

Article

Militant Liturgies: Practicing Christianity with Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil

J. Aaron Simmons 

Department of Philosophy, Furman University, Greenville, SC 29613, USA; aaron.simmons@furman.edu

Abstract: Traditional philosophy of religion has tended to focus on the doxastic dimension of religious life, which although a vitally important area of research, has often come at the cost of philosophical engagements with religious practice. Focusing particularly on Christian traditions, this essay offers a sustained reflection on one particular model of embodied Christian practice as presented in the work of Søren Kierkegaard. After a discussion of different notions of practice and perfection, the paper turns to Kierkegaard's conception of the two churches: the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant. Then, in light of Kierkegaard's defense of the latter and critique of the former, it is shown that Kierkegaard's specific account gets appropriated and expanded in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's account of "costly grace" and "religionless Christianity," and Simone Weil's conception of "afflicted love." Ultimately, it is suggested that these three thinkers jointly present a notion of "militant liturgies" that offers critical and constructive resources for contemporary philosophy of religion.

Keywords: Kierkegaard; Bonhoeffer; Weil; philosophy of religion; liturgy; practice; Christianity



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1. Introduction

It is often the case that philosophical discussions of Christianity overstate the unity by which the Christian traditions operate. In the name of referential precision, perhaps we should only ever speak of "Christianities" or, