007, pp. 481–83).

Before progressing, it will be useful to pause for a moment and consider what we might learn from these reflections on the question of personal identity. First, if the concept of identity is complex, it is also contested, both with respect to its development and structure, and also in terms of its significance for self-understanding, which might in some cases be a healthy and integrating sense in a person's life, or in other cases may become a personally isolating or socially divisive feature. Crawford and Rossiter highlight the dynamic and necessary balance between internal/personal and external/cultural resources required for mature and healthy identity, as well as the moral contours of an identity. They insist that identity formation includes the passing on of content as well as a firm subjective appropriation of one's identity. SIT reminds us that personal identity is inevitably social and often complex, in accordance with the disparate groups to which one belongs. It provides practical insight into the ways group participation contributes to identity formation, especially when persons move between groups or enter new groups. It is noteworthy that SIT has achieved some prominence in recent contributions to biblical scholarship (see, for example, Tucker and Baker 2014; Kok 2014; Du Toit 2023; Ukwuegbu 2008). Fukuyama, Appiah, and Grant are concerned that contemporary discussion of identity has become reductive and thus detrimental to common life. From Fukuyama, we learn not only that the quest for identity is a soul-cry for recognition, but also that the secularization of the concept in modernity has made this quest a social and political imperative that displaces other rational and moral dimensions of human social existence. Appiah reminds us that one's identity is communal, historically conditioned, multiple, and that the various aspects of a person's identity are mutually conditioning. Grant warns that valorising a particular or singular identity can lead to tyranny, and to the exclusion of genuine freedom and love, and warns in a manner similar to Appiah that any concept or practice of identity which serves to isolate us from others or sets us over against others is somehow deficient. Finally, Taylor has identified what he has termed the three transcendental conditions of personal identity, and the central significance of allegiance to a transcendental Good which orients, and provides direction for, one's life. Identity is framed in terms of a worldview and value system, a social imaginary which is sometimes held unconsciously or unreflectively but supports a stronger sense of identity when articulated.

3. Baptism and Identity

In light of these reflections, then, what might we say of Christian baptism?[9] The first thing to note is that lessons drawn from these reflections are not necessarily alien to the theology and practice of Christian baptism. But second, and to the contrary, we must also concede that this same theology and practice also cuts across modern conceptions of identity in some decisive and possibly irreconcilable ways.

To begin, perhaps the simplest idea is Fukuyama's contention that the quest for identity concerns an innate soul-cry on the part of every person for recognition, acknowledgement, and worth. Christian baptism speaks profoundly to the individual at the level of personal identity. One need not, for example, take 1 Peter as an ancient baptismal liturgy or catechetical tract,[10] to appreciate its various references to washing and baptism, as these are set within an overarching narrative of the electing love of a God who has chosen and washed his people, made them his children by new birth, granted them the living hope of an eternal and imperishable inheritance, redeemed them with a price of infinitely more value than silver and gold, and dignified them by naming them with the ancient covenantal titles originally applied to Israel, including becoming a royal and holy priesthood in his temple (see 1 Peter 1:1–2:10).

So, too, baptism into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) places our "unique and personal name in the company of the Trinity. . . . Holy baptism redefines our lives in Trinitarian terms" (Peterson 2005, p. 303). According to Eugene Peterson, this focal practice is basic to Christian identity formation, to our new identity as a child of God. While Thomas Oden's claim that trinitarian doctrine and theology emerged from the baptismal practices and liturgies of the ancient church is cogent, far more than doctrine is at stake here (see Oden 1992, p. 12). Baptism is an entrée into a participation in the life of the triune God, into the eternal communion of love, peace, fellowship, and mission that is the triune life, and into an experience in which the baptizand is now embraced, as they find themselves loved and accepted, acknowledged and recognised, forgiven and reconciled, by a love that posits and creates worth.[11] Further, they are also inducted as it were into the life of *this* people, the community formed in common baptism, and among whom too they are received, acknowledged, and valued.

These reflections also address the matters raised by Taylor, affirming his insistence that personal identity is grounded narratively, though doing so in a manner that cuts across the 'great disembedding' or 'disenchantment' that characterizes modern secularity (see Smith 2014, pp. 27–30, 45). Taylor correctly notes that the modern social imaginary constitutes a worldview and value system that is "largely unstructured and inarticulate", an understanding "that can never be expressed in the form of explicit doctrines" (Taylor 2007, p. 173). This is not the case with respect to Christian baptism into the triune name which constitutes an explicit *re-enchantment* or *re-embedding* of the life of the Christian and the Christian community in an alternative 'social imaginary' grounded in and emerging from Barth's 'strange new world of the Bible', and understood precisely in terms of a robust theological realism.[12] This is to say that baptism involves a thorough-going conversion of the imagination, though the new world into which we are baptised is not imaginary. It is rather the world of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the cosmos created and loved by God and reconciled in the Son and intended by God for glorious eschatological renewal through the power of the Holy Spirit. The community of the baptised are those who through baptism have been initiated into this world, into a new relationship, an ongoing story the unfolding of which has been told for millennia, and a living and traditioned community in and among whom they find that they have been granted a new identity. The story of the individual believer has been caught up into the larger and encompassing story of God and of God's relation to his people and the whole created order more generally. Their individual narrative has been resituated, their personal story re-narrated through an entirely new set of lenses. The Christian no longer lives in a world of self-sufficing humanism, and no longer is the highest value and allegiance of life that of their own human flourishing. Rather, the chief end of human existence is to know and love God, and to enjoy him forever.[13]

Christian baptism also cuts across the foundations of modern identity philosophy in at least three additional ways. First, there is something profoundly illiberal about it. Christian baptism is not a designer-project curated for an Instagram profile, not merely one lifestyle decision in a series of such choices, or something one can 'experience' in the present before moving on to other, newer, more enlivening experiences elsewhere. No one can baptize themselves. Baptism is an act of the Christian community; one is baptised *by* the church and *into* the church (Witherington 2007, p. 118). As such, it involves a certain yielding up and surrender of the self, to the process of baptism, and to the church, as well as to Christ, who commanded the baptism, and the triune God into whose name one is being baptised. In an act of personal sovereignty, one surrenders the seat of that sovereignty to become one under the command of, and obedient to, another. That is, obedient to the one Lord of the church in the company of the church.

Baptism is not merely an act of the church, however, but as Wolfhart Pannenberg argues, it is also an act of God:

> Administering baptism is indeed a human act, but at its core it is a divine action on the candidates. For to be baptized in the name of God is to be baptized not by others but by God himself, so that even though others administer it, it is truly God's own work. (Pannenberg 1998, pp. 260–61)

In the act of baptism, God lays claim to the person's life, definitively linking the life of the person baptised to the destiny of Jesus (Pannenberg 1998, p. 260), implanting their existence in Jesus Christ (Pannenberg 1998, p. 237), such that their very personhood is now reconstituted by this relation to God, and "concretely by participation in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father". As such, says Pannenberg, baptism is "the constitution of Christian identity" (Pannenberg 1998, p. 239). In this way, too, baptism resists the modern romantic ideal of a self-grounded and self-defined identity.

Second, this means that Christian baptism involves a radical decentering of the self and its earthly identity-markers. In Christian faith, one's identity is a divine gift that comes to us from without, but which is also wholly self-involving, claiming the recipient in the totality of their existence as an existence for another. Galatians 3:27–29 indicates that those baptised into Christ have 'clothed themselves with Christ' and so now 'belong to Christ' such that, in the new community, there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (see O'Neil 2019, pp. 13–22). Although we must surely insist that the order of redemption does not dissolve the order of creation—a male Jew or a gentile woman retain both their gender and their ethnicity—we might also insist that these identity-markers are displaced, secondary, and henceforth, subordinate (see Snodgrass 2011b, pp. 268–69, 272; and Dueck 2011, p. 26). The baptised have died with Christ with the result that their life now is "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).[14] And—here is the real challenge—in the new community, truly equal recognition and dignity is accorded to all the baptised regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. In baptism, a new polis is constituted, and one becomes the member of a new and different family (Smith 2009, pp. 182–87). A re-ordering of identity takes place, and with it a transformation of social and relational priorities, customs, and practices.

Not everyone concurs with the position taken here, and the matter is a live discussion in Christian scholarship and missiology. Some scholars, for example, insist to the contrary that to speak of the relation of Christian and cultural identity in terms of 'primary and secondary' is misleading and unnecessary, that there is no need to pit these two aspects of identity against one another, for they may be construed as existing on a continuum. It is certainly true that disciples of Jesus are not required to leave their cultures to follow him, and that their manner of discipleship will reflect certain aspects of their distinctive cultures. Nevertheless, Christians in every culture and age will face again and again the call to Christian faithfulness in ways that challenge their cultural mores, convictions, and heritage. That Christians inevitably struggle with this call to express their faithfulness appropriately is evident to anyone who examines (for instance) modern western Christianity.[15] Roccas and Brewer's fourfold typology does duty here. To live only in accordance with one's intersectional identity ("I can associate only with other English, female, Cambridge-educated lawyers who are also Christian, tennis-playing mothers") or to compartmentalise one's representation ("I will live and act as a Christian when amongst Christians but not when in other contexts") is clearly untenable for Christians. It is more difficult to parse the better option between 'dominant' and 'merged' models of complex identity. On the one hand, the merged model of identity complexity recognises the legitimacy and complex interplay of one's multiple identities and so potentially increases tolerance of others, in acknowledgement that they are not solely this identity ('person') or that, but both—and more—simultaneously. As Kok noted twice in his essay, when discussing Paul's ability to transcend social boundaries and facilitate a higher level of inclusivity: "This is particularly inspiring, even today" (Kok 2014, p. 8).

In this mode, ingroup identification is extended to others who share any of one's important social category memberships. Thus, the merger model goes beyond additivity of multiple ingroup memberships to what Urban and Miller (1998) referred to as the 'equivalence pattern' of evaluating others with multiple group memberships. The more social identities the individual has, the more inclusive the definition of ingroup becomes, to the point where no sharp ingroup–outgroup distinctions are made on any dimension and all others are evaluated equivalently ((Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 91), referencing (Urban and Miller 1998)).

Roccas and Brewer would evaluate all identity ascriptions equivalently, rendering Christian identity as merely one identity alongside other identities, and thus blurring or even obliterating all ingroup–outgroup distinctions. The mechanism accomplishing this is a primary commitment to a hidden, otherwise unidentified 'superordinate principle', one which in all likelihood is culturally derived and self-chosen. In effect, this becomes an a priori identity commitment to which all other identity ascriptions are subordinated. The problem here is evident. It would appear that the only 'superordinate principle' that may legitimately be introduced in a Christian discussion of identity complexity is Jesus Christ himself, as he is witnessed in the Scriptures as paradigmatic identity prototype. Christian identity becomes the overarching identity ascription within which other identities may be recognised—or rejected. Thus, in the example noted earlier, the Thai-Christian now living and working in the United States has effectively subordinated their Christian identity to that of 'American'. This, too, is untenable for Christians who would be faithful to the claim of the New Testament.

Although Kok argues that the merger model may be fruitful in New Testament studies, he seems alert to the dilemma:

> Practically, in Paul's day and in his mind it meant that the old categories of distinguishing between insiders and outsiders should be drawn in a new inclusive way by means of an overarching identity *in Christ*. (Kok 2014, p. 8, original emphasis)

Kok's identification of the superordinate principle is crucial. Only in Christ may Christians have a properly theological measure by which to evaluate competing identity claims. In Christ, those of various ethnicities, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, whether male or female, may be recognised, valued, and affirmed. Nevertheless, some identity ascriptions may be regarded as incompatible with life in Christ and thus incapable of equivalence. The history of the church provides examples. In the patristic period, Christians wrestled with whether soldiers and others whose vocation involved killing people could retain this vocation and yet be a Christian. In more recent centuries, Christians finally rejected the idea that one could be a Christian slave-trader. That is to say, Christian faith generates norms which provide direction and standards against which other identity claims are tested. As we will note presently, this does not require Christians to maintain hard-edged and rigid boundaries between insiders and outsiders, although it does mean that certain identity claims are incompatible with life in Christ. When Christian identity becomes the superordinate principle whereby all other identity claims are evaluated and thereby affirmed or rejected, it appears that in fact, Roccas and Brewer's dominance model more closely corresponds with the function of Christian identity vis-à-vis other identity claims.[16] To put it otherwise, Christian identity aims for salience in one's self-concept.

Finally, against the Romantic notion of the inherent goodness of the human personality, water baptism as *washing* (see, for example, Acts 22:16 and Hebrews 10:22) reminds us that, from a theological perspective, there is at the heart of human identity and personality a profound brokenness or stubbornness or waywardness, a narcissistic pride that insists on self-assertion and self-expression over and against God and against others. The contemporary insistence that we discover and express our 'true identity' hidden in the depths of our solitary being breeds an anxious self-concern. When a person exalts the self as the true locus of identity and value, their relationships with others are disturbed and ordinary human desires are distorted (Cooper 2003, p. 57). Such exaltation constitutes an idolatry of the self, together with a corresponding attempt at the justification of one's choices. Water baptism, and the repentance commonly associated with it (Acts 2:38), challenges this easy acceptance of our own goodness, confronts us with the reality that our identity is in fact 'mixed', and yet also reassures us that our sins can be forgiven, that we can be cleansed, that we are in fact loved and accepted, and even liberated from the requirement of establishing our own worth.[17]

Particularity and Openness

I have argued thus far that baptism is constitutive of a Christian's identity. I have tried to do so in conversation with a few insights drawn from the work of scholars examined above, and showing some of the ways in which Christian baptism both resonates with and cuts across these reflections. Now I want to take up Stan Grant's warning with respect to the dangers of a totalising identity. Christian baptism has to do with Christian particularity, with a new identity in which some previous forms of life are renounced and left behind and a new way of faith and discipleship in relation to Jesus Christ is established (Mikoski 2009, p. 205). Yet, as Gordon Mikoski argues, particularity must not be set against a fundamental *openness* toward the world. Both particularity and openness must be our goal (Mikoski 2009, p. 201). If Christian identity becomes an end in itself, a means of sectarian withdrawal from the world in all its vibrancy, richness, need, and depravity, if the pursuit of Christian identity leads the Christian community into supposed enclaves of holiness where they are protected as it were from the evils of society and culture, they are well on the road to falling into the kind of petty tyranny that Grant rails against. Further, they have also, in truth, denied the reality and meaning of their baptism.

I have already noted that baptism into the triune name involves a participation in the triune life of love, peace, fellowship, and *mission*. To be baptized into the name includes being caught up in the divine mission of healing and reconciliation exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus and committed to the church in his name. The divine being, revealed in the trinitarian portrayal of God in Scripture, is that of an ecstatic outpouring of divine self-giving and hospitable love. In the suffering redemptive love revealed at the cross, the Son of God embraced the misery and death of all humanity, and in so doing demonstrated the openness that characterises God's relation to the world. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them; and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Karl Barth argues that Christian baptism corresponds to and finds its basis in the baptism of Jesus Christ (Barth 1969, pp. 54–61). In his own baptism, Jesus responded to the word addressed to Israel in the proclamation of John and offered himself in unreserved submission to the will of God. At the same time, his baptism was also an offering of himself in unreserved solidarity with humanity—with humanity in its alienation and distance from God, in its sinfulness and misery, its longing and hope. Thus, in his baptism, Jesus committed himself unreservedly to the service of both God and humanity and so entered his ministry as the mediator between God and humanity. Just as Jesus was baptised into a deepening solidarity with humanity which was as such his service to God, so Christian baptism is a baptism into the common ministry committed to the church. The person baptised is

> now personally co-responsible for the execution of the missionary command which constitutes the community, of the commission to the outside world which surrounds both it and him on a large scale and a small scale alike. The task of every Christian—not additionally but from the very outset, on every step of the way assigned to him in baptism—is the task as a bearer of the Gospel to the others who still stand without. . . . The baptism from which he comes was as such a consecration or ordination to take part in the mission which is committed to the whole Church.[18]

Finally, the dialectic of particularity and openness should also characterise relationships within the Christian community, lest the church also become a dominating and oppressive agent with respect to her members. Nor may the church be so rigid or arrogant as to assume that it has already apprehended the eschatological fulness of truth and life. Believers are baptised *by* the church and *into* the church but not *to* the church to become, as it were, the possession *of* the church. To be baptised into the triune name is to come, says Frederick Bruner, "onto the account and into the possession of the Great God; baptised believers come under new management. They are transferred to a new company" (Bruner 2004, p. 821). Or as Pannenberg has reminded us, God is acting in and through the church, claiming us for himself. As such, the church baptises new believers not *to* itself but in company with itself *to* and *for God*. Certainly, this will include distinctively Christian notions of what baptism signifies, of the identity and life appropriate for those baptised since, as Appiah has noted, identities are communally grounded and historically conditioned. Christian identity comes with very definite 'entanglements', some of which cannot be compromised; some forms of belief or action are incompatible with Christian identity. Other 'entanglements' may require, again as Appiah suggests, some interpretation and negotiation (Appiah 2018, p. 217). The reason for this is that in baptism, one's life is 'set in direction of the Good', as Taylor says, a firm, settled direction and commitment in which we are *becoming* or *moving* or *going* (Taylor 1989, pp. 46–47). That is, a space is opened here for variety of expression, for conformity *and* liberty, for fresh initiatives and new insights as believers—within the ongoing life, theological reflection, and mission of the Christian community—oriented and responsive to the one Lord of the church. Christian formation does not occur in a cookie-cutter fashion, even though it will have some clearly discernible processes, forms, and results. Rather, it sets believers into the relational company of the triune God and the people of God amid an ongoing and unfolding life with God.

Thus far, I have explored various interpretations of the concept of identity in late modern western contexts, and brought these interpretations into dialogue with the Christian practice of baptism. This dialogue has proven fruitful, identifying a degree of resonance between baptism and contemporary identitarian philosophy, some thoughtful considerations for the church's practice, as well as identifying some aspects of Christian baptismal practice which resist assimilation to contemporary thought and mores. Some of the issues arising deserve further careful consideration by churches as they approach the task of formation of baptismal candidates. First, and perhaps most significant, is the observation that mature identity and healthy identity formation requires subjective appropriation and is not merely the passive acceptance of an externally imposed view of the self. A person chooses their identity and increasingly identifies with it in their self-understanding and expression. Because identity is also plural, Christian identity formation will press for primacy in one's self-understanding, without suppressing identity complexity. Second, however, is the reality that identity is formed dialogically, utilising both internal and external resources, finding a balance between personal and communal inputs and standards. This requires parsing the relationship between personal and ecclesial identity such that the individual freely embraces a communal identity as their own, conforming themselves, however imperfectly, to an external criterion—Jesus Christ—in company with others. This is all the more challenging in an age in which such conformity is deemed inauthentic. Finally, Crawford and Rossiter insist that healthy identity formation involves both process and content, while Taylor reminds us that one's identity is inescapably moral, involving an orientation to the Good. Christian faith and theology provide distinctive content as to the nature of this Good—the triune God revealed in the history of Jesus Christ—as well as the contours and content of the moral life. Some indications of how churches might practically approach the matter of baptismal formation is the focus of the final section of this essay.

4. Baptism and Formation

I begin with an assertion: Baptismal identity is both a divine gift and an ecclesial task.[19] Bordeyne and Morrill are surely correct in their contention that there can be no 'baptismal positivism': "any notion that a rite such as baptism could singularly, unequivocally govern the thoughts, imaginations, and actions of any and every Christian participating in it" (Bordeyne and Morrill 2012, p. 158). The question that arises here can be put bluntly: Is there a 'grace of baptism'? Is God active in baptism or is it purely a work of human response to the reception of saving grace received otherwise through the proclamation of the gospel and the hearing of faith? Gordon Fee, for example, argues that baptism is the human response to the Spirit's prior work of conviction, the 'hearing of faith', regeneration, and empowerment in which the believer offers himself back to God for life and service in his community (Fee 1991, p. 117; See also Ladd 1993, pp. 587–88, 593–94). He views experience of the Spirit as the *sine qua non* of Christian conversion, and argues that in Paul, the gift of the Spirit is not associated with baptism.[20]

Other readers of Scripture, however, note the close association of the Holy Spirit with baptism, even in Paul.[21] Including a broader range of biblical texts provides additional ground for viewing baptism as a 'means of grace', while even Dunn admits that sacramental interpretations of Paul have a strong exegetical basis.[22] This is observed especially in relation to Paul's references to baptism in Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–28, and Colossians 2:11–12, in which the accent is not on the believer's reception of the Spirit but their union with Christ in his death and resurrection. These texts, it seems to me, suggest an intrinsic relation between baptism and this grace. Indeed, with respect to the Colossians passage, Paul's entire argument in 2:8–3:17 seems predicated on a realist account of baptism. Finally, the New Testament portrays a multi-faceted cluster of divine and human actions which together comprise conversion–initiation, although theologians invariably order them in different ways. These actions include the conviction of sin and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, repentance and faith in response to the gospel, water baptism, reception of the Holy Spirit into one's life, often in a dynamic and even visible experience, and incorporation into the life and ministry of the Christian community.[23] Dunn thinks it likely that Paul viewed this cluster as a 'complex whole', with baptism filling "an important role within the complex whole", even as "the moment and context in which it all came together" (Dunn 1998, pp. 455, 457). Without denying that baptism does have the character of a human pledge in grateful response to grace, and that unless the human act is 'mixed with faith', it may indeed prove vain, it is nonetheless an event in which divine and human action coincide, and grace is given as well as received.

Thus, while I concur that 'baptismal positivism' is undesirable and impossible, it remains important for churches to affirm that baptism is not simply an 'empty' rite, and to encourage congregations and candidates to approach it reverently, prayerfully, and expectantly. Churches ought to pray fervently with and for baptismal candidates—perhaps also with fasting and the laying of hands (see, for example, Kreider 2016, pp. 145, 182; Lane 2020, p. 102; O'Loughlin 2011, pp. 81, 92n17, Cf. *Didache* 7.4)—that they might be granted and experience manifestations of divine grace as part of their baptism. Such formative practices involve the whole congregation and provide gestures and context which deepen faith and heighten anticipation for the divine work.

Nor should churches shrink from the possibility of baptismal experience but rather be open to it, though without manipulation or coercion. Paul apparently considered the experience of the love and power of God essential for Christian faith (1 Cor. 2:4–5; cf. Gal. 3:2–5; 1 Thess. 1:5–6), especially if it is to be sustained in times of suffering and trial (Rom. 5:3–5). The assurance of faith is necessary for every Christian, and much can be gained through the grace given us in our experience of conversion–initiation in which, as we have seen, baptism plays a central and integrating role. Churches do well to make water baptism the central ritual in which the entire cluster of saving actions noted above are discussed and learned, tested, affirmed, encouraged, prayed for, and testified—in hope that candidates are decisively embedded in their new life, identity, and community, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, via a life-transforming experience of the mighty power, presence, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Bordeyne and Morrill's rejection of 'liturgical positivism' recognises the broader context of the baptismal rite and thus also the ecclesial task of Christian identity formation—the purposeful inculcation of subjective realisation of Christian identity by baptismal candidates. The New Testament, they suggest, makes it abundantly clear that baptism does not settle matters for the believer concerning who they are and what they should do, but frames them (Bordeyne and Morrill 2012, pp. 158–159; cf. 164). The ritual does not stand on its own but within the broader context of the gospel, the community, the call to discipleship, the church's mission, and so on. It requires "an ensemble of references, of stories, of practices, of visions of the world in order to shape and reshape the identity of the disciples of Christ, in dynamic relationship with ethical behavior and its spiritual importance" (Bordeyne and Morrill 2012, p. 166). Although this 'ensemble' will feature a variety of instruments in different contexts, the following common elements are central to the framing work of baptismal identity: induction into a new story, a new community, and onto a new path.

First, baptismal candidates must learn—in such a way that they begin to inhabit—the 'Big Story', the master narrative of God and his people. This is the biblical account of God as Creator and Redeemer, in all his dealings with his creatures from creation to consummation, including his covenants, promises, judgements, and purpose. The account especially focuses on the coming of Jesus Christ as 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23), his life and ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the revelation of God's universal and cosmic purposes in and through the church as we 'wait for and hasten' the return of Christ and the restoration of all things in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:12–13; Acts 3:21). The Big Story is a revelation of the Good—the eternal love and purposes of God revealed in Scripture and supremely in Jesus Christ—which, as such, grounds and portrays a distinct view of the reality within which we have our existence, and also constitutes the identity of the people of God. As Taylor emphasised, we grasp our identity in a narrative that helps us make sense of our lives and orients our life toward the Good, setting us in the direction of the Good on a path in which we are not merely existing but *moving* and *becoming* (Taylor 1989, pp. 41–48). The Big Story provides the worldview and value system, the social imaginary into which the baptizand is being inducted, the 'strange new world of the Bible' they now call home. It includes also the history of the church and the particular community of which the new believer is now a part. Churches might inculcate a '*shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community*' (McClendon 2002, p. 30, original emphasis), that congregants might find in this (unfinished) story their own story and calling, and learn that God's purposes continue to be prosecuted and realised in and through this people. They are set in the company of Moses and Mary, Huldah and Haggai, Paul and Priscilla. The waters of their baptism are those of the Red Sea and the Jordan, and of the myriads of Christians who through the centuries have also walked this path. What God is up to in their lives is a continuation of what God has been doing over many centuries—liberating, sanctifying, transforming (2 Cor. 3:18) (see Dueck 2011, pp. 21, 25).

Thomas O'Loughlin has written that Christian formation is "calculated to irreversibly alter the habits of perception and standards of judgment of novices coming out of a pagan life style".[24] Thus, the aim of being inducted into this story is the 'renewal of the mind' toward a transformed life (Rom. 12:2). This is more than the mere accumulation of biblical knowledge, important as that is. It seeks also the conversion of the imagination to see and inhabit the world anew, in light of the theological account provided in Scripture; the alignment of the human will to God's will; the tethering of the affections in humility and trust to the love and fear of God; and the development of Christian modes of theological reflection and moral deliberation. This will involve an array of strategies when reading Scripture—historical, devotional, moral, missional, etc.—always with the intent of believers hearing the Word within the word, in dialogue with the community of faith past and present, and integrating it into their lives personally and corporately, not just learning it intellectually, but learning to practise and embody it in their lives together.[25]

Second, believers are incorporated into the new community of God's people, a counter-cultural people intended as the 'salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city on a hill' (Matt. 5:13–16). To be baptised is to be plunged into Christ's body and united with one's fellow believers. One becomes a participant of its life and ministry, a partner in its joys, suffering, and hope, and a recipient of God's grace, blessings, and promise given to his church. The corollary at the local level is that the baptised person is welcomed into the community as a brother or sister in Christ, accorded the status and honour worthy of a child of God, regardless of creaturely or social distinctions, recognised in time for the spiritual gifts and ministries given them, and their contribution to the fellowship nurtured and valued. It matters a great deal that the believer is truly loved in this new community, that they are embraced in relationships of acceptance, care, mutuality, and friendship that replicate in human form the high-tensile, tender-hearted love of God. Although this is especially true for those who come to faith with addictions, behavioural disorders, or wounded hearts, every Christian harbours secret sins, weaknesses, hurts, and faults. In such cases, transformation requires the church as a community

> of loving people who bring the healing grace of God to bear on the life of the disordered person. A long-term, deep-reaching transformation of the broken heart—the kind that frees the bound human will and strengthens the weak human will to choose righteously—is most often cultivated over time through relationships that finally convince the person of God's love. (Thigpen 1992, p. 51; See also Thrall and McNicol 2010, pp. 61–83)

Only where a person knows that they are deeply loved will they risk the vulnerability of exposing their wounded and wayward hearts to the healing light of God's love and truth. Personal and permanent transformation requires personal relationships (Clark 2003, pp. 252, 256).

The identity-forming recognition grounded solely on one's status in Christ cuts two ways. It affirms and elevates those who previously were without status and recognition but will challenge the identity of new believers if their self-concept is grounded in some creaturely or cultural standard. The rich person in James 1:9–11, for example, is forbidden henceforth from boasting in their riches, the 'glory' of their face, or any other benefit that may have previously accrued to him or her.[26] Rather, they are to embrace their (social) humiliation in light of the new theological construal of reality that they have obtained: knowledge of eschatological judgement and the standards there applied. Baptismal identity has social implications in the new community, as Klyne Snodgrass has argued. Although racial, gender, or socio-economic distinctions may still exist in the community, valuation based on these distinctions may not (Snodgrass 2011b, p. 268). These realities will likely continue to determine identity, but can no longer have primary defining force; they must be made subservient to the gospel and to Jesus, who now as Lord has been given primary defining force in one's life (Snodgrass 2011b, pp. 272–73). Baptised into Christ's death and resurrection means that the new believer has been crucified with Christ and thereby 'displaced' from their own being. "If they are not willing for this to happen", says Snodgrass, "he or she cannot become a Christian" (Snodgrass 2011b, p. 264). Snodgrass's rhetoric may overstate the matter given that we grow into our Christian identity over time. Nevertheless, how hard it is for those who cling to their socio-cultural identities to enter the kingdom of heaven!

Because Christian identity is mediated via the community, more 'caught than taught', it is imperative that the community into which persons are baptised be living out its calling and identity faithfully. In a study that explored why many who considered themselves Christians in their young adult years subsequently withdrew from evangelical faith, Steven Garber writes that

> Over the course of hours of listening to people who still believe in the vision of a coherent faith, one that meaningfully connects personal disciplines with public duties, again and again I saw that they were people (1) who had formed a worldview sufficient for the challenges of the modern world, (2) who had found a teacher who incarnated that worldview and (3) who had forged friendships with folk whose common life was embedded in that worldview. There were no exceptions. (Garber 1996, p. 111)

This sobering finding shows that learning and understanding the Big Story is not sufficient on its own but must be supplemented with a community in which the worldview, virtues, and values of the Story are embedded and embodied. Mature Christian faith and identity requires congruence between one's inner experience of their relationship with God, a personal ideal grounded in a coherent theological vision, and their public presentation. But it is difficult if not impossible to achieve this in isolation. Thoughtful participation in common worship, spiritual conversation, and corporate theological reflection can help overcome a privatised faith and encourage authentic spiritual and moral formation (Clark 2003, pp. 252–56). Also critical, as observed by Garber, is the friendship of a teacher or mentor who incarnates the way and ethos of the Christian worldview. New Christians need role models and exemplars who embody the Christian life and thus show both its possibility and how it translates in practical terms in the context. SIT researchers, in particular, have emphasised the importance of the group's leaders embodying the vision and norms of the group: "As the (most) prototypical group member the leader best epitomizes (in the dual sense of both defining and being defined by) the social category of which he or she is a member" (Esler 2014, p. 34). The mentor accompanies the novice, becoming a friend and confidant, praying for and with them, watching their progress and struggles, supporting, helping, and encouraging them to live an authentic Christian life. In community, new believers learn to be Christians by learning to do what the Christians do, in their worship and prayer, service, mission, care, relationships, and interactions. They learn by seeing, by participating, by learning the practices of the new community as it, too, lives a life of discipleship to Jesus Christ (see Kreider 2016, pp. 156–60).

This all suggests that third, new Christians must be inducted into 'The Way' (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23), that is, set in a new direction on a path different to the path they previously travelled. This is not an idiosyncratic or self-chosen path but that which corresponds to and continues the Big Story in the life of the new community of which they are now a member. Baptism, particularly by immersion, vividly portrays the death of the old self and its ways and the being raised to a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3–7; Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:9–11).

The Christian has died to their former life and its identity ascriptions (Gal. 2:20). Crucified with Christ, it is no longer 'I' that lives but Christ that lives in me. Christian identity is that of one who has been crucified, whose self has been displaced and who henceforth lives from a different centre—Jesus Christ. To live by faith in the Son of God is the act of living out the identity God gives us by grace (Snodgrass 2011b, pp. 262, 264–65).

The Christian life, therefore, is a matter of 'learning Christ' (Eph. 4:20–24), which involves practical embodied adoption of the teachings of Jesus as one's rule of life. The requirement to 'teach them to obey all I have commanded you', together with baptism, constitutes the life of discipleship appropriate to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19). Christians are those who, together as one body in common life, live the way of Jesus Christ. The emphasis is on formation in obedience, not merely in knowledge, on disciples who in practice have been 'fully trained' so that they are 'like their master' (Luke 6:40). O'Loughlin likens Christian discipleship to an apprenticeship, to learning a craft from a master craftsman.[27] This is a relational model of identity formation, in which the mentor has so internalised the Way that they are able to live it reflexively and thus also to model it to the one they are accompanying. Apprentices hopefully will recognise in their mentor standards of Christian excellence to be emulated and will thus give themselves to the required disciplines of the training which is, as Eugene Peterson has written, 'a long obedience in the same direction'.[28] In his study of the *Didache*, O'Loughlin notes that the content of the Way amongst the earliest Christians was primarily the distinctive teaching of Jesus, drawn especially from the Sermon on the Mount, supplemented by the Decalogue, and the patterns, practices, and routines of life in the community. One was typically drawn to the message of Christ through relationship with someone who was already a Christian. In this relationship, they would be confronted with a fundamental choice to accept the way of life and reject the way of death. That step taken, they could be baptised, the actual baptising being done by the church member who had trained the newcomer in the Way.[29] It was by engaging in a relationship with a Christian and entering into the Christian Way of life that one became a disciple. One became a Christian by doing what Christians did. The *Didache* assumes that "the neophyte will only really know discipleship from the inside, living it" (O'Loughlin 2011, p. 84).

These three central elements of Christian formation frame the subjective appropriation of Christian identity. It is evident that they include elements of both process and content, as Crawford and Rossiter have insisted. Is there an overarching process by which this formation might be consistently applied in Christian ministry?

Alan Kreider has argued strenuously that contemporary Christian formation should be shaped by the practice of the ancient church's catechumenate—an argument that unites both goal and process. He identifies a new *habitus* as the aim of this formation: reflexive behaviour that corresponds to the central dispositions and lifestyle of the Christian community's common life (see Kreider 2016, pp. 133–84; here: 165–66; See also Kreider 2011). The Christian *habitus* was a way of life rooted in a host of biblical passages and especially in the teachings of Jesus—that over time and with practice, became embodied and habitual (Kreider 2016, pp. 165–66).

> How did Roman Christians become habituated so that they lived the way of Christ reflexively? . . . Was it possible for a community to develop the practices necessary to maintain its new life over against a pagan habitus that was well established and deeply seductive, respected by society's elite, informed by deep narratives, and made immediate by omnipresent visual arts? In such a situation, could the Christians physically renounce the old habitus and supplant it with a new habitus? And if so, how? (Kreider 2016, p. 144)

Kreider argues for a renewal of the ancient catechumenate as a process for formation in the contemporary church, illustrating his contention with reference to the *Didache*, Justin Martyr, Cyprian, and the *Apostolic Constitutions*. He claims that the extraordinary growth of the pre-Constantinian church was due in large part to the 'uncommon commitment' of the ancient church to this formation (Kreider 2016, p. 2). Catechumens were to learn and embody the way of Jesus as a pre-requisite for baptism, as a 'counter-habitus' to the culture and ethos of the Roman empire (Kreider 2016, p. 143). Conversion involved the re-formation of the new believer's identity and life "in which the candidate declares that Jesus is Lord, identifies primarily with the Christian family ("I am a Christian"), and commits himself or herself to living in the Christian way" (Kreider 2016, p. 176).

Although this and similar proposals have attracted their critics, not least as an offence to a doctrine of grace (Colwell 2005, pp. 131–32; cf. Witherington 2007, pp. 125–26; Lane 2020, pp. 99–100), W. John Carswell laments the lack of "an intentional and cohesive *process* of initiation and inculturation" to enable candidates to live *into* the baptised life (Carswell 2018, p. 431 (original emphasis)). Although a member of the Church of Scotland, he commends the Roman Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) as a model for the Reformed Church, precisely because it updates the ancient catechumenate, which

> Prepared its baptizands for a radical departure from a hostile and pagan culture . . . baptism meant leaving one community and joining another, a transition marked by great ceremony and serious personal reflection from the participants. Catechesis was lengthy and challenging and called for genuine life change. (Carswell 2018, p. 434). See (International Commission 1987)

5. Conclusions

It will be clear, I think, that I have undertaken this exploration of identity and baptism as one who practises believer's baptism, and so with the assumption that the baptismal candidate is of an age to receive instruction concerning what baptism signifies and requires, and to participate in the Christian community and its various formative activities and practices. This is not to suggest that the study is not also relevant to those who practise infant baptism, although with structures and practices appropriate for formation in those traditions. Gilbert Meilaender, for example, grounds his study of Christian bioethics in the reality of our identity established in (infant) baptism:

> In baptism we are handed over to God and become members of the Body of Christ. . . . In baptism God sets his hand upon us, calls us by name, and thereby establishes our uniquely individual identity and destiny. We belong, to the whole extent of our being, only to God, whom we must learn to love even more than we love father or mother. (Meilaender 2013, p. 2)

In the story of her conversion from a pagan life to Christian faith, Rosaria Champagne Butterfield notes that the pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church who was guiding her was concerned to ensure that she had never repudiated her baptism into the Catholic Church. Her conversion did not include a 'rebaptism' as may have occurred if she were converted in a Baptist context, but it did include an acceptance of the validity and providential grace involved in her infant baptism. Further, her conversion included official vows—a 'Covenant of Church Membership'—which functioned in this church as a reaffirmation of baptismal commitments.[30]

In both cases, whether adult or infant baptism, the subjective appropriation and expression of a truly Christian identity is necessary and requires formation. I have argued that such identity formation is both a gift and a task, a process in which the candidate is inducted into the Big Story, the Christian community, and the Way of Jesus, such that their identity becomes simply and primarily, "I am a Christian". This is a matter of 'slow conversion', a deepening comprehension and grasp of the grace of Christ in our lives, as well as a deepening commitment to live in the way of Christ in the company of his people, in mission and in hope. The role of baptism understood as both the rite and the broader context of conversion–initiation is integral in this formation.

I began this essay with the story of Polycarp, whose martyrdom set his Christian identity in stark relief. I close with a similar story, this time of a modern martyr—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis on 9 April 1945, just a month before the end of World War II in Europe. In June 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote a poem which showed he was plainly wrestling with questions of identity. His plaintive question *Who Am I?* also testifies to the necessity of a faith—and identity—grounded ultimately in God alone:

> Who am I? They mock me these lonely questions of mine.
>
> Whoever I am, you know me, O God. You know I am yours.[31]

When all the identity supports had been torn from his life, as he awaited in prison his fate at the hands of the Nazis, Bonhoeffer's identity was grounded not in himself. No doubt his faith was nurtured in a lifelong commitment to God, with strong intellectual, practical, and affectional components. Foundational, however, is that he is known by God and that he belongs to God. Assured of God's love, he could rest in divine grace free from the need to establish his own identity. We, too, are known by God and belong to him for eternity. This is not merely our hope, it is also our identity, for we belong amongst the community of those who have been baptised.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

1 See "The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp" in (Roberts and Donaldson 1885, p. 41).

2 A recent volume of forty two essays indicates the variety of approaches to Christian identity formation; see (Houston and Zimmermann 2018).

3 (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, p. 90). Compare the eight factors identified by Snodgrass (2011a, pp. 11–14).

4 (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, p. 23). Crawford and Rossiter cite (Meijer 2006, pp. 92–99).

5 (Esler 2014, p. 19). Michael Hogg defines SIT: "Social identity theory is a social psychological analysis of the role of self-conception in group membership, group processes, and intergroup relations". See (Hogg 2018).

6 (Roccas and Brewer 2002, p. 91). The authors' description of the merger model is not straight-forward. In the diagrammatic representation of the models provided in the article, two partly overlapping identities are portrayed as roughly equivalent *against the background of* or *enclosed within* a larger amorphous and unidentified field. Later, they suggest that the model requires "the introduction of some superordinate principle that makes the inconsistent cognitions compatible" (also page 91). Given the nature of the case, the superordinate principle also remains unnamed, but one wonders whether it might be akin to Kwame Anthony Appiah's idea of the 'cosmopolitan'—which we note below.

7 (Esler 2014, pp. 32, 35). So also (Hogg 2018): "People construct group norms from appropriate in-group members and in-group behaviors and internalize and enact these norms as part of their social identity". As such, conformity is not "surface behavioral compliance but a deeper process whereby people's behavior is transformed to correspond to the appropriate self-defining group prototype".

8 (Appiah 2018, p. 219). Appiah concludes his book by commending the famous quote of Terence (Publius Terentius Afer): "I am human, I think nothing human alien to me" (p. 219).

9 It is beyond the scope of this essay to provide a theological account of baptism itself, and the various critical questions pertaining to the topic. For studies, see (Beasley-Murray 1973; Schreiner and Wright 2007; Ferguson 2009; Streett 2018).

10 For a discussion of these ideas see (Davids 1990, pp. 11–14; Jobes 2005, pp. 53–56). See also Miroslav Volf's essay "Soft Difference: Church & Culture in 1 Peter" in (Volf 2010, pp. 65–90).

11 Thesis 28 of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation is relevant here: "God's love does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it". See (Wengert 2015, pp. 85, 104–5).

12 See (Barth 1956). For a discussion of Barth's lecture, see (O'Neil 2013, pp. 75–82).

13 An adaption of the first article of the Westminster Catechism. To claim this as the chief aim of human existence is not to deny the possibility of a vision of human flourishing. In a recent book, Miroslav Volf makes much of Jesus' statement in John 6:51 that Jesus came as the bread from heaven to give his life "for the life of the world". Volf argues from this for a vision of 'flourishing life'. Evident in Volf's exposition is a concern for the flourishing of all of life and not merely the flourishing of one's own life. See (Volf and Croasmun 2019).

14 Compare 2 Corinthians 5:16–17 where Paul can say, "henceforth we recognise no one according to the flesh. . .if anyone is in Christ they are a new creature". See also his setting aside of identity markers in Philippians 3:3–8.

15 For a thoughtful consideration of this issue, see (Ezigbo 2018).

16 See also (Du Toit 2023). In his essay, Du Toit correctly notes that Christian identity is divinely grounded rather than socially constructed, and that Christians are 'foreigners' with respect to social environments. This does not annul the usefulness of SIT as a descriptive and heuristic tool in biblical studies but does indicate something of its limits: it cannot provide a normative account of Christian identity formation.

17 This remains the case even without implying doctrines such as original sin or total depravity.

18 (Barth 1969, pp. 200–1). Mark Lindsay notes that for Barth participation in this mission cannot be reduced to proclamation alone. Rather, "mission also and necessarily includes within it those acts of ethical and political solidarity with others, by which the entirety of human life is made more *human*". See (Lindsay 2013, p. 243, original emphasis). See also James Smith's contention that baptism functions as ordination did in the Old Testament with believers being brought into the priesthood and ministry of Christ: (Smith 2009, p. 184).

19 Again, as noted above, I cannot in this essay discuss in detail the theology underpinning this assertion. It is evident to anyone familiar with the topic that every Christian tradition and theologian brings their own nuance to the matter, some laying more emphasis on (or even denying!) either the former or the latter aspect of the assertion. See, as an example, (Hunsinger 2000).

20 (Fee 1994, pp. 860–64). James Dunn arrives at a similar conclusion although he allows a little more space for the development of a sacramental understanding of baptism in his helpful exposition. See (Dunn 1998, pp. 413–59; especially 419, 425, 452–53, 456).

21 See, for example, (Snodgrass 2011b, p. 167). See also Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13–17 (cf. Luke 3:21–22), and those of Paul, Cornelius, and the Ephesians in Acts 9, 10, and 19 as well as Acts 2:38–39, 1 Cor. 6:11; and Titus 3:4–6. Some commentators view Jesus' teaching about being born from above (John 3:1–10) as referring to baptism. See, for example, (Ridderbos 1997, pp. 127–28; Bruner 2012, pp. 175–78, 181–88).

22 (Dunn 1998, pp. 442–47). The methodological point is worth noting: if the 'traditional' reading of Paul tended to 'over-read' baptismal contexts and theology into Paul's expressions, Dunn tends towards a caution that will seek an alternative to baptismal interpretation unless it is explicit in the text.

23 This is my own adaption of lists presented by Fee, Dunn, and Lane. See (Fee 1991, p. 117; Dunn 1998, p. 456; Lane 2020, pp. 93–111). Fee claims that early Christian experience of the Spirit in conversion was both dynamic and usually visible; see (Fee 1994, pp. 863–64).

24 (O'Loughlin 2011, p. 84). Note that O'Loughlin's claim is concerned with the establishment of norms, or more precisely, the processes by which norms are identified and adopted and the inputs feeding these processes, than with navigating or negotiating identity complexity per se. The point is to 'become a Christian' and the result is that modes of Christian life and identity reign supreme in the life of the novice. See also (Kreider 2016, p. 139).

25 For an excellent discussion of reading Scripture as an ecclesial practice, see (Verhey 2002, pp. 49–76).

26 The ESV translates *kai hē euprepeia tou prosōpou autou apōleto* (Jas. 1:11) as 'and its beauty perishes'. Literally the phrase is 'and the beauty of its face perishes'. The NASB translates as 'the beauty of its appearance is destroyed', retaining the genitive, but losing the personification of the image ('its beautiful face is destroyed'), and its resulting power when applied to the rich person. Note that in Jas. 2:1 the new community are instructed not to 'receive the face' (*prosōpolēmpsiais*) of the rich man but to accord equal honour to rich and poor alike, and indeed, to privilege the poor as God has done (2:5).

27 (O'Loughlin 2011, pp. 79, 81). The imagery is also prominent in the work of Stanley Hauerwas. See (Hauerwas 1991; 1999, pp. 93–111).

28 See Eugene Peterson's book bearing this title. Peterson credits the phrase to Friedrich Nietzsche: (Peterson 1980, p. 13).

29 (O'Loughlin 2011, p. 81); cf. Didache 7:1, on page 88.

30 See (Butterfield 2014, pp. 19–20, 38–41). Also note Carswell's observation that increasing secularisation in the West means that even churches of paedobaptist traditions will find that the numbers of infant baptisms in their congregations has declined sharply, as has the proportion of babies in the community being baptised. Such churches are again in conditions in which their mission will require a greater emphasis on evangelism and thus believer's baptism. Carswell insists that a process such as the RCIA is an integral aspect of such evangelisation. (Carswell 2018, pp. 431–32).

31 The final couplet of Bonhoeffer's "Who Am I?" (Kelly and Nelson 1995, p. 514).

References

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2018. *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity: Creed, Country, Colour, Class, Culture*. London: Profile.

Barth, Karl. 1956. The Strange New World within the Bible. In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Translated by Douglas Horton. New York: Harper and Brothers, pp. 28–50.

Barth, Karl. 1969. *Church Dogmatics IV/4: The Doctrine of Reconciliation (Fragment)*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

Beasley-Murray, George R. 1973. *Baptism in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Bordeyne, Philippe, and Bruce T. Morrill. 2012. Baptism and Identity Formation: Convergences in Ritual and Ethical Perspectives a Dialogue. *Studia Liturgica* 42: 154–75. [CrossRef]

Bruner, Frederick D. 2004. *Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 2: The Churchbook (Matthew 13–28)*, Revised ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Bruner, Frederick Dale. 2012. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.
Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne. 2014. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications.
Cameron, James E. 2004. A Three-Factor Model of Social Identity. *Self and Identity* 3: 239–62. [CrossRef]
Carswell, W. John. 2018. New Directions in Adult Baptism: Baptism in a Secular Culture. *Theology* 12: 430–36. [CrossRef]
Clark, David K. 2003. *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology. Wheaton: Crossway.
Colwell, John E. 2005. *Promise & Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster.
Cooper, Terry D. 2003. *Sin, Pride & Self-Acceptance: The Problem of Identity in Theology & Psychology*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.
Crawford, Marisa, and Graham Rossiter. 2006. *Reasons for Living: Education and Young People's Search for Meaning, Identity and Spirituality. A Handbook*. Camberwell: ACER Press.
Davids, Peter H. 1990. *The First Epistle of Peter*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Dueck, Irma Fast. 2011. It's Only Water: The Ritual of Baptism and the Formation of Christian Identity. *Vision* 12: 21–27.
Dunn, James D. G. 1998. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Du Toit, Philip La Grange. 2023. A Foreign People: Towards a Holistic Identity Theory within a Christian Context. *Religions* 14: 1167. [CrossRef]
Esler, Philip E. 2014. An Outline of Social Identity Theory. In *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*. Edited by Brian Tucker and Coleman Baker. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 13–39.
Ezigbo, Victor I. 2018. African Christian or Christian African? Identity Relations in African Christianity. In *Sources of the Christian Self: A Cultural History of Christian Identity*. Edited by James M. Houston and Jens Zimmerman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 664–82.
Fee, Gordon D. 1991. *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
Fee, Gordon D. 1994. *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
Ferguson, Everett. 2009. *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Fukuyama, Francis. 2018. *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition*. London: Profile.
Garber, Steven. 1996. *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief & Behavior during the University Years*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
Grant, Stan. 2019a. *Australia Day*. Sydney: HarperCollins Publishers.
Grant, Stan. 2019b. *On Identity*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
Hauerwas, Stanley. 1991. Discipleship as a Craft, Church as a Disciplined Community. *Christian Century*, October 2, pp. 881–84.
Hauerwas, Stanley. 1999. *After Christendom*. Nashville: Abingdon.
Hogg, Michael A. 2018. Social Identity Theory. In *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories*. Edited by Peter Burke. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Perlego. Available online: https://www.perlego.com/book/746019/contemporary-social-psychological-theories-second-edition-pdf (accessed on 23 January 2024).
Houston, James M., and Jens Zimmermann, eds. 2018. *Sources of the Christian Self: A Cultural History of Christian Identity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Hunsinger, George. 2000. Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2: 247–69. [CrossRef]
International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conference. 1987. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Sydney: E. J. Dwyer.
Jobes, Karen H. 2005. *1 Peter. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
Kelly, Geffrey B., and F. Burton Nelson, eds. 1995. *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. New York: Harper One.
Kok, Jacobus. 2014. Social Identity Complexity Theory as Heuristic Tool in New Testament Studies. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70: 2708. [CrossRef]
Kreider, Alan. 2011. 'Converted' but Not Baptized: Peter Leithart's Constantine Project. *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85: 575–617.
Kreider, Alan. 2016. *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
Ladd, George E. 1993. *A Theology of the New Testament*, Revised ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Lane, Tony. 2020. *Sin and Grace: Evangelical Soteriology in Historical Perspective*. London: Apollos.
Lindsay, Mark. 2013. The Abandonment of Inauthentic Humanity: Barth's Theology of Baptism as the Ground and Goal of Mission. *Pacifica* 26: 229–45. [CrossRef]
McClendon, James Wm. 2002. *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume 1*, Rev ed. Nashville: Abingdon.
Meijer, Wilna A. J. 2006. Plural Selves and Living Traditions: A Hermeneutical View on Identity and Diversity. In *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions of Education*. Edited by Marian De Souza, Kathleen Engebretson, Gloria Durka, Robert Jackson and Andrew McGrady. Dordrecht: Springer Academic Publishers, pp. 321–32.
Meilaender, Gilbert. 2013. *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Mikoski, Gordon S. 2009. *Baptism and Christian Identity: Teaching in the Triune Name*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Oden, Thomas C. 1992. *The Living God: Systematic Theology Volume 1*. San Francisco: Harper One.
O'Loughlin, Thomas. 2011. The Missionary Strategy of the *Didache*. *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 28: 77–92. [CrossRef]

O'Neil, Michael D. 2013. *Church as Moral Community: Karl Barth's Vision of Christian Life, 1915–1922*. Paternoster Theological Monographs. Milton Keynes: Paternoster.
O'Neil, Michael D. 2019. 'For As Many of You as were Baptised into Christ have Clothed Yourselves with Christ': Baptism, Baptists, and the Renewal of the Church. *Pacific Journal of Theological Research* 14: 13–22. Available online: https://issuu.com/careybaptistcollege/docs/pjtr_nov_2019__final_#google_vignette (accessed on 23 January 2024).
Pannenberg, Wolfhart. 1998. *Systematic Theology Volume 3*. Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Peterson, Eugene H. 1980. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Culture*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
Peterson, Eugene H. 2005. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Ridderbos, Herman. 1997. *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, eds. 1885. *Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
Roccas, Sonia, and Marilynn B. Brewer. 2002. Social Identity Complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6: 88–106. [CrossRef]
Schreiner, Thomas R., and Shawn Wright, eds. 2007. *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*. New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology. Nashville: B&H Academic.
Sittser, Gerald L. 2007. *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries*. Downers Grove: IVP.
Smith, James K. A. 2009. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Cultural Liturgies Volume 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Smith, James K. A. 2014. *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Snodgrass, Klyne R. 2011a. Introduction to a Hermeneutics of Identity. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168: 3–19.
Snodgrass, Klyne R. 2011b. Paul's Focus on Identity. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168: 259–73.
Streett, R. Alan. 2018. *Caesar and the Sacrament. Baptism: A Rite of Resistance*. Eugene: Cascade.
Tajfel, Henri, Michael G. Billig, Robert P. Bundy, and Claude Flament. 1971. Social Categorisation and Intergroup Behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology* I: 149–78.
Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
Thigpen, Paul. 1992. Sin, Sickness or Something Less Simple? *Charisma*, March 1, pp. 48–51.
Thrall, Bill, and Bruce McNicol. 2010. Communities of Grace. In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*. Edited by Alan Andrews. Colorado Springs: Navpress, pp. 61–83.
Tucker, J. Brian, and Coleman A. Baker, eds. 2014. *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.
Ukwuegbu, Bernard O. 2008. Paraenesis, Identity-defining Norms, or Both? Galatians 5:13–6:10 in the Light of Social Identity Theory. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70: 538–59.
Urban, Lynn M., and Norman Miller. 1998. A Theoretical Analysis of Crossed Categorization Effects: A Meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74: 894–908. [CrossRef]
Verhey, Allen. 2002. *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Volf, Miroslav. 2010. *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Volf, Miroslav, and Matthew Croasmun. 2019. *For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes a Difference*. Grand Rapids: Brazos.
Wengert, Timothy J., ed. 2015. *The Annotated Luther Volume 1: The Roots of Reform*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
Witherington, Ben, III. 2007. *Troubled Waters: Rethinking the Theology of Baptism*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

religions

MDPI

Article

Shaped by the Supper: The Eucharist as an Identity Marker and Sustainer—A Literary Analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

JM (Jooman) Na

Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, MI 49546, USA; jna0218@calvinseminary.edu

Abstract: This study demonstrates that Paul presents the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 as an identity-forming and identity-sustaining liturgical act. Through literary analysis, the research first highlights Paul's deliberate fivefold use of the verb συνέρχομαι ("to come together") to frame the passage, emphasizing the communal nature of the Eucharist. The meal is intended to mark the identity of the church as one body—set apart from the status-based divisions typical of Roman banquet culture. The current study also observes that Paul strategically places the early Christian confession of the Lord's Supper at the center of his argument. In doing so, he calls the Corinthians to recall this tradition and re-engage in a shared act of remembrance—one that enacts the memory of Christ's death and thereby reconstitutes them as a unified body. This understanding is rooted in Jewish conceptions of ritual memory, in which liturgical acts not only recall the past but renew and reinforce communal identity. Through such embodied remembrance, the church does not merely recall who it is; it performs and sustains that identity. Thus, the Eucharist functions both to form the church as one body distinct from the world and to maintain that identity through repeated, participatory remembrance.

Keywords: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; literary analysis; Eucharist; Lord's Supper; ritual memory; identity formation; communal identity; liturgical theology

1. Introduction

This study attempts to demonstrate that Paul presents the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 as a liturgical practice that both forms and sustains Christian identity, as revealed through literary analysis of the passage. Modern liturgical scholars broadly agree that Christian liturgy functions as a means of faith formation. Hwarang Moon observes that although faith begins as a gift from the Holy Spirit, it is trained and cultivated through the practice of liturgy (Moon 2015, pp. 21, 192). In other words, while liturgy does not create faith ex nihilo, it guides, molds, and deepens existing faith. Liturgy shapes faith especially by bringing the gospel to remembrance. Don E. Saliers and James K. A. Smith emphasize that participation in liturgical practices—particularly the Lord's Supper—enables believers to better understand and internalize the contents of the Christian faith, as the salvific history of God comes alive in communal memory (Saliers 1996, pp. 13–14; J. K. A. Smith 2009, pp. 26–27). Smith writes that "The sights, smells, and rhythms of the Eucharist seem to make the story both come alive and wriggle into our imaginations in a way that it wouldn't otherwise" (J. K. A. Smith 2009, pp. 198–99).

However, this strong affirmation raises a pressing question: On what New Testament grounds does this claim rest? In other words, can we move beyond theological or philosophical reflections and demonstrate, within the biblical text itself, how liturgy actively shapes Christian faith? This study seeks to answer that question by offering a literary analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. While it involves a range of features, a key aspect of literary analysis recognizes the importance not just of the content of the text (*what* is said) but also of its form (*how* it is said). Approaching Paul's discourse, this perspective reveals that the form of each letter, paragraph, and even a small unit within a paragraph significantly contributes to our comprehension of their content and, crucially, enables us to better discern Paul's original "intent" (Weima 2016, pp. 2–8). Through this approach, we can discern that Paul intended to present the Lord's Supper in this passage as a formative and sustaining practice essential to Christian identity and faith.[1] While this study emphasizes the horizontal and communal implications of the Eucharist, this focus does not exclude or diminish the vertical and Christological dimensions. Rather, as will be discussed below, it is grounded in them.

This study will be structured in three major sections. The first two explore the two primary functions of the Eucharist—identity formation and identity sustenance—by analyzing how Paul strategically addresses the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper. To support the formative nature of the Eucharist evident in the passage, historical, sociological, and archaeological insights will also be considered where appropriate. Finally, the last section will reflect on the contemporary implications of this reading for the practice of the church today.

2. The Eucharist as an Identity-Marking Practice: The Formative Power of Gathering

Before exploring the formative function of the Eucharist, it is important to consider two preliminary matters: the two dimensions of the Eucharist and the significance of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 for this study. First, while this study emphasizes the horizontal and communal implications of the Eucharist, it is essential to recognize that the Lord's Supper is rooted fundamentally in a vertical communion with Christ, from which the horizontal communion among believers flows. This dual relationship is evidenced in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17. In verse 16, Paul clearly states that during the Lord's Supper, the participants "participate" (κοινωνία) in the blood and body of Christ. As Anthony C. Thiselton and Michael F. Bird rightly observe, the Greek word κοινωνία signifies fellowship or sharing, indicating a "vertical communion" with the presence of Christ himself (Thiselton 2000, pp. 761–64; Bird 2013, p. 894). Therefore, the Christological or Christocentric significance of the Eucharist cannot be overlooked.

From this vertical communion, the horizontal dimension naturally emerges, as seen in verse 17. As Ernst Käsemann notes, Paul transitions from describing the believers' participatory relationship with Christ to their participatory relationship with the "body of Christ", the church (Käsemann 1964, p. 109).[2] In verse 17, Paul declares that "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we partake of the one bread". As Hans Conzelmann rightly observes, Paul takes up the notions of "bread" and "body" from verse 16 and reorients them toward the unity of the church, emphasizing the shared identity of the gathered believers (Conzelmann 1975, p. 172). In short, vertical communion with Christ fosters a closer horizontal relationship among fellow believers (Bird 2013, pp. 834, 894).[3]

Second, it is important to consider why 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 warrants special attention. There are three primary reasons why this passage is crucial for understanding the theological and liturgical dimensions of the Lord's Supper. First, this passage is the first and unique place in the New Testament where the phrase Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) appears. Since 1 Corinthians predates the written Gospels, this passage represents the earliest extant source describing the eucharistic practice of the early Christian community. In other words, we are examining the most primitive written witness to how the earliest believers understood and practiced the meal (Snyder 1992, p. 156; Knoch 1993, p. 3; Witherington 2007, pp. 20–21). Second, as David E. Garland notes, this passage is the only place in Paul's letters where he explicitly cites a tradition about Jesus that corresponds to the narratives in the Synoptic Gospels (Garland 2003, p. 544). As will be discussed below, the convergence between Pauline and Gospel tradition suggests that Paul is offering an authoritative teaching regarding the Eucharist. Third, Paul addresses the issue of the Lord's Supper within a broader discussion of worship practices. This section is framed by other liturgical concerns—preceded by his instructions regarding women's head coverings in worship (11:2–16) and followed by a discussion on the abuse of spiritual gifts, particularly speaking in tongues, in the gathered assembly (chaps. 12–14).[4] Thus, a close literary analysis of this passage may yield not only deeper insight into the nature of the Supper itself but also into the ways worship practices shape communal identity and faith.

2.1. Paul's Strategic Framing of the Problem in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

Because 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 is filled with parenetic language—rebuke, exhortation, and calls for correction—it is tempting to reduce the passage to a practical "how-to" list for celebrating the Eucharist. However, reading the passage through a literary lens reveals that Paul is doing something far more deliberate. He explicitly frames the discussion of the Lord's Supper as a matter of "coming together" (συνέρχομαι), a verb that serves as a structural and theological anchor throughout the passage.

One of the key concerns in literary analysis is the justification of textual boundaries. Jeffrey A. D. Weima observes that defining the boundaries of a passage ensures that our explanation begins and ends at the right place and that each verse is interpreted in light of its surrounding literary unit (Weima 2016, p. 92). In this case, the boundaries of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 are clearly marked by the repetition of the verb συνέρχομαι in both the opening (v. 17) and closing (v. 34) verses—a literary device known as inclusio.[5] This verb, meaning "to come together" or "to assemble" (Danker et al. 2000, p. 969), signals that Paul is framing the Corinthians' abuse of the Eucharist not merely as a ritual error, but as a failure of communal gathering.

The importance of this framing is reinforced by the repetition of συνέρχομαι five times within the passage (vv. 17, 18, 20, 33, 34). Remarkably, this verb appears only twice elsewhere in all of Paul's letters—both in 1 Corinthians 14 (vv. 23, 26), likewise in the context of gathered worship. This concentrated clustering strongly suggests that Paul is using the term intentionally to underscore the significance of the church's assembly in relation to the Eucharist. Moreover, from a literary standpoint, συνέρχομαι not only recurs but also functions structurally—appearing three times (vv. 17, 18, 20) within the introduction (vv. 17–22), where Paul introduces the problem, and twice more (vv. 33, 34) in the conclusion (vv. 33–34), where he offers corrective instruction. Between these two sections, Paul inserts a citation of the Eucharistic tradition (vv. 23–26) and an exhortation grounded in that tradition (vv. 27–32). In this way, not only the paragraph as a whole but also its individual sub-units are framed around the idea of gathering together—a practice that the Corinthians have failed to embody even as they attempt to partake in the Lord's table.

What is particularly striking about this framing is how it exposes the core problem in the Corinthians' practice. The issue becomes clear through the appearance of the word σχίσμα (split, division, dissension, or schism) in verse 18. In other New Testament contexts, such as Matthew 9:16 and Mark 2:21, σχίσμα refers to the tearing of a garment—an image of rupture and disunity (Danker et al. 2000, p. 981). Paul had already identified the presence of such divisions earlier in the letter (1:10), and here he makes clear how those divisions have disrupted the proper observance of the Eucharist. Instead of eating the Lord's meal (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, v. 20), the Corinthians were each partaking in their own private meals (ἴδιον δεῖπνον, v. 21), thereby undermining the communal essence of the Supper. As will be discussed further below, this behavior nullified the identity-marking function of the Lord's Supper—one of the very purposes for which the church was called to gather as one body. For this reason, Paul opens the passage by arguing that their gathering was doing more harm than good (v. 17).

2.2. The Identity-Marking Function of the Eucharist: Body as Boundary

2.2.1. Imitating Empire: How Corinthian Eucharistic Practice Reflected the Roman Banquet

The issue with the Lord's Supper among the Corinthians was that its intended function —shaping communal identity—was not being realized. At the root of the problem was the fact that the Corinthian observance of the Lord's Supper had come to resemble, in both form and social effect, the function and symbolic meaning of the Roman banquet—reinforcing status divisions and exclusion. There is a general consensus among scholars that early Christian meals were nearly identical in format to that of traditional Roman banquets. What matters most, however, is not merely the form but the function of such meals. On the imperial level, the Roman banquet served as a means to promote imperial ideology, define the boundaries of community, and reinforce allegiance to the Roman order (Taussig 2012, p. 30; Streett 2013, p. 7). In short, it functioned as a tool of political and ideological formation. On the individual level, the banquet acted as a social marker—solidifying one's standing within the Roman hierarchy (D. E. Smith 2012, p. 111; Streett 2013, p. 9). Whom one ate with and where one sat were deeply tied to one's identity.[6] The banquet was, in every sense, a ritual of belonging—a way of answering the questions: Who am I? Who belongs with me? Whose authority do I acknowledge?

The problem in Corinth was that this same boundary-marking function, now operating under the name of the Lord's Supper, was being used by the wealthier members of the church to separate themselves from those of lower status—just as it functioned in Roman society. Archaeological evidence underscores this dynamic. In typical Greco-Roman banquets, participants reclined on three large couches and ate, and most scholars agree that early Christian meals likely followed a similar pattern (D. E. Smith 2012, p. 9).[7] The issue was the size of dining rooms in Roman homes. As Richard B. Hays notes, archaeological studies of Roman homes from this era reveal that the dining room (*triclinium*) typically accommodated only nine people reclining at the table. Additional guests would have had to remain in the atrium, where space was available for another thirty to forty individuals to sit or stand (Hays 1997, p. 196).[8]

While it is difficult to determine the number of attendees in the Corinthian gathering, it is clear that not everyone could participate in the Eucharist in the same space. In the early Christian community, the Eucharist and the communal meal (ἀγάπη) were not yet separated; in fact, they were often two names for one and the same ritual (Barclay 1975, p. 100; Blue 1993, p. 578; Knoch 1993, p. 3; Blomberg 1994, p. 229.).[9] This means that higher-status members, including the host, would eat in the triclinium, while lower-status members—such as freedmen and slaves—were relegated to the outer atrium during the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Hays 1997, p. 196). As noted earlier, Roman meals functioned to form the identity of a group within a stratified society. In this light, the fact that a small number of Corinthians were eating in the dining room while others remained outside signified precisely the kind of status-based exclusion that the Eucharistic gathering (cf. συνέρχομαι) was meant to overcome. This social dynamic gives weight to Paul's piercing question in verse 22: "Do you humiliate those who have nothing?"

2.2.2. The Eucharist's Role in Forming One-Body Identity

This section now turns to two key questions: What kind of identity does the Eucharist form, and how does it shape that identity? To begin with, the Eucharist shapes Christian identity as one body in a world marked by fragmentation and social division. It does so by drawing believers together (συνέρχομαι) in a visible, communal expression of their shared life in Christ. The fivefold appearance of the verb συνέρχομαι in this passage, as we saw above, underscores Paul's concern with true gathering—not merely assembling physically, but forming as a unified body. Paul's emphasis on gathering is reinforced in verse 29, where he warns that "Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the *body* eats and drinks judgment on himself". As Thiselton observes, a longstanding interpretive tradition—beginning with Justin and Augustine and extending through Thomas Aquinas, Peter Lombard, and Beza—reads the body in this verse as a reference to the Eucharistic elements, distinguishing them from ordinary bread from the table (Thiselton 2000, p. 892). Another compelling view is that "the body" refers to the Lord's physical body, given "for you" (v. 24), signifying the death of Christ (Barrett 1968, pp. 274–75; Schweizer 1971, pp. 1067–68; Danker et al. 2000, p. 984; Thiselton 2000, pp. 892–93; Gardner 2018, p. 515). However, beginning with Käsemaan, most modern commentators agree that the context points clearly to a different referent: "the body" here refers to something communal and relational, the gathered community itself (Käsemann 1964, pp. 132–33; Bornkamm 1969, p. 149; Marshall 1997, p. 121; Hays 1997, p. 200; Ciampa and Rosner 2010, p. 555; Fee 2014, p. 564; Kwon 2022, p. 467).

There are at least three pieces of evidence for this interpretation. First, when Paul refers to Jesus's physical body, or symbolic representation of it in this passage, he consistently includes both the bread and the cup (vv. 26, 27, 28). In verse 29, however, he refers only to "the body", with no mention of the cup—suggesting a shift in reference (Fee 2014, p. 623). Second, Paul refers to σῶμα (body) 18 times in 1 Corinthians, and 9 of those occur in chapters 10 and 12—the chapters immediately surrounding this passage. In those contexts, σῶμα refers predominantly to the community of believers, the body of Christ understood as the church (Y.-J. Lee 2012, pp. 584–85). Third, text-critical evidence supports this reading. While the NIV adds "of the Lord" after "the body", the phrase τοῦ Κυρίου (of the Lord) is absent in earliest and most reliable witnesses ($\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ ℵ* A B C* 33 1739 cop^{sa}, ^{bo} *al*) and was likely a later addition (cf. ℵ^{c} C^{3} D G K P *al*). Metzger further highlights that, with such strong manuscript support, the shorter reading—without τοῦ Κυρίου—is likely original (Metzger 1994, p. 496; Thiselton 2000, pp. 890–91).

Paul's omission of the phrase "of the Lord" in verse 29 appears intentional, distinguishing it from verse 27 where he explicitly refers to "the body and blood of the Lord" (τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου). By doing so, Paul likely signals a shift in meaning—from the sacramental elements to the communal body of believers. This interpretation aligns with Paul's statement in 12:13, "we were all baptized into one body", where he emphasizes that Jew or Greek, slave or free, all belong to the church as one unified body. Similarly, in 10:17, Paul writes that "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one loaf"—directly connecting Eucharistic participation with communal unity.

These observations lead us to reconsider Paul's expectations for gathering together (συνέρχομαι) for the Lord's Supper. For Paul, the Eucharist was a formative practice, meant to constitute the community as one body—a community distinct from the world "out there", where divisions of class and power prevail. The Corinthian celebration of the Lord's Supper was therefore formative in two ways: First, it established an external boundary, identifying those who belonged to Christ through their participation in a shared meal. Second, it cultivated internal intimacy, fostering mutual recognition and solidarity among members regardless of their social or economic status (J. H. Lee 2018, p. xxiv).

These characteristics set the Christian Eucharist apart from Greco-Roman banquets. Michael J. Rhodes explains that a formative practice is "a *telos*-shaped, embodied, social action which intends to shape the character of God's people, the politics of the community, and the world 'out there'" (Rhodes 2022, p. 52). By gathering the church together—literally and theologically—the Eucharist forms Christians into nothing less than a new humanity, distinct from the status-based social order of the world (Rhodes 2022, p. 230). N. T. Wright observes that all human societies develop ways of "saying things by doing things". A military salute, or a handshake to seal a deal—these are symbolic actions that carry communal meaning. In the same way, says Wright, communion shapes who we are (Wright 2002, p. 5). The Eucharist was intended to form the Corinthians into a distinct body by calling them to gather together and share the meal as one body.

3. The Eucharist as an Identity-Sustaining Practice: The Sustaining Power of Tradition

3.1. Paul's Literary Strategy: Tradition as a Persuasive Device

Another literary insight into Paul's strategy emerges from the internal structure of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. Paul's response to the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper is not simply to issue commands; rather, he deliberately grounds his argument in foundational theological tradition, drawing from the story of the Lord's Supper. To do this, he inserts two central sub-paragraphs, forming a clear four-part structure within the passage. As noted above, verses 17–22 form the introduction (cf. the inclusio formed by the repetition of οὐκ ἐπαινῶ in vv. 17 and 22), in which Paul states the problem. Verses 33–34 form the conclusion, where Paul offers the solution (cf. ὥστε and ἐκδέχεσθε). Between these sections, Paul inserts two central sub-units: the confessional material (vv. 23–26) and an exhortation based on that material (vv. 27–32; cf. ὥστε). Notably, Paul could have moved directly from the problem (vv. 17–22) to the solution (vv. 33–34). However, he deliberately places the tradition of the Lord's Supper at the center of the passage to shape the Corinthians' thinking and reinforce his corrective instruction.

From a literary perspective, confessional material[10] is one of several liturgical forms Paul incorporates into his letters—others include prayers,[11] doxologies,[12] and hymns.[13] Scholars have recognized that Paul uses these forms as rhetorical strategies to persuade his readers (Weima 2016, p. 134). In this case, before offering a direct command (ἐκδέχεσθε), Paul appeals to a shared tradition, reinforcing his argument with the authority of what has been "received and passed on". To support this argument, it is necessary to demonstrate that what Paul is quoting in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 is indeed an authoritative tradition. The use of the verbs παρέλαβον ("I received") and παρέδωκα ("I passed on") in verse 23 strongly indicates that Paul is introducing a confessional or creedal formula. These terms, παραλαμβάνω and παραδίδωμι, are widely recognized as technical vocabulary used to describe the transmission of tradition (Ciampa and Rosner 2010, pp. 548–49).[14]

Several lines of evidence support this interpretation. First, there are equivalents to these terms in the rabbinic literature. The Hebrew verbs קבל(to receive) and מסר(to deliver) were used to describe the faithful handing down of authoritative teachings (Klauck 1993, p. 60).[15] Second, the presence of pre-Pauline tradition is evident. The same pair of verbs appears in 1 Corinthians 15:3, where Paul introduces what is now broadly acknowledged as an early Christian confession (Gathercole 2022, p. 49). Weima offers several pieces of evidence for this conclusion: (1) many of the words and phrases in 15:3b–5 are atypical of Paul's usual vocabulary—for example, "according to the Scriptures", "he was buried", "on the third day", and "the Twelve"; (2) the four lines in vv. 3b–5 exhibit a carefully stylized structure, divided into two parallel units: Christ's death (vv. 3b–4a) and his resurrection (vv. 4b–5); (3) each line begins with the conjunction ὅτι (that), a literary marker often used to introduce quoted material; (4) the confession itself places equal emphasis on Christ's death and resurrection, whereas Paul's surrounding argument in chapter 15 focuses primarily on the resurrection (Weima 2016, pp. 151–52).

Third, the content of 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 bears a striking resemblance to the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper. As Craig S. Keener notes, the similarities suggest that Paul and the Gospel writers are drawing on the same stream of tradition (Keener 2012, p. 98). While the phrase "from the Lord" (ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου) in verse 23 has prompted some to argue that Paul received the tradition directly by divine revelation (e.g., Lenski 1963, pp. 461–63; Morris 1985, p. 157; Alabi 2022, pp. 1–31), most scholars agree with Thiselton that Paul is referring to a tradition that originated with the Lord but was transmitted to him through earlier Christian witnesses (Thiselton 2000, pp. 866–69). Paul's formulation—"I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you"—thus emphasizes both the apostolic origin and authoritative continuity of the Eucharistic tradition, reinforcing Paul's argument in the passage. Therefore, we can conclude that Paul's deliberate placement and framing of this tradition highlight its rhetorical and theological weight: it serves not only to validate his instruction but to anchor his corrective in what the church has received and always confessed.

3.2. The Identity-Sustaining Function of the Eucharist

As discussed above, Paul strategically embeds the tradition of the Lord's Supper in the center of his argument, rather than moving directly from critique (vv. 17–22) to correction (vv. 33–34). This literary placement signals that Paul saw the tradition not merely as background information, but as central to persuading the Corinthians. The question now becomes How does this tradition function in his argument, and what does it reveal about the Eucharist's role in Christian identity?

The tradition Paul cites in verses 23–26—passed down and rehearsed in the Lord's Supper—functions both as a re-presentation of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, drawing believers into spiritual participation with him, and as a means of communal self-understanding, reinforcing who the Corinthians are in relation to Christ and to one another. By recalling the tradition of the Lord's Supper, Paul invokes Jesus's command, "do this in remembrance of me" (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν; vv. 24, 25), urging the Corinthians not merely to repeat the outward action of the Eucharist, but to participate actively in the remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and saving work (Fee 2014, p. 615; Gardner 2018, p. 511). However, Paul is actually saying more than this. His exhortation extends beyond recalling the vertical dimension of the Eucharist; it moves toward re-engaging in a shared, communal act of remembrance—one that enacts the memory of Christ's death and, in doing so, reconstitutes the Corinthians as one body (σῶμα). As evidenced in this confessional material, the early Christians confessed that the bread representing Jesus's body was for them (τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, v. 24)—they who are then described as "the body" in verse 29.

Participation in the Eucharist, then, is a form of embodied remembrance that reaffirms a shared identity grounded in that memory. Whenever they eat the bread and drink from the cup (v. 26a), they are reminded not only of the story of Jesus's death on the cross (v. 26b), but also of their identity as one body. In this way, the Eucharist functions as an identity-sustaining practice, drawing the community together in the present (συνέρχομαι), binding them to the past, and pointing them toward the future—with the shared identity continually affirmed—until the Lord comes (v. 26c).

This understanding aligns with insights from social memory theory. Ritual practices like the Eucharist do not merely preserve memory—they activate and reshape it within a particular community, thereby realigning the participants' sense of self and belonging (Duling 2014, p. 301; Rhodes 2022, p. 229). Paul's appeal to the Lord's Supper tradition fits this pattern: it is not a static reminder, but a dynamic act of reorientation. To put it differently, Paul does not invoke tradition merely for rhetorical effect, nor for the sake of historical continuity. He does so because the Eucharistic tradition embodies the memory that defines the community. By reminding the Corinthians of what they do and what it means when they gather at the Lord's table, Paul seeks to sustain their identity as one body—formed by Christ's death, bound by a shared confession, and re-formed through repeated participation in the meal ("as often as you eat and drink", v. 26). In short, they become what they commemorate.

3.3. Remembering to Become: Jewish Foundations of Eucharistic Identity

To fully grasp the identity-inscribing function Paul assigns to the Eucharist, it is important to recognize that his understanding of ritual memory is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, where remembrance was not merely retrospective but a formative, identity-sustaining act. The Hebrew Scriptures frequently employ the verb זכר(to remember)—169 times in its various forms—not in a passive or merely cognitive sense, but as part of a dynamic process by which Israel continually re-appropriated God's redemptive acts, such as the Exodus, in the life of the present community.[16] This process of remembering found its clearest expression in Israel's liturgical calendar, especially through the annual festivals (Childs 1962, pp. 74–75; Spaulding 2009, p. 39). These repeated celebrations did more than recall the past—they actualized the memory, enabling each generation to participate anew in the foundational events of their faith and, in doing so, to preserve and perpetuate their identity as the people of God.

This emphasis on ritual memory persisted into the Second Temple period, when Jewish identity was no longer monolithic but expressed through a wide variety of theological and cultural forms across both the Land of Israel and the Diaspora (Pearce and Jones 1998, p. 15). Amid this diversity, shared practices such as the pilgrimage festivals served as ritually enacted moments of corporate memory and identity reinforcement. These annual celebrations bound the community together not through doctrinal uniformity, but through embodied participation in commemorative rites—affirming a common story and sustaining a shared identity (Spaulding 2009, p. 43).

Paul's appeal to the tradition of the Lord's Supper mirrors this Jewish understanding of ritual memory as a formative act. His use of the phrase "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24–25) reflects the same mnemonic logic of Israel's festivals, which were designed not merely to recall, but to re-present the redemptive act in the present, so that communal identity might be reaffirmed through symbolic participation. Similarly, for Paul, the Eucharist is not just a cognitive recollection of Jesus's death, but a commemorative event that connects believers with Christ's saving act and reconstitutes them as one body defined by that act (Ábel 2022, pp. 101–2). In this light, Paul's understanding of the Eucharist is in deep continuity with Jewish ritual logic: The Eucharist is a ritual in which memory is enacted liturgically to sustain the church's identity. Through the embodied act of remembering, the church does not simply recall its identity—it performs and perpetuates it.

This understanding of Eucharistic memory is echoed in modern liturgical theology. Scholars such as Saliers and Moon emphasize that in the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine bring to the minds of participants the story of Christ—not merely through passive reflection, but through a multisensory encounter: listening, eating, drinking, singing, and communing (Saliers 1996, pp. 13–14; Moon 2015, p. 81).

4. Living the Memory: The Eucharist and the Church's Identity Today

The Corinthians gathered to share meals in the name of the Lord's Supper, yet, shockingly, Paul declares that they are subject to divine judgment for their abuse of the table. In verse 31, he writes that "If we examined (διεκρίνομεν) ourselves truly, we would not be judged". The grammar here is significant: Paul employs a second-class conditional construction, which assumes the premise to be false. In other words, the statement "we would not be judged" is a simple assertion of a non-fact, implying that true self-examination is not taking place. From a rhetorical perspective, Ben Witherington observes that legal language permeates and defines the mood of this entire section, framing the Corinthians' conduct in terms of judicial culpability (Witherington 1995, p. 252). Paul's point is sobering—because the Corinthians are failing to examine themselves rightly, they are exposed to God's judgment. This "examination" (διεκρίνομεν, v. 31) is directly connected to the "discerning" (διακρίνων, v. 29) of the body—understood, as discussed above, to mean the gathered community itself. Had the Corinthians genuinely evaluated whether they were living out their identity as one body, they would not be under judgment. What, then, does Paul's warning say to the church today?

While it is unlikely that churches today will repeat the Corinthian error in precisely the same form, the underlying tendencies toward division, status-seeking, and social exclusion might still persist. The fact that such dynamics often unfold outside the formal celebration of the Lord's Supper does not diminish their seriousness (Seifrid 2016, p. 124). In a fractured and stratified world, the church is called to be a sign of new creation by embodying a reconciled and unified community (J. K. A. Smith 2009, pp. 202–3). The communion table has historically served as a space where reconciliation is not only remembered but enacted. According to 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, the Eucharist is not merely symbolic—it is a formative practice that shapes and sustains the church's identity as one body. For this reason, the church today is called to recover the Eucharist's original function by gathering in genuine unity, free from partiality and division, as a visible sign of Christ's body in the world. The church has one head—Christ (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 2:10)—and is thus called to live as one body (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24) (Bird 2013, pp. 833–34). As discussed above, this identity is not merely remembered cognitively but enacted ritually. The Eucharist functions as an embodied act of remembrance, one that renews and reinforces the church's shared identity. It is at the table that the unity of the church becomes not only proclaimed but made visible. Similarly, in traditions where sacramental theology has been minimized and the Eucharist is often reduced to an act of cognitive remembrance, this passage challenges churches to recover the Eucharist as an act of formative participation—not only in Christ but also in one another. Concrete steps could include restoring the communal dimension of the meal and emphasizing reconciliation and shared life within the congregation, which is the body of Christ. To conclude, from a literary perspective, 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 reveals a vision in which communal memory, ritual participation, and ecclesial identity are inseparably intertwined—calling the church in every age to become what it remembers, and to remember who it is by gathering as one body around the table of the Lord.

5. Conclusions

This study has sought to determine whether the New Testament—particularly Paul—supports the claim advanced by liturgical theologians: that Christian liturgy, and especially the Eucharist, plays a vital role in forming and sustaining faith. Through a literary analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, the findings affirm that it does. The conclusion based on this observation may be summarized in two points: (1) Paul intentionally frames his discussion of the Eucharist with the verb συνέρχομαι ("to come together"), signaling that the issue at Corinth was the failure to embody communal identity. The Eucharist is intended to form the church as one body—distinct from the status-based divisions characteristic of Roman banquet culture. (2) Paul deliberately places the early Christian confession of the Lord's Supper at the center of his argument, presenting the Eucharist as a dynamic act of remembrance that reconstitutes the community around Christ's saving work. This understanding, as demonstrated, is deeply rooted in Jewish conceptions of ritual memory, in which liturgical acts not only recall the past but renew and reinforce the communal identity. At the heart of the Eucharist, however, is not merely the formation of Christian identity but first and foremost participation in the presence and redemptive work of Christ himself. As Paul indicates especially in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, believers partake in a vertical communion (κοινωνία) with Christ's body and blood, and from this union flows the horizontal communion with one another as one body. Thus, the sustaining of Christian identity in the Eucharist is inseparably grounded in participation in Christ's saving sacrifice.

The significance of this study is as follows: First, it advances current scholarship by grounding the formative function of the Eucharist more explicitly in the biblical text. While previous liturgical theology has often explored this function from philosophical or psychological perspectives, its exegetical basis in Paul's letters has been comparatively underdeveloped. Second, the literary approach adopted here—attentive to rhetorical structure and authorial intent—sheds fresh light on Paul's Eucharistic theology and offers a more textually anchored challenge to the contemporary church: to recover the formative and sustaining function of the Supper in shaping Christian identity. Finally, as a proposal for future research, similar literary analysis could be applied to other Pauline texts associated with liturgical forms—such as doxologies, hymns, and confessional formulas—placing them in dialogue with insights from liturgical studies. Such interdisciplinary engagement will deepen our understanding of how early Christians conceived of worship not simply as expression, but as formation.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 As Moon rightly observes, identity is not separate from faith but serves as a vital channel through which faith is lived and embodied. For a detailed study of the relationship between faith and identity, see Moon (2015), pp. 87–90.

2 Harm W. Hollander contends that the term κοινωνία in both verses 16 and 17 should be understood ecclesiologically, meaning that it refers not primarily to an individual's participation in Christ but rather to partnership among the believers (Hollander 2009, p. 457).

3 Cf. Did. 9.4.

4 Cf. (Fee 2014, p. 542).

5 In Paul's letters, inclusio is a literary device in which a key word, phrase, or sentence appears at both the beginning and end of a literary unit, serving to mark its boundaries (Weima 2016, pp. 158–60).

6 Cf. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 615c–619c.

7 Cf. Xenophon, *Symp.* 1.20; Xenophon, *Anab.* 263; Plato, *Symp.* 174e. Konrad Vössing and Mark A. Seifrid, by contrast, argue that the Corinthians may have sat on benches at tables rather than reclining, given Paul's assumption in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that all participants are seated during worship (Vössing 2011, pp. 54–55; Seifrid 2016, p. 123). However, the majority of scholars concur with Matthias Kinlighardt's observation that there was no distinction between Hellenistic and Jewish community meals. People reclined while eating and drinking together for several hours in the evening (Klinghardt 1996, p. 24; Taussig 2012, p. 30).

[8] See also Murphy-O'Connor (1983), pp. 153–61; D. E. Smith (2012), p. 108. Cf. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 679A–B.
[9] Cf. Jude 12; Ign. *Smyrn.* 7.1; 8.2; Clement, *Paed.* 2.4.3; 2.4.5; Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.16.
[10] 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Cor. 11:23–26; 15:3b–5.
[11] Rom. 15:5–6, 13; 1 Thess. 3:11, 3:12–13; 2 Thess. 2:16–17; 3:15.
[12] Rom. 11:36b; 16:25–27; Gal. 1:5; Phil. 4:20; Eph. 3:20–21; 1 Tim. 1:17, 6:16b; 2 Tim. 4:18b.
[13] Phil. 2:6–11; 1 Tim. 3:16. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:22–23.
[14] Ciampa and Rosner 2010, pp. 548–49.
[15] Cf. Pirkei Avot 1.1; Josephus *Ant.* 13.297, 408.
[16] Cf. Num. 11:5; 15:39–40; Deut. 5:15; 7:18; 8:2, 18; 9:7, 28; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22.

References

Primary Sources

Clement of Alexandria. *Paedagogus*.
Ignatius of Antioch. *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*.
Josephus. *Jewish Antiquities*.
Plato. *Symposium*.
Plutarch. *Quaestionum Convivialium Libri IX*.
Tertullian. *Apologeticus*.
Xenophon. *Anabasis*.
Xenophon. *Symposium*.

Secondary Sources

Alabi, Afetame. 2022. 'I Received from the Lord': Assessing the Arguments Against a Pauline Claim to Revelation in 1 Corinthians 11:23. *Neotestamentica* 56: 1–31. [CrossRef]
Ábel, František. 2022. Remembering in the Eucharistic Tradition Reflected in 1 Corinthians 11:24–25 (17–34): Its Meaning and Role in Eschatological Perspective. *Communio Viatorum* 64: 83–102.
Barclay, William. 1975. *The Letters of the Corinthians*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
Barrett, Charles Kingsley. 1968. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New York: Harper & Row.
Bird, Michael F. 2013. *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
Blomberg, Craig. 1994. *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
Blue, Bradley B. 1993. Love Feast. In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, pp. 578–79.
Bornkamm, Günther. 1969. *Early Christian Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
Childs, Brevard S. 1962. *Memory and Tradition in Israel*. Naperville: A. R. Allenson.
Ciampa, Roy E., and Brian S. Rosner. 2010. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Conzelmann, Hans. 1975. *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 2000. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Duling, Dennis C. 2014. Social Memory and Commemoration of the Death of 'the Lord': Paul's Response to the Lord's Supper Factions at Corinth. In *Memory and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A Conversation with Barry Schwartz*. Edited by Tom Thatcher. Atlanta: SBL Press, pp. 289–310.
Fee, Gordon D. 2014. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Gardner, Paul. 2018. *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
Garland, David E. 2003. *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
Gathercole, Simon. 2022. *The Gospel and the Gospels: Christian Proclamation and Early Jesus Books*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Hays, Richard B. 1997. *First Corinthians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
Hollander, Harm W. 2009. The Idea of Fellowship in 1 Corinthians 10.14–22. *New Testament Studies* 55: 456–70. [CrossRef]
Käsemann, Ernst. 1964. *Essays on New Testament Themes*. London: SCM Press.
Keener, Craig S. 2012. *1–2 Corinthians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Klauck, Hans-Josef. 1993. Presence in the Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 in the Context of Hellenistic Religious History. In *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts*. Edited by Ben F. Meyer. Macon: Mercer University Press, pp. 58–74.

Klinghardt, Matthias. 1996. *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern*. Tübingen: Francke Verlag.

Knoch, Otto. 1993. 'Do This in Memory of Me!' (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:24ff.): The Celebration of the Eucharist in the Primitive Christian Communities. In *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts*. Edited by Ben F. Meyer. Macon: Mercer University Press, pp. 1–10.

Kwon, Yon-Gyong. 2022. *1 Corinthians*. Seoul: IVP.

Lee, Jin Hwan. 2018. *The Lord's Supper in Corinth in the Context of Greco-Roman Private Association*. Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic.

Lee, Young-Jine. 2012. The Lord's Supper for Fellowship: 1 Corinthians 11:23b–25. *Journal of the New Testament Society of Korea* 19: 561–92.

Lenski, Richard Charles Henry. 1963. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.

Marshall, I. Howard. 1997. *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*. Carlisle: Paternoster Publishing.

Metzger, Bruce M. 1994. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Moon, Hwarang. 2015. *Engraved Upon the Heart: Children, the Cognitive Challenged, and Liturgy's Influence on Faith Formation*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock.

Morris, Leon. 1985. *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. 1983. *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*. Wilmington: Michael Glazier.

Pearce, Sarah, and Siân Jones. 1998. Introduction: Jewish Local Identities and Patriotism in the Graeco-Roman Period. In *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period*. Edited by Sarah Pearce and Siân Jones. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, pp. 13–28.

Rhodes, Michael J. 2022. *Formative Feasting: Practices and Virtue Ethics in Deuteronomy's Tithe Meal and the Corinthian Lord's Supper*. New York: Peter Lang.

Saliers, Don E. 1996. *Worship and Spirituality*. Akron: OSL Publications.

Schweizer, Eduard. 1971. σῶμα, σωματικός, σύσσωμος. In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, vol. 7, pp. 1024–94.

Seifrid, Mark A. 2016. Gift of Remembrance: Paul and the Lord's Supper in Corinth. *Concordia Journal* 42: 119–29.

Smith, Dennis E. 2012. Hospitality, the House Church, and Early Christian Identity. In *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum/Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity*. Edited by Matthias Klinghardt and Hal E. Taussig. Tübingen: Francke, pp. 103–17.

Smith, James K. A. 2009. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Snyder, Graydon E. 1992. *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary*. Macon: Mercer University Press.

Spaulding, Mary B. 2009. *Commemorative Identities: Jewish Social Memory and the Johannine Feast of Booths*. London and New York: T&T Clark.

Streett, R. Alan. 2013. *Subversive Meals: An Analysis of the Lord's Supper under Roman Domination During the First Century*. Eugene: Pickwick Publications.

Taussig, Hal. 2012. Elaborating a New Paradigm: The Work of the Society of Biblical Literature's Seminar on Meals in the Greco-Roman World. In *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum/Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity*. Edited by Matthias Klinghardt and Hal E. Taussig. Tübingen: Francke, pp. 25–40.

Thiselton, Anthony C. 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Vössing, Konrad. 2011. Das 'Herrenmahl' und 1 Cor. 11 im Kontext antiker Gemeinschaftsmähler. *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 54: 41–72.

Weima, Jeffrey A. D. 2016. *Paul the Ancient Letter Writer: An Introduction to Epistolary Analysis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Witherington, Ben, III. 1995. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Witherington, Ben, III. 2007. *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper*. Waco: Baylor University Press.
Wright, Nicholas Thomas. 2002. *The Meal Jesus Gave Us*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

religions

MDPI

Article

Liturgical Narrative and the Imagination

Michelle L. Whitlock

Garett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL 60201, USA; michelle.whitlock@garrett.edu

Abstract: Paul Ricœur's narrative hermeneutic provides a unique lens for interpreting liturgy as narrative. Liturgy begins with the collective, prefigured knowledge of the assembly and configures symbols, music, prayers, scriptures, and actions into an interpretive narrative. This process engages the liturgical assembly's imagination to synthesize its unique narrative of God's divine story. This paper explores the function of imagination in the formative process of liturgical narrative arguing that imagination shapes human knowing and being through liturgical narrative.

Keywords: liturgy; worship; faith formation; ritual studies; narrative; imagination

1. Introduction

In twenty-first century American culture, the word "narrative" commonly refers to a fictional story, a literary form, or an unseen voice in a movie. Perhaps less often, "narrative" is also a crucial component of human cognition and plays a critical role in human formation (Hauerwas and Jones 1997). The narratives we tell about ourselves shape our understanding of the world around us, our personal identity, our relationships, and our faith. Narratives require imagination to synthesize images, symbols, characters, and actions into a plot. Imagination is a synthetic process that shapes human knowing and being, and it is a critical part of narrative formation.

Philosopher Paul Ricœur describes narrative as the interpretive process of narrating life as a synthesis of events, characters, time, place, and actions (Ricœur 1991). Like stories, narratives have a beginning, middle, and end. Narratives also create meaning through the act of synthesizing elements of the plot into a cohesive whole. Each time we narrate our life and faith we create new meaning and understanding. Narrative, then, is the process by which we interpret life as it is lived.

According to Stephen Crites, all of human experience has a narrative quality (Crites 1997b). He identifies two kinds of stories in human life. Mundane stories are the events of our lives, while sacred stories are the stories that shape our understanding of the world and our place within that world. Crites claims human life exists within time and in the context of a sacred story, but is described through the mundane stories of our lives. People learn the sacred stories that shape their identity by enacting the story repeatedly over a lifetime.

Sacred stories, or myths, are shared by a community and are transmitted through a ritual embodiment of the narrative. It is impossible to separate the narrative from the ritual or the ritual from the narrative. Ricœur writes, "what the myth says, the ritual performs" (Ricœur 1989b, loc. 782). As a form of ritual, Christian liturgy is the performance of God's divine story in the world. It makes the story of faith real and present in the life of the gathered assembly.

Faith narratives require some level of imagination to believe in the unseen and hope for the future (Heb. 11:1). This is also true in the narrative performance of liturgy. According to Thomas Schattauer, "liturgical imagination takes the words and actions—all the things of worship we know and expect—and makes them ever-new to those gathered in the present moment" (Schattauer 2019). Liturgy weaves together the scripture, symbols, and actions of faith into a narrative shaped by the unique imagination of the gathered assembly.

An exploration of the connection between liturgical imagination and liturgical narrative suggests that imagination powers the liturgical narrative, as it configures human knowing and being.

2. Liturgical Narrative

In the Christian tradition, the Bible contains a written form of our sacred story, but it is the narrative telling of the story in liturgy that shapes the Christian understanding of the world. Paul Connerton believes the story is embedded into the heart, mind, and body of the participants. He writes, "in habitual memory the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body" (Connerton 1989, loc. 1562). The repetition of the story from week to week invites the participants into the story and embeds the story into their lives. Participants become part of the story, and the story becomes part of the participants.

The Bible, of course, includes many literary genres that exist in relation to one another. Genres are usually understood as categories or classifications, but Ricœur talks about them as modes of discourse (Ricœur 1989c, loc. 540). Narrative, poetry, prophecy, and other genres function as discourse within each biblical text, between the text and the reader, and between the texts themselves. For example, each Psalm carries with it an internal dialogue from beginning to end. Every reader engages the Epistles from a unique perspective. The Gospel narratives are informed by the narratives, prophecy, wisdom, and Psalms from the Hebrew Bible.

Like scripture, liturgy uses several modes of discourse to embody the larger story of God's divine work in the world. Gordon Lathrop describes worship as a gathering in which "the Bible is read and then interpreted as having to do with us" (Lathrop 1993, p. 15). The prayers, hymns, actions, and symbols of the liturgy carry with them, implicitly or explicitly, the biblical story. Mark Searle describes this narrative quality of liturgy as narrating God's divine plan throughout time (Searle 1982). He notes that the liturgical assembly becomes part of the unfolding narrative and bears some responsibility for what is yet to be.

In a similar way, Ricœur argues we are narrators of our own story (Ricœur 1991). He claims the stories we narrate about ourselves are what make us human. Ricœur's narrative hermeneutic is derived from his textual hermeneutic through an understanding of "text" as meaningful action, sign, symbol, or anything with a relatively fixed meaning (Ricœur 1981). He describes a three-part process that begins with a prefigured understanding, moves through a critical explanation, and develops a new understanding, or second naïveté (Ricœur 1984). The new understanding then becomes the prefigured understanding and the interpretive process repeats indefinitely.

The relationship between text and action is an analogy. That is, an observer interprets actions in the same way a reader interprets a text. As narrators of our own stories, we interpret actions, signs, and symbols of our lives as we narrate their meaning. We are constantly configuring the narrative (the text) and reconfiguring our lives (the reader). While we can never fully control the events of our lives, we can control how we synthesize them into a narrative. Thus, we interpret life at the intersection of the stories we tell and the life we live.

Ricœur's narrative theory is built on the concepts of *muthos* (emplotment) and *mimesis* (imitation) as derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Emplotment is understood as the organization of events, people, actions, symbols, and time as they are represented in the narrative. For Ricœur, emplotment happens in three mimetic movements that he calls prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration (Ricœur 1984). In this sense, narrative is "inventing another work of synthesis—a plot" (Ricœur 1984, p. 5). Narrative is the synthesis of events, people, symbols, and actions into a temporal plot. Each week, the liturgical narrative describes what we know at the beginning of worship, narrates the story of God's presence in the world, and prescribes a reconfiguration of our knowledge, what Ricœur calls a second naïveté.

The narrative process also shapes our identity as a conversation between self and other. Ricœur uses the Latin words, *idem* and *ipse*, to represent the relationship between an unchanging self (*idem*) and an ever-changing other (*ipse*) as a dialectic of personal identity (Ricœur 1992). *Idem* is the part of identity that remains constant within oneself and across time, while *ipse* is the part of our identity that develops over time in response to the world around us. The dialectic between *idem* and *ipse* occurs within the process of narrating life and faith. At the beginning of the story, *idem* and *ipse* share a prefigured understanding of identity. Throughout the narrative, they configure and refigure each other. Eventually, the two arrive at a new understanding of identity. Christian identity, then, might be understood as the dialectic between the constant, unchanging tradition (*idem*) and the unique, ever-changing assembly (*ipse*).

The organization, or emplotment, of worship is a theological act that interprets the Christian narrative and forms Christian identity. It is where the faith story intersects with the identity of the assembly. According to Ricœur, the meaning of any narrative "wells up from *the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader*" (Ricœur 1991, p. 430). Thus, when the liturgical assembly gathers to embody the story of God's divine plan, the meaning of the narrative emerges at the intersection of faith traditions (the text) and the assembly (the reader). This process invites the assembly to become part of the liturgical narrative, and the narrative becomes part of the assembly.

3. The Liturgical Narrator

If liturgy is a narrative, then the narrator and subject of liturgy is the gathered assembly. Liturgical assemblies gather to enact the story of God's divine action in the world. No two assemblies are the same. An assembly with the same people in the same place still gathers at a different time. The people themselves are changed over time. Thus, while the historical, traditional story of God remains the same, each liturgical assembly is unique. The liturgical assembly narrates its own changing identity in conversation with God's unchanging presence in the world.

Liturgy requires a liturgical assembly to synthesize the symbols, images, sounds, actions, and words to create meaning. In fact, Lathrop argues that the liturgical assembly is the most important "thing" of liturgy because without an assembly the symbols, words, time, and space have no meaning (Lathrop 1993). The people gather to do the theological work of liturgy, and the embodiment of liturgy requires people "to set these symbolic objects in motion, to weave them together in a pattern of meaning" (Lathrop 1993, pp. 88–89). Liturgy does not exist without the people of the liturgical assembly, but the people do not narrate individual stories. Rather, the people serve as one narrator and interpreter of the divine story.

The liturgical assembly, then, is composed of many people, or characters, which act together as one liturgical assembly. This is not unlike the many identities each person has in their own lives. Developmental psychologist Dan McAdams argues that humans are composed of many characters, or *imagoes*, which work together to create individual identity. He defines *imago* as "a personified and idealized concept of the self" (McAdams 1993, p. 99). For example, my *imagoes* of mother, pastor, musician, and scholar do not exist individually; they are all part of my personal identity, and they work together to interpret the world around me. Likewise, the many people, or characters, gathered in the liturgical assembly work together to narrate the story of God's divine acts in the world in conversation with their collective identity.

Each liturgical assembly is "a unique presence of God and various members of the community, such that, when gathered, concretize in the here and now. . . a communion of the human and divine" (Zimmerman 1994, p. 48). The collective gathering of people with God creates a space for holy conversation and divine narrative. Joyce Zimmerman draws on Ricœur's identity dialectic to describe the nature of the assembly as a collective subject. She names three interpretive actions of the assembly: participation, distanciation, and appropriation.

Participation is defined as "a fundamental 'belonging' to a particular tradition" (Zimmerman 1993, pp. 38–39). Participation, then, is a function of *idem* (same) as a constant throughout time and space. On the other hand, distanciation is the interpretive function of *ipse* (other) that allows the assembly to narrate the story from a unique perspective. Participation and distanciation exist simultaneously as interpretive actions of the assembly. They function as both a dialectic with each other and as a narrative discourse between the story and its narrator. Finally, appropriation is the interpretive act that results from the liturgical narrative. It is the interpretative act that Ricœur might call the second naïveté. According to Zimmerman, appropriation is enacted in a Christian life.

The assembly serves as the liturgical narrator as they participate, distanciate, and appropriate the liturgy at the intersection of God's divine narrative and the human experience. It seems appropriate, then, that Ricœur believes a theology that interprets the intersection of God's divine plan and human action and "calls for the narrative mode as its primary hermeneutical mode" (Ricœur 1989a, loc. 2695). In this sense, liturgy is a narrative hermeneutic and the assembly is the narrative interpreter. The assembly acts as one subject to interpret the liturgy.

Each liturgical assembly is a unique gathering of people, and each person comes with their own life narrative. Even when the same people gather at a different time, they are not the same. The changes may be small and hard to identify, but each assembly is a new and different gathering of people. Their personal narratives, and therefore their collective narrative, have developed and changed since they last gathered. This new liturgical assembly narrates its own, new dialectic with God's divine plan.

4. The Liturgical Imagination

The narrative process draws from a collection of images that already exist in individual or communal memory. The liturgical assembly uses its collective imagination to narrate a unique dialectic with God's divine story. According to David Power, the Word of God comes to us in many biblical and liturgical genres with a "holy imagination" at work in configuring our understanding of the world (Power 2011, pp. 172–73). Imagination makes the narrative real and present in the life of the assembly. It allows the liturgical assembly to place itself in the story, embody the narrative, and experience Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Liturgical imagination weaves together the songs, symbols, and actions of worship into something we know and experience.

To understand liturgical imagination, we must first look at the definition of imagination. In his study of faith formation, James Fowler defines image "as a vague, felt inner representation of some state of affairs and of our feelings about it" (Fowler 1981, p. 26). Images are the sights, memories, and feelings of human experience. These images are generated and organized by our imagination as a tool for interpreting life. Fowler argues that images are the beginning of human life and represent all knowledge and experience. Everything we see, taste, hear, feel, and smell is gathered by our senses and stored in our memory as images. These images become part of the stories we tell about ourselves, and our shared images create meaning for our lives together.

Gathering and organizing images is only one function of human imagination. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant argues that imagination is a cognitive function of the human mind (Kant 2003). It is a synthetic act of organizing knowledge into understanding. In this sense, imagination is a verb. That is, imagination is not simply a collection of images, but the act of synthesizing them into an understanding or meaning. Rolf-Peter Horstmann takes Kant's argument further by suggesting imagination is a series of synthetic activities that "contributes to the realization of one synthetic act" (Horstmann 2018, p. 34). Imagination is the ongoing process of collecting and synthesizing several parts into a whole.

Ricœur also draws on this dual understanding of imagination. He defines it as both "rule-governed invention and a power of redescription" (Ricœur 1989d, loc. 2137). The rules of imagination include the collection of images that are redescribed, or organized, in a new way. There are rules of cognitive knowledge that exist before the interpretive process of redescription, but imagination always goes beyond the text and points us toward something new. It has "the power to open us to new possibilities, to discover another way of seeing, or acceding to a new rule in receiving the instruction of the exception" (Ricœur 1989e, loc. 4090). Imagination integrates the knowledge of what was with the experience of being now and the understanding of what is yet to be. It is both epistemological (rules) and ontological (redescription).

Ray L. Hart also sees two aspects of imagination. He claims imagination is both a "mental act" of cognition and a "way of being human" (Hart 1979, p. 184). He argues that humans are always learning and always revealing new meaning in life and that imagination is an essential part of this process. Humans, according to Hart, are always unfinished and engaged in a process of self-revelation. Humans are always in the process of being human. Hart aims "to show that a hermeneutic of revelation shares in, and is formally coextensive with, a hermeneutic of human being" (Hart 1979, p. 182). Imagination is an essential part of the revelatory process that forms both our way of knowing and our way of being. It forms our knowledge and experience of the world around us.

Yet another definition of imagination comes from Crites, who also focuses on the formative nature of imagination. He defines it as "the activity of holistic formation, forming the sorts of multidimensional images, associated, and presented against a complex visual, aural, narrative background, that make up immediate experience. Indeed, imagination is a synthesizing activity in the formation of experience" (Crites 1981, p. 72). Imagination is a complex, formative human activity that synthesizes knowledge and experience into something new. Jullian Hartt questions Crites' definition of imagination, claiming knowledge and imagination are both functions of human cognition (Hartt 1997). Hartt's argument suggests that cognition alone forms a human identity independent of narrative and experience. It may be more accurate to define cognition as knowing, experience as being, and imagination as the integration of knowing and being into a formative narrative.

There are some common threads in these different definitions of imagination. First, imagination is a collection of images, or pre-existing knowledge. Second, it is a synthetic act that weaves together the collection of images or pre-existing knowledge. Third, imagination is a formative act that shapes human experience and identity. Finally, imagination is both ontological and epistemological, meaning it shapes both our knowing and our being. Drawing on these common themes, imagination might be defined as the synthesis of epistemological knowing and ontological being into a formative narrative of human becoming. In the liturgical setting, imagination is the act of knowing, experiencing, and synthesizing the words, actions, sights, and sounds of liturgy into a formative faith narrative.

5. The Narrativity of Liturgical Imagination

Schattauer identifies six forms of imagination that create a "well-formed liturgy" as scriptural imagination, sacramental imagination, ecclesial imagination, eschatological imagination, contextual imagination, and ritual imagination (Schattauer 2019). Each liturgical assembly engages these forms of imagination as it narrates the liturgy. Thus, liturgical narrative cannot exist without imagination and liturgical imagination is inherently narrative. Since both narrative and imagination are synthetic acts, the synthesis of Schattauer's imaginative forms might be called narrative imagination.

Scriptural imagination integrates several biblical genres into a larger narrative. Ricœur describes scriptural imagination as "a narrative and symbolic form of imagination" (Ricœur 1989d, loc. 2204). He notes that imagination is at work in the text itself, in reading the text, and after reading the text. Imagination is an ongoing process before, during, and after reading scripture. Scripture is a written text, interpreted by narrator, and lived by those who read, hear, and narrate the story.

Crites describes the Gospel as a narrative that unites the life and death of Christ with those who hear and narrate the story (Crites 1997a). Liturgy, then, is an act of scriptural imagination at the intersection of the biblical narrative and human experience. This occurs in the reading of scripture, but also in hymns and prayers that imagine the relationship between life and scripture. The liturgical assembly imagines scripture as it narrates the actions, words, and symbols of liturgy.

Sacramental imagination narrates the meaning of sacred things and sacred words. David Power describes the verbal polyphony of biblical genres and the intertextuality of sacrament as a language event, made real through sacramental imagination. He writes, "it is within prayer that the sacramental imagination exercises creativity, construing what has been heard in the scriptures to meet new situations" (Power 2011, p. 175). The words of scripture and liturgy have their own sacramental meaning when they are spoken aloud as proclamation and prayer.

The symbols of bread, wine, and water are familiar things, but it takes sacramental imagination to see them as body, blood, and bath. These sacred things do not carry independent meaning, they are in constant juxtaposition with each other and with sacred words (Lathrop 1993). Sacramental imagination allows the bread to become Christ's body and the wine to become his blood. The assembly imagines the sacraments through prayer, song, and word as it narrates the meaning of bread, wine, bath, and word.

Ecclesial imagination narrates the identity of the church as the body of Christ. Ricœur argues that ecclesial identity is shaped in relation to sacred texts (Ricœur 1989f). He identifies liturgy, and specifically the Eucharist, as a sacred text because it institutes a sacred act within the assembly. The body of Christ is both present in the gathered assembly and transcendent across time.

Canonical texts and symbols connect each assembly to the body of Christ. Ricœur argues a congregation is changed when it strays from the canonical texts and symbols of the Christian faith. The Lord's Prayer, for example, is shared with Christians around the world in their own language. Changing the content or omitting the prayer changes the assembly's relationship with the universal church. It is one thing that connects assemblies as they imagine their connection to the larger body of Christ across time and space.

Eschatological imagination looks ahead to narrate the telos, or the end goal of liturgical performance. Unlike theater, liturgy is performed in an enacted manner that integrates symbols, time, and action into the lives of the participants. According to Richard McCall, "the *anamnesis* of the act of the Triune God, using symbolic means, to enact that Trinity in the lives of the enactors, transforming them through faith into the church" (McCall 2007, p. 103). He describes *anamnesis* as creating a new, real event in the present that recalls the past events of our story.

McCall claims all performance modes have an end goal, or a telos. In liturgy, he argues, the end goal is the formation of a Christian identity and world view. This is an ongoing process of interpretation that evokes Hart's "unfinished man" and Ricœur's "second naivete". A benediction, for example, often acknowledges the end goal by offering a charge to the congregation. The assembly imagines a telos as it rehearses its role in the Kin-dom of God.

Contextual imagination narrates the unique culture and experience of each assembly. In his book, *Common Worship*, E. Byron Anderson wrestles with the church's tension between unity and diversity (Anderson 2017). In one sense, liturgical assemblies are united by the common practice of worship, but there will always be cultural and experiential differences. Culture, experience, and context are always part of the liturgical narrative.

Liturgy is, by nature, a contextual experience. While the fundamental texts and symbols of liturgy are the same, the narrative performance of liturgy is unique to each context. The assembly's sacramental, ecclesial, and ritual imaginations remain in constant conversation with its unique traditions and practices. The most obvious example of this is the many musical styles that exist in churches around the world. Each assembly imagines the liturgical narrative in their own way to remain relevant in the assembly's context.

Finally, ritual imagination narrates the liturgy itself. The narrative imagination of the assembly interprets the sacred story through the ritual. Liturgy, then, is a ritual that enacts the sacred story of God's action in the world. Like any myth–ritual relationship, the ritual cannot be separated from the narrative. When rituals change, the narrative changes.

At the same time, humans are imperfect people with imperfect imaginations. Liturgical narrative can form a strong faith and Christian life, but it can also form a questionable theology and practice. The narrative changes when the communion table is moved to the back wall, or the Passing of the Peace becomes a ten-minute greeting. Thankfully, the assembly imagines the ritual anew each time it gathers to narrate the story and rehearse its Christian identity.

Liturgical narrative goes beyond the biblical story to include music, symbols, action, and proclamation. It is an interpretive act in which the assembly actively participates in the hermeneutical process of narrating sacred texts. From Ricœur's perspective, liturgical imagination is a narrative discourse between the assembly's prefigured knowledge and its experience of recalling God's divine story. In this sense, narrative imagination is the primary mode of liturgical theology and the synthesis of Schattauer's six imaginations.

6. Conclusions

Imagination and narrative are essential functions of human life and faith. They are complex processes that shape personal and communal identity. Imagination collects and synthesizes our pre-existing knowledge into experiences of knowing and being human. Narrative weaves together, or synthesizes, the characters, place, time, and events of life into an interpretation of human identity.

Understanding imagination as a formative, synthetic process may be the first step into starting a broader conversation about the function of imagination in liturgy. The present paper is an initial exploration of the relationship between liturgical narrative and imagination. Future studies may engage additional scholars and continue to challenge common understandings of narrative and imagination. The practical application of these theories should also be addressed.

In the context of Christian liturgy, narrative imagination is both an ecclesial performance of the story we know and an eschatological rehearsal of what is yet to be. Liturgical imagination draws on prefigured knowledge to narrate human experience and prescribe narrative identity. The eschatological nature of liturgy relies on the ability to imagine the unknown future. The liturgical assembly engages its collective imagination to synthesize the words, actions, and symbols of worship into a narrative. Liturgical imagination powers the formative narrative of Christian liturgy, as the assembly configures human knowing and being.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Anderson, E. Byron. 2017. *Common Worship: Tradition, Formation, Mission*. Nashville: Foundery Books.

Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. New York: Cambridge University Press, Kindle.

Crites, Stephen. 1981. Unfinished Figure: On Theology and Imagination. In *Unfinished*. . .*: Essays in Honor of Ray Hart*. JAAR Thematic Studies. Edited by Mark C. Taylor. Chico: Scholars Press.

Crites, Stephen. 1997a. A Respectful Reply to the Assertorical Theologian. In *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.

Crites, Stephen. 1997b. The Narrative Quality of Experience. In *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.

Fowler, James W. 1981. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. New York: Harper Collins.

Hart, Ray L. 1979. *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation*. New York: Seabury Press.

Hartt, Julian. 1997. Theological Investments in Story: Some Comments on Recent Developments and Some Proposals. In *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and L. Gregory Jones. 1997. Introduction. In *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.
Horstmann, Rolf-Peter. 2018. *Kant's Power of Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kant, Immanuel. 2003. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Guttenberg Ebook. Translated by J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Available online: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4280/4280-h/4280-h.htm#chap50 (accessed on 17 April 2024).
Lathrop, Gordon. 1993. *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
McAdams, Dan P. 1993. *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. New York: William Morrow and Company.
McCall, Richard D. 2007. *Do This: Liturgy as Performance*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
Power, David N. 2011. *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company.
Ricœur, Paul. 1981. The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text. In *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Edited by John B. Thompson. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Ricœur, Paul. 1984. *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, vol. 1.
Ricœur, Paul. 1989a. Interpretive Narrative. In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Kindle.
Ricœur, Paul. 1989b. Manifestation and Proclamation. In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Kindle.
Ricœur, Paul. 1989c. Philosophy and Religious Language. In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Kindle.
Ricœur, Paul. 1989d. The Bible and Imagination. In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Kindle.
Ricœur, Paul. 1989e. The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God. In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Kindle.
Ricœur, Paul. 1989f. The "Sacred" Text and the Community. In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Kindle.
Ricœur, Paul. 1991. Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator. In *A Ricœur Reader*. Edited by Mario J. Valdes. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
Ricœur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University Press.
Schattauer, Thomas. 2019. Training Liturgical Imaginations. Deeper Understandings. Available online: www.LivingLutheran.org/2019/12/training-liturgical-imagination/ (accessed on 11 August 2024).
Searle, Mark. 1982. The Narrative Quality of Christian Liturgy. *Chicago Studies* 21.
Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. 1993. *Liturgy as Living Faith: A Liturgical Spirituality*. Cranbury: Associated University Press.
Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. 1994. Liturgical Assembly: Who is the Subject of Liturgy? *Liturgical Ministry* 3: 41–51.

religions

MDPI

Article

"Taken, Blessed, Broken, Given": Lukan Table Practices in the Faith Formation of Christian Communities

Timothy R. Gaines

School of Theology and Christian Ministry, Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, TN 37210, USA; trgaines@trevecca.edu

Abstract: Luke's Eucharistic pattern not only serves as a Christological marker, but formative pattern for Christian faith communities. In this article, I appeal to Luke's Eucharistic pattern to advance the claim that hospitable Eucharistic table practices are not only consistent with Luke's Christology but also form faith that is capable of confronting and dismantling psychological disgust responses to outsiders. This motif is expanded in Luke–Acts, where acts of table fellowship become the places where socio-moral barriers are transgressed, signaling the good news of the gospel, especially for Gentiles. Drawing from biblical scholarship as well as recent work in psychology, I will advance the claim that hospitable Eucharistic practices not only expose disgust psychology in the faith formation of persons but also act as a potential balm, forming persons according to the good news proclaimed in Luke–Acts.

Keywords: Eucharist; Lord's Supper; liturgy; Luke–Acts; disgust; psychology; open table

1. Introduction

With eleven distinct stories of Jesus engaging in table fellowship, Luke's gospel highlights this practice as a means of culture formation and an arena of the gospel's activity. Karris has shown that beyond meal accounts, food and hospitality are heavily influenced in all major sections of Luke's Gospel (Karris 2006). The theme carries into Acts as well, where matters of table fellowship become occurrences of transgressive culture-making, disrupting Greco-Roman table mores with practices of welcome and hospitality (Witherington 2007). In short, Luke–Acts presents meals as places where the gospel, enacted in Jesus' table practices, is transgressing the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, resulting in the creation of a new, gospel-formed community. Beyond a mere social construction project, Luke presents this occurrence Christologically. Not only does Jesus 'take, bless, break, and give' bread in various meal settings, establishing a fourfold pattern of table fellowship, but he himself is taken, blessed, broken, and given in the formation of a new community. The faith formed in the church of Luke–Acts carries forward Jesus' mealtime practice of opening table fellowship in ways that transgressed contemporary social and moral boundaries, especially those that were reinforced by the psychological powers of disgust. Luke, among the gospel writers, emphasizes the difference between those who were welcome at tables and those who were not. As Jesus engages in table fellowship, he welcomes those who were outcasts, even those whose presence would invoke frustration or disgust. The table, then, becomes a Christologically formed reenactment of the boundary-transgressing gospel, confronting, and challenging the faith community at the places where its members may be most disgusted and forming a faith consistent with the gospel as presented in Luke–Acts.

2. Table Fellowship in Luke–Acts

Table fellowship, of course, is not unique to Luke's Gospel in the New Testament, but it is a central feature. Matthew, Mark, and John all give readers examples of Jesus eating and feasting, which Luke often parallels (Smit 2008). Luke's account, for example, of Jesus feasting with Levi, a tax collector, appears in Luke as well as Mark (Luke 5: 27–32; Mark 2: 15–17). Jesus dining with the notoriously reviled is a mark of all the gospel accounts to one degree or another. Additionally, Luke includes the miraculous feeding of the multitude, a story native to all four canonized gospels (Matt. 14: 13–21, Mark 6: 30–43, Luke 9: 10–17, and John 6: 1–15). We gather from these accounts that making food available in an act of hospitality is a hallmark of Jesus's ministry and the community that he is creating. In Luke's account, Jesus takes loaves that had been offered, blesses them, breaks them, and gives them (Luke 9: 16). In this account, the means of production are mysterious. In the absence of a distinct explanation of how a few loaves of bread and a scant number of fish are enough to feed thousands, readers are left to wonder how exactly there was enough for twelve extra baskets to be taken up afterward. Was Jesus modeling for the multitude an act of hospitality that was replicated in the groups of those seated nearby? While this is unclear, what we do see in Luke's account is a wide, hospitable offering of food, ostensibly including strangers and those who were outsiders to Jesus's immediate group of disciples. When his disciples requested that he send them away (Luke 9: 12), Jesus's response was a command to his disciples to feed the people. When their response catches on to the logistical challenges, Jesus takes up what they had and offers it in an act of table fellowship.

Luke, however, includes more narratives highlighting table fellowship that do not appear in the other synoptic gospels or John. In essence, "there is virtually no part of Luke in which either foodstuffs and their consumption, their (non-)provision, or the theme of table fellowship do not appear" (Smit 2008, p. 116). Often, Luke situates the content of Jesus's teaching that appears in other gospels around a table or at a meal (Streett 2016). In table fellowship material distinctive to Luke's Gospel, Jesus's presence with and among outcasts is pervasive, amounting to a recasting of table etiquette (Green 1997). While reclining around the table at the house of a Pharisee, for example, a "woman in that town who lived a sinful life" follows Jesus into the house, disrupting the meal (Luke 7: 36–50). Lodging at the home of two sisters, Jesus welcomes one of them to sit with him as the rest of his male disciples would, a violation of contemporary social conventions. When Martha, the other sister, objects, Jesus reassures her that Mary "has chosen what is better," including Mary among the men (Luke 10: 38–42). Another Pharisee is disgusted by Jesus' lack of participation in cleansing rituals before a meal (Luke 11: 37–44), while a third dinner invitation from a Pharisee affords Jesus the opportunity to offer a parable about the nature of banqueting in the kingdom he is bringing, marked by the invitation of "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (Luke 14: 1–24). Luke also includes a unique and powerful juxtaposition, placing the third meal invitation from a Pharisee alongside the Pharisaic grumbling about Jesus's welcome of sinners and tax collectors (Luke 15: 1–2). In the material unique to Luke, Jesus is especially prone to include or welcome those who present a threat of contamination or evoke disgust. His table practices often transgress the social and religious boundaries that operated in his day. In Luke 14 especially, the writer emphasizes the way "Jesus instructed his followers to enact hospitality conventions, not in accord with reciprocity conventions but rather in accord with gracious self-giving and self-sacrificial principles" (Witherington 2007, p. 30). According to Witherington (2007), the table is a primary place where Christian social imagination challenges and remakes the social conventions of the Greco-Roman world, shattering social stratification and establishing fellowship. Whether it is in his actual table practices or his parables that feature meal fellowship, the social norms of his day are being challenged and remade in the new community that he is forming (Blomberg 2005).

Another table fellowship account unique to Luke's Gospel demonstrates that recognition of the resurrected Christ happens in the act of hospitality and the sharing of food. Luke 24 carries the account of two disciples who share the road with the resurrected Jesus on their way away from Jerusalem following the crucifixion, offering Jesus hospitality and table fellowship when he signaled that he would continue on while they stopped. "When he was at the table with them," we read in Luke's account, "he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (Luke 24: 30–31).

What Jesus begins in Luke's Gospel is carried into Acts and the life of the early church. Perhaps the most notable narratives of transgressive table fellowship in Acts are those of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10). Peter's vision of a blanket being lowered to him containing food that was unclean according to Jewish law, a custom not only represents food that would have evoked reactions of disgust ("Surely not, Lord!"), but calls into question the notion that certain *people* are also unclean and thus disgusting (Neyrey 1991). The scene concludes with Peter offering hospitality to two strangers who had been sent to him from Cornelius, a Gentile. The Spirit's voice in reassuring Peter of both the purity of the food and the worthiness of the men to be welcomed further indicates that table fellowship imagination in Acts is transgressing and remaking the boundaries that had previously defined the practice. "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean," is the Spirit's message to Peter (Acts 10: 15). In the vision of Luke–Acts, this applies to food and people, the two ingredients necessary for table fellowship.

3. Taken, Blessed, Broken, Given: Luke's Eucharistic Pattern

In several of Luke's table scenes, Jesus enacts a fourfold pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. Central to the Church's Eucharistic imagination is Jesus enacting this pattern in his institution of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22: 19). That pattern, however, is also seen in Luke's account of Jesus feeding the multitude (Luke 9: 16) as well as his roadside meal with grieving disciples who came to see his resurrected self in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24: 30).

Taking Luke–Acts as a whole, we can say that this pattern is definitive of Jesus's life. He is taken (or chosen) in his birth, blessed in his baptism, broken in his crucifixion, and continues to be given in his ongoing presence in the life of the Church. Thus, Jesus's life, death, and resurrection are Eucharistically reenacted each time bread is taken up, blessed, broken, and given in remembrance of him (Luke 22: 19). Whereas Jesus employs the taken-blessed-broken-given pattern at the meals he shares, he himself now becomes the meal that is chosen by God and blessed to be broken and shared. Gathered around bread that has been chosen, blessed, broken, and given, disciples not only continue the pattern of table fellowship initiated by Jesus but locate themselves in him as he not only offers the food but becomes the meal. In his institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus's words, "This is my body. . ." signal an offering of more than bread; the chosen, blessed, broken, and given food is now also his bodily presence extended to the life of the community.

In Luke–Acts, Jesus's presence is extended to the Church in the power of the Spirit, seen particularly around table fellowship. Indeed, in the opening lines of Acts, the first time the resurrected Jesus speaks to the disciples, it is "while he was eating with them" (Acts 1: 4), linking the former volume to the latter through table fellowship, extending the pattern of Christ's life into the mission of the Church. In short, the sending of the disciples to be Christ's witnesses "in all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1: 8) cannot be disconnected from the remembrance of Christ at the Eucharistic table each time they take up bread, bless it, break it, and give it. In the life of the Church, Christ continues to be chosen, blessed, broken, and given for the life of the world. The feasting continues just after Pentecost, as the believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2: 42). Acts, then, is the narratival Eucharistic extension of Christ's life, the account of the various ways in which the Holy Spirit empowers disciples to continue to repeat the pattern of Christ's chosenness, blessedness, brokenness, and givenness.

The early church in Acts also gives attention to the importance of table fellowship and the distribution of food. While we may read Acts 6 in ways that potentially dismiss the importance of table fellowship, the story of the Twelve choosing those who are "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" to ensure fair food distribution to Hellenistic widows signals the importance of maintaining meal practices that carry forward a mealtime ethic consistent with Jesus's life and ministry (Acts 6: 1–6). Paul's mealtime instructions to the Corinthians, too, alert us to the importance of conducting table fellowship in ways that faithfully remember and welcome Christ's presence at the meal (Witherington 2007). Recalling the fourfold pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving, Paul passes on what he believes he has received, reminding the Corinthian church, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11: 26). We find, then, that table fellowship in the early church is more than the sharing of necessary foodstuffs. It is, rather, a place where Jesus's life and ministry are extended to the world.

Since Christ continues to be present to the world in this way, the Church's life and mission as the body of Christ is to continue to live its chosenness to be blessed, broken, and given. That is, the Church continues to make Christ present to the world in the power of the Spirit precisely as it is chosen, blessed, broken, and given for the sake of the world. As the Body of Christ in the world, the church in the world is indeed chosen and blessed. That blessing is to be broken and given, thus being defined not by sociomoral boundaries but hospitable table fellowship, forming a church that might be given in the world.

The narratives of Acts recount this Eucharistic mission from Pentecost, through the Jerusalem Council, and into Paul's missionary journeys, concluding dramatically in a shipwreck as Paul takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his captors and fellow prisoners (Acts 27: 33–37). In essence, Acts closes in an act of Eucharistic extension of Christ's chosen, blessed, broken, and given life to the world. In closing Acts this way, Luke signals to the reader that the ongoing life of the Church is to reenact the pattern established by Jesus and carried forward by Paul in the power of the Spirit.

Throughout those stories, of course, the kind of Eucharistic life the Church lives involves the welcome of strangers and outsiders. Indeed, Paul's own extension of Jesus's taking, blessing, breaking, and giving pattern is directed toward his own captors, who were transporting him as a prisoner. Stated differently, the kind of table fellowship Jesus modeled, especially as it included the most despised, is the Eucharistic heartbeat of the Church's life. In Acts, we find a string of accounts of Gentile outsiders being welcomed into the fledgling fellowship of Christ's followers. We turn now to a brief examination of recent scholarship on the psychology of disgust, giving attention to the ways in which a Luke–Acts Eucharistic vision might help form faith that can move past disgust for the outsider.

4. Psychological Disgust in Community Faith Formation

Drawing from the scholarship of Martha Nussbaum, Jonathan Haidt, Paul Rozin, Charles Darwin, and others, contemporary psychologist Richard Beck has recently offered an examination of the psychology of disgust, especially as it functions in religious communities (Beck 2011). Disgust, of course, carries beneficial connections to the preservation of health and physical well-being. Consider, for example, the disgust we would experience at the invitation to eat food that has spoiled and would likely cause harm if it were to be consumed.

Accounting for these kinds of benefits, Beck points to the way that this preservationist instinct has also shaped the lives of faith communities in ways that are less beneficial. His argument advances along the trajectory set by the reality that human beings, who are the only 'religious' creatures, are apparently also the only creatures who experience disgust. Disgust, then, has shaped the kind of faith that is developed inside religious communities, creating powerful moral, social, and theological challenges for faith communities.

Beyond mere distaste to mild dislike, disgust "involves the feeling of *revulsion*, a visceral, almost nauseous, response. And this revulsion is very often triggered by a judgment or appraisal of contamination or pollution" (Beck 2011, p. 21). Among the most obvious of these types of revulsion have to do with food. In the Lukan corpus, we find that contaminants to ritual purity can be accompanied by a disgust response. Peter's "Surely not, Lord!" response to God's command to eat ritually unclean food in Acts 10: 14 and 11: 8 rings with emotion. His response is a refusal on ritual grounds but also charged with feeling; his threefold refusal signals the depth of his emotional turmoil.

Beyond the initial reactions invoked in Luke's characters, however, our attention is drawn to the kind of faith being formed among the communities who are reading his writing as they deal with their own responses to contaminants and the presence of outsiders. Theologically, Luke highlights the activity of divine grace that forms a community of redemption, graciously overcoming ritual impurity and disgust reactions.

In seeking to map human disgust reactions, Paul Rozin has noted three 'domains' of disgust: (1) Core Disgust, which tends to center around food and oral incorporation, (2) Sociomoral Disgust, which often arises from social and moral judgments, and (3) Animal-Reminder Disgust, which often involves reminders of mortality in the form of gore, poor hygiene, and the like (Beck 2011).

Core Disgust is the type of human experience that is especially powerful across cultural boundaries. What may be a delicacy in one culture is considered disgusting in another. While eating a chicken's leg or thigh is common in my native North American culture, for example, I can quickly recall the difficulty I had trying to eat a chicken's foot when it was offered to me at the wedding of two Vietnamese friends. The difference in centimeters anatomically was the difference of kilometers culturally, invoking in me a reaction of disgust. This dynamic can play out in faith communities easily. A colleague and mentor recounted a story in which his Southern California, historically white church was plunged into turmoil when its newly welcomed Korean membership began bringing kimchi to after-service potluck meals.

Sociomoral disgust tends to shape faith communities, especially when disagreements emerge around questions of ethics. We need to look no further in the North American context than the current rancor over abortion or homosexuality. While these are often discussed in faith communities as moral issues, they evoke far stronger psychological responses than, say, the care of creation or economic issues. In short, the practice of abortion or homosexuality evokes a disgust response among members of faith communities that is not comparable regarding other moral issues.

Perniciously, this often extends to social groups as well. While sociomoral disgust may not take the form of blatant racism, Beck argues that it is fueled by notions of selfhood defined by boundaries. In this dynamic, 'me' is whatever falls inside of the boundaries of my personhood. Whatever falls outside those boundaries is 'not me' and tends to invoke disgust responses, even if ever so slight. In offering a memorable example, Beck asks his readers to imagine spitting into a cup and being asked to immediately drink the contents. Most persons are not moved to disgust by the saliva in their mouth because it is held inside the boundary of our bodies. Once it leaves the body and transgresses the boundary from 'me' to 'not me,' it tends to trigger a disgust response. Beck points to this dynamic in sociomoral terms, such that those persons and groups that are 'not me' are far more likely to cause disgust than those who belong to one's in-group. The implications of Sociomoral Disgust for faith formation are manifold. Consider, for example, the in-grouping that can easily take place when denominational boundaries are invoked. Even inside those boundaries, persons may organize official or casual affinity groups, where others are not only disagreeable but psychologically disgusting.

Animal Reminder Disgust manifests around realities that prompt humans to acknowledge that they share aspects of creatureliness with non-human creation. Biological realities of birth, death, reproduction, and digestion often factor heavily in this form of disgust. While walking a pet dog, for example, we may not be discomforted by the dog relieving itself on a nearby bush, but the idea of watching our human walking companion engage in a similar biological function would immediately trigger deep discomfort. Similarly, we may pass a deceased animal on a roadway whose life has ended violently in an encounter with an automobile, evoking only a minor emotional response. If that creature were human, however, the same encounter would likely evoke horror. In faith formation, Animal Reminder Disgust often manifests around sexual reproduction. While sexual reproduction is just as natural to humans as it is to animals, faith communities often tend to make clear distinctions between animal and human sexual activity. In part, this may serve to differentiate humans from animals, insisting that humans are less like animals than even the opening chapters of Genesis imply.

Beck implicates faith communities as trafficking in the power of disgust. His argument uncovers the various ways that the faith formed inside of those communities is often fueled by the psychology of disgust. Consider, for example, the behaviors considered to be the most objectionable in faith communities. While those faith communities may adhere to certain moral structures, say, shaped by the Ten Commandments, there are certain actions that carry more revulsive weight, evoking stronger reactions than other forms of violation. Beck charges the contemporary church to give attention to its motivations and consider whether the moral imagination of faith communities is being shaped more by disgust psychology than it is theological conviction.

In giving attention to Luke–Acts, we may recall Peter's reaction of disgust when he is commanded by God to eat food considered unclean (Acts 10). Though the command was threefold, Peter's disgust never allowed him to follow the command he was receiving. As we have already seen, Luke's account of this encounter presses the reader to consider not only whether the food offered to Peter is truly unclean but also whether the visitors who were seeking an audience with Peter were as well. The close link between meals, food contamination, and whether certain people are unclean stands out as a marker of Luke's telling of the gospel. At heart is the question: 'If the food that evokes disgust is being called clean by God, what of the people who also evoke disgust in the new movement of the church?'.

That theme is also detectable in the Lukan account of an unnamed woman's contaminating presence at a meal Jesus shared with a Pharisee (Luke 7). In this story, her presence is a contamination, both ritually and socially. By placing this event at a meal, Luke highlights the difficulty the dinner guests would have encountered as they attempted to ingest food in the presence of a person who evokes disgust. Our memories may be prompted to recall a time when eating food became psychologically difficult because of the 'invasive' presence of a person we find disgusting.

The story of the woman anointing Jesus also points to the power of disgust psychology regarding moral issues. "If this man were a prophet," the hosting Pharisee maintains, "he would know who is touching him and what kind of a woman she is—that she is a sinner" (Luke 7: 39). Beck demonstrates that moral disgust is a powerful force in the life of faith communities, especially when purity metaphors become dominant in faith formation. "Some Christians," he argues, "may use purity metaphors to structure the entirety of the religious experience so that everything from morality to doctrine to worship is regulated by notions of purity and contamination" (Beck 2011, p. 51). By including the 'contaminating' presence of those who invoke disgust at several meal accounts, Luke not only highlights this effect but also Jesus's challenge to this type of moral and religious imagination. While the presence of a sinner at a meal represents contamination to the Pharisee, Jesus turns the situation into an opportunity for hospitality and welcome. The same dynamic takes place in Acts, where outsiders who represent contamination are welcomed into the community through the good news of the gospel.

We may come to read Luke–Acts, then, as a type of critique of disgust-formed faith. Whatever may invoke the strongest disgust reactions, Luke has a story to tell about the way Jesus has engaged that dynamic of disgust. Further, Acts can be read as the fledgling church working out how to be a community that is not formed by disgust of the other but by intimacy made possible by the Holy Spirit. Table fellowship plays a particularly powerful role in this dynamic, especially as it lives in the fourfold pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving.

5. The Table as Location of Hospitable Faith Formation

The Eucharistic table, then, is the place where boundary-building disgust that forms faith is confronted and reversed, forming a faith marked by hospitality. As table fellowship is presented in Luke–Acts, it is not only the place of the fourfold pattern, but it is also the place where taking, blessing, breaking, and giving confront the boundary-building disgust reactions that may have come to characterize the life of faith. In particular, the Eucharistic practice of Christian communities can be a place where faith is formed in a way that breaks down boundaries and reforms disgust reactions. The table becomes a place where "Jesus plays host to celebrative meals with toll-collectors and sinners," which is "the salvific activity of God among the outcasts of society" (Green 1995, p. 35).

As Christ's presence is extended to the world in the fourfold pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving, so too is his pattern of breaking bread with those who would not have been previously welcome, offering the possibility of hospitality and fellowship. At the table, faith is developed that confronts and redeems disgust, making that faith hospitable.

In the Eucharist, Beck finds particular importance for faith formation beyond disgust, especially as it confronts the three major types of disgust. He offers a fascinating observation: "The three disgust domains map onto, almost perfectly, the dominant images and metaphors of the Lord's Supper" (Beck 2011, p. 19). All three arenas of disgust we have previously examined are confronted by faith-forming Eucharistic practices.

In the church's ongoing table practices, Core Disgust is confronted by the reality that the Eucharist centrally involves food consumption. In his institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus takes everyday edibles (bread and wine) and renames them as materials that would likely invoke disgust. Roman rumors that early Christians were eating human flesh and drinking human blood in their gatherings not only invoked disgust but also served to cast suspicion on the followers of Jesus (Benko 1986). By casting Christians as cannibals, they readily became outsiders and 'other' in Roman culture, 'exotic' in nature and thus living on the other side of a social boundary (McGowan 1994). Embracing Eucharistic practice, then, is a form of taking a most objectionable form of consumption and allowing it to confront our disgust reactions each time it is received, even liturgically reminding participants at each occurrence that these elements are indeed associated with Christ's body and blood.

Sociomoral Disgust is also confronted at the Eucharistic table, especially in the reality that all persons are invited to participate, at least in traditions that practice an open table. Remembering the disgust invoked by Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors in the Lukan corpus, the ongoing table practices of Christian communities can be a place where the associations and practices represented by others that we may find objectionable are brought near in the act of eating together. In essence, the Lord's table is where Christians practice eating with 'those people,' whoever they may be. Additionally, those who are 'not me' are united with me in the act of eating together. In the words of 1 Peter to an early Christian community, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 1: 10). Or, as Joel Green has argued, Luke's gospel presents Jesus as "instructing his followers not only to continue sharing meals together but to do so in a way that their fellowship meals recalled the significance of his own life and death in obedience to God on behalf of others" (Green 1997, p. 762). As the community that assembles in the name of Jesus breaks bread, they also embody a transgressive grace, "so that these features of [Jesus'] life would come to be embodied in the community of those who call him Lord" (Green 1997, p. 762).

This is not to say, of course, that the early Christian communities were openly permissive of all associations and behaviors. In light of the resurrection, certain jobs, practices, and associations were simply out of step with the new creation that has opened in Christ's resurrection (Hippolytus and Stewart 2001). The reality Christians were baptized into, however, was a community formed by faith in which exclusionary disgust was not the reigning moral impulse. Objectionable ethical practices were left behind as persons who had previously been at social and moral odds joined together in table fellowship.

Animal Reminder Disgust is also confronted at the Eucharistic feast, largely in the fact that it is a reminder of death. "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup," Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians, "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11: 26). In remembering the death and proclaiming it, Christian Eucharistic practices confront the impulse in Animal Reminder Disgust to deny death or hide it away. In the

Eucharistic celebration, we not only confront our own mortality but also Christ's mortality, an objectionable reality, especially to those who would deny that divinity should not be "subject to death" (Philippians 2).

In confronting all types of disgust in the Eucharistic meal, it becomes a place of hospitality. Hospitality, of course, involves welcoming those who are 'not me' to draw near and share association. Often, it includes the welcome of those who we find objectionable, as Jesus reminds us in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 15). The narratives of Luke–Acts, replete with stories of table fellowship with and welcome of outsiders and the unsavory, set a reminder for Christian communities that each time the fourfold pattern is reenacted, extending Christ's presence into our midst, sociomoral boundaries are going to be transgressed for the sake of a new kind of community is formed. Indeed, the sociomoral forces that hold different kinds of people apart are rooted in strong psychological forces. The ongoing celebration of the Eucharist is the kind of practice necessary to form a faith that rejects disgust-reinforced boundaries, overcoming that which would divide and unite persons to one another as they are united to Christ. "Food, hospitality, salvation, the physical body: every facet of disgust is implicated and blended in the Eucharist. We eat. We welcome. We are purified" (Beck 2011, p. 20).

The table, then, is the location of hospitable faith formation. It is where our psychological reactions, especially to those who are considered outsiders or disgusting, can be exchanged for something more like what we see in Luke–Acts, where the objectionable are offered welcome. In the formation of the new community we see in Luke–Acts, the welcome of the stranger, the outsider, is an impulse that is nurtured around tables and in the act of table fellowship.

What, then, are the boundaries that are necessary for hospitality? So far, we have discussed boundaries as barriers to hospitality, largely because the boundaries we have in mind are those that are triggered by disgust and thus prevent true hospitality. Boundaries, though, have also been shown to be a necessary corollary to hospitality, making the freedom hosts need to offer hospitality possible (Pohl 1999). Space allows only a cursory engagement of the ways in which boundaries interact with hospitality.

The kinds of boundaries Pohl (1999) describes are those that allow for hospitality to take place. Significantly, they are not the kind built around disgust. We may think of a host who needs to stop working and rest so that another meal can be offered tomorrow. This type of boundary is simply an outworking of creaturely finitude. Boundaries may need to be established to protect the vulnerable so that they can be offered hospitality without harm.

As an example, some faith communities have adopted boundary practices around the consumption of alcohol so that those for whom alcohol consumption has been addictive or deadly might find a place of welcome and celebration. Similarly, we may think of the kinds of boundaries that must be established for hospitality to flow to many. Acts 6, as we have seen, recounts a story of the way that food was not being adequately distributed to widows in the early church. Part of Stephen's work, then, was to order the work of table fellowship in a way that allowed hospitality to function well. Notice that neither of these kinds of boundaries involves exclusionary disgust. Neither of them recoil from entering into table fellowship with a *person* who we find disgusting. Additionally, the Eucharistic practices of the early church made a way for persons who had been social and moral outsiders to be welcomed into fellowship (Hippolytus and Stewart 2001). Through entering into baptism and renouncing former practices, converts amended their lives as new members of the faith community, but the *person* received a Eucharistic welcome. Overcoming a disgust response to one who has been brought near through the waters of baptism calls for hospitable faith to be formed in the Eucharistic pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving.

Faith communities may also consider who is being admitted to the table under the examination of boundaries. Most Christian communities have some level of boundaries around table fellowship, some dating back to the time of the early church. While we are not able to discuss these in adequate depth here, I will simply offer the vision of Luke–Acts, suggesting that the church at large consider the way faith is formed through hospitable table practices. We should also remember that Christian faith formation around hospitable table practices extends Christ's presence into the world, which implies that our table practices can welcome others into Christ's presence. That is, Eucharistic practices have a Christological 'center'. Eucharistic table fellowship, especially as we see it in Luke–Acts, involves persons moving closer to Jesus, whose lives are often transformed in one way or another.

6. Concluding Practices for Faith Formation

Christian faith communities likely exhibit a faith that has been formed at some level by disgust. Disgust, in turn, erects boundaries that are contrary to the kind of table fellowship we see Jesus establishing in Luke–Acts. By enacting the fourfold pattern of table fellowship found in the Lukan corpus, we can form a faith that is more likely to offer hospitality and be stunted by disgust.

Forming a hospitable faith may benefit from including practices that draw attention to the boundary-transgressing nature of Eucharistic table fellowship. Clergy may want to remind congregations of the many stories we find in both Luke and Acts that gesture to the formation of a new kind of community that is not formed around exclusionary disgust.

Faith communities will also want to consider the role of boundaries in their table fellowship. What boundaries are making hospitality possible, and what boundaries are simply being erected by disgust? For example, if a welcome to the table is being closed because of collective disgust with persons or their behaviors, those boundaries will need to be examined and confronted through the lens of Jesus's actions in Luke–Acts. If boundaries, however, are those things that are making hospitality more possible, it is possible that a faith is being formed that allows more readily for the formation of the kind of community we see in Luke–Acts. Various faith communities, again, have many different reasons for boundaries. The question is whether those boundaries are being motivated by disgust or whether they are making hospitality more possible.

Practices of an 'open table' not only confront disgust reactions but also remake them, forming faith that is Christologically centered while welcoming outsiders. This is the faith formed in the early church as they found their life in the pattern of being chosen, blessed, broken, and given.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No data sets were generated.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Beck, Richard. 2011. *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
Benko, Stephen. 1986. *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
Blomberg, Craig. 2005. *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*. Downers Grove: InterVaristy Press.
Green, Joel B. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
Green, Joel B. 1997. *The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Hippolytus, A., and A. Stewart, eds. 2001. *On the Apostolic Tradition*. Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
Karris, Robert. 2006. *Eating Your Way Through Luke's Gospel*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
McGowan, Andrew. 1994. Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism Against Christians in the Second Century. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4: 413–42. [CrossRef]
Neyrey, Jerome. 1991. *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.
Pohl, Christine D. 1999. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Smit, Peter-Ben. 2008. *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom: Eschatological Meals and Scenes of Utopian Abundance in the New Testament*. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Streett, R. Alan. 2016. *Subversive Meals: An Analysis of the Lord's Supper under Roman Domination during the First Century*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co.
Witherington, Ben. 2007. *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

religions

MDPI

Article

A Comedian in the Pulpit: Empowering the Use of Humor in Preaching

Philmont Devon Bostic

School of Ministry, Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, FL 33401, USA; bostipd@pba.edu

Abstract: Each week, the preacher mounts the pulpit with many tools to deliver an impactful sermon. One element of preaching that the black church should embrace is humor. Humor and preaching may appear strange bedfellows, but humor is embedded in the art of black preaching. This study explores humor within the confines of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Keywords: black church; humor; Methodist

1. Introduction

Preachers spend hours crafting a sermon each week. They search for the right words and meanings and tie them together to help their congregation understand God's Word. There are books to help teach pastors how to exegete the text correctly. There are commentaries to ensure preachers understand the context and meaning behind what they are reading. There are books to teach the proper use of their voice to drive home a point. There are even books that illustrate how to celebrate in preaching. However, very little is offered to preachers to invoke humor into their sermons and the worship experience. There has been resistance throughout the years to fully embrace the use of humor as something that is not only appropriate but necessary for a complete experience with God. Bernard Schweizer suggests, "Laughter and faith have a vexed relationship with one another: laughter tends to pull us in the direction of irreverence and subversion while (monotheistic) faith tends to pull us in the direction of irreverence" (Schweizer 2017, p. 135). This study explores humor and comedy in preaching within the black church context. This will be completed by employing the four-fold word pair method.

2. Theological Research Problem

This study is needed for several reasons. There needs to be more work being performed on the benefits of humor in a group setting. Some studies look at the health benefits of humor. Much work has been performed on the psychological benefits of humor. Humor can help lift a person's emotions when they are down. Humor can also help raise one's psychological health. Cann, Stillwell, and Taku state, "Thus, it would appear that good humor can support maintaining a stable positive personality style, which has positive associations with both psychological and physical wellbeing" (Cann et al. 2010, p. 213). However, these articles reveal the benefits in a group setting; there is a limited review of these benefits within a church setting.

Secondly, much work showcases the connection between the black church and West Africa. The exploration of humor and the black church is virtually nonexistent. The study will explore the shared link between the black church and black humor. Both have initial connections that will be explored in greater depth later. The black Church and black humor draw their origins to West Africa. This study will examine how West Africans carried with them through the middle passage their religion and style of humor. The study will explore the connection between the oral tradition of black spirituality and humor.

Thirdly, the study will explore the connection between humor and The Bible. The study will also explore the relationship between humor and the biblical text. Through exegesis of the crucial text, the study will look to link to humor and worship in The Bible. This will be achieved by comparing the three texts in the Bible where God is said to laugh in the Psalms, as well as Old and New Testament texts that reflect humor in worship.

The study will focus on three key questions. First, does humor have any place in preaching in the black church? The second is how humor is essential in an African-American church context. Thirdly, is there genuine theological support for black comedy?

With the focus on the black church, the study will further narrow its focus to the use of humor in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ). This research is partially ethnographic, as the author served as a pastor in this context for over a decade. This church is a part of the Black church experience and begins in America. This church will help focus on a specific culture—black culture. Black culture is a rich culture that needs further exploration regarding the use of humor and worship.

3. Thesis

To answer the previously stated questions, this study suggests that the AMEZ looks to employ a few concepts. The first is a greater understanding of the church's history within the black church tradition, also by the preacher engaging in black comical theology. The study suggests that the use of these two concepts will bring about the use of humor in the black church, which can be fulfilled if the black preacher understands his role in the black tradition. Then, by employing a black comical theology, these ideas fall in line with traditional black theology. Frederick Ware points out three different schools of Black theology in his book. The Black comical theology would combine The Black Hermeneutical School and the Human Science Schools. The Black Hermeneutical School focuses on liberation, while the Human Sciences School focuses on empowerment (Ware 2012, p. XVI). A theology of black comedy looks to empower the person while seeking to use humor to liberate them first from their circumstances.

Black comical theology is a theology that looks at the work of God in the lives of the oppressed. The black comical theologian uses humor to understand God and themselves in a better way. Black comical theology understands the power of oppression and turns it on its head. This view of God recognizes that God is a God of reversal. Followers of this theology comprehend that in the end, no matter what happens, God will reverse all the wrongs in the world. This theology applies to our lives now as well as the future.

Black theology began taking shape during the civil rights movement in the 1960s in America, where black people wrestled with the ideas of God and how to handle the oppressive nature in which African Americans found themselves. Ware states, "The first stage of the emergence of black theology started with the civil rights and black power movements" (Ware 2012, p. 2). With the Black hermeneutical school, theologians promoted the idea of liberation. Black comical theology builds on this idea and takes it forward by seeking liberation and looking to empower, such as in the Human Services School. People need physical and spiritual liberation but must also be assigned to go ahead after finding that freedom. Using humor both liberates and empowers.

A historical analysis of the plight of African Americans is full of oppression. The implementation of black comical theology seeks liberation and empowerment. They used it to liberate their minds from the horrors of slavery and oppression. As will be discussed later, black people laughed through hardships. They also used humor to empower themselves from the ideas brought on by slavery. They used humor to point out the faults in social and church views on the status of African Americans. This theology can still work today, as people use God and his work in the community to liberate people from their spiritual bonds. Black people use humor to showcase fault and help to uplift. Because of these ideas, humor is the best way to help black preachers engage their congregation.

4. Literary Review

For African Americans, humor is embedded within the culture. African Americans have used humor to combat the social and political ills of slavery and oppression. One of the first ways this was accomplished was by living a double life. The oppressed would have one way in front of their oppressors and another behind closed doors. This is seen in William Schechter′s book; he states, "Thus did a black man scarcely removed from African origins summarize the function of humor in the Afro-American history: a balm against oppression".

Upon arrival from West Africa, African Americans brought a culture of humor. West Africans had stories and tales of tricksters. In many West African creation narratives, there were stories of twins who used trickery to get what they wanted. Will Coleman mentions the twins Zinsu and Sagbo, who were trickster spirits. Coleman says, "There are several stories of how Zinsu barely escapes being eaten by the dreaded yehwe (a type of predatory vodun), which are thirty horned monsters who live in the forest" (Coleman 2000, p. 25). The priest or priestess would tell these stories. This person also served as the griot. Coleman says, "He or she was also often the griot (storyteller and chronicler of familial and tribal traditions), fortune-teller, and healer within the community" (Ibid, p. 33).

Coming to America, these stories were modified. The trickster narratives were told to help fight oppression. The trickster used humor to combat the ills of slavery and oppression. This spawns the use of folk tales, such as Br′er Rabbit and other stories. Schechter states, "They were able to rid themselves of their aggressions by overly gloating over the torture and death of the fox. The harmless scary rabbit was converted into a superhuman myth hero who could do and say all the things black could not" (Schechter 1970, p. 29). They would point out the fault of the oppressor without them knowing it. This was a skill that is known as signification.

Signification is a skill that began in Africa but was further developed during slavery and has carried over into modern times. The *St. James Encyclopedia of Hip Hop Culture* defines signification as "a rhetorical technique in the black vernacular characterized by verbal indirection and innuendo" (Rooks 2018). This is popular in West African tales of the signifying monkey. The use of a monkey is similar to that of the Br′er Rabbit, and the monkey has been used as a term of degradation for African Americans. Henry Louis Gates says, "The ironic reversal of a received racist image of the black as simianlike, the Signifying Monkey—he who dwells the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language—is our trope for repeating and simultaneously reversing in one deft, discursive act" (Gates 1983, p. 686). The basis for African American Humor is pointing at the incongruities of life and awaiting the glorious reversal.

Reversal is an essential aspect of African-American humor. It follows the Theory of Humor. This Theory states that jokes are implied when the ending is not congruent with the beginning. Incongruity Theory occurs when situations do not turn out how we would believe (Kulka 2007). Philosophers such as James Beattie, Immanuel Kant, and Kierkegaard were proponents of the idea. This is how African Americans base their theology that God is working towards the reversal of the oppressed.

These uses of humor are tied to black theology. Many African American preachers lean into the reversal work of God—especially the reversal work of God on the cross. Christ is on the cross, and his oppressors are laughing at him. M.A. Screech points out, "Laugher is one of the ways in which crowds, thoughtless, cruel or wicked, may react to the sight of suffering" (Screech 1999, p. 17). African Americans experienced similar laughter as crowds showed up to witness lynchings in America. James Cone saw the similarity of Jesus on the cross to people being lynched. Cones states, "That God could 'make a way out of no way' in Jesus' cross was truly absurd to the intellect, yet profoundly real in the souls of black folks" (Cone 2011, p. 2). Black people understand a messiah who has suffered like them and understands their pain. When the African American preacher stands in the pulpit, they are standing on the traditions of the trickster in the African American culture.

5. Methodology

The four-fold word pair method will work as follows. The study will first begin by inserting and identifying the subject. The subject is AMEZ. The study will determine the church outline in NancyAmmerman's book *Pillars of Faith: American congregations and their partners*. The study will focus on the black church overall. Next, the study will focus on assessing and analyzing and will begin by reviewing the history of the AMEZ. It will then present the statistics collected from the survey given to pastors from the AMEZ. The study will move to correlate and confront and will examine how the church can look to apply humor in the church and then deal with the challenges of applying humor. Last, the study will explore expanding and empowering. This section will expand further on the uses of humor whilst also examining the connections or disconnects of humor.

5.1. Inserting–Identifying

The focus of this study will be on the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The AMEZ traces its history to the John Street church in New York in 1796 (Miller 1963, p. 2). The John Street church was one of the oldest Methodist churches in America. The church initially welcomed black members, but the black congregants were pushed to the side after new members joined (Hood 1987, p. 1). The black congregants were allowed to hold their meetings shortly after. In his book, *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, Bishop J.W. Hood states, "These meetings were regarded as prayer meetings, but the leaders frequently gave exhortations—in fact, did such preaching as their abilities permitted" (Ibid, p. 57). This continued for another 20 years until a breaking point was reached. The ordination of preachers caused a complete separation between the black congregation and the denomination. Other churches could eventually ordain their clergy, but in Methodism, the Bishop performed ordination at the General Conference. Finally, the members saw they would not gain the opportunity to fulfill their calling by God to preach, so they severed their agreement with the Methodist church after witnessing Richard Allen from the African Methodist Episcopal Church and Peter Spencer from the Union Church of Africans. Hood suggests, "If they had agreed to ordain a few of our men before 1813, there would have been one African Methodist Episcopal Church, of which old Zion would have been the fountain head" (Ibid, p. 62). Now, according to the General Secretary Auditor's office, this church has 3700 congregations around the globe.[1]

This church is very much a part of what is known as the Black Church. The Black Church was born in America. The Black Church separated itself from other churches in America around the early 1800s. Hood states, "Secessions from churches are generally the result of differences of opinions on doctrine or church government" (Hood 1987, p. 1). The Black Church was a significant movement in ending slavery and the civil rights movement. The Black Church has its feel and action that differs from other churches. Most of this comes from the church's ties to West Africa.

Furthermore, both within and alongside these more African belief systems, this African Diaspora developed unique forms of African American Christianity, just as ("pagan") Europeans and Euro-Americans had progressively (often with some ecclesiastical coercion) indigenized Middle Eastern and North African forms of Christianity, Greek philosophy, and Jewish thought centuries earlier through the formation of various Orthodox traditions, Roman Catholic orders, Protestant denominations, esoteric societies, and fraternal orders (Coleman 2000, p. 36).

5.2. Assessing-Analyzing

The Methodists appear to be serious people. You can see this by looking at John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who rules how people should conduct themselves. In his four rules, Wesley states in rule two, "2. To labor after continual seriousness, not willingly indulging myself in the least levity of behavior or laughter; no, not for a moment" (Wesley n.d., p. 49). Though the AMEZ is a part of the Methodist movement, it still draws heavily from the black church tradition.

A survey was conducted to understand the beliefs of the preachers in the AMEZ. The author contacted 10 members of the AMEZ church for the survey. The survey was conducted via Google Forms. The survey was limited due to the availability of the preachers within the AMEZ. Each person was sent a link to complete the survey. Google Forms tallied all the information gathered (Gordon 1998). This research gave a fundamental idea of the church's view on humor. The reason for a more comprehensive study was due to time and availability. These people were chosen due to personal connections and the belief in an unbiased answer. The participants were told to be honest and answer from their perspectives.

The survey contains six questions—each question after the first was graded on a scale of one through four. Level one was do not agree, going up to level four with strongly agree to be the highest. Each person was emailed the survey and instructed to answer honestly. Each person understood that the survey would be used for this study. The first question assessed the length of time the individual spent preaching. The following questions were to gauge how each preacher saw the use of humor in preaching and its relationship to the black church.

The purpose was to gauge each preacher's view on the participation of humor in worship, especially in preaching. The survey produced the following results. Of the preachers surveyed, 80% had at least 10 years of preaching experience. When asked whether they felt humor had a place in preaching, all the respondents strongly agreed. The next question asked whether those surveyed purposely used humor in preaching; 60% slightly agreed, leaving the other 40% somewhat agreeing. When asked if they feel the need to open or close their sermon with a joke, 40% said they do not agree, while 60% said they somewhat disagree. When asked whether leadership supported humor in preaching, 40% said somewhat agreed, while 60% said strongly agreed. Finally, when asked whether they felt that humor was part of the black preaching experience, 20% somewhat disagreed, while 40% agreed and strongly agreed.

5.3. Correlating and Confronting

The African-American experience in the country drives the humor of the people. Dexter B. Gordon states, "American slavery provides the backdrop of tragedy against which African Americans developed their distinct form of humor, in which material of tragedy was converted into comedy, including the absurd" (Dance 1988, p. 125). This form of laughter appears to be paradoxical. Black people laugh at things that should bring them to tears. Daryl C. Dance speaks to this by pointing out that during slavery, the happy narrative comes from this reality. She quotes John Little as saying, "They say slaves are happy because they laugh and are merry. I and three or four others have received two hundred lashes in a day and our feet in fetters, yet at night, we would sing and dance and make others laugh at the rattling of our chains" (Pang 2009).

The humor of African Americans is dark humor. It is similar in many ways to the humor of Jews. The Jews and Blacks carry a similar history of trauma and, in turn, similar uses of humor. Sander Gilman says, "Both black and Jewish humor is rooted in oppression culture, where people laugh at themselves to deal with adversity" (Hood 1987, p. 15). Both communities find humor in things that would appear to break others.

5.4. Expanding and Empowering

African Americans understood that humor was not only for survival but also a tool to help change their situation. Much of black humor is used to point out the hypocrisies of their system. They used humor as a tool of subversion. As stated earlier, during slavery, they would use stories such as Br'er Rabbit to point out the hypocritical views of those in power.

This history is found in the AMEZ. Two of the more famous church members are Fredrick Douglass and Sojourner Truth. Both were members of AMEZ. Hood says of Douglass, "Fred Douglass, one of the most remarkable men that the race has produced, admits that he is indebted to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Bradford, Mass. for what he is" (Ganter 2003, p. 535). Though the abolitionist is known for his fiery speeches, such as his speech on the Fourth of July, he was also a humorist.

Fredrick Douglass used humor as a technique to help in debates and other activities, but Douglass was careful in how he used humor. A popular form of entertainment at the time was that of minstrel shows. Many of these minstrel shows were used to debase black people and perpetuate stereotypes. Douglass walked the line between that but used some elements to support his point. Granville Ganter says of Douglass, "By exploiting his audiences' likely prejudices, however, Douglass used humor to transform himself from a social pariah into an equal" (Goldner 2012, p. 50).

Sojourner Truth also used humor to her advantage in a debate with a young lawyer about the place of African Americans in America, especially black women. Truth's debater alluded to many African American women being domestics. Sojourner Truth waited for her opponent to finish and retorted that she did not mind doing the dirty work of social change. She pointed out that she was likely the perfect person for it. Pointing to her time as a slave, she understood that black women have always been willing to do the dirty work.[2]

More recent examples of humor in preaching can be found in the two members of the AMEZ. In the AMEZ Church, there were a few examples of preaching that engaged in humor. Preachers often quoted famous sayings by comedians during the sermon. One example of this comes from Bishop W. Darin Moore. Bishop Moore is a sitting Bishop in the AMEZ. Bishop Moore would often quote the famous comedian Jackie Moms Mabley. Moore would say, "To quote that great theologian, Moms Mabley, if you always do what you've always done, you always get what you always got". Moore would use this quote in preaching to spur change in the congregation.[3]

Preachers would often close or open their sermons with a humorous story. This would be done to drive home the point. During a conversation with Rev. Dr. David T. Miller, he explained how humor can be used in a sermon to challenge the status quo. Dr. Miller was the pastor of a church in Vallejo, California, near Silicon Valley. Dr. Miller had once told a story to his Kyle Temple AMEZ Church in 2014. It is a story of people flying in a small plane. The pilot, a computer nerd, a cub scout, and a preacher were on the flight. While on the plane, they encountered severe turbulence, so much so that the pilot knew the plane was crashing. The pilot looked at the passengers and explained that he did everything possible, but the plane would crash. "There are only three parachutes and being that I have a wife and three kids, and they need me, you have to decide who gets the other two". The pastor hears this and begins to pray, and when he opens his eyes, the computer geek says, "Sorry, pastor, but while you were praying, I grabbed the other parachute. The world needs me as a computer genius," so he took the parachute and jumped. The pastor looks at the cub scout and says, "Son, I have lived a good life; you can take the parachute. I have prayed and made my peace with God". The cub scout says, "Oh, no, sir, there are two parachutes left". He said, "How do you figure, son?" "The pilot took one, and the computer guy took the other, the cub scout said, "he didn't take a parachute; he took my book bag" (Coleman 2000, p. 102).

6. Findings

6.1. The Black Church and Comedy

The AMEZ has ties to comedy, but the tradition runs throughout the black church. Both come from West African traditions that expanded and grew under the weight of slavery. Black people took the narratives given to them in both cases and used them for their liberation. If we first begin by looking at the Black Church, we will see that there was not much activity until after slavery ended. Will Coleman states, "According to C.B. Burton, African Americans had no church of their own until the end of the Civil War" (Walker 2015, p. 11). This does not mean all black churches were formed officially until after the Civil War. There were black churches, such as the AMEZ, that were moving toward formation before the war, but after the war, the church began to expand. The common thread between the black churches is dealing with oppression.

Much of the slave narratives that Coleman and others reviewed demonstrate how African Americans gravitated towards Christianity. Though it was illegal for the enslaved people to read, they would often be told the stories of The Bible. Many of the enslaved people gravitated toward the story of the Hebrew exodus. This story and others were removed from the “slave bible”, a redacted version of scriptures used to help with the oppression of the enslaved people. The slaves saw through this and saw themselves in the story of the Jews. The same God who brought them out of bondage is the same God who could do the same for them. Abolitionist *David Walker's Appeal* spoke about Moses wanting to side with the oppressed over the oppressor. In his allusion to Exodus 2, Walker says of Moses, “But he had rather suffer shame, with the people of God that enjoy pleasures with that wicked people for a season” (Abrahams 1962, p. 209). Ideas like Walker's helped the enslaved see their value and that they were on the right side of God.

It was during the time of slavery that black comedy began to take root. During this time, African Americans had little way to fight back against their oppressors physically. So, they fought back mentally. They first began by touching themselves mentally by playing the dozens. This is a mental and verbal game where African Americans take turns battling each other through insults. Roger Abrahams defines the activity this way, “One insults a member of another's family; others in the group make disapproving sounds to spur on the coming exchange” (Coleman 2000, p. 91). This verbal jousting is the training young people engage in that not only provides them with a way of relief through humor but sharpens the verbal and mental sharpness to become a trickster.

As stated earlier, the trickster in African-American culture is a person who uses his mental skills and capabilities to help point out the hypocrisies of a situation. One main way the tricker engaged in this activity is through signifying. The trickster would use many forms of language to get their point across and to point out flaws in the logic of the oppressor. Trickster tales can be found in African-American folklore.

Another trickster points to the signifying monkey. He used a creature that was a common racial epithet towards black people as the hero. The monkey would often trick the lion and get out of trouble because of its wit and skill. However, the lion was strong physically. He could not match the wit of the monkey. These stories and others, such as Br'er rabbit, were often used to explain the incongruities of slavery and the hypocrisy of the master but told in a way that the master never caught on that they were the butt of the jokes. These skills were also used in black preaching.

Black preaching often took place on the plantations of the South. The slave owner often tasked the black preacher to preach to the enslaved. In this lies a paradox of slavery. A black preacher was to preach to enslaved people that their place was enslavement and to maintain the proper decorum to gain liberty in the next life. The freedom that Jesus brought was only for those of a certain race. Though they were perceived to care for the soul of the enslaved, they cared little for the body of the enslaved. Coleman points out, “Thus, Southern Christians cult(ure) exists within the heretical paradox of economic decency, white supremacy, and evangelical sensibilities” (Mills 2015, p. 44). The slave owners sought to use the black preacher to help maintain civility and to have the slave accept their place in life.

The black preacher saw through this ruse and used the time allotted for preaching to showcase the hypocrisy in the slaver's thought process. Zachary Mills states, “Some black preachers often used the sermon as a highly coded message to be grasped by ‘insiders’ and though intelligible to the English speaker, often remained out of the full reach of ‘outsiders” (Ibid, p. 2). They relied on their trickster abilities to live this double life.

6.2. How Is Humor Overlooked

At first glance, humor would be an important element in preaching in the black church, but it is so embedded that it is often taken for granted. When looking at black preaching, when preaching is doing a great job, another person might say that the preacher is acting a fool. In other contexts, this would appear to be an insult, but this is a compliment in black preaching. Acting or behaving “foolish” in this context is fully embracing what you are doing. Zachary Mills states, “During especially emotional, climactic moments during a sermon, congregants or fellow preachers will often say of the person preaching, 'She's a fool!' Or, overwhelmed with the truth and relevance of a sermon, others will exclaim, 'That fool is preaching!' These statements are not meant to disparage a preacher" (Levine 2007, p. 327). Because of the "foolish" nature of black preaching, the preachers might overlook this as a skill. The fear of many black preachers is becoming a trope or expression.

Many black preachers look to fight the common tropes of the black preacher. Most comedians from Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, and beyond have comedic renditions of the black preacher. The black preacher is viewed as loud, boisterous, and often phony. Lawrence Levine points out: "The substantial anger black felt at the hypocrisy on top of the figure of the black minister, whose lofty pretensions were constantly pictured as being undermined by his compulsive lust for chicken, liquor, money, and women" (Mills 2015, p. 38). The black preacher would preach holiness but live a double life. Many comedians pick up on this trope and have presented it for years. In the movie *Car Wash*, Richard Pryor plays a man who could be a pimp or a preacher. The point is that the lives of both closely resembled each other. If preachers knew these tropes, the goal would be to push back against this narrative. These tropes were used to invoke humor, and the black preacher would look to avoid being labeled in this way.

7. Theological View of Humor

As mentioned earlier, there are few examples of humor in The Bible, but there are ways to look at The Bible considering humor. Mills offers two examples of this: one is Inversion/Reversal, and the other is indirection. These skills come from the African-American trickster tradition. These ideas can be used further to understand the theological views of African Americans and humor. First, the thought of inversion or reversal. As Mills states, "This practice involves turning normative expectations and categories on their heads, inverting them, in order to establish a context in which a new meaning can be experienced" (Cone 2011, p. 2). This can be seen all through The Bible. An Old Testament would be from Exodus 14:19–31. God called on Moses to leave Egypt, and the people were trapped with the sea before them, with the Pharoah's army chasing them down. All-natural measures stuck the people, and their exodus from Egypt was now being thwarted. Still, God reversed the situation by having Moses part the Red Sea, and the children of Israel crossed onto dry land, drowning the Pharoah's mighty army. This bit of scripture is popular within the black church because it reminds the people that their situation can change in a heartbeat with God on their side.

As mentioned earlier in the New Testament, the ultimate example of reversal is that of Jesus on the cross. Much like the Exodus story, Jesus' situation was over. He was taken to the cross and killed by the Roman government. They assumed that placing him on the cross would end his movement, but God used the cross to fix the brokenness in the world. James Cone saw black people's connection to the cross's reversal. Cone states, "That God could 'make a way out of no way' in Jesus' cross was truly absurd to the intellect, yet profoundly real in the souls of black folks" (Mills 2015, p. 41).

Now, we shift our focus to the other skill of the black preacher: indirection. Mills says of indirection, "Indirection involves the communication of message through an intentionally subtle, cryptic or roundabout way" (Goenawan 2021, p. 50). In many ways, this is one of the more used skills of the black preacher—a way of talking about something without talking about it. When it came to lynching in the American South, a popular term was "strange fruit". This term comes from a poem by a Jewish man named Abel Meeropol. (Ali 2008). The poem was popularized by the singer Billie Holiday. The song speaks about lynching victims as strange fruit. Jesus could be viewed as a strange fruit hanging from the cross. When black preachers reference Jesus being lynched, it has a deeper meaning to the black soul. Cone says, "Like the lynching tree in America, the cross in the time of Jesus was the most 'barbaric form of execution of the utmost cruelty' the absolute opposite of the human value system" (Cone 2011, p. 35).

8. Discussion

8.1. Humor Reimagined

New skills must be acquired for the preacher to engage in humor fully. The first step would be to have a different understanding of laughter. As stated earlier, only three scriptures demonstrate God laughing: Psalms 59:8, Psalms 2:4, and Psalms 37. Jacqueline Bussie points out that these texts show God laughing at man's hubris. This means that when the oppressed people laugh, they are laughing with God. God's laughter in this text reflects God's knowledge of how things will turn out. When oppressed people laugh, they laugh, understanding that God will work this all out. Bussie states, "A theology of hope must be the counterpart of a theology of laughter" (Bussie 2007, p. 184). When those facing oppression laugh, they laugh with the hope of a brighter tomorrow.

This falls in line with the tradition of the black preacher. The black preacher must fully embrace their role as a trickster. There are elements in black preaching that go back to the trickster role. The trickster used humor to showcase hypocrisy and to initiate liberation. The preacher in the AMEZ should seek to do the same. This does not mean the preacher operates as sociologist and comedy historian Mel Watkin suggests as a clown (Hansen 1994, p. 1). The role of the clown has some success, such as minstrel actor Bert Williams, but the more effective form of humor is satire. The preacher should find ways through humor to challenge and empower their congregations.

This could be achieved by unifying the work of a trickster with a new view of scripture. This combination would be a black comical theology that combines the work of Jacqueline Bussie and black theology. Bussie's work helps fill the gaps where other theologians of laughter tend to fall short. Their work seeks to demonstrate the permission of laughter but does not cover the areas of laughter where laughter seems to fall short. Schweizer says, "Thus theologians of laughter such as Kuschel and Arbuckle condemn the superiority laughter which manifests itself in mockery and scorn, they fail to recognize that 'inferiority laughter', i.e., laughter issuing from a place of disempowerment and oppression, also tend to take on bitter, mocking, and sardonic tone" (Schweizer 2017, p. 139). This is how laughter must be separated between good laughter and bad laughter. Evil laughter mocks and demeans, such as with those who laughed at the foot of the cross. Good and Holy laughter is the laughter of oppression, knowing God will fix it.

8.2. Conclusions

This study demonstrates the potential for humor within the AMEZ. The research suggests that the black church and humor have had a great relationship within their shared history. From the humor of slaves on the ship through chattel slavery and Jim Crow humor, the church has worked together. The work performed here is the beginning of a larger conversation about the work of humor and homiletics within the African-American context. The implementation of the black comical theology would allow better engagement with homiletics. The poll conducted demonstrates the potential for greater concentration in humor in preaching. The work above also shows potential for greater attention in the historical history of humor within the AMEZ. There is still a greater need for exploration in the work of the black church and humor, but there appears to be some resistance to humor.

Other areas within the context of humor could be explored, reflecting greater exploration in other areas. First, a further study in other denominations use of humor. During the research process, it was discovered that the Eastern Orthodox Church has a service called "Bright Sunday". This worship service is conducted the Sunday after Easter. The service is to commemorate God's reversal of Satan's plan in the death of Jesus. A further study in this service could reveal more ways humor could be employed within the AMEZ.

Secondly, the poll conducted amongst the preachers was beneficial but led to a need for further expansion. While the answers benefited the work here, they showcased the potential for additional work across the AMEZ and the other Black Methodist denominations. As stated earlier, this work opens the door to more significant research.

Finally, humor within the context of theology is a severely underexplored area. There are volumes of work from a historical, sociological, and even philosophical view, but humor and theology have limited voices. These voices are almost nonexistent within the realm of the black church. As showcased above, humor in the black church was born out of slavery and has helped sustain African Americans throughout the centuries, but little work has demonstrated the potential and power of humor in theological formation as well as spiritual growth. This work could be the first step in the expansion of the field.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 https://www.ameziongsa.com/, accessed on 22 June 2023.

2 The author was in the congregation for this sermon circa 2019 in Johnson City, Tennessee.

3 The author spoke to Dr. Miller, who gave this in a sermon in Vallejo, CA, circa 2014.

References

Abrahams, Roger D. 1962. Playing the Dozens. *The Journal of American Folklore* 75: 209–20. [CrossRef]

Ali, Munir. 2008. African American Folk Humor as A Collective Memory: Narratives of an Idiom and an Ideology. *The Griot*. Available online: http://pba-primo.hosted.exilbrisgroup.com/openurl/01PALMBCH_INST/01PAL\T1\textless{}BCH_INST_SP?genre=article&atitle=African+American+Folk+humors+as+a+collective+Memory%3A+narratives+of+an+idiom+and+an+ideology&author=ALi%2c+Muni&Munir&volume=27&issue=2&0873&isbn=&sid=ProQ%Apgrl (accessed on 22 June 2023).

Bussie, Jacqueline Aileen. 2007. *The Laughter of the Oppressed*. London: T & T Clark.

Cann, Arnie, Kelly Stilwell, and Kanako Taku. 2010. Humor Styles, Positive Personality and Health. *Europe's Journal of Psychology* 6: 213–35. [CrossRef]

Coleman, Will. 2000. *Tribal Talk: Black Theology, Hermeneutics, and African/American Ways of "Telling the Story"*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Cone, James H. 2011. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Dance, Daryl Cumber. 1988. Wit and Humor in the Slave Narratives. *Journal of African American Issues* 2: 125–34.

Ganter, Granville. 2003. From "He Made Us Laugh Some": Frederick Douglass's Humor. *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass* 37: 535–55. [CrossRef]

Gates, Henry Louis. 1983. The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey. *Critical Inquiry* 9: 685–723. [CrossRef]

Goenawan, Mohamad. 2021. Strange Fruit. *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 12: 49–51. [CrossRef]

Goldner, Ellen J. 2012. The Art of Intervention: The Humor of Sojourner Truth and the Antebellum Political Cartoon. *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 37: 41–67. [CrossRef]

Gordon, Dexter B. 1998. Humor in African American Discourse. *Journal of Black Studies* 29: 254–76. [CrossRef]

Hansen, Liane. 1994. Author Traces History of African American Humor. *NPR*, June 19. Available online: http://search.proquest.com.proxy.pba.edu/other-sources/author-traces-history-african-american-humor/docview/190173212/se-2?acountid=26397 (accessed on 22 June 2023).

Hood, James Walker. 1987. *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*. PDF. New York: A.M.E. Zion Book Concern.

Kulka, Tomas. 2007. The Incongruity of Incongruity Theories of Humor. *Organon F* 14: 320.

Levine, Lawrence W. 2007. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk thought from Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miller, John H. 1963. *The Right Hand of Fellowship*. Charlotte: AME Zion Church.

Mills, Zachary William. 2015. Excuse Me While I Act a Fool: A Homiletic Examination of the Afro-American Trickster. Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA.

Pang, Kevin. 2009. Subversion Explores Where Black, Jewish Humor Intersect. *Tribune Business News*, November 9.

Rooks, Maya. 2018. *St. James Encyclopedia of Hip Hop Culture*. Farmington: St. James Press.

Schechter, William. 1970. *The History of Negro Humor in America*. New York: Fleet Press Corporation.

Schweizer, Bernard. 2017. The Heresy of Humor: Theological Responses to Laughter. In *Reading Heresy*. Boston: De Guyter, pp. 135–44. [CrossRef]

Screech, Michael Andrew. 1999. *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross*. London: Penguin.
Walker, David. 2015. *David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Mansfield Center: Martino Publishing.
Ware, Frederick L. 2012. *Methodologies of Black Theology*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers.
Wesley, John. n.d. *The Journal John Wesley*. Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

religions

MDPI

Article

With Whom Should One Worship? A Fresh Perspective on John Calvin's Liturgical Theology of Physical Proximity and Spiritual Epidemic

Sam Ha

H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4388, USA; nh092@calvinseminary.edu

Abstract: COVID-19 has taught us that whom one surrounds oneself with has a profound influence on one's well-being. In that light, does whom we worship with matter as well? John Calvin would in fact argue that the people we physically worship with have a great impact on our spiritual life. According to Calvin, if you simply worship with (who he deemed to be) the unrighteous group of people, you will lose your spiritual health or even endanger salvation. This is why he was so insistent on asking the French Protestants to leave France and join him in Geneva. What is striking is that worshipping with the right kind of people does not have that automatic effect. Rather, they have to actively engage in many beneficial activities together, encouraging and empowering one another. This is because, for Calvin, while unrighteousness itself is highly contagious, growing in a nurturing community takes conscious and purposeful effort. In this sense, Calvin explains that idolatry and unrighteousness were a spiritual epidemic that is spread physically, while true piety is acquired through a communal practice of many forms of spiritual exercises. This article will have many important contributions to the field of worship and faith formation. Most notably, while scholars have long been addressing Calvin's view of active practices during worship which help faith formation, I will show that that is not all there is. Instead, I will demonstrate how even simple physical proximity in worship can have an impact on one's spiritual growth in Calvin's thought. Another important contribution of this article would be offering a clearer presentation of Calvin's sacramental theology of body and soul. Scholars have long been arguing that, for Calvin, the bodily participation in a Roman Catholic mass while believing in (what was for him) the true gospel was a serious sin of idolatry and hypocrisy. My article will further develop this idea by noting that, according to Calvin, not only is it wrong to do one thing with one's body and another with one's soul but having one's body in a negative environment is harmful to one's soul. If one's body is surrounded by other people who do not believe in the true gospel, it would have a devastating impact on one's soul. In other words, for Calvin, the body and soul influence each other in a way that has sacramental and developmental implications.

Keywords: John Calvin; liturgical theology; spiritual epidemic; worship formation

1. Introduction

It has often been considered that John Calvin had little interest in the forms of worship or liturgy and that he saw "the preaching of the word as the first essential of the worship experience" (McKim 1992, p. 305). Recently, however, scholars such as Witvliet and Moon have shown that, in Calvin's liturgical theology, external elements in worship are in fact described as an aid for people to experience God better and as a method to help believers' faith formation (Witvliet 2003, p. 127; Moon 2015, pp. 24–26).

Nevertheless, there are two aspects which were neglected by these interpreters of Calvin. First, although they both see the importance of looking at writings by Calvin other than his *Institutes*, such as his exegetical works and catechisms, they do not address Calvin's letters in depth, despite the fact that they offer profound insights into his thoughts on worship and faith formation (Witvliet 2003, p. 129; Moon 2015, p. 23). Second, while they successfully demonstrate Calvin's liturgical perspective on the relationship between *how* one worships and faith formation, they do not discuss an important question in Calvin's liturgical theology: whom should one worship with? These two issues are precisely what this article will address. I will argue that Calvin's letters to the Protestants in France offer a unique insight into his worship theology. These pastoral epistles show that whom we worship with matters to believers' spiritual formation because virtues and vices are contagious like infectious diseases, as people are assimilated to those with whom they physically worship.

In order to make this case, I will use the following structure. First, I will describe the historical context of Calvin that is specifically relevant to Calvin's liturgical theology of contagion. This section will also include some discussion about Calvin's insistence on exile as well as his theology of body and soul as a necessary background for the following argument. Second, I will analyze Calvin's letters which deal with the contagious nature of virtues and vices in liturgical settings. Third, the implications of my findings will be explored.

2. Historical Context: Calvin's Insistence on Exile

In order to understand Calvin's worship theology of contagion, it is crucial to grasp his thoughts on exile. In Calvin's era, being an exile was not necessarily a unique condition. For example, in the 15th century, more than 100,000 Jews in total were expelled from Germany, France, and Spain. Another example would be the Muslims during the early 1500s. Around 200,000 Muslims in Granada had to choose between being baptized into the Christian faith or exile (Terpstra 2015, p. 2). In this larger context, many early Protestants in France faced various dangers which made them ponder exile. To be more specific, after what is so-called the Placard Affairs of 1534 (Marcourt 1534), as many as 400 Protestants were imprisoned and at least nine of them were burned to death (Kelley 1981, p. 13). According to one historical source of the 16th century, Francis I of France decreed that everyone associated with Lutheranism be arrested (Crespin 1570, p. 81). After this event, the king persistently persecuted them, though the degree of oppression ebbed and flowed (Gordon 2009, pp. 40–41; Heller 1986, pp. 14–17). It is unsurprising that this created many exiles.

Calvin was acutely aware of the persecutions against the Protestants in France. According to one letter which Calvin wrote to the pastors of the church in Tigurina in 1537, he explains how Protestants in Nîmes were in grave danger. According to this account, the Protestants in this town were going through "the fire of persecution", and, consequently, many were incarcerated and two were put to death.[1] In this letter, Calvin laments the sufferings of these believers and insists that something must be done to rescue those who were in peril.[2]

In light of this historical context, in many, if not most, letters where Calvin talks about the possibility of exile, he almost always tells the individual recipients to choose exile. In fact, he does not really offer other options. One would expect him to give them alternatives, such as staying where they are while sustaining persecution and keeping their faith or getting ready to be martyred for the gospel, but those are hardly ever mentioned. For Calvin, exile is presented as the only choice for most of his individual letter receivers. Examples of Calvin's insistence on the choice of exile alone are evident in so many letters, but here are some of the clearest and most direct incidents.

When Calvin was writing to Monsieur de Budé in 1547, Calvin encouraged him to pursue the cure for the situation that he was in, and this remedy was to remove himself from the bondage through exiling. Here, Calvin does not contemplate other options at all; no other possibilities are mentioned. Instead, he is clear that this is the "only" option for Monsieur de Budé to take.[3] Calvin emphatically affirms that God is pressing him in every possible way and that he is not allowed to extinguish the gracious opportunity to flee that God has given him.[4] In a similar manner, in a letter written to an anonymous

French Seigneur, Calvin considers that, for the Seigneur, there is no reason to neglect an opportunity to flee at all.[5] Moreover, when Calvin wrote to Monsieur de Clervant in 1559, he expressed that, in order to "remain constant and unshaken in the profession" and to follow the "truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ", he should be ready to leave his house, give up his worldly wealth, and abandon his homeland.[6]

If these letters seem too gentle to be considered as evidence for Calvin's insistence on the necessity of exile, there are other places where Calvin appears even more determined. In a letter to Madame de Pons, Calvin proclaims that she has to leave her homeland in order to follow God properly and even declares that God will "avenge" her if she does not pursue exile immediately.[7] When he wrote to another lady a few years after, he was equally firm about this issue. In this letter, Calvin does not even spare a few sentences to share greetings or offer encouraging words. Instead, he begins his letter by noting that it is about time for her to quit the spiritual captivity that she is in and by rebuking her for having marched so sluggishly toward that goal. Having lamented such a slacking attitude, Calvin warns her that she should not be going back and forth, and worries that, if she continues to put off her exile, God may even decide to overturn his plan to rescue her from her captivity.[8]

3. Calvin's Theology of Body and Soul

If Calvin were so fixated on the necessity of exile for so many of his connections, why was it the case? There may be various ways to explain the logic, but Calvin's theology of body and soul is one of the most persuasive explanations. As Calvin insists that people should leave their homeland, he explains such flight is necessary because God needs to be honored and worshipped with one's body as well as one's soul. In his letter to Monsieur de Falais, who was the second cousin of Emperor Charles V and converted to evangelical faith in the 1540s (Bonali-Fiquet 1991, pp. 14–15), Calvin admits that it is not as though God is giving him a direct revelation to leave the country. However, he insists at the same time that, in order to obey the commandment to honor God, he and his wife must leave their homeland. Calvin then connects the situation of Jacques de Falais to that of Abraham and argues that God's command toward Abraham to leave his country and people applies to him as well, because the glory of God cannot be upheld where he was currently living.[9] Indeed, it would be unreasonable to assume that Calvin had no political agenda in convincing them to come to Geneva to join him and his evangelical movement (Gordon 2009, p. 280), but it is also nevertheless true that, for Calvin, exile was highly recommended, first and foremost, for the glory of God. When Calvin wrote a letter to his wife, Madame de Falais, on the same day, he expressed a similar sentiment, saying that, because the glory of God surpasses everything in this world—which naturally includes her life in France—she should choose exile for the honor of God.[10] The letter which Calvin wrote to Jacques de Falais in the following year also reflects this reasoning. According to Calvin, he should prefer honoring God to any other worldly desires.[11] There are also other letters where he connects the glory of God and obligation of exile.[12] For Calvin, if one is not able to worship God purely in one's homeland, they must leave, however difficult that is.

How, then, can these correspondents protect and uphold the glory of God through exile? How does leaving and abandoning one's own country help one honor God properly? For Calvin, these questions can easily be answered with one concept: worshipping with both *body* and *soul*. When Calvin exhorted Monsieur de Falais to exile for the glory of God, he stated that he has to honor God both in body and soul.[13] According to Calvin, knowing the true gospel (with one's soul) while worshipping in a manner that was not appropriate (with one's body) is harming the glory of God, because God wants and deserves to be honored both in body and soul. In short, they could not worship God purely in body and spirit if they stayed where they were and, hence, could not give the due glory to God unless they exiled.

A very clear example can be found in a letter that Calvin wrote to Monsieur de Falais in 1544. In this letter, Calvin praises God for enabling Jacques de Falais to overcome the obstacles that had been keeping him from "worship[ping] purely" and for making him prefer honoring God instead of prioritizing the world.[14] Here, it is evident that Calvin is equating pure worship with proper honoring of God. In other words, for Calvin, honoring God can only be done through exile because pure worship is only possible through exile.

The importance of worshipping appropriately and purely as the reason for insisting on exile can be found in other letters as well. In a letter written to Madame de Budé, Calvin admits that exile can seem like such a drastic measure for her, but he nevertheless stresses that she should prefer a place where God is purely worshipped to her homeland, desire to be in the church rather than seeking comfort, and seek to be where God is glorified rather than being robbed of the honor that is rightfully his.[15] For Calvin, God deserves to be worshipped with one's body as well as one's soul because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit,[16] and the liberty to worship purely is in fact "the chief point of all" for one's flight.[17] Calvin even tells someone who is being mistreated at home that the mistreatments that she is suffering are nothing at all if they are compared to the miserable captivity by which she is held back from worshipping God properly.[18]

Moreover, for Calvin, God is not only glorified through a person who worships purely, but he is also honored through those who help other people revere him properly. Calvin's letter to the Duchess of Ferrara in 1563 shows that the duchess took a number of refugees in so that they could settle in a place where they could worship purely. In this letter, Calvin writes that God has done her a remarkable honor in allowing her to carry God's banner by accepting these exiles and that God is glorified in this duty of hers.[19]

Although Calvin insists that risking God's honor is infinitely more problematic than exile, this by no means signifies that Calvin considers exile to be an easy option. Calvin's emphatic language of the importance of the glory of God and weightiness of pure worship should not be a reason to believe that he took exile lightly. It was in fact quite the opposite. Throughout his lifetime, Calvin continuously highlighted how awful exile is, despite the fact that it enables people to worship freely. Again, Calvin tells Monsieur de Falais that even Abraham himself must have been greatly reluctant to leave his homeland and did not have all things the way he wanted them.[20] In a letter to an anonymous French lady, Calvin compares exile to the Exodus—leaving Egypt for wilderness. Indeed, the wilderness is the place where one can follow God, but Egypt is indeed full of "flesh-pots and pleasures" and, consequently, it is by no means easy to abandon one's homeland to live in a strange land.[21] Quitting one's own house, giving up one's wealth, and leaving one's homeland, in order to choose to live according to what God deserves, is indeed not a small temptation at all, according to Calvin.[22]

4. Virtue and Vice Contagion in Worship

What, then, does it mean to worship purely for Calvin? Answering this question would require an entire monograph or two. There are indeed countless ways to approach this question, but perhaps it would be reasonable to say that the scholarly consensus on this matter is that, for Calvin, to worship God purely is to honor God only according to his decrees as they are written and expounded in the Scriptures (Eire 1989, p. 201). According to Calvin, the biblical witness is clear on the definitions of true and false worship. Throughout his exegetical works as well as his *Institutes*, Calvin constantly stresses *how* one is to worship God properly and purely according to Scripture (Eire 1989, pp. 201–02). However, I will focus on one particular aspect of worship that Calvin insists on in letters to the Protestants in France during his time.[23] Generally speaking, Calvin justified his insistence on exile by arguing that believers need a community of worship which consists of people who share the same truth. Calvin contended that worshipping with the like-minded and equally virtuous believers is indispensable for one's faith formation.

Analyzing the way Calvin understood this particular liturgical theme is necessary partly because it is an aspect which has not been considered thoroughly in the liturgical studies in the recent years. The current discussions on the relationship between worship, community, and formation revolve around the question of *how* one worships. For example, Regule argues that participating in certain rituals helps believers realize the meanings of living as a Christ-follower (Regule 2020, p. 46). Similarly, according to Saliers, different models of worship and liturgical patterns influence the emotional conditions of believers (Saliers 2021, p. 8). To be sure, Johnson affirms that there is an element of imitation and assimilation in his understanding of worship (Johnson 2020, p. 15). However, his perspective is much more concentrated on the rhizomatic process of liturgical practices, rather than the significance of the ethical and theological nature of a worshipping community in any authentic way.

It must be noted that even the liturgical interpreters of Calvin have not paid attention to this issue. As noted in the Introduction, Moon is one of the latest scholars who have attempted to analyze and present Calvin's theology of worship. Moon must be commended for introducing various ways to understand the relationship between liturgical practices and faith formation in Calvin's thought. He has shown how Calvin saw diverse specific physical rituals impacting believers' faith formation, such as bodily gestures of prayer and repetition of certain practices (Moon 2015, pp. 25–26). However, his interpretation of Calvin has neither the indication of the importance of the theological and virtuous attributes possessed by a worshipping community nor the consequences of whom one worships with. With this scholarly gap in mind, I will begin to analyze letters by Calvin to observe and examine how he connects faith formation with worship community.

In a letter written to an anonymous Mademoiselle, Calvin subtly but firmly tells her that she should not give up an opportunity, which he calls "the remedy", to go to a place where she can give glory to God purely and properly through worship.[24] He highlights that she will be joined to the flock there, by which he means a church community. For Calvin, the message is not that it is important for her to find a place where she does not have to participate in the Roman Catholic Mass. Nor is it that finding a good community may be helpful to a degree. Instead, he urges her to be a part of a worshipping community of like-minded people. To be sure, Calvin does not explicitly use the word "worship", but he certainly implies the idea. For him, to be joined to the flock was not simply becoming a member of a suitable community. Rather, one of the key elements of the said joining is worshipping together at the same time in a physical proximity. We know this to be the case because Calvin notes that, if she joins this flock, she will be able to "hear the voice of the Shepherd".[25] This expression no doubt refers to the sound of teaching and preaching. According to Calvin, this hearing cannot be done individually. Calvin insists that one has to be a part of corporate worship where preaching happens synchronously. Had the receiver of this letter needed sound religious doctrines and had that been sufficient, Calvin would have written that it was what she needed. He could have simply encouraged her to acquire the appropriate literature or receive private education from a trustworthy instructor. However, that was not the case. In this specific case, it was Calvin's insistence that she joins a worshipping community of the righteous where she could listen to the word of God with other believers. He also affirms that she will enjoy this important aspect in a Protestant church once she exiles. For Calvin, anyone who does not belong to a healthy gospel community of worship is nothing but a sheep wandering in the wilderness, bound to get lost and end up in the mouths of "wolves".[26]

Why, then, is being a part of a worshipping community so important for Christians in Calvin's liturgical theology? Why does he think it is very difficult, if not impossible, for believers to survive, grow, and thrive if they worshipped with the wrong kind of people? Why does one need to be joined to a flock? The reason has to do with Calvin's understanding of assimilation and contagion. Perhaps the better word here would be the spiritual epidemic, now that the word "pandemic" has become familiar to us. According to him, believers are easily influenced negatively by those with whom they worship.

In a letter to an anonymous French lady, likely a noblewoman, Calvin explains that God's light has reached her who was in the place of profound darkness. Here, we are already seeing Calvin's way of comparing where she was and where she ought to go. He then writes that God has reached out his hand to her who was in the deepest abyss, which again stresses the contrast between two drastically different kinds of worship settings, and that she was now obligated to glorify God's name. As he connects the concept of the glory of God with the necessity of exile, he directly expresses why her body should be in a different physical place where she can worship with the people who believe in the true gospel with her soul. "For in calling us to himself, God sets us apart in order that our whole life may to be his glory, which cannot be without our withdrawing ourselves from the pollutions of this world".[27] Not only are the meanings of this sentence loud and clear, but they have extensive implications. For Calvin, it is clear, if she continues to worship God with the same people who are unrighteous, she will definitely be assimilated to their pollution. If she continues to surround herself with the wrong kind of worshippers, it will become impossible for her to honor God with her entire life.

In this letter, Calvin writes that she is surrounded by "the pollution of the world (*pollutions de ce monde*)". By definition, pollution influences what is around it. With this word, Calvin was implying the possibility of assimilation. Just like a contagious disease, if you are near someone who has it, you will doubtlessly be affected. According to a letter written by Calvin in 1540, we see the clear connection between pollution and contagion in Calvin's thought. Calvin writes that "nothing is more infectious than association with the ungodly".[28] Calvin explains that, because human beings are all naturally "inclined to vice . . . when we frequent corruption, the contagion spreads more widely".[29] For Calvin, when believers get in contact with the impious, they will be infected by their sinful actions. One may wonder how this question of proximity is connected to worship. In fact, in this letter of 1540, Calvin emphasizes the risk of idolatry as the key problem regarding the assimilation. In other words, believers are likely to worship like the people with whom they worship, and they are also likely to live as they do in this context.[30]

Much like COVID-19, if you do not keep the social distance, you will be influenced. Unlike COVID-19, there were no vaccines or masks that could protect one from the infectiousness of the spiritual disease, according to Calvin. Calvin does not give her any indication that she may be able to glorify God in her own way while worshipping with the wicked. In Calvin's thought, if you worship with the spiritually weak and wicked people who do not know and practice the gospel in the proper way, you are most likely to become like them in various ways.

According to this letter, the reasoning behind this problem of assimilation is simple: human frailty. Calvin explains that, when one is surrounded by the unrighteous, no one is able to retain their virtues. Everyone, including himself, needs to be completely prepared. For Calvin, because God's honor is more important than one's life, this preparation has to include worshipping with the righteous. He writes: "let us not think it strange, if for his name's sake we be chased from one place to another, and that we must forsake the place of our birth".[31] Once he stresses that she needs to be living in a different physical location, Calvin then repeats his reasoning of contagion by noting that, if she remains in the current "bondage", she cannot worship God purely without the rage of the wicked.[32]

What needs to be emphasized now is the relationship between my analysis above and the long-standing debate concerning Calvin's view on Nicodemism. According to numerous scholars, Calvin criticized the Nicodemites for their inadequate theology and practice of worship.[33] For example, Eire explains that Calvin was not able to see how believers could separate the inner beliefs and outer worship. In other words, according to Eire's reading of Calvin, the Protestants should worship God with all their souls, but they had to follow the biblically defined and constructed liturgical forms with their bodies (Eire 1985, pp. 127–28). To be more specific, Calvin was against the Roman mass and other papal rituals (Pattison 2020, pp. 265–66) and affirmed that participating in the mass certainly meant that "the glory of God is obscured, his religion profaned, and his truth corrupted" (Eire 1985, pp. 135–36). In the writings other than these letters, we see Calvin dealing with the idolatrous worship of the Roman Catholics which he condemns.

Although Calvin's anti-Nicodemite theology is significant in its own right, my contribution is quite different. The anti-Nicodemite rhetoric employed by Calvin is much more focused on an individual level. According to Calvin, when an individual believer participates in the Roman mass, they are dishonoring the glory of God because God is not to be worshipped in that manner. Conversely, what I seek to demonstrate is the communal nature of Calvin's liturgical thought. Indeed, participating in the Roman mass itself is wrong, but worshipping with the unrighteous has another acute effect of assimilation and contagion. To go back to the letter in hand, Calvin does not mention the mass. What must be acknowledged is the fact that Calvin was aware of possible censorship and surveillance, so it would have been impossible for him to mention the ritual by name. However, it is interesting to see that Calvin does not imply anywhere about that matter in this letter. Instead, Calvin talks about the danger of assimilation. For Calvin, this danger was indeed a potential and real threat for the Protestants living in France.

The contagious nature of this pollution is prevalent in many of his letters addressed to those who were living in Catholic regions, but we find a particularly clear example in a letter addressed to the Admiral de Coligny. In this letter, he begins by saying that Calvin wants him to secure the admiral's own salvation. Calvin also affirms that God has been working for the admiral so that he could indeed be fortified by the Spirit. It is also highlighted that this admiral is in some sort of difficulty which is, according to Calvin, going to work for the growth of the admiral, as God may have sent this affliction that is in fact a blessing in disguise.[34]

However, as soon as Calvin finishes talking about what *God* has been doing for the sake of this admiral and his salvation, he immediately adds that there is something that the admiral should do in order to participate in God's providence. He does so by stressing that corruptions prevail everywhere and that the children of God should not mingle in them, "lest they share in their pollution".[35] According to Calvin, because idolatrous worship, unrighteousness, and a corrupted way of living are contagious, believers should always worship with other upright brothers and sisters in Christ (cf. Shepardson 2007, p. 114).[36] Because the devil always seeks to tempt true believers by surrounding them with disloyal, worldly, apathetic, and decadent people so that they may stumble,[37] it is imperative for them to belong to a visible community that worships together. When believers worship and live with those who do not honor God properly, they will most likely face grumbles and hostility which will lead them in the wrong direction.[38]

One may wonder if this letter is strictly related to worship per se. Indeed, such a question is justified because Calvin does not spell out his intention. He certainly does not say "These are what I believe about worship and assimilation, and I would like you to act accordingly". What must be noted in relation to this letter and the letters which have been addressed above is that these are personal correspondence, many of which were under surveillance. In other words, we have to read between the lines and use these letters as a mirror to understand the circumstances of the recipients.[39] In Calvin's words to the admiral, Calvin repeatedly emphasizes keeping the honor and glory of God in purity. For Calvin, this expression is most explicitly, though not exclusively, tied with worship. When Calvin says, "you have to keep God's glory and honor in purity", it should be understood as "you should worship God properly" (Eire 1989, pp. 197–99). On the one hand, this was simply Calvin's personal jargon. On the other hand, Calvin had to be subtle, and even poetic, so that the recipients may not get into too much trouble. In that regard, in this letter, as soon as Calvin says that corruptions are everywhere and that believers should not mingle with the wicked, he quickly highlights the preeminent significance of keeping the honor of God in purity. Once he does that, he reiterates that the admiral should consider guarding and praising the honor of God to be his privilege, which again is the language Calvin uses in relation to worship.

After insisting that the admiral should stay away from the contagiously evil people, Calvin explains why the admiral should be careful not to be infected by them. First, according to Calvin, it is because believers should place God first. Rather than enjoying the company of the wicked and benefiting from worshipping with them, real Christians should seek to please God by staying away from them. This is because God is worthy to be honored above everything else. Second, Calvin reasons that believers should not worship with the unrighteous because they must hold fast to the promise of Christ. For Calvin, becoming a voluntary refugee in order to worship with the virtuous in the same location is not an easy choice. However, Calvin insists that such drawbacks are nothing compared to the true joy that a righteous life brings. In a sense, according to Calvin, there are essentially no real setbacks in giving up one's homeland. The assurance Calvin gives is that God will not make the admiral miss anything that is of true importance.[40]

Now that we have explored the negative kind of assimilation, we can also talk about the positive effects of worshipping with the virtuous. Calvin deals with this issue most explicitly in a letter addressed to the brothers in Poitou, who were being persecuted for being evangelicals in France and could not worship without triggering the Roman Catholics around them to give them a hard time. In this letter, Calvin immediately begins his argument with human weakness. According to Calvin, every human being is frail. Because every single person is naturally so weak on one's own, believers with the same gospel need to worship together so that they can serve each other by "stir[ring] one another up".[41] Calvin does not say that some are strong and thus do not need other people. Rather, every believer with no exception needs a nurturing worshipping community where positive assimilation can take place (cf. Parsons 2014, p. 136).[42] Calvin even includes himself in this common problem of humanity by insisting that "we are but too sluggish".[43] This is not to say that, in this letter, he denies the importance of personal devotions such as praying and reading at home. However, for him, worshipping with the right kind of people has a profound benefit. This important perspective is most explicitly demonstrated in this letter in the following section: "do not deprive yourselves of the blessing of invoking God together with one accord, and receiving some sound doctrine and good exhortation".[44] In addition, Calvin affirms that what is "well-pleasing to God" is the people of God gathering together in the same location and praying to him "with one mouth".[45] When true and virtuous believers get together in one place and worship together with a physical proximity, they are giving the full honor to God with their souls and bodies. With this true worship, they grow in righteousness and truth. It is also Calvin's insistence that praising God along with his people is what the Scriptures themselves exhort.[46]

Calvin's determined emphasis on this liturgical concept, that is, the contagious nature of virtues and vices in worship communities, is also revealed by how his letter-writing scheme changes over the years. Until 1554, Calvin tended to write to individual believers urging them to exile so that they can worship with the like-minded believers and that they may be assimilated to by fellow righteous Protestants. However, after 1555, the number of Calvin's letters to (underground) churches increased significantly. As the number of Reformed churches grew exponentially between 1555 and 1562 (Reid 2007, p. 105; Higman 1998, p. 699), Calvin began to see less value in writing to struggling individual believers in France. For example, when he wrote to Monsieur d'Andelot, he expressly indicated that he is grateful for the people who are physically closer to him to assist him and with whom he could worship.[47] The fact that Calvin began to write less and less to individuals to choose exile as churches began to grow more and more in France (and other Roman Catholic regions) demonstrates that, for Calvin, a worshipping community was a strong motivation for recommending exile to individuals (Woo 2019, pp. 26–68). This also explains why Calvin was more inclined to emphasize in 1561 not that "the faithful should rebel against the government but that they should continue to submit to it, while waiting patiently for God's sure deliverance", rather than telling them of the third option of fleeing (Tuininga 2017, p. 345). It was because they already had a devoted community of worship in which they could influence each other in a positive way.

5. Practical Implications

As I have noted above, there has been little interest in the ethical and theological nature of the community with whom one worships. Contrary to this lack of attention in the liturgical academia, Calvin argues that one should choose one's fellow worshippers carefully. Indeed, the liturgical formats and rituals matter to Calvin, and he would insist that establishing them according to the biblical witness carries much weight. However, the contagious nature of virtues and vices cannot be ignored. Church communities need to work together as a community in terms of setting the right worship orders, but, if Calvin is right, they also need to work on their congregation's spiritual health.

In that sense, perhaps this idea was behind Calvin's attitude toward church discipline and liturgy. Calvin has often been understood to have considered the Lord's Supper as a ritual of community with which ministers were able to reprimand, teach, and comfort (Bouwsma 1988, pp. 218–19; Speelman 2017, p. 166). Although Calvin did not necessarily wish to use church discipline as a one-way method of eliminating evil and wickedness (Speelman 2016, pp. 193–230), this contagious nature of virtues and vices may have been related to his thoughts on church discipline. In this regard, for the congregations who are serious about keeping the spiritual health of their members, they may want to consider church discipline as a way to keep the spiritual epidemic in control.

That said, this theology of contagion may be a double-edged sword. In order to put this concept into practice, a community or an individual church needs to agree on their ethical convictions. Unless the members emphasize the same virtues to embody and vices to refrain from, it becomes difficult to see the value of this theology of Calvin. Moreover, this notion of Calvin can be used as a malicious weapon of the majority group. If a larger portion of a community dictates which moral stances are indispensable, they may unrightfully use this idea to discriminate, segregate, or expel those who disagree with them. Unjust and unjustified use of this idea would be the last thing Calvin would have recommended.

Another practical aspect to consider in light of my finding is related to standards with which one should choose one's worshipping community. If Calvin is right, perhaps believers should not simply look for churches that have appropriate liturgical formats and worship styles which promote the biblical values. Instead, they should look for communities which hold the same virtues and reject the same vices as they do. Not only should they consider the communities' ethical beliefs, but perhaps they should examine how the community walks the talk.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I have attempted to show that, for Calvin, whom one worships with matters a great deal. Although how one worships is as important as recent interpreters of Calvin have argued, this article has demonstrated that virtues and vices are contagious in liturgical settings.

I believe this article contributes to the scholarly debate on Calvin's liturgical understandings. As I have noted above, very little attention has been given to the significance of the ethical and theological nature of a worshipping community. In that regard, not only has it started a discussion on his theology of contagion, it also has made more room to explore his worship theology in terms of one's body. This is not to say that the physical aspect should be emphasized over his thoughts on mind and soul. However, it certainly allows other interpreters of his to address what has often been undermined by historians and liturgical scholars throughout history.

Moreover, I think this article has a pastoral value as well. The modern assumption is that, as long as one works on oneself, the environment does not matter so much. However, according to Calvin, no one is strong enough to sustain his or her character without having a community of worship which consists of the like-minded. In an age where the human weakness is often overlooked, this insight of Calvin works as a warning.

Nevertheless, as observed earlier, when it comes to practical application, it is imperative to note that his emphasis on the infectiousness can be misused. For example, it can be used as a ground for exclusion. One may also use this concept as a way to justify separation or even a form of segregation that is not in fact based on real morality.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 See (Baum et al. 1863–1900). Hereafter cited as CO; (Calvin 1858). Hereafter *Letters*.
2 CO 10:130; *Letters*, 1:59.
3 CO 12:542; Calvin to Monsieur de Budé, 19 June, 1547, *Letters*, 2:106.
4 CO 12:542; Calvin to Monsieur de Budé, 19 June, 1547, *Letters*, 2:107.
5 CO 13:62; Calvin to a French Seigneur, October, 1548, *Letters*, 2:166.
6 CO 17:703; Calvin to Monsieur de Clervant, November, 1559, *Letters*, 4:78.
7 CO 14:670; Calvin to Madame de Pons, 20 November, 1553, *Letters*, 2:420.
8 CO 15:193–194; Calvin to Madame de Cany, 24 July, 1554, *Letters* 3:46.
9 CO 11:630; Calvin to Monsieur de Falais, 14 October, 1543, *Letters*, 1:397–398.
10 CO 11:631; Calvin to Madame de Falais, 14 October, 1543, *Letters*, 1:399.
11 CO 11:735; Calvin to Monsieur de Falais, June, 1544, *Letters*, 1:424–425.
12 One of the clearest examples would be this letter: CO 13:151; Calvin to an Anonymous Mademoiselle, 12 January, 1549, *Letters*, 2:190.
13 See note 9 above.
14 CO 11:735; Calvin to Monsieur de Falais, June, 1554, *Letters*, 1:424–425.
15 CO 12:453–454; Calvin to an Anonymous Madame, 1546, *Letters*, 2:77–78.
16 CO 13:63; Calvin to a French Seigneur, 18 October, 1548, *Letters*, 2:165–166.
17 CO 14:517; Calvin to Monsieur de Marolles, 12 April, 1553, *Letters*, 2:382.
18 CO 14:669; Calvin to Madame de Pons, 20 November, 1553, *Letters*, 2:419.
19 CO 20:16; Calvin to the Duchess of Ferrara, 10 May, 1563, *Letters*, 4:315.
20 CO 11:630; Calvin to Monsieur de Falais, 14 October, 1543, *Letters*, 1:397.Interestingly and quite naturally, Calvin stresses that exile was a sorrowful thing for Abraham in his commentary on Genesis 12 as well. “For since exile is in itself sorrowful, and the sweetness of their native soil holds nearly all men bound to itself, God strenuously persists in his command to leave the country, for the purpose of thoroughly penetrating the mind of Abram. If he had said in a single word, *Leave thy country*, this indeed would not lightly have pained his mind; but Abram is still more deeply affected, when he hears that he must renounce his kindred and his father’s house”. See (Calvin 2010). Cf. (Engammare 2010).
21 CO 13:296; Calvin to Madame de la Roche-Posay, 10 June, 1549, *Letters*, 2:217.
22 CO 17:703; Calvin to Monsieur de Clervant, November, 1559, *Letters*, 4:79.
23 As noted in the introduction, I am focusing on certain letters by Calvin in this piece. There are a few matters I wish to highlight in this regard. First, because very few have attempted to delve into Calvin’s liturgical theology with letters, this approach is a unique contribution to the current scholarly discussion. Calvin’s *Institutes*, theological treatises, commentaries, and even sermons have been analyzed but not letters in that regard. Second, Calvin’s letters are more beneficial for those who are interested in his liturgical thought because they show us his own *applications* for different circumstances. The other more theoretical genres tend to show Calvin’s conceptual stance, and it is up to us to infer how it can be implemented. Third, although I am dealing with a handful of letters, they offer sufficient insights for us to reason his notion of assimilation through worship. Out of every letter which mentions exile and worship directly or indirectly, these are the letters that explicitly focus on the issue of spiritual contagion. As far as I know, these are the only places where Calvin mentions this significant liturgical theme. In that sense, though the number of letters may be small, their ramifications are profound.
24 CO 13:151; Calvin to an Anonymous Mademoiselle, 12 January, 1549, *Letters*, 2:193.
25 See note 24 above.

26 See note 24 above.
27 CO 13:295; Calvin to Madame de La Roche-Posay, 10 June, 1549, *Letters*, 2:215.
28 John Calvin, "Letter of 1540", as cited in Bouwsma, 36.
29 Calvin, "Letter of 1540".
30 See note 29 above.
31 CO 13:295; Calvin to Madame de La Roche-Posay, 10 June, 1549, Letters, 2:216.
32 CO 13:296; Calvin to Madame de La Roche-Posay, 10 June, 1549, Letters, 2:216.
33 For an overview of the important scholarly works on this matter, see (Woo 2019), pp. 1–2.
34 CO 17:319; Calvin to the Admiral de Coligny, 4 September, 1558, *Letters*, 3:466.
35 CO 17:320; Calvin to the Admiral de Coligny, 4 September, 1558, *Letters*, 3:467.
36 See note 35 above.
37 Cf. CO 20:140; Calvin to the Comtesse de Seninghen, 28 August, 1563, *Letters*, 4:332.
38 See note 35 above.
39 There is much literature which helps us understand what is often called "mirror-reading". I suggest one important example: See (Barclay 1987).
40 See note 35 above.
41 CO 15:222; Calvin to the Brethren of Poitou, 3 September, 1554, *Letters*, 3:68.
42 See note 41 above.
43 See note 41 above.
44 CO 15:222–223; Calvin to the Brethren of Poitou, 3 September, 1554, *Letters*, 3:69.
45 CO 15:223; Calvin to the Brethren of Poitou, 3 September, 1554, *Letters*, 3:69.
46 See note 45 above.
47 CO 17:192; Calvin to Monsieur d'Andelot, 10 May, 1558, *Letters*, 3:418.

References

Barclay, John M. G. 1987. Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31: 73–93. [CrossRef]

Baum, Guilielmus, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss. 1863–1900. *Ioannis Calvini opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*. Braunschweig: Schwetschke, vol. 10, pp. 129–30.

Bonali-Fiquet, Françoise. 1991. *Jean Calvin, Lettres à Monsieur et Madame de Falais*. Geneva: Droz.

Bouwsma, William J. 1988. *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Calvin, John. 1858. *Letters of John Calvin, trans. Jules Bonnet*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, vol. 1, pp. 58–59.

Calvin, John. 2010. *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*. Translated by John King. Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, vol. 1, p. 343.

Crespin, Jean. 1570. *Histoire de Vrays Tesmoins de la Vérité De L'Euangile, Qui de leur Sang l'ont Signée, Depuis Jean Hus Iusques Autemps Present*. Geneva: Crespin, p. 81.

Eire, Carlos M. N. 1985. Prelude to Sedition? John Calvin's Opposition to Nicodemism and Religious Compromise. *Archiv Für Reformationsgeschichte* 79: 120–45. [CrossRef]

Eire, Carlos M. N. 1989. *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Engammare, Max. 2010. Jean Calvin l'exilé: Une théologie de l'exil dans l'œuvre du Réformateur. *Dimensioni e Problemi della Ricerca Storica* 2: 31–32.

Gordon, Bruce. 2009. *Calvin*. New York: Yale University Press.

Heller, Henry. 1986. *The Conquest of Poverty: The Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth Century France*. Brill: Leiden.

Higman, Francis. 1998. L'Édit de Janvier 1562. *Bulletin de La Société de l'Histoire Du Protestantisme Français* 144: 697–705.

Johnson, Todd E. 2020. Weed and Feed: Congregational Crabgrass and Liturgical Formation. *Liturgy* 35: 8–17. [CrossRef]

Kelley, Donald R. 1981. *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marcourt, Antoine. 1534. *Articles veritables sur les horribles, grandz et importables abuz de la messe papalle, inventee directement contre la saincte Cene de Jesus-Christ*. Neuchâtel: Pierre de Vingle.

McKim, LindaJo H. 1992. Reflections on Liturgy and Worship in the Reformed Tradition. In *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 305–10.

Moon, Hwarang. 2015. *Engraved upon the Heart: Children, the Cognitively Challenged, and Liturgy's Influence on Faith Formation*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock.

Parsons, Michael. 2014. 'It Is Too Late to Think of Shrinking Back.' Calvin's Letters to Contemporary Martyrs. In *Reformation Faith: Exegesis and Theology in the Protestant Reformations*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, pp. 122–37.

Pattison, Bonnie L. 2020. Worship and Calvin's Theology of the Body in His Anti-Nicodemite Writings. *Calvin Theological Journal* 55: 255–76.

Regule, Teva L. 2020. The Mystagogical Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem: Forming the Identity of a Christian. *Liturgy* 35: 42–47. [CrossRef]

Reid, Jonathan A. 2007. French Evangelical Networks before 1555: Proto-Churches? In *La Réforme En France et En Italie: Contacts, Comparaisons et Contrastes*. Rome: Ecole française de Rome, pp. 105–24.

Saliers, Don E. 2021. With Kindled Affections: Worship and Emotion. *Liturgy* 36: 4–10. [CrossRef]

Shepardson, Nikki. 2007. *Burning Zeal: The Rhetoric of Martyrdom and the Protestant Community in Reformation France*. Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, pp. 1520–70.

Speelman, Herman. 2016. *Melanchthon and Calvin on Confession and Communion: Early Modern Protestant Penitential and Eucharistic Piety*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Speelman, Herman. 2017. Weekly at the Lord's Table: Calvin's Motives for a Frequent Celebration of the Holy Communion. In *Liturgy and Ethics: New Contributions from Reformed Perspectives*. Edited by Pieter Vos. Leiden: Brill, pp. 149–74.

Terpstra, Nicholas. 2015. *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tuininga, Matthew J. 2017. *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Witvliet, John D. 2003. *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Woo, Kenneth J. 2019. *Nicodemism and the English Calvin, 1544–1584*. Leiden: Brill.

religions

MDPI

Article

Mass of the Ages 18–39: The Sudden Revival of the Tridentine Latin Mass and Lessons for a More Robust Post-Conciliar Theological Aesthetics in Liturgy

Sean C. Thomas

School of Ministry, Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, FL 33401, USA; seanthomas.theology@gmail.com

Abstract: The Tridentine Latin Mass (TLM) is rapidly growing in popularity. The movement that has formed around it has grown so attached to it as to threaten the unity of the Catholic Church. I attended TLMs in multiple distinct settings, studied the worshippers' ordinary theology, and proceeded hermeneutically using the Circle Method. The most useful insight to emerge from this is that the theological aesthetics of the post-Conciliar Mass could be more deeply symbolic and synergistic with Conciliar intellectual theology. The TLM's aesthetics offer worshippers assurances of certainty, but these assurances are empty. Therefore, parishes should facilitate the self-expression of the faithful, both to foster engagement with mystery and to inspire liturgical aesthetics. From these expressions, contextually meaningful symbols will emerge, which, through communal discernment guided by the Holy Spirit, may prove worthy to the task of enhancing liturgical aesthetics.

Keywords: Latin Mass; Vatican II; aesthetics; traditional Catholicism; liturgical movement; synodality; art; inculturation; practical theology; hermeneutics

1. Introduction

If one were to spend a single evening out at dinner with new traditionalist Catholic acquaintances, one may very well hear one young man describe his fantasy: high-rise concentration camps in the Australian desert, where all the globe's non-Catholics are to be housed until they should convert to Catholicism. All manner of criticism,[1] progressing from subtle attempts at correction to incisive quips and flabbergasted exclamations, may reveal that he is very seriously committed to this fantasy, ending the night with an apology only for how excited he is about the prospect. One might be chilled to find that one is the only person at this gathering criticizing this coercive vision.

1.1. Worship, Community, and Faith Formation

Faith is formed through worship. Human worship of the divine, though motivated in the first instance by human devotion to one's god, has the ultimate effect of edifying the worshipper, such that they more closely resemble the ideal that they worship. The worship action forms the worshipper, and the particularities of the worship action affect this formation.[2]

Jesus Christ instructed His gathered followers to do as He did at the Last Supper in remembrance. This instruction was accompanied by His prayer that His followers be one as God is one. In light of Christ's expressed desires, the norm for Christian worship is communal worship, specifically liturgical worship.

Faith is formed communally through this liturgical worship. In Eucharistic liturgies, such as Catholic liturgies, the community is also formed into one through the Eucharist.[3]

1.2. The Tridentine Latin Mass Movement: A Story of Defied Expectations

Nevertheless, for all of the unifying attributes of the Mass, the Catholic community is divided.[4] The deepest division is between traditionalist Catholics, who generally reject many of the developments in the life of the Catholic Church that have flowed from the Second Vatican Council, and the rest of the Catholic Church. Among these developments are the liturgical reforms implemented to accord with the Council's call for inculturation.[5] Therefore, by many definitions of "traditionalist Catholic", Catholics who prefer the Tridentine Latin Mass (TLM) are traditionalist. While not all TLM-preferring Catholics meet all of the potential criteria for classification as traditionalist, including ideological and theological traditionalism (Marx 2013, pp. 67–72), many, if not most, who attend TLMs are traditionalist in ways beyond simply liturgical preference, which is perhaps unsurprising given the social and informational forces.

Catholics outside of the traditionalist community, despite holding strongly to a wide range of ideologies and preferences,[6] have generally exhibited a "live-and-let-live" attitude toward other Catholics' ideologies and preferences. In the U.S., for example, the Catholic political ethos has been described as one of "inclusive loyalty and dissent" (D'Antonio et al. 2013, p. 56). This attitude befits a church whose name means "according to the whole,"[7] a church that sees all humanity as potential members, regardless of political, philosophical, or any other identity. This is not the case within the traditionalist Catholic community, which has a strong tendency to normatively enshrine their liturgical, political, and other preferences. The exclusive normative statements made by those who prefer the TLM incite reactions from those who are passionate about worship in the vernacular, which plant the seeds of their own normative enshrinements, and thence begins a cycle of disagreement that leads to disunity.

Besides the apparent defiance of the uniting effect of worship, the TLM movement defies expectations in a number of other ways. For one, one might expect the movement to be less popular among younger Catholics. During their formative years, the TLM was imagined as something entirely of the past, something their grandparents barely remembered, something their Catholic school teachers described to them as a dry, minimally engaging, even unpleasant experience.[8] For millennial Catholics, even with constant exposure to other Catholic families through all levels of school, extracurricular activities, and communal life, it was easy to have absolutely no idea that the TLM was still practiced.[9]

On the contrary, among committed Catholics, the strongest demographic for TLM preference is those aged 22–39. If one were to spend any amount of time in various Catholic young adult groups, even in a diverse, immigrant-rich, well-educated metropolis, one would find few groups that do not have a sizeable contingent of traditionalist Catholics who might, after the official meeting ends, discuss their discontent with mainstream Catholic doctrine and liturgy, bemoan any affront to reverence as they define it,[10] and invite newcomers to a "traditional Latin Mass." Some parishes' young adult groups would even be entirely composed of traditionalist Catholics. Even at Eastern Catholic parishes, Catholic young adults are becoming interested in the TLM.[11]

This is an emerging phenomenon. In the United States, it is a ubiquitous, still-accelerating, emerging phenomenon. It represents a discontinuity in U.S. Catholic life. This discontinuity is so pronounced that it prompts a reevaluation of the conceptualization of the reception of the Second Vatican Council.[12] And while it may be a phenomenon that is almost entirely restricted to committed Catholics, it is precisely young adult committed Catholics who will determine what the Catholic Church looks like later in the 21st century. The TLM movement is ubiquitous in North America, and it exerts through social and informational means a strong ideological influence on those within it. It will be a feature of U.S. Catholic life at least as long as millennial Catholics abide. To ignore it is akin to sticking one's head in the sand amidst a stampede. It must be understood.

This is no easy task for as counter-intuitive a trend as worship that appears to be willfully explicitly contextually mismatched.[13] To understand it, one must first understand TLM worshippers' ordinary theology.[14] That will allow an understanding of the discontinuity and apparent counter-contextuality of the phenomenon. That, in turn, will aid an understanding of the significance of the TLM movement for the Catholic Church. Upon this understanding, a reasoned response may be proposed, enacted, reflected upon, and refined.

2. Method and Methodology

The Circle Method[15] is well suited to the task, since inserting, correlating, confronting, and empowering are absolutely necessary, but above all else, because a resolution requires Spirit-inspired, collegially deliberated, communally evaluated insightful action. This method answers the call for liturgical and sacramental theology that accounts for what is happening in the complexities, particularly the social complexities, of the context (Morrill 2021, p. 15). Any understanding of ritual praxis in the TLM prior to the discontinuity of the 2020s must be reevaluated, as liturgical study does not inquire into static ritual but ritual activity (Bell 1992, pp. 48–200).

The process began with insertion, specifically participatory research. The researcher attended 13 TLMs at six churches in six U.S. cities.[16] The social scientific study of ritual and performance appropriately complements the social scientific and practical theological study of the worshippers and the liturgical theological study of ritual and performance (see Morrill 2021, p. 13). Liturgy by its nature is about what the people do (Senn 2006), and this must be studied holistically. Two of the churches studied featured TLMs celebrated by diocesan priests, including one parish serving a Catholic university. Two churches featured TLMs said by the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), which split from the Catholic Church over a dispute regarding the celebration of the TLM and remains in irregular communion with the Catholic Church. Two churches featured TLMs celebrated by the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP), which separated from the SSPX to reconcile with the Catholic Church.

The TLM worshippers were observed as the researcher worshipped alongside them, including the mutual reception of Communion in churches known to be in full communion with the Catholic Church. Upon their exit from the worship space, 73 worshippers were interviewed.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Demographics of the TLM Movement

A summary of the demographics, recorded in detail, at these Masses may be of some interest for those interested in the TLM movement. Generally, daily TLMs featured four to five adult women for every adult man.[17] 90% of the adult women wore veils. Of the adult men, 50% were attending alongside an adult woman. Relative to the English-language Masses at analogous times and locations, the TLM congregants appeared to be more of European descent and less of Latin American and other descents. The generational distribution was fairly strongly bimodal, with a significant majority of attendees either retirement-aged or aged 22–35. At Sunday TLMs, these statistical patterns were directionally similar though attenuated in magnitude. To what extent they were attenuated is not clear, as with over 500 worshippers present at a high Mass, precise quantification was not possible.

Some worship contexts featured deviations from this pattern. At an early evening FSSP Mass, 80% of attendees were under 40 years old. The SSPX Masses were also unimodal in age distribution: more of the congregants there tended to be old enough to have had the opportunity to have experienced the TLM as a child or young adult before the introduction of the vernacular Mass than at non-SSPX TLMs. Social veiling norms were more permissive in the university setting: those sitting in the front pews were veiling, while those sitting farther back became increasingly likely not to veil. One group of five female friends featured three veiled women and two unveiled women. Taken together with the interview data, this seems to indicate a liminal curiosity in the TLM among university-aged Catholics. For many of these Catholics, the TLM is still an experiment, while, among Catholics who are older than them, fewer are TLM-curious relative to those who have built an identity around the TLM.

3.2. Alternative Participation[18]

In the TLM movement, worship is non-verbal. The vast majority of congregants did not verbally respond to the priest. He would turn to the congregation and say "Dominus vobiscum",[19] but only a couple of people would say "et cum spiritu tuo."[20] This seemed to indicate a general lack of understanding of Latin, and for many this held true, but some informants explained they knew the response yet deliberately refrained from saying it aloud, because they felt it was more reverent to stay silent.

They do not see this as a lack of participation, though. They feel that they are participating by following along with the Mass in their 1959 Missals. These books, which explain what is going on in the Mass by providing the Latin being murmured by the priest, the English translation, and a diagram of where the priest is standing and what his hands are doing, are the most reliable way for worshippers to ascertain their temporal position in the progression of the TLM. One informant visiting from out-of-town explained how she viewed liturgical participation at a TLM. She compared the priest to an airplane pilot and the gathered assembly to passengers, the idea being that the priest's participation in making the worship successful was much more active and that the others present were therefore justified in taking a passive role.

As if on an airplane, the congregants acted as if oblivious to each other, despite being engaged in the same activity. No one responded to a sneeze by saying "God bless you." No congregants were observed looking at other congregants. The congregants seemed to be possessed by a dogged determination to maintain tunnel vision toward the altar and their missals.[21] This was less communal worship than it was parallel worship.[22]

This may partially explain why the TLM movement has only recently exploded in popularity, and why the TLM is particularly popular among younger committed Catholics. A certain desensitization to the presence of others may make it more possible for many people to feel comfortable worshipping in parallel instead of in community. This desensitization may come from Zoom meetings, Zoom classes, and live-streamed liturgies, where the convention is to mute oneself as a presenter speaks uninterrupted, even when the presenter invites minor interruptions. For the generation that grew up texting to communicate, even when discussing intimate matters, participating in worship by silently reading a missal is a less uncanny experience.[23]

Nevertheless, one who has a relationship with God will joyfully acknowledge God's presence as they encounter it. The "willful ignorance" of the gathered assembly by many of its members[24] suggests that they fail to see God's presence therein.[25]

3.3. The TLM Movement and Mission

The theological anthropology of TLM worshippers, which unbendingly subordinates the importance of and attention to their fellow human to the importance of and attention to God, ultimately limits their ability to mediate the missio Dei. God loves God's human creation, so to serve God fully, the priorities of the faithful should align with God's priorities.[26] TLM churches were observed to fall short of answering their missionary call.[27]

Many churches have less than an integral sense of mission;[28] however, this deficient sense of mission was particularly outstanding in the churches visited. One man who had been going to an SSPX church since the 1980s is a preciously rare example of a self-identified Catholic who saw no value in aid to the poor. He bragged that, at his church, "it's not about redistribution of wealth. When we have collections, they don't go to charities; we fix the place up and we pay for the priests."

One FSSP church just so happened to be holding its lone fundraising event of the year. The purpose was to raise money to send the congregation's children to a traditionalist Catholic summer camp over 2000 km away.

This makes some sense when one considers that the Society of St. Pius the X and the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter lack the economy of scale that comes with the sheer number of the faithful present in Catholic churches. While this may to some extent explain their lackluster mission, it does not excuse it, because it also serves to highlight the importance of communion with other Christians, as Church, for Christians' endeavors to act effectively as Christ's hands and feet. When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. Likewise, when the Christian Church divides itself because of pride and a Western fetishization of uniformity of belief, the Kingdom of God and its foremost beneficiaries, the poor, the marginalized, and those who need an introduction to the God who infinitely loves them, are robbed of their place at the table.

A comprehensive survey of the free literature at these churches, SSPX, FSSP, and diocesan, gave no indication of any outreach ministries. A diocesan parish featured the only observed evidence of any missionary endeavor: an old wooden box with a low-contrast bronze plaque that read "Food for the Poor." It seemed to be a holdover from a previous parish priest's tenure. One would donate through the top of this box, but it was being used primarily as a table. Upon it sat a bright seminarian donation box bedecked with large multi-colored polka dots.

Many Catholics at this parish were proud of the high Sunday Mass attendance, despite their parish's being located in a marginalized neighborhood. At this Mass, it was striking how different the inside of the church looked from the community outside—racially and economically, by education and by ZIP code—despite the parish's location next-door to low-income housing provided by the diocese.[29]

This is no wonder when any happenstance visitor to the church would find a room full of non-responsive people watching a priest murmur unintelligible language inaudibly. The TLM may attract Catholics seeking to deepen their experience of faith, but it repels, even frightens, many outsiders. An uninviting atmosphere acts as a bushel basket around the Light of the World present in the liturgy. History offers an empirical answer to the question of how to make disciples of all nations when the liturgy is unappealing: domination. Colonial domination is an obvious example, but not the only one. One SSPX congregant actually much prefers the Novus Ordo Mass. I asked her why, then, she only goes to TLMs. Standing next to her husband, she answered with a grim smile visible only to me: "marriage".

Liturgy is one of the primary spaces for mission.[30] This knowledge calls for a liturgy of encounter,[31] of encuentro, a liturgy that is deeply symbolic and relational (Guardini 1964, pp. 237–39).[32] The mystery of the liturgy should go deeper than language: it should point seductively at that relationality.

3.4. Ordinary Theology and Extra-Ordinary Theology

All 73 informants were asked what they liked so much about the Latin Mass. With few exceptions, they serenely answered, "the reverence." Many of them elaborated saying, "it's not about me; it's about God."[33] This is not an instance of a clever amalgamation of quotes typical when presenting qualitative research; a large majority of informants independently said those exact words. The number of informants who reported viewing the absence of some of the TLM prayers in the Novus Ordo Mass with a hermeneutic of suspicion has informed the researcher's approach, which views their reported ordinary theology with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Though I sought their ordinary theology, I found the theology of one or more shared thought leaders.[34]

Thus, some of the more unique responses were the most helpful hermeneutical keys for understanding the TLM movement.

One retired woman appreciated that she was taking part in the same Mass her grandparents took part in. She values the Latin Mass as part of a chain of memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000). Hers is a beautiful sentiment that imagines acting in unison with the Church of ages past. However, in the Eucharist, we also "remember the future." (Morrill 2000, p. 32). Therefore, an appreciation of diachronic communion[35] must also imagine the Mass her grandchildren celebrate, and the one their grandchildren will celebrate.

A couple of people expressed that the TLM feels to them like Eucharistic adoration. A tempting surface explanation may rest on the implications of worshippers' adoration of God's goodness that is inherent to their liturgical actions (Wolterstorff 2015b), but there is a more fundamental explanation in the functional significance of these two worship practices. Practitioners of Eucharistic adoration find healing and receive the grace they need for their mission.[36] This is partly because adoration offers the faithful a precious space to practice listening in their prayer. God's word is transformative and life-giving. In a context characterized by constant technologically mediated distractions and a culture of compulsive constant labor, Eucharistic adoration allows many to hear God's word who would not otherwise have any occasion to (Thomas 2024). Eucharistic adoration and the TLM offer worshippers instances of occasion-based worship that allow for spiritual growth,[37] as well as transformation and flourishing, despite incessant demands on attention in every other moment of their week. Young Catholic adults would appreciate an extra 5–15 min for personal Eucharistic prayer following reception of the Eucharist for this purpose exactly.[38] Both practices supply a deep and widespread demand for hesychasm.

3.5. Liturgical Aesthetics

Both of these insights are potentially fruitful hermeneutical points of departure, but I will focus on what promises to be the most fruitful. One informant offered her perception as to why Catholics young adults choose the TLM: they are finding the Novus Ordo Mass boring, because everything means exactly what it says it means.[39] A young priest walked up, and she asked him what he thought. He sees them flocking to the beauty they find in the TLM.

This is a criticism the Catholic Church should take seriously. There is a deep synchronicity between the aesthetics of TLM worship and the modern[40] ecclesiology that prevailed before the Second Vatican Council.[41] Before postmodern questions began to accumulate, the Catholic Church could stand more securely in its stewardship of the truth, building on a Scholastic metaphysics using a deductive epistemology. The faithful could rely on the Catholic Church to have an answer to all of the questions posed to it by its modern critics on the basis of some other familiar modern philosophical framework. They could rest assured in institutional expertise, much the same way airline passengers rest assured in their pilot's expertise: they understand their role to be largely passive. Their missals offer the enthusiastic and curious a satisfying window into the mysterious work of the pilot in the same way the digital seatback map display might.[42] This paternal guide to Catholic practice mirrors the pre-Conciliar Church's implicit message to the faithful: "just trust the professionals, and you can follow along if you like." Their message constituted an allowance for comfortable ignorance.

This synergy ought to be no surprise. Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi.[43] Liturgical language transforms its members,[44] for better or for worse. Imagination from liturgy[45] links the two, shaping one's perception of reality, which influences one's actions.

3.6. Why Here?[46] Why Now?

The enduring features of U.S. culture are disproportionately rooted in the Victorian era and the Post-War years. Americans collectively experienced these times in a way that juxtaposed them to the years where survivors had to face the death of people they knew and loved in the U.S. Civil War and the Second World War. These periods' lasting influence on U.S. culture is particularly pronounced in cultural Christmas traditions. Christmas comes at a time when people across the higher latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere seek comfort from darkness and the depression and existential uncertainty it brings. It is precisely in this existential uncertainty and darkness that they most turn to traditions that form a chain of memory to the times of recovery from collective trauma. For a pattern-finding species like ourselves, that is how we experience winter, as we wonder "Will the sun, which allows my family to eat, ever return?"

The pandemic provoked a similar existential fear: "will I ever get to see my communities again, or will my social experience continue to wane? How long must this season last until I am gainfully employed?" These questions are particularly urgent for young adults given their stage of life.[47] The vast majority of interviewees had been attending

TLMs for three years or less, which, given that the research was conducted in April 2023, aligns exactly with the onset of the pandemic. The pandemic death toll in the U.S. is higher than that of the Civil War and World War II combined.[48] And in those periods of recovery from trauma, the Mass was celebrated in Latin.[49] In the midst of existential uncertainty, there is comfort in the certainty that a modern, pre-Conciliar Church would offer.

This certainty, however, is built on a foundation of sand. The Catholic Church cannot answer every question anymore, if for no other reason than because new questions are being asked more quickly than they can be adequately answered. To vanquish uncertainty, answers have to work in every epistemological foundation. But the fleeting nature of certainty ought to be no surprise to the faithful. Jesus warned His disciples that there would be plenty of discomfort because they were His disciples. To imitate Christ is to have nowhere to rest one's head, nowhere to rest one's mind (Mt 8:20).

What Christ did promise was an advocate. The Holy Spirit brings gifts that allow us to develop a mature faith, a faith that needs no basis for certainty, because that is the very nature of faith. **She** is a foundation of stone. On this pneumatological foundation, we can expand, empower, and imagine.

3.7. Imagination for Liturgy[50]

It bears repeating: the Catholic Church must take the aesthetic criticism of the Novus Ordo Mass seriously. The most recent three pontificates have taken different approaches in the hopes of encouraging a liturgical practice that accords with the spirit of the Council, and yet the movement not only persists but is at a numerical apex and continues to grow. The ineffectiveness of the three approaches suggests that something about the Novus Ordo Mass may underly the ongoing process in which worshippers discover their affinity for the TLM. The discontinuity of the TLM's popular resurgence recommends a response to liturgical traditionalism under a new paradigm.

Considering that aesthetics is the normative science of objective beauty (García-Rivera 1999), a theological aesthetical approach may be helpful. As has been empirically demonstrated through the research findings, worshippers are finding a certain beauty in the TLM that is not present in the post-Conciliar Mass. The Novus Ordo Mass may be able to benefit from the incorporation of deeper symbols, symbols which fully allow mystery while fully emphasizing the participatory call and true nature of the liturgy.[51] This is not to detract from the wealth of signals within the Novus Ordo Mass, nor its intricate web of Scriptural allusions. Increased awareness of these allusions and their beauty is part of an inoculation against modernist extremism and liturgical division. Thankfully, there are resources available to educate people about the depth of the Novus Ordo Mass.[52] Awareness may be fostered not only through cognitive pathways but through visually experienced liturgical performance. A partial remedy may consist of ancient symbols performed more grandiosely and expressively. The modernist enshrinement of the rational over the ritual, in ignorance of the ritual nature of human beings (Han 2020), is still culturally prevalent, at least in the West. This modern negligence of ritual explains the smallness of the gestures in the TLM but also the general absence of ritual in extra-liturgical settings, which makes the presence of ritual in the TLM all the more resonant. Ritual performed with undeniable commitment in the post-Conciliar Mass would be all the more resonant.[53]

Nevertheless, there is room for even greater symbolic depth. The Mass should exude a synergy between Conciliar intellectual theology and liturgical theological aesthetics that is at least as strong as the synergy between the theological aesthetics of the TLM and pre-Conciliar intellectual theology.[54] Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi. This causal sequence is providential and innate.[55]

These symbols should speak to the present context. They must, therefore, address the underlying unresolved uncertainty that pervades the present context.

Philip Salim Francis' work offers a model for how this may be done. He studied students at Bob Jones University, an academic institution that exemplifies modernist Christian thinking. These students participated in a program in which evangelical university students expressed themselves through art in a natural area. He found that "the arts unsettled the evangelical practices of certainty, offering comfort and form to fledgling practices of *uncertainty*."[56]

3.8. A Proposed Solution That Integrates Treatment, Prevention, and a Flourishing Liturgy

Faith communities are suffering from the division that can be traced to the faithful's unresolved uncertainty. Catholic parishes should be organizing similar initiatives. This would be a meaningful step toward shepherding the faithful away from paths that lead to schism.

Lest the reader think this is hyperbole, a vignette from the research is in order. I developed a particularly close rapport with an older woman who goes to diocesan TLMs but not SSPX TLMs, even though they would have sometimes been more convenient for her. Her passionate desire to do the right thing by God shone particularly brightly. Seeing it in her helped me identify the same desire in other TLM attendees. Over breakfast, I asked her, as gently as possible, "if you were forced to choose between the Latin Mass and communion with Rome, which would you choose?" She thought about it carefully. After a few seconds of reflection, she said, "I would choose the Latin Mass. I would." Despite her ardent desire to abide by the Catholic Church's teaching, her attachment to the TLM prevails.

She is representative of the typical worshipper in the TLM movement. Where there is not already schism in this movement, there is a latent potential for schism.

The faithful enter the movement in an effort to live their faith more deeply, "to be more Catholic." That is how the movement is being sold to them. The tragic result is that they become less Catholic (see Figure 1).

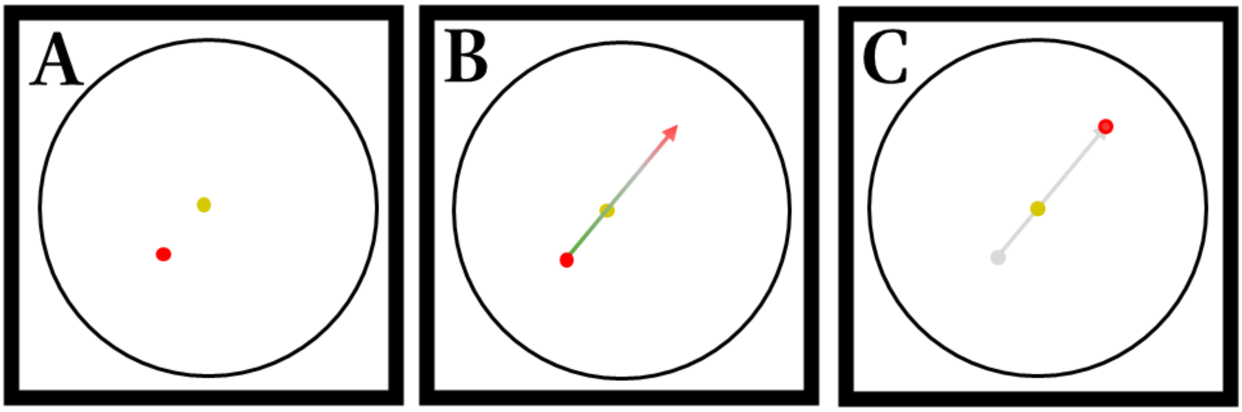

Figure 1. A Conceptualized Representation of the Path to Traditionalist Catholicism. This figure shows a common trajectory for Catholics who grow attached to the TLM and the ideology of traditionalist Catholicism. In (Panel **A**), the gold dot represents the Catholic "ideal", I_C, and the red dot represents a particular Catholic's position in praxiological space (represented and arbitrarily bounded by the outer circle) relative to I_C. Notably, there is distance between them. Upon experiencing a particular conversion or receiving some education, the Catholic in question decides to reduce the distance between their position and I_C, proceeding along a vector in the direction of I_C (Panel **B**). They all too often continue to proceed along that vector even after they have passed I_C, to the point where they are farther from I_C than when they began their movement (Panel **C**).

In this moment of liquid modernity, as clearly defined societal roles become increasingly fleeting, people turn to identity for psychological stability (Baumann 2012). They have found identity as part of a counterculture, namely, traditionalist Catholicism. In an oft-repeated pattern (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 1997, p. 129; Adorno 1994), their counterculture is actually a recapitulation of U.S. culture. For example, they worship God as if individuals. Through social contagion within the TLM movement, they become extreme, even to the point of fantasizing about religious violence. They come as normal Catholics curious about the aesthetics of the TLM. They stay because of the sense of community, formed through a sense of unity against the idea of Pope Francis and other imagined affronts and threats to orthodoxy. Nothing visible below the horizon of the future suggests any incentive strong enough to motivate them to leave.[57]

Therefore, the best solution available is to limit the influx of Catholics into this movement.[58] Parish initiatives for artistic expression to resolve uncertainty-based anxiety[59] are key in helping the faithful avoid the near occasion of schism. As these activities are conducted, and the faithful express themselves through art,[60] the Holy Spirit will have an opportunity to impart meaning through them. There is no better way to find symbols that speak to contextually prevalent stressors,[61] particularly symbols that act as a bridge from uncertainty to relationality, mercy, and joy in Christ.[62] The Holy Spirit will guide the propagation of these symbols, and, with the deliberate investment of effort, the often centuries-long process of grassroots development of adequate liturgical theological symbols can be accelerated.[63] In this way, the ideas from the parishes engaged in this strategy will aid other parishes facing the same issues. This is a relatively[64] safe[65] path toward imagining greater symbolic depth for the liturgy, as collective discernment aided by the Holy Spirit will determine which symbols merit liturgical inclusion.

4. Conclusions

The resurgent attachment to the TLM is a threat to the unity of the Catholic Church. The aforementioned vignette suggests that overt attempts to roll back access to the TLM may threaten that unity as well.[66] The least harmful course of action is to address the root causes of Catholics' entry into the TLM movement.

The first factor is the prevalence of the idea that TLM Catholics are inherently more devout and that the progression to greater devotion happens primarily through worship. God tells God's people otherwise. Increased devotion to God is accompanied by increased efforts to do God's will. God expresses God's will thus: "'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'" (Mt 9:13, quoting from Hos 6:6). God prefers that God's devotees prioritize works of mercy. The relative value of works of mercy to works of sacrifice is not clear, but this variable can be denoted as factor x, which is known to be greater than 1, so much greater that God feels comfortable speaking in prophetic hyperbole of x approaching infinity. The precise value of x may be left to personal discernment, but for those who are truly and informedly devoted to God, for every unit of increase they practice in works of sacrifice, they should practice a corresponding x units of increase in works of mercy. Closer adherence to the lex orandi is measured through closer adherence to the lex vivendi. Without more readily observable progress in the latter, one is right to question whether any progress made in the former is real or merely imagined.

God deserves our worship, but God desires our formation. Worship forms the worshipper to better serve God in God's desire for mercy. When they receive the Eucharist, worshippers become increasingly more like Christ, more able to act mercifully, to be the hands of God. An important aspect of imitation of Christ is Jesus' witness to God's love, even in the face of anxiety, remembering how Jesus witnessed to God's love by His crucifixion, in the face of the agony He experienced in the garden.

Worship should form Christians to witness to God's salvific love despite unresolved anxiety. Liturgical symbols contextually appropriate to the West, a global region wrought by anxiety, a negative emotion in response to uncertainty, should speak to this unresolved uncertainty, from which the TLM movement (over-)promises a refuge.[67] Beauty speaks to human emotions most effectively, so the most effective solution will be an aesthetic one. The findings above demonstrate that a superficial assessment of aesthetics will not suffice. A deep comprehension of aesthetics is needed because liturgical aesthetics have practical effects on Christian praxis. When parishes organize initiatives where the faithful express themselves in art, parishioners will resolve their anxiety not necessarily intellectually, but aesthetically. Some of these aesthetic resolutions will resonate more broadly. The Church can propagate these artistic responses, and collective discernment aided by the Holy Spirit will determine which symbols merit adoption. These may be additions to the liturgy or simply modifications to the environment. It is not for this paper to suggest specific aesthetic modifications to the liturgy. Rather, this is a question for further theological conversation, empirical research into the resonance of specific liturgical aesthetic permutations with the faithful, and, above all, the creativity and discernment of the People of God.

Such human participation in the work of the divine is the essence of the spirit of liturgical worship. This work is ongoing, and the tasks called for continue to evolve with the needs of the day (see Mt 6:11). To do the work required of them as the hands and feet of Christ, the faithful must be nourished by the appropriate Food for the journey. Today the human–divine collaboration called for is to holistically craft that shared meal—food, environment, and dialogue—so that the faithful are formed and strengthened sufficiently to do God's merciful work on earth.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in and collected for this study may be available on request from the corresponding author, subject to redaction and modification, due to concerns for the maintenance of confidentiality.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 This can be predicated on The Second Vatican Council 1965 5 or, if one prefers, an appeal to human decency.

2 Practice leads to reflection, which leads to revised practice. Humans naturally tend to operate in this way. This pattern forms the basis for a great deal of theological method; see, for example, (Browning [1991] 1996; Senn 2000; Smith 2009; Marx 2020).

3 See Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV, as well as Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation I and II in *The Roman Missal* (2011).

4 Even as they are united; see (Fink 1990), who posits the intriguing idea that Christians are united at a deep level, even as they are divided on a surface level. The division is growing to be far deeper than is healthy, though, particularly within a shared faith tradition.

5 Of course, these reforms began well before the Council, which represented the foremost fruit of the liturgical renewal movement, though neither its beginning (1909) nor its end (as the centennial edition of *Worship* is sure to highlight, the movement abides); see, for example, (Senn 2006, pp. 305–7, 319–23).

6 In explicitly political terms, this includes everything from ardent and active advocacy for policies in line with Catholic social teaching (Thomas 2023a, pp. 354–62) to Catholic members of Congress whose politics are wholly libertarian.

7 The word "catholic" derives from kata (according to) + holos (the whole).

8 Of course, God is present in an especially real way in the Eucharistic celebration, even when, as is the case in the TLM, the Mass includes no epiclesis. God's special presence in the liturgy only contributes to the paradox that is the division within the Catholic Church over the liturgy.

9 For an example of the complacency possible in this era before the precipitous ascent of the TLM's popularity, see (Pecklers 2009, pp. 23–46).

10 For the importance (and non-importance) of particularly held definitions of reverence, see (Fagerberg 2023).

11 There is stunningly little evidence in the academic literature to support this phenomenon that most U.S. (and, in all likelihood, U.K. and, to a lesser extent, broader global Anglosphere-resident) committed Catholic young adults are so acutely aware of. However, it is suggested by (Cieslik and Phillips 2022, p. 50), as well as (Rymarz 2022).

12 A conceptualization gainfully communicated by (Roy-Lysencourt 2022).

13 For the merits of contextually tailored worship, see (Acts 10–11; Pecklers 2009, p. 21; Schreiter 1985, pp. 1–30); or nearly any other scholarly theological source on the subject, as it represents the resounding consensus.

14 That is, the theology postulated and held by ordinary Christians (or, more broadly adherents of any religion). This term and concept are developed by (Astley 2002). Worshippers' own understanding of their liturgical practice must be included in any scholarly liturgical hermeneutical exercise, particularly one of such a puzzling phenomenon (Morrill 2021, pp. 21–88).

15 (Froehle and Koll 2019, pp. 181–203). This method involves five movements of paired actions: inserting and identifying, assessing and analyzing, correlating and confronting, expanding and empowering, and the collectively exercised evaluating and summarizing. This final step will take place once the strategy outlined below has been implemented by practitioners and parish leaders. For those who are open to collaboration and/or evaluation of the proposed measures, see the corresponding author details.

16 These cities were all in the same region, a region that will remain unspecified so as to restrict identifying information.

17 Obviously, these gender ratios exclude the very many dependent children present at daily Masses.

18 Much of the theology of traditional Catholics observed through this project is fairly common knowledge for the well-acquainted (e.g., their conviction that lay hands should not touch the Eucharist or their disdain for dancing priests and other congregants' attire; see Marx, "Ritual in the Age of Authenticity" for an in-depth treatment), so the focus here is on those aspects which cannot be ignored in a hermeneutical treatment of the TLM movement and on those that may be illuminated through this particular research.

19 The Lord be with you.

20 "And with your spirit". It is this, the celebrant's interactions with all who are present, that is intended to encourage the faithful's participation, as detailed in (Turner 2021, pp. 33–81). The concelebration of the faithful symbolizes the sacrifice of the Mass (Turner 2021, pp. 83–121), which the TLM movement views as the overwhelmingly primary characteristic of the liturgy.

21 This represents a mournfully flawed approach to the liturgy, the purpose of which is to not ignore the world (Fagerberg 2016, p. 96), much less those with whom one worships.

22 Parallel worship is still liturgical (Wolterstorff 2015b, p. 8), though it is obviously rare for liturgical action to be non-communal.

23 For a discussion of how intrapersonal and interpersonal skills are affected by the sudden onset of videoconferencing as a medium of social gathering, see (Joia and Lorenzo 2021, p. 2531).

24 This assertion is based in part on in-depth interviews in which TLM worshippers reported a certain cultivated lack of awareness of other worshippers present.

25 Of course, as Robert Feduccia explores further in yet-unpublished work, God's presence is in the church as it sings (psalit) and prays (supplicat) (The Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 7). It is questionable whether the people gathered in silence sing in the sense of psalit and pray in the sense of supplicat or if their prayer and song, internalized, formal, and solemn, are better described using the words "cantat" and "orat."

26 For more on the missionary orientation of liturgy, see (Fagerberg 2016, pp. 4ff).

27 Of the six elements of mission as prophetic dialogue (Bevans and Schroeder 2004, pp. 348–95), they were observed to excel at one (contemplative), pass in another (witness), and perform poorly in three (justice, inculturation, and reconciliation). The research conducted was inconclusive with regard to the sixth (interreligious dialogue).

28 For a sense of mission that is integral, see, for example, (Padilla 1986; Benedict XVI 2009).

29 This indicates a rejection of the sacramental grace that transforms the community of the faithful into one of prophetic disciples that is empowered to transform the oppressive structures surrounding them, thus uniting and reconciling those whom these structures have isolated (Bretanha Junker 2014, pp. 60–143). One such isolated person was observed at worship. A devout elderly Vietnamese women attended daily TLMs because she lived in the adjacent diocesan-provided housing. She passionately loved God and appreciated the intimate encounter with God in the Mass. She had no car, but she lived next to the church. Despite her preference for Mass to be in a language she actually knew, she went every day. One day, her phone rang loudly and announced "Unknown Caller." This prompted a rare acknowledgment by a TLM worshipper of her fellow worshipper: an intentionally loud, disapproving smack of the lips, decidedly **not** a realization of this vision of God's sacramental grace.

30 Yet not in such a way that the liturgy is simply instrumental toward this end (Bretanha Junker 2014). In the liturgy, rituals serve as a moment to reflect on the incremental progress the worship community has made toward liberation and then to recommit itself, in a faithful communal ritual setting, to doing God's work in the world (Empereur and Kiesling 1990), or, put another way, to mediating God's sending of Godself to the margins.

31 For one conception of a liturgy of encounter, see (Morrill 2012).

32 This may be one path to the profoundly inter-relational human collectives that (Rogers-Vaughn 2016, pp. 211–28) calls for to remedy the "privatization of suffering" (100-3) that has increasingly come to plague the mental health of U.S. Americans.

33 The very inclusion of a single liturgical second-person address to God implies that God participates in the liturgy as listener. Intercession implies that God will hear worshippers favorably and bring the Kingdom and its fruits of flourishing (Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*). Thus, the "about-ness" of the Mass cannot be isolated to God, nor to the worshipper. In the liturgy, all exist in relation to each other.

34 The entire TLM movement seemed to care about the same thing at the same time, with the shared outrage or obsession rotating on a three-day cycle. Interviewees across the cities of the region were talking about the same thing as an extreme all-traditionalist Catholic young adult group in an unconnected region. The leaders of this group have since created a WhatsApp group that conglomerates other Catholic young adult groups on WhatsApp across the latter region. There is a similar group for all the traditionalist Catholics in New York. These groups explain some, but not all, of the TLM movement's collective awareness.

35 See (Morrill 2021, p. 53) for additional comments on the importance of considering communion diachronically and synchronically.

36 (Thomas 2023b). Those interested in citing this assertion should note that this source contains a foretaste of a fuller communication of the research into the lived theology of Eucharist adoration that is to come in the academic literature.

37 For more on this concept, see (Foster 1994) and (Morrill 2021, p. 101).

38 (Thomas 2024), as well as Thomas, unpublished findings. These findings support calls for greater emphasis on silence in the liturgy, such as that in Pecklers (2009, pp. 40–46).

39 Her criticism echoes that of Peckler, *The Genius of the Roman Rite*, 87: didactic efforts may come at the cost of disrupting the flow of worship.

40 A note on terminology may be important here, given that the traditionalist Catholic community often uses the word "modern" to denote what would in academic circles be described as "post-modern." Here, the term "modern" refers to absolutizing worldviews that envision utopia as possible if complete truth as to how the world works is discovered and adopted by all. Modern thought prevailed in Europe roughly from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century and is fundamental to scientific progress, but also to colonialism, fascism, and totalitarianism.

41 Authenticity is something many of the faithful are seeking in their worship. A particularly effective hermeneutical lens for identifying authenticity is harmony, particularly between inner and outer experiences. See Marx, *Authentic Liturgy*.

42 Those in the TLM movement love the knowledge they get from their missals that they would not otherwise have; there is a certain sense of initiation when they begin using them. They are happy to buy young inquisitive newcomers a monthly 1959 missal and initiate them into the knowledge of what is happening in the Tridentine Latin Mass.

43 This oft-repeated liturgical maxim was formulated by Prosper of Aquitaine, *Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae Episcoporum Auctoritates, de Gratia Dei et Libero Voluntatis Arbitrio* 8, with supplicare used instead of orare, and evolved as detailed in (Johnson 2013, pp. 1–23), including the common embellishment of "lex vivendi."

44 Bretanha Junker, *Prophetic Liturgy*.

45 Thomas H. Schattauer has developed this concept, building from his (Schattauer 2019, pp. 44–45).

46 "Here" in this case refers to the United States, where the study was conducted. The TLM movement is by no means restricted to the United States. However, the U.S. elements of the movement currently possess a claim to global leadership that is difficult to dispute. Thus, an understanding of the TLM movement in the U.S. facilitates an understanding of the movement elsewhere, both because the movement elsewhere takes cues from successes in the U.S., and because societal factors in the United States that have created an environment favorable to the rise of the TLM movement may be present to various extents in many other global contexts.

47 This might be a factor in explaining the difference in attachment to the TLM between young adult worshippers aged 25–39 versus those aged 18–22. At the latter age, either one's university offers social and (delayed) employment assurances or one has not left one's community behind to go to college.

48 "COVID Data Tracker", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed 20 December 2023, https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home; "Death and Dying", National Park Service, accessed 20 December 2023, https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/national_cemeteries/death.html; "Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II", The National WWII Museum, accessed 20 December 2023, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-worldwide-deaths-world-war.

49 Practice of the TLM as a romantic return to past worship makes even more sense when considering the traditionalist Catholic social imagination of history. Multiple informants claimed that the TLM constitutes Christian liturgy as originally celebrated. While this obviously reflects an incomplete understanding of early Christian history, as the use of the Latin language would have been totally nonsensical given the very demographics of the Church, not to mention the demographics of its persecutors, it also reflects a deep search for authenticity. In some ways, the traditionalist Catholic liturgical–historical imagination reflects a medievalist fallacy in the conceptualization of liturgy.

50 This concept too comes from Schattauer, building on his "Training Liturgical Imagination."

51 As called for in (Pecklers 2009, pp. 40–46).

52 For example, (Turner and Martens 2023; Sri 2011).

53 Especially if that ritual is more contextually relevant. This point is developed in the following paragraphs.

54 For the as-yet incompleteness of the realization of the vision of the Second Vatican Council, see (Pecklers 2009, p. 39ff).

55 Humans reason emotionally and, when asked to explain their reasoning, backfill with logic (Haidt 2001, pp. 814–34). Emotions are more easily shaped by beauty than by reasoning.

56 (Francis 2017, p. 141). Original emphasis.

57 Nevertheless, there is hope on a personal scale in the short term and at a larger scale in the long term. Hope for change is predicated upon encounter, both in the liturgy and the liturgy outside liturgy (see Fagerberg, *Consecrating the World*, but also obviously (Fagerberg 2018)). Those who remain in their TLM community do so precisely because it is a community. The only way they will find their way out is if those Catholics on the opposite side of the divide offer them relationship and a place in their community. The path back to ecclesial wholeness necessitates a liturgical and extra-liturgical ecclesial disposition that is expressively ready for encounter.

58 As liturgical action leads to ethical action (Senn, *The People's Work*), stemming the flow, especially of young adults, into the TLM movement, will also address the crisis of chauvinism led by the traditionalist Catholic movement, which is more comfortable with violence as a means of religious persuasion than a healthy spiritual formation would have them be.

59 See the diversity of effects art has on human action in (Wolterstorff 1980) and the further development of this principle in religious, worshipping, and liturgical contexts in (Wolterstorff 2015a).

60 One can already imagine detractors ridiculing artistic expression in parish settings. To them, one might address a case on purely modernist terms. The idea that form and function are normatively causally related is a very modernist one. The Creator made humans an artistic species, as is empirically observable. It would be folly at best, sin at worst, to rebel against how we were made.

61 These symbols may richly express the wounded innocence (García-Rivera 2003) of a collapsed sense of certainty, and through this expression provide catharsis. These symbols may draw on Scripture, as the corpus of symbolism present in the Mass does (Daniélou [1956] 1964). Particularly resonant may be Scriptural instances wherein Jesus disrupts not only the disciples' theretofore unquestioned preconceived notions but also those of the powerful, who were prouder and less intimate with Jesus. This distinction is meaningful in how the faithful conceptualize attachment to certainty relative to a humble relationship with God and may thus constitute a foundation for such contextual liturgical symbolism.

62 Two ideas flow from a view of liturgy as divine datum. The first is that liturgy produces fruit by shaping worshippers' attitudes. The second is that it should not be subject to hasty manipulation (Daneels 2003, pp. 7–26). A pneumatological inspiration of liturgical symbolism is concordant with a view of liturgy as divine datum.

63 This progression from artistic expression to ritual is a natural progression, given that, as noted in (Morrill 2021, 145–159), the irresolvable ambivalences of ritual mirror those of life.

64 There are risks in both the pre-Conciliar and post-Conciliar liturgies (Marx 2013, pp. 372–24). These ought to be weighed in considering the risks of a liturgy that takes seriously the criticisms motivating the oppositional polemics by the supporter of each.

65 Pecklers, in *The Genius of the Roman Rite*, notes the consequences of hasty liturgical experimentation. These experiments loom large in the memory and historical consciousness—and even the propaganda—of traditionalist Catholics. This underscores the importance of an extra-liturgical space for experimentation.

66 Of course, a balance should be found in each local church, because the continued availability of the TLM will draw more Catholics into a potentially separatist movement.

67 This is the second factor. A third may be the desire of the faithful to participate in authentic worship (see (Marx 2013) and (Congar 2011)), a factor which needs no remedy, particularly when the other two factors are addressed properly.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. 1994. *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*. Edited by Stephen Crook. New York: Routledge.

Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. 1997. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. New York: Verso. First published 1944.

Astley, Jeff. 2002. *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening, and Learning in Theology*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Baumann, Zygmunt. 2012. *Liquid Modernity*. Malden: Polity.

Bell, Catherine. 1992. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Benedict XVI. 2009. *Caritas in Veritate (Encyclical on Integral Human Development)*. Vatican: Vatican.

Bevans, Stephen B., and Roger P. Schroeder. 2004. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Bretanha Junker, Tércio. 2014. *Prophetic Liturgy: Toward a Transforming Christian Praxis*. Eugene: Pickwick.

Browning, Don. 1996. *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. First published 1991.

Cieslik, Emma, and Robert Phillips. 2022. Veiled Heads, Venerating Hearts: The Return of Veiling among US Catholics Post Vatican II. *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 12: 43–58. [CrossRef]

Congar, Yves. 2011. *True and False Reform in the Church*. Translated by Paul Philibert. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Daneels, Godfried. 2003. Liturgy Forty Years after the Second Vatican Council: High Point or Recession. In *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*. Edited by Keith F. Pecklers. New York: Continuum, pp. 7–26.

Daniélou, Jean. 1964. *The Bible and the Liturgy*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. First published 1956.

D'Antonio, William V., Michele Dillon, and Mary L. Gautier. 2013. *American Catholics in Transition*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Empereur, James L., and Christopher G. Kiesling. 1990. *The Liturgy That Does Justice*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Fagerberg, David W. 2016. *Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology*. Kettering: Angelico.

Fagerberg, David W. 2018. *Liturgy Outside Liturgy: The Liturgical Theology of Fr. Alexander Schmemann*. Rome: Chorabooks.

Fagerberg, David W. 2023. Liturgy and Reverence. *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* 27: 4–26. [CrossRef]

Fink, Peter J. 1990. Sacramental Theology after Vatican II. In *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*. Edited by Peter J. Fink. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, pp. 1107–13.

Foster, Charles R. 1994. *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Francis, Philip S. 2017. *When Arts Disrupts Religion: Aesthetic Experience and the Evangelical Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Froehle, Bryan T., and Karla Ann Koll. 2019. World Christian Revitalization and the Circle Method. In *Signs of New Life in Central America and the Caribbean: Christian Revitalization Amid Social Chang*. Edited by Karla Ann Koll. Wilmore: First Fruits, pp. 181–203.

García-Rivera, Alejandro R. 1999. *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

García-Rivera, Alejandro R. 2003. *A Wounded Innocence: Sketches for a Theology of Art*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Guardini, Romano. 1964. A Letter from Romano Guardini. *Herder Correspondence* 1: 237–39.

Haidt, Jonathan. 2001. The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment. *Psychological Review* 108: 814–34. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Han, Byung-Chul. 2020. *The Disappearance of Rituals*. Medford: Polity.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle. 2000. *Religion as a Chain of Memory*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press.

Johnson, Maxwell E. 2013. *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay between Christian Worship and Doctrine*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Joia, Luiz Antonio, and Manuela Lorenzo. 2021. Zoom In, Zoom Out: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Classroom. *Sustainability* 13: 2531. [CrossRef]

Marx, Nathaniel. 2013. Ritual in the Age of Authenticity: An Ethnography of Latin Mass Catholics. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, USA.

Marx, Nathaniel. 2020. *Authentic Liturgy: Minds in Tune with Voices*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press Academic.

Morrill, Bruce. 2000. *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue*. Collegeville: Pueblo.

Morrill, Bruce. 2012. *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist: The Paschal Mystery in People, Word, and Sacrament*. New York: Paulist.

Morrill, Bruce. 2021. *Practical Sacramental Theology: At the Intersection of Liturgy and Ethics*. Eugene: Cascade.

Padilla, C. René. 1986. *Misión Integral: Ensayos sobre el Reino y la Iglesia. Nueva Creación*. Grand Rapids: Nueva Creación.

Pecklers, Keith F. 2009. *The Genius of the Roman Rite: On the Reception and Implementation of the New Missal*. Collegeville: Pueblo.

Rogers-Vaughn, Bruce. 2016. *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Roy-Lysencourt, Philippe. 2022. The Reception of the Second Vatican Council by Traditionalist Catholics. In *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*. Edited by Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 360–78.

Rymarz, Richard. 2022. 'It's Where I Feel at Home': An Investigation of Young Adult Catholic Members of an Australian Traditional Latin Mass Community. *Australasian Catholic Record* 99: 32–48.

Schattauer, Thomas H. 2019. Training Liturgical Imagination. *Living Lutheran* 4: 44–45.

Schreiter, Robert J. 1985. *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Senn, Frank C. 2000. *New Creation: A Liturgical Worldview*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Senn, Frank C. 2006. *The People's Work: A Social History of the Liturgy*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Smith, James K. A. 2009. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Sri, Edward. 2011. *A Biblical Walk through the Mass*. West Chester: Ascension.

The Roman Missal. 2011. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

The Second Vatican Council. 1963. *Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)*. Vatican: Vatican.

The Second Vatican Council. 1965. *Nostra Aetate (The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)*. Vatican: Vatican.

Thomas, Sean C. 2023a. A Home for the Politically Homeless? The American Solidarity Party, Catholics, and Third Parties in U.S. Politics. *Politics and Religion* 17: 353–79. [CrossRef]

Thomas, Sean C. 2023b. Is Eucharistic Adoration Really an Idle Retreat from the World? What Interviews with Worshippers Reveal. *Fieldnotes*, October 10. Available online: https://studyingcongregations.org/is-eucharistic-adoration-really-an-idle-retreat-from-the-world-what-interviews-with-worshippers-reveal/ (accessed on 20 December 2023).

Thomas, Sean C. 2024. The Lived Theology of Eucharistic Adoration: Encounter and a Space for Receptivity. Paper presented at Exploring Contemporary and Alternative Worship Seminar of the North American Academy of Liturgy Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA, USA, January 4.

Turner, Paul. 2021. *Ars Celebrandi: Celebrating and Concelebrating Mass*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Turner, Paul, and John W. Martens, eds. 2023. *Liturgy and Life Study Bible*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 1980. *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 2015a. *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 2015b. *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

religions

MDPI

Article

Formation of Korean Christianity through the Banning of Ancestral Rites

Shinhyung Seong

Baird College of General Education, Soongsil University, Seoul 06978, Republic of Korea; seongshil@ssu.ac.kr

Abstract: This study explores the ways in which a ban on ancestral rites influenced Korean Christianity. Ancestral rites are religious ceremonies that form the most critical social basis of Joseon, a Confucian society. First, the Korean Catholic Church was the first to oppose ancestral rites. Catholics created a new social and ethical resonance in Joseon society but had to endure tremendous persecution. Second, Protestantism was introduced when Joseon society was the most confused. Protestant missionaries banned ancestral rites, and Korean Protestants accepted them. Gradually, they interpreted it and embodied it in their faith. The ban on ancestral rites contributed to the formation of Korean Christianity. This laid the foundation for Christian social ethics and *Hyo* (孝, *Xiao* (Chinese pronunciation), filiality) theology. It has expanded into various fields, such as systematic theology, biblical studies, practical theology, and liturgical practice. Thus, this study examines how the ban on ancestral rites in Korea had a profound impact on the contextualization of Korean Christianity.

Keywords: ancestral rites; contextualization; Korean Christianity; *Hyo* (filiality) theology; liturgical practice

1. Introduction

Theology as a process of contextualization (Bevans 2002, p. 3) led to the formation of Christianity when the first Jewish disciples of Jesus transmitted their teachings to Greek culture. Christianity spread worldwide and developed to suit the circumstances of each region. Christianity has no unique theology but rather a contextual theology. Specifically, Christianity has evolved through the traditional confessional theologies in ways related to the enculturating process of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, like Christology and the Trinity.

Accordingly, this study examines ancestral rites, one of the most critical issues in introducing and developing Christianity in Korea. It examines how Christianity, a Western religion, was contextualized in Korea, and how theology and liturgy were formed. First, it examines the story of the Korean Catholic Church's refusal to perform ancestral rites. In particular, the background and results are explored, focusing on the *Jin-san* incident, in which Catholics refused to perform ancestral rites for the first time. Second, this study examines how Korean Protestant churches rejected ancestral rites. In Korean Protestantism, the controversy over the rejection of ancestral rites developed as church members accepted and amplified missionaries' claims. Finally, this study examines how Christianity became indigenous to Korean society through this process from social–ethical, theological, and liturgical perspectives. This study examines one aspect of the formation of Korean Christianity.

2. Religious Meaning of Ancestral Rites of Confucianism and its Social Context in Korea

Ancestral rites are the main ceremonies that best reveal the religious characteristics of Confucianism. From the standpoint of viewing Confucianism as a form of religion rather than a political ideology, ancestral rites have been emphasized as the center of Confucian tradition. Three foci are involved in interpreting ancestral rites as religious forms. First, people receive blessings from them. Second, ancestral rites make humans realize the extinction and existence of the soul. Third, ancestral rites help people realize the origin and the ultimate (Lee 2011, pp. 476–85; Bae 2013, pp. 419–23).

Confucianism emphasizes that those who perform ancestral rites are blessed. Confucius once said, "I receive blessings when I offer sacrifices (*The Book of Rites*, Chapter 10)."[1] Humans receive blessings from God through sacrifices and meet God through this process. There are seven main stages of ancestral rites:[2] humans welcome the gods (*yeong-sin*, 迎神), humans offer sacrifices to the gods (*jin-chan*, 進饌), humans raise drinks to the gods (*heon-jag*, 獻酌), gods accept humans' devotion and offerings (*heum-hyang*, 歆饗), gods respond to humans with blessings (*gang-bog*, 降福), humans receive and keep the blessings given (*eum-bog*, 飮福), and humans send gods with courtesy (*song-sin*, 送神).[3] Humans conduct the first, second, and third stages toward gods. Gods conduct the fourth act and the fifth stage to humans. The sixth and seventh stages involve humans' building relationships with gods. Among these, the fifth and sixth steps are directly related to blessings (Bae 2013, p. 419).

The blessings received through ancestral rites do not mean praying for materialistic blessings but are obtained through the mutual relationship between gods and humans. In other words, it is a blessing that prays for people to live well in the world through encounters between God and humans. Chapter 25 of *The Book of Rites* elaborates this point:

> The ancestral rite of a virtuous person is sure to receive the blessing. It is not the blessing that the world calls, but being equipped (*bi*, 備)). Being equipped means being compliant in all things (*sun*, 順)). It implies that he or she is equipped to follow the doctrine, which means that they dedicate themselves internally and follow the way (*do* (Tao, Chinese pronunciation) 道,) externally. 賢者之祭也, 必受其福, 非世所謂福也. 福者 備也, 百順之名也. 無所不順者謂之備, 言內盡於己, 而外順於道也. (The Book of Rites 2003, Chap. 25)

Thus, the blessings received through ancestral rites do not mean acquiring material belongings. However, since virtuous people already live according to the principles (the Tao, *do*, 道) of everything, this life is a blessing from the gods.

Moreover, ancestral rites help people understand the existential limits of life and death and accept the world after death. In other words, ancestral rites make people realize that the dead and the living interact even after death. Confucian ancestral rites divide the soul into *hon* (魂) and *baeg* (魄). *Hon* (魂) is the energy from heaven, and *baeg* (魄) is the shape of the earth. Heaven is related to the *yang* (陽, positive) principle, and the earth is related to the *eum* (陰, *yin* (Chinese pronunciation), negative) principle. In other words, when humans die, they return to the principles of *eum* (*yin*) and *yang*, the basis of harmony (Lee 2011, p. 484). In Confucianism, however, the soul does not have permanence but exists in the relationship of gathering *hon* and *baeg* at birth and dispersing them at death. "Dispersion" means that an individual disappears and returns to the universal energy of *eum* (*yin*) and *yang*. In Confucianism, the soul is said to remain intact for approximately 100 years (four generations) after death and then gradually disappears. Thus, ancestral rites were performed for about four generations (Lee 2011, p. 485). In the Confucian ancestral rite tradition, there is no separate mediator, such as a priest performing ancestral rites. The first-born son in a family performed the ceremony. Families are living beings whose ancestors and descendants are connected, and ancestral rites intertwine the living and dead. The person who conducts ancestral rites must live his or her life sincerely as a mediator connecting the living and dead (Lee 2011, pp. 486–87).

Lastly, the fact that death is not the end, realized through ancestral rites, naturally makes people aware of the existence of gods since they can reach the realm of ultimate origin through ancestral rites. Humans meet God through ancestral rites, such as blessings. Sincerity (*seong*, 誠) is needed for this process to occur. Ancestral rites are the foundation for reaching heaven wholeheartedly. The purpose of ancestral rites is to return to the original form. Ancestral rites are primarily to honor the parents who gave birth and, ultimately, to honor heaven, the source of everything (Lee 2011, pp. 478–80). Confucianism eventually aims to reach heaven through self-discipline, that is, the process of uniting heaven and man. The reason for performing ancestral rites with sincerity is not to receive material blessings, appease the gods, or avoid their wrath and curses. The ultimate goal is to interact with and respond to God through ancestral rites (Bae 2013, pp. 422–23). Confucianism does not have the concept of monotheism like Western Christianity. It is difficult to understand the idea of God in Confucianism through Western concepts, but if we distinguish it, the idea of Confucianism is close to henotheism. There are three types of divine beings in Confucianism as the objects of ancestral rites: *Cheon-sin* (天神) (or *Sang-je*, 上帝, the god of the sky), *Ji-gi* (地祇, the god of the earth), and *In-gwi* (人鬼, ghosts of deceased ancestors). *Cheon-sin* is the God who presides over everything in the sky; *Ji-ji* refers to the mountains, rivers, and plants on the earth; and *In-gwi* is the god of the dead. The gods follow heaven's orders and interact with each other, and humans live with the gods to reach heaven (Bae 2013, pp. 408–10). Although Confucianism's view of God is far from Christian monotheism, it also clearly understands divine beings, as revealed through living in response to divine beings in specific situations.

During the Joseon Dynasty,[4] Confucian ancestral rites became deeply entrenched in the lives of Joseon people. The upper and lower classes regarded ancestral rites as significant ceremonies, even if the lower class could not prepare sufficient sacrifices. The desire to examine oneself and reach heaven and ancestral spirits became deeply rooted in people's lives during the Joseon Dynasty. The ancestral rites that played this role became a tool for creating social contradictions during the late Joseon Dynasty. Ancestral rites became a tool for building a social system that valued patriarchal, male-centered, primogenitary, and polygamous systems (Moon 1974, p. 75).

The reason for strengthening these social contradictions can be found in the code of clan regulations (*jong-beob*, 宗法) that has been strengthened since the 17th century. The code of clan regulations is a system of tribal organizations established during the Zhou Dynasty in China to establish a legitimate and primogeniture male-inheritance system. Family rules such as ancestral rites and marriage are regulated through this code. Neo-Confucian scholars accepted and established it in Korea at the end of the Goryeo Dynasty. In Joseon, this law was strengthened after the 17th century and became an important instrument for protecting social ideology. This code strengthened male-centered inheritance rights related to ancestral rites and women's subordination to men in the home (J. Kim 2002, pp. 38–9).

During this dynasty, women were subordinate to men. If the husband died during the early Joseon Dynasty, a woman could be listed as the head of the family (household); however, this could not be done during the late Joseon Dynasty. After her husband's death, a woman became dependent on her sons. Women were utterly subservient to men and were not given the right to handle matters based on their independent judgment. Women's rights and duties have disappeared, leaving only protection and exclusion. This relationship was also revealed in ancestral rites. In the early Joseon Dynasty, a woman had the authority as the daughter-in-law of the head of the family, known as the right of the head of the family (*chong-bu-gwon*, 冢婦權). If the husband died childless, the woman (*chong-bu*, 冢婦) had the right to take her husband's place in ancestral rites. However, during the late Joseon Dynasty, this authority disappeared. When the day of ancestral rites comes, it is rare for a woman to participate in ancestral rites, and she is relegated to being a person who only prepares food and other materials for ancestral rites (S. Kim 2016, pp. 31–3).

In this situation, the Korean people accepted Christianity as a Western religion. They accepted the Catholic Church first in the 1870's. And they accepted the Protestant Church in the 1890's. The teachings of Christianity as a foreign religion posed the social framework of the Joseon Dynasty related to the practice of ancestral rites.

3. Korean Catholic Church and Ancestral Rites

The introduction of Christianity, a Western religion, into Joseon was an extraordinary phenomenon. Catholic missionaries like Francis Xavier and Matteo Ricci consecutively arrived in East Asia, such as Japan in 1549 and China in 1601. Catholic missionaries may have initiated the Catholic churches in East Asia. Meanwhile, there is a theory about the origin of *Im-jin-wae-lan* (the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592) that Céspedes, a Catholic missionary who was active in Japan with the Japanese army, came to Joseon in 1593 and first spread the Catholic Church (Kim et al. 2009, pp. 107–16). However, this theory is not currently accepted. Instead, after the *Byeong-ja-ho-lan* (the war between the Qing Dynasty (China) and the Joseon Dynasty, December 1636–January 1637), the Joseon Dynasty learned about the Catholic Church in China through the *Buyeon* envoy (*bu-yeon-sa-haeng*, 赴燕使行) to China through the travel of the noble class, known as *yeon-haeng* (燕行) in Korea. Joseon people were able to access Western books. These books were mainly Catholic Church books (Cho 2006, p. 200). Joseon people, especially those from the noble class who came and went as envoys, naturally accepted Western books as Western Studies (*Seo-hag*, 西學). Some gradually converted to the Catholic Church. This was the first time in the history of the World Church that Christianity was accepted voluntarily but not by missionaries.

In the late Joseon Dynasty, Joseon society divided ideological systems into right ideology (*jeong-hag*, 正學), practical ideology (*sil-hag*, 實學), and pseudo-ideology (*sa-hag*, 邪學). *Jeong-hag* was Neo-Confucianism, and *sil-hag* was a practical study to reform the theoretical rigidity of Neo-Confucianism. Buddhism and folk religion were in the category of *sa-hag*, and Western learning (*Seo-hag*, 西學) was newly added. *Jeong-hag* and *sil-hag* were socially recognized, but *sa-hag* was not publicly accepted (Cho 2003, pp. 51–2). The acceptance of the Catholic Church by the Joseon people, which began voluntarily with the introduction of Western learning (*Seo-hag*), reflected the social phenomenon of that time, including the demand for a changing social structure and the acceptance of advanced Western culture, that is, modernization. This was a result of a combination of these demands (K. Cho 2003, pp. 53–4; J. Kim 2002, p. 9).

Lee Seung-hun, the first baptized Catholic Christian in Korea, founded the first Catholic Church in Joseon in 1784, known as the initiating year of the Korean Catholic Church. He was a nobleman, received baptism by Missionary Jean-Joseph de Grammont in the Qing Dynasty, and returned to establish and spread the Catholic Church. Lee became Catholic at the recommendation of Lee Byeok, who had already become Catholic. He went to the Qing Dynasty, received the world, and returned to Joseon to establish a church. In areas without priests, a baptized person could build a church and officiate at mass in the Catholic tradition. Lee established the first Catholic Church as a substitute priest (Grayson 2005, p. 9). The Catholic Church began to spread among the noble class, gradually spread to the middle class, and was accepted by commoners. It spread quickly among those who wanted to reform the social hierarchy of the time:

> While the church was established by the scholar-gentry class, the first leaders included members from the middle people and commoners. An early Catholic adherent, the butcher Hwang Ilgwang, was of the lowest class and hence despised in society. When he became a member of the Catholic community, he was overwhelmed with emotion for being treated as a peer…… Other members of community released their slaves. (Yoon 2007, p. 357)

They also translated and read the Bible (the Gospel of Jesus) into Hangul, the Korean alphabet created by King Se-jong but ignored by the upper class because they respected only Chinese culture, preached the Gospel to women, and created a new community (J. Kim 2002, pp. 12–3; Yoon 2007, pp. 357–58).

The Catholic Church quickly took root in Joseon society but soon suffered persecution. The Catholic Church, which emphasizes monotheism, banned ancestral rites, and Catholic believers in Joseon followed this order. This belief became a leading cause of persecution. The trend of rejecting ancestral rites should not be understood simply at the religious level; rather, the desire for social change at that time should be understood. As mentioned earlier, ancestral rites had great religious significance, and when performed correctly, they were a system that could establish relationships with gods and people. However, this spirit was not properly implemented in society, and it became a system that caused social discrimination. The religious reason for Catholics to reject ancestor rites was to abandon their polytheistic worldview and worship one God; however, this went beyond a simple religious trend and developed into a trend of social change. Accordingly, those who had a vested interest in Joseon persecuted Catholics severely.[5]

The Jinsan Incident, which occurred in Jinsan, Jeolla-do, in 1791, was the first incident in which the Catholic Church was persecuted for refusing to perform ancestral rites. This incident occurred when the Catholics Yoon Ji-chung and Kwon Sang-yeon refused to perform ancestral rites and burned the memorial tablet that had been used to enshrine their parents. These two people were cousins and, after becoming Catholics, refused to perform ancestral rites in accordance with the Vatican (Clement XI) order, banning ancestral rites in 1790. They destroyed all the ancestors' memorial tablets. When Yun Ji-chung's mother passed away, they refused to conduct ancestral rites but held the funeral following the traditions of the Catholic Church. Yun Ji-chung stated several reasons for refusing ancestral rites: The Church prohibits ancestral rites; since people go to heaven or hell when they die, it is unnecessary to enshrine their souls in a shrine; even if alcohol and food are offered to ancestors, the souls of the dead cannot eat; and filial piety (or filiality, *hyo*, (Xiao) 孝) is not about ancestral rites but about accumulating virtue (H. Cho 2018, pp. 149–50). Ultimately, these two people were sentenced to death for breaking the laws of the country.

Another thing to pay close attention to in this case is Yoon Ji-chung's mother. Unfortunately, her name is unknown, but she is mentioned as Madam of Andong Kwon Family in the dictionary, which also reflects the situation of that period. Mrs. Kwon lost her husband at a young age and raised her son, Yoon Ji-chung, and her nephew, Kwon Sang-yeon. She followed the Catholic Church's order banning ancestral rites as soon as they were issued in 1790. For women, following these orders was a case of pursuing human relationships that were completely different from the norms of society. As mentioned earlier, women in the late Joseon Dynasty were victims of the patriarchal system and were treated as shadows, given only their duties but no rights. However, before her death, she left a will not to hold Confucius' ancestral rite for her but a Catholic funeral service (S. Kim 2016, pp. 34–7). Yoon Ji-chung followed his mother's will and also endured martyrdom along with Sang-yeon Kwon, with whom he grew up. This example shows that the influence of the Catholic Church on Joseon society at the time was not merely religious but also social.

In this way, the Catholic Church in Joseon society underwent a trend of change in the modern sense; at its center was the rejection of ancestral rites, which had received considerable attention. This issue led to constant persecution, which became a good excuse for persecution. Meanwhile, the family was divided into those with and without faith, which also caused conflict within the family. Accordingly, in 1939, the Catholic Church (Pope. Pius XII) partially permitted ancestral rites as it banned serving ancestral tablets.

4. Korean Protestant Church and Ancestral Rites

Before understanding the origins of Korean Protestantism, it is necessary to examine the circumstances of the time. Protestantism was introduced to Korea in 1884 with the arrival of the medical missionary Allen and in 1885 when the missionaries Appenzeller and Underwood arrived. During this period, Joseon became politically and economically impoverished as the maternal relatives of the king became the ruling power with the fall of the royal authority. Along with the development of the Catholic Church, which started with *Seo-hag*, a new religion named *Dong-hag* (Eastern learning, 東學) emerged after Choi Je-woo received revelation from *Sang-je* (God) in 1859. Although there is a strong connection between *Dong-hag* and *Seo-hag* (K. Cho 2003, p. 52), *Dong-hag* developed religious ideas by combining traditional Korean Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and spread rapidly among the people, even sparking a revolution in 1894. The Joseon Dynasty suppressed the *Dong-hag* Revolutionary Forces with the help of the Qing Dynasty and Japan.

Regarding international relations, Joseon, whose power was weak, could barely maintain its national power among its neighboring countries, China (Qing), Japan, and Russia, along with the expansion of imperialism. Japan—which concluded a unilateral unequal trade treaty named the Gang-hwa-do (Gang-hwa Island) Treaty in 1876—strengthened its power on the Korean Peninsula, eventually led the war against the Qing Dynasty to victory (1894), and won the war with Russia in 1904. Finally, Japan became the most potent imperial power in the Korean Peninsula. During these chaotic times, Protestant missionaries came to the Korean Peninsula.

Many missionaries who came to Korea were American missionaries passionate about evangelizing the Gospel due to the influence of the revival movement that developed after the American Civil War in 1865. They emphasized pietism, Bible-centeredness, and social concerns (Grayson 2007, p. 434).[6] Although some Protestant missionaries, such as Hulbert and Gifford, cooperated with the Catholic Church, most carried out missionary activities while differentiating themselves from the Catholic Church. They thought that Korea was a wasteland for religion because of Koreans' multi-layered religious views. However, they gradually came to understand the meaning of religion by understanding the monotheistic faith of the *Dan-gun* (檀君)[7] myth that Korea had, and by experiencing the social revolution (1894) and revival (1907), they began to understand the religious nature of Korea (Oak 2013, pp. 66–83).

Because the circumstances of the times had already changed significantly, the issue of ancestral rites was not as central as it was in the Catholic Church. However, the issue of ancestral rites has also been dealt with in depth in Protestant churches. First, pamphlets written by Chinese Protestant missionaries Medhurst and Nevius were widely read in Joseon and greatly influenced the people. In particular, Nevius' *Errors of Ancestor* Worship (*Sa-seon-byeon-lyu*, 1864) became a guidebook for missionaries in Joseon. These two missionaries represented the first and second generations of Protestant missionaries in China, and during this period, there was no significant opposition to opinions refusing ancestral rites. However, as progressive missionaries entered China and a trend of positive evaluation of Chinese culture was formed, three missionary conferences were held in Beijing, China in 1877, 1890, and 1907, discussing banning ancestral rites. Rather than having a positive opinion on ancestral rites, the conclusion favored banning them (Oak 2013, pp. 357–74).

Protestant missionaries in Korea followed the opinions of Chinese missionaries from the beginning of their mission in Korea. The Korean Presbyterian Churches and Methodist missionaries, including Underwood, Appenzeller, Ross, and Scranton, implemented a policy of banning ancestral rites for several reasons. First, ancestral rites constitute idolatry and violate the first and second commandments of the Decalogue. Second, ancestral rites teach the soul immortality through unbiblical teaching. Third, in terms of social ethical content, ancestral rites are the direct cause of Korea's evil customs, such as early marriage, the concubine system, discrimination against women, and poverty. Fourth, as they tried to differentiate themselves from the Catholic Church, they argued that ancestor worship was a variation of the Catholic Church's saint worship and purgatory theory (Oak 2013, pp. 375–77). For these reasons, early Protestant missionaries in Korea opposed ancestral rites. Joseon people generally followed this view. Even when missionaries like Gale took a reserved stance by presenting cautious views, Korean Protestants strongly opposed ancestral rites. In September 1904, a missionary conference commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Korean mission was held in Seoul. Engel, an Australian Presbyterian missionary, expressed caution regarding this issue, and Moose agreed with this opinion; however, many other missionaries refused to perform ancestral rites (Oak 2013, pp. 283–85).

Interestingly, both the missionaries and Korean Christians participated in the debate by presenting their opinions on the issue of ancestral rites. Previously, there was a high conversion rate to Protestantism among lower-class grassroots groups below the middle class, including merchants and technicians. However, after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, many members of the noble class entered the Protestant Church (Oak 2013, p. 382).

The debate became more active as Joseon Protestants contributed articles to new media outlets such as the *Christ Newspaper* (*Geu-li-seu-do-sin-mun*) (1897) and *Joseon Christian Bulletin* (*Jo-seon(dae-han)-keu-li-seu-do-in-hoe-bo*) (1899), and missionaries expressed their opinions there (Oak 2013, p. 393).[8]

The debate progressed as Joseon Christians who were well versed in Confucianism expressed their opinions. In addition to the prevailing opinion that ancestral rites were idolated, Korean Protestants expressed their opinions on ancestral rites. Noh Byeong-seon and Choi Byeong-hun attempted a new interpretation by combining East Asian traditions with soteriology. Noh argued for open soteriology in his book *Pa-heug-jin-seon-lon*, published for Christian apologetics. It is a similar claim to Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian, which claims that those who have not heard the Gospel are saved through their good deeds and merits (Noh 1899, p. 8b). Choi argued for a change from ancestral rites to Christian worship in his article "Jung-chu-ga-jeon-il,"[9] in the 27 September 1899 issue of *Joseon Christian Bulletin* (*Joy-seon(dae-han)-keu-li-seu-do-in-hoe-bo*), arguing that the old Confucian-style ancestral rites should be abolished, and ancestral rites should be completed through Christian worship (Choi 1899).

Thus, Korean Protestants developed their own theological and liturgical traditions regarding funeral culture while adhering to the ban on ancestral rites as they accepted missionaries' opinions about them. While the Catholic Church changed this policy from prohibition to permission, Protestants made efforts to create their traditions, and these efforts developed into a process through which Korean Protestants found their path.

5. The Formation of Korean Christianity through the Issue of Ancestral Rites

Christianity encountered varied cultures across countries in the field of missions, accepted and transformed each other, and sought theoretical foundation and practical measures. Just as early Christianity was contextualized by encountering Greek–Roman culture, in Korea, it was contextualized by encountering Confucian culture. The center of this phenomenon was the issue of ancestral rites. On the Korean Peninsula, Buddhist culture continued for approximately 1000 years throughout the Silla and Goryeo periods. However, when religion colluded with power and became corrupted, Neo-Confucian scholars opposed it and founded Joseon. Confucianism was a political philosophy, but it also played a religious role, with ancestral rites at its center. The ritual of observing oneself, reaching the ultimate goal, and meeting God while enjoying blessings through ancestral rites became the center of Joseon people's lives. However, after the 17th century of the Joseon Dynasty, the spirit disappeared, and ancestral rites became one of the essential elements causing social contradictions and conflicts. In this situation, Christianity (Catholicism first) was introduced into the Joseon Dynasty, and the Christian spirit opposing ancestral rites spread among Catholic Christians.

Christianity in Korea was formed and took root in response to ancestral rites that Confucianism valued the most in Joseon society. This is a potent social and ethical response. The Catholic Church was involved at the beginning of this process. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Joseon endured two invasions from Japan (1592–1598) and China (1627 and 1636).[10] Joseon society accepted Western learning (*Seo-hag*) while pursuing practical values to overcome wars' predicaments and take a new leap forward. Because the texts of *Seo-hag* were books from the Catholic Church, Joseon naturally accepted the Catholic Church. It opposed ancestral rites and rejected idol worship at a religious level. However, the problem was complex. At that time, ancestral rites were at the center of creating a Neo-Confucian family based on Confucianism. Because healthy social customs during the early Joseon period were broken by war, ancestral rites were used to discriminate against women and create a hierarchical structure centered on men, especially the eldest son. During this process, the social and ethical ramifications of the Catholic Church, which rejected ancestral rites while spreading universal love, were significant. They demanded human dignity and created a new community based on gender equality (J. Kim

2002, pp. 42–9; S. Kim 2016, pp. 39–40). Great persecution awaited Catholics; however, the newly ethically armed Catholic Church grew.

Meanwhile, Protestantism was introduced quite differently from the Catholic Church when Joseon was nearly collapsing. Protestant missionaries recognized various ethical problems in Korean society and confirmed that these problems were not separate from the issue of ancestral rites. Therefore, ancestral rites were prohibited not only from a religious perspective but also from an ethical perspective (Oak 2013, p. 356). Thus, in the formation of Korean Christianity, the issue of banning ancestral rites was connected to social situations. It had become a channel for presenting alternatives at the social and ethical levels.

Moreover, the ban on ancestral rites caused great controversy in Joseon society, which concerned filial piety (filiality, *hyo* (Xiao) 孝), one of the fundamental values of Confucianism. Refusing to perform ancestral rites is the greatest act of disloyalty toward parents. The Catholic Church responded to these claims with a readiness to die, that is, martyrdom. After the Jinsan Incident in 1791, more than 10,000 believers became martyrs in the persecution, which lasted for 100 years. This persecution ended in 1939 after ancestral rites were understood and accepted as part of traditional culture. At the same time, Protestantism developed the theology of filial piety. Korean Protestantism accepted the Confucian ethics of filial piety (filiality, *hyo* (Xiao) 孝), as Christian ethics and developed logic at the theological level. Protestants actively defended the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, arguing that serving one's heavenly father is the basis for honoring one's parents, and emphasizing that one should perform filial piety. Instead of performing ancestral rites after their death, people should conduct their filial piety while their parents are still alive (Oak 2013, pp. 401–3). Several Korean Protestant theologians are currently developing *Hoy* theology, which explores the meaning of filial piety at systematic theological, biblical, and practical theological levels (Ban 2011; Nam 2008; Oak 2013, pp. 419–20).

These theological endeavors eventually led to the development of liturgical practices such as Korean-style funerals and memorial services. In the Korean Catholic Church, it is difficult to find a developmental process at the liturgical level because ceremonies are determined according to the guidance of the Vatican. As ancestral rites were banned, using ancestral tablets and eating ceremonial food were prohibited. Additionally, ancestral rites for Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, maintained as a Confucian tradition, were also prohibited. After ancestral rites were allowed in 1939, however, only prohibitions on using ancestral tablets remained. Meanwhile, Protestantism's sacrificial ritual was called a *Chu-do-ye-bae* (追悼禮拜, memorial service) and became Christian content. "Prayers for the dead," practiced not only in Confucian ancestral rites but also in the Catholic Church, were banned, and non-Christian elements such as *Chug*-mun (祝文), *Heum-hyang* (歆饗), *Eum-bog* (飮福), and *Pung-su* (風水) were removed.[11] Instead, they invited church members to hold a simple worship service with hymns, prayers, and Bible reading and then changed the format to sharing food (Park 2012, pp. 128–9). Each Korean Protestant denomination creates and implements an order for memorial services (Park 2012, p. 133). This liturgical practice results from the development of *Hyo* theology in Korea. Thus, Confucian ancestral rites influenced Korean Christianity.

6. Conclusions

This study explored the issue of the ban on ancestral rites to examine the formation of Korean Christianity. Ancestral rites were religious ceremonies that served as the most critical social basis of Joseon, a Confucian society. The Korean Catholic Church was the first to oppose ancestral rites. As a result, it created a new social and ethical resonance in Joseon society. However, because this shook the foundations of society, Catholic Christians endured tremendous persecution. Protestantism was introduced when Joseon society was the most confused. Protestant missionaries, like the Catholic Church, banned ancestral rites. Korean Protestants experienced the process of the missionaries' ban on ancestral rites, as Protestants in Joseon interpreted and accepted it and embodied it in their faith.

Overall, the ban on ancestral rites became the most essential foundation for the formation of Korean Christianity. This laid the foundations for Christian social ethics. In particular, in conjunction with social changes in the late Joseon Dynasty, the rejection of ancestral rites brought about social changes at an ethical level. In addition, while interpreting filial piety from a theological perspective, it expanded into various fields such as systematic theology, biblical studies, practical theology, and liturgical practice, becoming the foundation for the formation of today's Korean Christianity. Thus, this study examines how the ban on ancestral rites in Korea had a profound impact on the contextualization of Korean Christianity.

Funding: This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2018S1A6A3A01042723).

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 *The Book of Rites* is one of the Five Classics of Confucianism. It is a compilation of Confucius and his disciples' writings on ancient Chinese etiquette, collected by Confucian scholars during the *Han* Dynasty. The Five Classics include *Classic of Poetry*, *the Book of Documents*, *the Book of Rites*, *I Ching* (*the Book of Changes*), and *Spring and Autumn Annals*. James Legge translated *the Book of Rites* into English in 1885 for the first time. In this paper, I followed the Korean translation published by Lee Sang-ok at *Myeongmundang* in 2003 and cited chapters instead of pages according to the usual clause notation in Korea.

2 The ancestral rites have a preparatory stage before the main stage and a final stage afterward. The preparation stage is where the body is thoroughly bathed and cleaned (*je-gye*, 齊戒) and prepared foods (*jin-seol*, 陳設) to be offered to the ancestral spirits for ten days. In the final process, there is a stage of placing the sacred tablets in the shrine (*nab-ju*, 納主) and removing the offerings (*cheol-jo*, 徹俎), a stage of burning the offerings (*mang-lyo*, 望燎) and burying the ashes (*ye-mae*, 瘞埋) to make gods return after the ancestral rite, and a stage in which the ancestral rite participants share the foods (*bun-jun*, 分餕) to share the blessings from the gods (Bae 2013, pp. 416–9).

3 Chinese characters originated in ancient China and are currently used in East Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia. The Chinese characters in these countries are similar but used differently in their pronunciation and usage. Chinese characters are an element of the Korean language, and when Koreans read Chinese classics, they read them with Korean pronunciation, not Chinese. Therefore, since this paper describes Korean Christianity, it is written according to Korean pronunciation rather than Chinese. This paper used Korean pronunciation and followed the way of the Revised Romanization of Korea, which was released to the public on 7 July 2000, by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Chinese pronunciations widely used in academia are also indicated.

4 Joseon (1392–1910) was a country founded by Confucian scholars (Neo-Confucians) who wanted to reform Goryeo (918–1392), which had Buddhism as its political and religious foundation. Accordingly, Confucianism established itself as a powerful ruling ideology during the Joseon Dynasty and exerted a strong religious influence through ancestral rites. However, the form of religious life during the Joseon Dynasty remained consistent with the form of Buddhism combined with shamanism for a long time. It is reasonable to say that Confucianism, the ruling ideology, simultaneously acquired a religious aspect, but Buddhism was the foundation of the people's religion.

5 After entering Joseon, Catholics were severely persecuted four times: the *Shin-yu* Persecution in 1801, the *Gi-hae* Persecution in 1839, the *Byeong-o* Persecution in 1846, and the *Byeong-in* Persecution in 1866. Of course, this means that there were only four major bloody outbreaks, and in the meantime, large and small persecutions and executions continued continuously. In particular, the *Byeong-in* Persecution of 1866 was so harsh that it is estimated that at least 8000 to up to 20,000 people were martyred during this time alone.

6 For a long time in Korean church history, the early missionaries were evaluated as fundamentalists, but viewing them as fundamentalists did not sufficiently consider the historical situation. This is because fundamentalism began in the United States after the 1930s. Regarding this, Oak Sung-Deuk said that the reason for the prejudice that the early missionaries in Korea were fundamentalists was that Korean historians followed the missionary report of Missionary Brown, who was the general secretary of the Overseas Mission of the Northern Presbyterian Church in the United States, where he introduced them as stubborn and exclusive, and Korean historians followed this idea. Ok pointed out furthermore that this was due to the excessive dichotomous thinking of progressive theologians in evaluating them as fundamentalists. However, they could be evaluated as people who showed their passion for the Gospel rather than fundamentalists (Oak 2013, pp. 45–55).

7 Koreans have revered him as the founder of Korea. According to the myth of *Dan-gun*, he was born between *Hwan-ung* (a son of God, *Hwan-in*) and *Ungnyeo* (she was initially a bear, but she changed a woman after passing a test, enduring the ordeal of eating

only mugwort and garlic in a cave without seeing sunlight for 21 days), established his capital at *Asadal* in 2333 BC, established Gojoseon, and ruled the country for about 2000 years.

8 Underwood published *Christ Newspaper* (*Geu-li-seu-do-sin-mun*) in 1897, and Appenzeller published *Joseon Christian Bulletin* (*Joy-seon(dae-han)-keu-li-seu-do-in-hoe-bo*) in 1899; it was named *Jo-seon* first, but he changed it to *Dae-han*.

9 Jung-chu-ga-jeon-il, known as *Chu-seog* (秋夕), is a national holiday celebrated on the eighth month of the lunar calendar (15 August) in East Asia, similar to Thanksgiving Day in the U.S.A.

10 The Japanese invasion in 1592 is called the Im-jin-wae-lan. Meanwhile, the Yeo-jin tribe in China invaded Joseon for the first time in 1627, before the establishment of the Qing Dynasty (Jeong-myo-ho-lan). After establishing the Qing Dynasty, they invaded Joseon again in 1636 (Byeon-gja-ho-lan).

11 *Chug-mun* is written material to offer blessings to God, *Heum-hyang* is that gods accept humans' devotion and offerings, *Eum-bog* is that humans receive and keep the blessings given, and *Pung-su* is about finding good land (grave site).

References

Bae, Yo-han. 2013. Yu-gyo-ui jo-sang je-sa-gwan-e gwan-han go-chal [An Analysis of the View of Ancestor Worship in Confucianism]. *Jang-sin-non-dan* 45: 405–31. [CrossRef]

Ban, Jae Kwang. 2011. Nu-ga-ui yeo-seong i-hae—hyo-sin-hag-jeog da-si ilg-gi- [Luke's Understanding on the women in Luke-Acts—Re-reading from a Hyo Theological perspective]. *Hyo-hag-yeon-gu* 14: 73–103.

Bevans, Stephen. 2002. *Models of Contextual Theology*. New York: Orbis Books.

Cho, Hyeon Beom. 2018. Yun-ji-chung-ui pye-je-bun-ju(廢祭焚主) non-geo-e dae-han il go-chal [A Study on the Reasons of Ancestor Worship Refusal of Yoon Ji Choong]. *Jong-gyo-yeon-gu* 78: 141–74.

Cho, Kwang. 2003. 19se-gi hu-ban seo-hag-gwa dong-hag-ui sang-ho-gwan-gye-e gwan-han yeon-gu [A Study on the Relationship between Donghak and Western Learning at the end of 19th century]. *Dong-hag-hag-bo* 6: 51–83.

Cho, Kwang. 2006. Jo-seon-hu-gi seo-hag-seo-ui su-yong-gwa bo-geub [On the Vernacular Catholic Books in the 19th Century Korea]. *Min-jog-mun-hwa-yeon-gu* 44: 199–235.

Choi, Byeong-hun. 1899. Jung-chu-ga-jeon-il. *Joseon Christian Bulletin(Joy-seon(dae-han)-keu-li-seu-do-in-hoe-bo)*, September 27.

Grayson, James H. 2005. A Quarter-Millennium of Christianity in Korea. In *Christianity in Korea*. Edited by Timothy E. Lee and Robert E. Buswell. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Grayson, James H. 2007. The Grieving Rite: A Protestant Response to Confucian Ancestral Rituals. In *Religions of Korea in Practice*. Edited by Robert E. Buswell. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kim, Jeong Sook. 2002. Jo-seon-hu-gi cheon-ju-gyo yeo-seong-sin-do-ui sa-hoe-jeog teug-seong [Social characteristics of female Catholic believers in the late Joseon Dynasty]. *Gyo-hoe-sa-yeon-gu* 19: 9–60.

Kim, Seong-tae, Jang-woo Lee, Sang-geun Bang, Hyun-beom Cho, and In-sung Yang. 2009. *Han-gug-cheon-ju-gyo-hoe-sa [Korean Catholic History]*. Edited by The Research Foundation of Korean Church History. Seoul: Bun-do-chul-pan-sa.

Kim, Sootae. 2016. An-dong gwon-ssi bu-in-ui yu-gyo-sig jo-sang-je-sa geo-bu [Refusal of Cunfucian Ancestor Worship by Madam of Andong Kwon Family]. *Gyo-hoe-sa-hag* 13: 5–52.

Lee, Wook. 2011. Jo-sang-je-sa-ui ui-mi-wa gi-eog-ui ui-lye-hwa (儀禮化) [The Meaning of Ancestral Memorial Services and the Ritualization of memory]. *Gug-hag-yeon-gu* 19: 473–500.

Moon, Seong Gyu. 1974. Ancestor Worship in Korea: Tradition and Transition. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 5: 71–87. [CrossRef]

Nam, Byong Hun. 2008. Seong-gyeong-gwa hyo—hyo-sin-hag-ui jeon-gae [The Bible and Hyo—Development of Hyo Theology]. *Hyo-hag-yeon-gu* 6: 73–100.

Noh, Byeong-seon. 1899. *Pa-heug-jin-seon-lon*. Seoul: Jo-seon-seong-gyo-seo-hoe.

Oak, Sung-deuk. 2013. *Han-gug-gi-dog-gyo-hyeong-seong-sa [The Making of Korean Christianity]*. Seoul: Sae-mul-gyeol-peul-leo-seu.

Park, Jong Soo. 2012. Han-gug gae-sin-gyo jo-sang-ui-lye-ui byeon-cheon-gwa jaeng-jeom [The Issues and Change of the Ancestral Rites on the Koran Protestant]. *Jong-gyo-yeon-gu* 69: 123–47.

Ye-gi, 禮記 [The Book of Rites]. 2003. Translated by Sang-oak Lee. Seoul: Myeong-mun-dang.

Yoon, Inshik C. 2007. Martyrdom and Social Activism: The Korean Practice of Catholicism. In *Religions of Korea in Practice*. Edited by Robert E. Buswell. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

religions MDPI

Article

Preaching the Ecclesiological Gospel Amidst a Syndemic Context

Seyeom Kim

Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL 60201, USA; seyeom.kim@garrett.edu

Abstract: As the proliferation of new variations of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) continues to increase, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. Indeed, we are living in a world of interrelating and overlapping pandemics—a syndemic. A syndemic accelerates the polarization of access to health care, financial support, and education opportunities in marginalized communities, and the polarization breeds social injustice, violence, and ignorance. What, then, is the Gospel the Church proclaims for those who have experienced the pandemic and are now facing a syndemic? As part of a liturgical response, this paper proposes preaching as a praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel. The ecclesiological Gospel is a term I suggest to highlight the contextual, sacramental, and communal aspects of the Gospel. Highlighting God's holistic work for salvation represented in baptism and the eucharist, the ecclesiological Gospel yearns to form a church that baptizes people in diversity, that severs evil interconnections, and that welcomes people to the table of hospitality that forms a new covenantal relationship. This paper examines the concept of a syndemic and its significance for preaching in marginalized communities. It contrasts a holistic Gospel perspective with a narrow view, proposes preaching as praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel, and illustrates its application within a particular context in responding to syndemic conditions. I hope this work offers a chance to reorient the meaning of the Gospel and the identity of the Church for people living in fear, grief, and hopelessness, while encouraging them with the unwavering hope revealed in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.

Keywords: COVID-19; syndemic; liturgy; preaching; ecclesiological Gospel; contextuality; sacramentality; communality

1. Introduction

The consequences of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) are immense. Schools, companies, restaurants, and churches shut their doors indefinitely. Because of the lockdown, day laborers lost their jobs and became homeless while others in high-ranking positions gained more wealth than before the outbreak of COVID-19. Virtual spaces became prominent places for meeting, learning, and relationships as a means of protecting the immunocompromised from contagious variants. The world grieved over the deaths of more than six million people around the globe. A bitter truth is that the pandemic is hardly over, yet we now face what scientists call a syndemic, a cluster of interrelated infectious diseases that weakens those who are more seriously marginalized socially, politically, and economically than those who are privileged.

COVID-19 made a profound impact on the external and internal life of the Church. Externally, churches had to decide whether to hold in-person or online gatherings. Some churches never gave up in-person gatherings because of their conviction that bodies must be present for meaningful public worship, while other churches moved to online worship in the interest of public welfare. Some local churches celebrated the eucharist and baptism remotely while other churches postponed both until they could celebrate them as they had before the pandemic. In addition, preachers endured the internal impact of COVID-19 because week in and week out they had to deal with immediate and thorny questions including: Where is God amidst the pandemic? Why do innocent people suffer from the pandemic? When and how will the pandemic end? What is a gospel for the people who have lived through the pandemic and now face the prospect of a syndemic? The issues raised by the syndemic are deeply interrelated to social, political, and economic threats to the most vulnerable people in communities. Just as the pandemic accelerated the polarization of access to health care, financial support, and education opportunities, the syndemic reveals the hidden interconnectedness of social injustice, violence, and ignorance in the aftermath of the pandemic. What, then, is a gospel that the Church proclaims for the people who now face the challenges raised by the syndemic?

In this article, I first examine the term syndemic and its origins, considering the syndemic as a significant locus of preaching after the outbreak of COVID-19. I underscore that communities experiencing the syndemic are the contexts in which the Church must preach the Gospel urgently and immediately. Second, I tackle the fundamental question of what the Gospel is. Examining an aspect of the Gospel as pharmaceutical—a narrowed concept of the Gospel—I underscore the holistic aspect of the Gospel that resolves external, internal, and interconnected issues in our lives. Finally, I propose a homiletical possibility: preaching as praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel. The ecclesiological Gospel is a term I suggest to highlight the contextual, sacramental, and communal aspects of the Gospel which offer a clue for preachers who are mindful of the syndemic as an imminent and unavoidable condition for their congregations. Highlighting God's holistic work for salvation represented in baptism and the eucharist, I argue that the ecclesiological Gospel yearns to form a church in which baptism severs evil interconnections and welcomes the baptized to the table of hospitality that forms a new covenantal relationship. At the end, I will provide an example of preaching as praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel: engaging in the preaching of Puerto Rican churches that have suffered from a syndemic situation engendered by colonialism, natural disasters, and COVID-19.

2. What Is a Syndemic?

2.1. A Definition

Merrill Singer and his colleagues coined the term syndemic in the early 1990s. While researching the HIV epidemic in poor and minoritized communities in urban North America, Singer and his colleagues realized that the term epidemic was not adequate to describe the problem in the community. So, they deeply examined the relationship between gang-related violence and AIDS and found strong connections between endemic and epidemic conditions including, yet not limited to, HIV, TB, STDs, infant mortality, drug abuse, suicide, and homicide. Those factors interacted with one another in a wide range of political–economic and social ways. In this regard, Singer defines a syndemic: "Like the terms epidemic and pandemic (spreading health problems of local or extra-local distributions), the suffix of syndemic is derived from the Greek word *demos* (the people), while the prefix is taken from the Greek term for 'working together.' In other words, a syndemic is a set of closely intertwined and mutually enhancing health problems that significantly affect the overall health status of a population within the context of a perpetuating configuration of noxious social conditions" (Singer 1996, p. 99).

The term syndemic illustrates a critical interrelatedness between various external and internal factors that heighten problems in a community. The outbreak of COVID-19 became an exemplar that expresses how a syndemic operates in a community or a country. Clarence C. Gravlee examines the syndemic condition in the U.S. Gravlee argues that there were much higher infection and death rates in disproportionately black, indigenous, and other people-of-color communities. Those communities were in low-income neighborhoods, and most community members had limited access to health care and were suffering from hypertension and diabetes. Moreover, those communities historically experienced systemic racism such as residential, school, and occupational segregation. Therefore, when COVID-19 hit those communities, the consequences were devastating (Gravlee 2020, p. e23482).

2.2. The Syndemic's Theological Implications

The syndemic has three theological implications for preaching. First, preaching the Gospel means to name various harmful factors and their insidious interconnectedness that fashion a context. In this sense, a gospel can be particular to a context today that needs transformation and empowerment (Brooks 2009, p. 7). Second, preaching the Gospel should focus not only on curing a temporal and peripheral disease but also on holistic healing. God saves our body, mind, and soul, as the body of resurrected Christ indicates. Third, preaching within a syndemic condition should offer an ecclesiological Gospel that embraces the diversity of individuals yet unites them with hospitality to serve the community where the Church belongs. Before articulating those three aspects of preaching the Gospel within a syndemic condition, the essence of the Gospel should be examined to demonstrate that the Gospel is holistic and particular, providing equal salvation for individuals and communities in different contexts.

3. The Gospel as Pharmaceutical

The Gospel leads each body, spirit, and society into holistic salvation. However, when the Gospel is considered narrowly as therapeutic, it attempts to cure only the sinfulness of human beings or psychological problems. A pharmaceutical aspect of the Gospel highlights a concept of the Gospel that cures individual sinfulness, psychological issues, or social issues. In his book *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, David Buttrick points out a therapeutic notion of the Gospel found in the twentieth century. Buttrick writes, "Most sermons from most pulpits, particularly since 1950, seem to have been aimed at an existential self in phycological self-awareness. The movement has culminated in a 'positive-thinking' pulpit on the East Coast, a 'possibility-thinking' pulpit on the West Coast. But the trust is that most of our pulpits, Protestant and Catholic alike, have read Scripture but then preached a psychological personalism for the past four decades, with sin as psychological dysfunction and salvation as inward good feeling" (Buttrick 1994, p. 13).

It is understandable that preachers tried to respond to the issues that the congregation was experiencing in the mid-twentieth century. Preachers seemed to pay attention to the psychological aspect of preaching to respond pastorally to people who were experiencing unprecedented psychological issues, including depression, anxiety, and stress. These preachers combined the perspective of pastoral counseling with their homiletic style. Harry Emerson Fosdick is a renowned pastoral counseling preacher. He was interested in using new psychology, mental health issues, and Freud to deliver the Gospel for pastoral counseling on a group scale (Edwards 2004, pp. 666–67). He endeavored to resolve the difficulties in the lives of the congregation by combining the Gospel with a psychological method: "Little by little. . . the vision grew clearer. People come to church on Sunday with every kind of personal difficulty and problem flesh is heir to. A sermon was meant to meet such needs; it should be pastoral counseling on a group scale. . . Every sermon should have for its main business the head-on constructive meeting of some problem which was puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives, and no sermon which so met a real human difficulty, with light to throw on it and help to win a victory over it, could possibly be futile" (Fosdick 1956, p. 94).

Fosdick's psychological and pastoral counseling approach helped preachers focus on the concurrent difficulties that the congregation was experiencing. In this sense, the Gospel became therapeutic, or pharmaceutical, to solve a particular difficulty. In such cases, though, the Gospel seems to deal only with psychological salvation rather than holistic salvation that includes the body and spirit, as well as the individual and society. Fosdick's preaching is significant because it helps the congregation acknowledge how God deals with and solves the issues in their situation, including psychological dimensions. However, it should be noted that this pharmaceutical Gospel fails to address the complex and interconnected social issues in congregations' lives.

A congregation listens to preaching to experience God's holistic healing and salvation and to refresh their identity as the body of Christ to serve the world. Issues that each individual experiences seem separate, but they are not unrelated. Sinfulness and psychological issues are the tip of the iceberg. On a larger scale, one person's problem is the problem of the community. Proclaiming the Gospel must deal both with explicit individual issues and implicit corporate issues interconnected within the community, society, and country that negatively affect both an individual and their community.

4. What Does Preaching the Gospel Mean in a Syndemic World?

The aftermath of COVID-19 proved that we are both closely connected and widely polarized. On the one hand, the experience of quarantine, a forced experience of isolation, made people realize how they were closely connected and related to one another. On the other hand, marginalized communities experienced higher death rates, poverty, and violence than privileged communities. Given that the Church is called to proclaim the Gospel to the poor, weak, and oppressed, it is time to ponder deeply the meaning of the Gospel for people living in a syndemic world.

The Gospel is not the object of preaching, but the subject of preaching. The Gospel itself preaches through all possibilities that make humans apprehensive about the mystery of God's salvific grace. A preacher cannot possess the Gospel. Instead, the Gospel humbly expresses itself through preaching for communion with people. Therefore, even though ongoing confusion is unavoidable in grasping what the Gospel is, as history manifests, the Gospel, Immanuel, has dwelled with us, manifesting itself with and beyond human words. Preaching is an attempt to name the Gospel, which has existed before the Creation and been highlighted in the past event of Christ's ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection. The Gospel moves from the past to the future since God's salvific grace is not limited to a certain period and is not trapped in a written text.

Therefore, the Gospel cannot be static but must move freely to enflesh itself on behalf of those who need God's salvific grace. In her book *Good News Preaching: Offering the Gospel in Every Sermon*, Gennifer Benjamin Brooks explains how divine grace meets the human need through good news preaching. Brooks states that "Good news represents specific, recognizable, and transformative action that can be attributed to God's relationship with human beings" (Brooks 2009, p. 7). The Gospel is neither abstract nor passive. The Gospel is the good news that shows how God works in a specific context to save the oppressed and marginalized while transforming its context and empowering the weak. This aspect of the Gospel as good news must be revisited and highlighted in preaching for the people in fear, desperation, and hopelessness engendered by the pervasive negative social issues and their insidious connections that worsen their condition. Good news preaching shows that God is still working and transforming both externally and internally interconnected problems within individuals and their communities.

Naming the Gospel requires struggles with complex reality, faithful interpretations of the Scripture, and a strong faith that God saves the oppressed. In his book *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry*, Edward Farley offers a description of the Gospel that invites preachers to consider the multilayered questions in this world: "Gospel is not simply a clear and given content. It is the mystery of God's salvific working. Thus, we never master it, exhaust it, or directly or literally comprehend it. Rather, we continue to struggle to fathom its reality. . . It is something to be proclaimed, but the summons to proclaim it is a summons to struggle with the mystery of God's salvific action and who that transforms the world. To proclaim the Gospel then is to enter the world of the Gospel, struggling with questions of suffering, evil, idolatry, hope, and freedom" (Farley 2003, p. 81).

According to Farley, what preaching does is to bring the past event of Jesus Christ to bear on the present in such a way that the present is both judged and drawn in hope toward redemption. Preaching opens the hopeful future to the desperate present through the past. Even though naming a gospel is an ongoing struggle with complex issues in a syndemic world, preachers need to challenge themselves to name a gospel for the people who yearn to listen to the good news.

Since there is no one-size-fits-all concept of the Gospel, André Resner encourages preachers to develop their concept of the Gospel and helps them to generate their world of the Gospel. Resner proposes a tripartite taxonomy for the Gospel that includes Previous Situational Witness, grammatical substructure, and the working Gospel. Previous Situational Witness includes "concrete instances in the past of witness-bearing to the Gospel" (Graves and Resner 2021, p. 185). This witness includes not only the witness in the Bible but also witnesses in a particular time and space that a congregation experienced before in difficult times. Grammatical substructure describes "a dynamic behind and within the particular witness that causes it to ring true to what we know gospel to be" (Graves and Resner 2021, p. 185). We should remember that this grammatical substructure always deals with the transformative and redemptive work of God in a particular context. The working Gospel is "a preacher's always-in-process core belief and central conviction about the center of the good news of God's redemptive work in the world" (Graves and Resner 2021, p. 192). It includes hermeneutical and theological tools to reflect critically on the past and present so that the working Gospel can be inclusive of the poor and the marginalized. Preaching begins with the Gospel and moves through the Bible and to new insights and reflections for a syndemic world. As stories in the Bible and current life experiences are juxtaposed, the world of the Gospel is freshly acknowledged and expanded. The world of the Gospel keeps expanding to the margins in a syndemic world until all are included in God's salvific grace.

A preacher who lives in the syndemic world needs to discern his or her working Gospel. I propose a working Gospel: the ecclesiological Gospel represented in baptism and the eucharist. Preaching the Gospel in a syndemic context starts from the Scripture that includes the stories of God's promise and God's salvific grace toward people in need of salvation. The Scripture describes both baptism and the eucharist as significant agents that reveal Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. When preachers reflect on the meaning of both baptism and the eucharist for a community under a syndemic condition, they might consider the Gospel for the Church that severs evil connections, generates new relationships, and empowers the marginalized.

5. Preaching as a Praxis of the Ecclesiological Gospel

Praxis describes practice with ongoing reflection. Preaching as praxis reflects not only Scripture and the tradition of the Church but also the contemporary context and situation to help the Church as the body of Christ embody the Gospel and serve the world. Baptism and the eucharist are the essences of what Scripture and the Church tradition hold on to. Baptism is grounded in God's holistic salvation including healing and regeneration. The eucharist sustains the baptized to live in and as the body of Christ to serve the world. And the Scripture is the written text of the baptismal and eucharistic communities. Baptism, the eucharist, and the Scripture consist of the Church.

Preaching is a praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel because it consists of the Church that serves the world God so loved (John 3:16). Preaching invites people to the baptismal font and leads them to the eucharistic table to participate in the body of Christ. When preaching is linked to the baptismal font and the communion of the Eucharist, it guides people in a syndemic world to immerse themselves in the waters of healing and regeneration. Emerging from the transformative experience, they come together to form a covenantal community that serves to heal yet another syndemic world.

5.1. Contextuality

First of all, preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel starts from a concern with its context. A context is a locus where the Gospel immerses itself and emerges anew. As the Church cannot exist without locality and historicity, the Gospel seeks a place to dwell and to transform that place for the people who yearn for God's salvific grace. Baptism and the eucharist take seriously their context. Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel signifies the baptismal washing of interconnected fears, desperation, and hopelessness in the past and proclaims a relationship of healing, hope, and joy that creates a new covenantal community where diversity flourishes. The baptismal image in preaching became a locus for the death of harmful interconnectedness in a syndemic world and for the rebirth of a new relationship directed toward salvation. Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel leads people to join a baptismal community of healing and regeneration to begin their new life in harmony (Ferguson 2009, pp. 60–76). Preachers need to evaluate the congregation through baptismal and eucharistic perspectives with the goal of inviting people into the community of diversity in Christ not by whitewashing or standardizing but by acknowledging and appreciating differences in harmony (Willimon 1992, pp. 24–33).

5.2. Sacramentality

In his book *The Language of God's Giving*, David N. Power explains the meaning of sacramentality: "Through the sacraments God gives the Church the gift of word and Sprit, and through this gift the Church worships the giver, keeping the memorial of the Cross a Pasch of Jesus Christ" (Power 1999, p. 1). Words, deeds, and elements in the liturgy project the invisible and inward grace of God. In particular, the sacramental celebrations of baptism and the eucharist enliven Jesus Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection for current congregations and allow the Church to embody Christ to continue to serve the world. In this regard, I argue that preaching can be sacramental because preaching allows us to encounter Christ through the words from past written Scripture and the future in the Kin-dom of God to the current congregations.

Once a preacher acknowledges the Gospel in a syndemic context through the examination of baptismal and eucharistic perspectives, how then does the preacher name the Gospel? Mary Catherine Hilkert provides a homiletical possibility: sacramental imagination. According to Hilkert, sacramental imagination considers human experiences and history as the locus where God's salvific grace manifests itself. As indicated in the water of baptism capturing God's saving grace and the bread and wine embodying God's abundant life, Hilkert argues that God's salvific grace is embedded and revealed in the depths of human experiences. Hilkert asserts that preaching "the naming of grace in human experience" resonates with, yet is not limited to, stories in the Bible and the basic symbols—baptism and the eucharist—of the Christian tradition (Hilkert 1997, p. 49).

Preachers investigate the experiences of humans not to find problems to be solved or cured; instead, with sacramental imagination, preachers delve into the experiences of the Church to know how Christ has suffered with people and tried to liberate them despite the crucifixion. Christian history and the stories in the Bible are not the subjects of intellectual interpretation; rather, they are sacramental anamnesis and prolepsis that "bring to bear a certain past event on the present in such a way as to open the future" (Farley 2003, p. 80). Through sacramental imagination, preachers name the disgrace of the syndemic world and the identity of the Church in each context that yearns for justice, peace, and holistic salvation.

5.3. Communality

Finally, preaching is communal practice; preaching is not an individual practice. When the Word is proclaimed to the congregation and the community of faith embodies the Word, it has become the Church as the body of Christ. Lucy Atkinson Rose, in her book *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, underscores the significance of communality in preaching. Rose argues that "preaching's goal is to gather the community of faith around the Word where the central conversations of the church are refocused and fostered" (Lucy Atkinson Rose 1997, p. 4). Faith communities gather to listen to the Word and they reshape themselves constantly, responding to the Word. This communal approach to preaching can be expanded to the margins when we focus on cultivating inclusive and empowering communities. Preaching highlights and uplifts the voices and experiences of those on the margins within congregations.

The communality in preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel considers margins as the center of preaching. Jung Young Lee explains the meaning of margins as the center of God: "God is not central to those who seek the center, but God is the center to those who seek marginality, because the real center is the creative core, the margin of marginality" (Lee 1995, p. 97). Margins are the places where the Gospel is preached and the Church stands. Margins are the center where the identity of Christ manifests to reorient the meaning of what the center is. In his book *The Roundtable Pulpit*, John S. McClure argues that the Word of God is not an individual word but a communal Word, which originates from the margins of the community (McClure 1995, p. 23). Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel pursues communality for the margins where Christ shows righteous anger to the oppressors and suffers at the margins with the oppressed (Lee 1995, p. 162).

Underscoring the Church's communality toward margins, Sarah Travis also highlights the Church's solidarity with the weak. Travis argues that the Church's interest has always reached the margins. When the Church ignored the margins and was attracted to the center, the Church became the oppressor that betrayed its reason to exist. Considering that the contemporary mainline Church is in a process of disestablishment, Travis encourages the Church to be transformed from a product of Christendom to an incarnate, vulnerable, creative body "to become a humble, loving creation that could mingle with life at the margins, with the most vulnerable, and find its strength at the moment of greatest weakness" (Travis 2019, pp. 126–27). Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel creates a community ready to reform, not to extend its life but to live in solidarity with those to be baptized and invited to the eucharist table from the margins.

6. An Example: Preaching in Puerto Rican Churches

History proves that the syndemic has affected many cultures over the course of human history, persisting throughout our current cultures. Offering examples and case studies from Ancient Rome to the contemporary world, *Epidemics and Pandemics: From Ancient Plagues to Modern-Day Threats*, by Joseph Patrick Byrne and J. N. Hays, provides us with evidence of epidemics and pandemics and how they impact and are impacted by political, economic, and societal factors. The Roman Empire in the second century indicates an aspect of the syndemic because during the Antonine Plague, known as the Plague of Galen, the wealthy fled the cities to avoid the spread of disease while the poor were left behind without the resources to defeat the disease. Such examples persist even now. Consider how capitalism in the nineteenth century fostered ill health and crime among the poor in the Global South. Syndemics have existed in every corner of our world.

Responding to the consequences of syndemics, churches have consistently endeavored to share the Gospel with marginalized communities by engaging in charitable initiatives, educational programs, and health care services. This commitment is exemplified by movements such as the Social Gospel Movement in the United States prior to World War I, as well as liberation theology in Latin America and other disadvantaged communities. Here is the example of Puerto Rican churches that attempt to overcome evils and misfortunes engendered by the syndemic situation. In her book *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperenza en Práctica*, Yara González-Justiniano provides an example of what preaching the ecclesiological Gospel looks like and sounds like. Engaging with churches in Puerto Rico that have struggled with colonialism, natural disasters including hurricane María in 2017, and COVID-19, González-Justiniano shows how the practices of the churches provided an unwavering hope in Puerto Rico.

González-Justiniano reports interviews with local churches that show how preaching in the churches of Puerto Rico offered hope within a community and provided solidarity that overcame the doctrinal and political differences within a community (González-Justiniano 2022, pp. 45–62). In addition, González-Justiniano shows how three aspects of the ecclesiological Gospel—contextuality, sacramentality, and communality—are represented in the messages of Puerto Rican preachers. González-Justiniano introduces Jorge L. Bardeguez, a Puerto Rican missionary, who advocates for a mission directed toward marginalized populations and engages in a reclamation of historical narratives to inform future trajectories. Bardeguez explains that preaching actively connects a Christian theology of hope with the practices of hope within their church and wider society. When Puerto Rican Christians listened to the messages from the pulpit, the Church sacramentally embodies a decolonial Christ who binds them in hope and encourages them to enact hope in their community (González-Justiniano 2022, p. 88).

Based on her analysis of ecclesial practices and grassroots movements in local communities, González-Justiniano maintains that the Church's proclamation in Puerto Rico works to eliminate colonial sins, including systems of economic exploitation, social stagnation, and theft of land, which have pervaded Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans' lives (González-Justiniano 2022, pp. 110–15). As reflected in the practice of Puerto Rican preachers, preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel invites people to consider the actual practices of liberation engineered by sacramental imagination that shows Christ dwelling within the community, inviting people to communal work and partnership beyond any kind of boundary.

7. Conclusions

In the ever-evolving landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by the emergence of new variants and the unsettling reality of overlapping crises, it becomes evident that we are navigating not just a health crisis but a complex interplay of social, economic, and educational challenges. This syndemic, with its disparities in access and opportunities, has given rise to profound injustices, violence, and ignorance.

Amidst this tumultuous backdrop, the question I have wrestled with is "What message does the Church have for those who have weathered the pandemic and now find themselves entangled in a syndemic?" This article proposes a liturgical response, positioning preaching as a praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel—a term introduced to underscore the contextual, sacramental, and communal dimensions of the Gospel.

The ecclesiological Gospel, rooted in the transformative experiences in baptism and the eucharist, aspires to shape a diverse and inclusive church. It envisions a community that dismantles the webs of evil interconnections and extends an open invitation to a table of hospitality, forging new covenantal relationships. This proposition seeks to redefine the essence of the Gospel and the identity of the Church that provide hope for those grappling with fear, grief, and hopelessness.

In the face of the challenges posed by the syndemic, the ecclesiological Gospel becomes a guiding light, encouraging individuals with the unwavering hope found in the narrative of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. It beckons people to a renewed understanding of faith, resilience, and community while reminding them that even in the darkest moments the Gospel persists as a wellspring of enduring hope and transformative potential. Despite the interconnected conditions of desperation and hopelessness, the Gospel awaits preachers to name the good news that emerges from their context and embodies Christ for the context to create a thriving community for the marginalized.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Brooks, Gennifer Benjamin. 2009. *Good News Preaching: Offering the Gospel in Every Sermon*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.

Buttrick, David. 1994. *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Edwards, Otis Carl. 2004. *A History of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Farley, Edward. 2003. *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry*, 1st ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Ferguson, Everett. 2009. *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

Fosdick, Harry Emerson. 1956. *The Living of These Days, an Autobiography*, 1st ed. New York: Harper.

González-Justiniano, Yara. 2022. *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperenza en Práctica*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Graves, Mike, and André Resner, eds. 2021. *What's Right with Preaching Today?: The Enduring Influence of Fred B. Craddock*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
Gravlee, Clarence C. 2020. Systemic Racism, Chronic Health Inequities, and COVID-19: A Syndemic in the Making? *American Journal of Human Biology* 32: e23482. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
Hilkert, Mary Catherine. 1997. *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*. New York: Continuum.
Lee, Jung Young. 1995. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
McClure, John S. 1995. *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
Power, David N. 1999. *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
Rose, Lucy Atkinson. 1997. *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
Singer, Merrill. 1996. Dose of Drugs, a Touch of Violence, a Case of AIDS: Conceptualizing the SAVA Syndemic. *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 24: 99.
Travis, Sarah. 2019. *Metamorphosis: Preaching after Christendom*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
Willimon, William H. 1992. *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

MDPI AG
Grosspeteranlage 5
4052 Basel
Switzerland
Tel.: +41 61 683 77 34

Religions Editorial Office
E-mail: religions@mdpi.com
www.mdpi.com/journal/religions

MDPI

Academic Open
Access Publishing

mdpi.com

ISBN 978-3-7258-4357-2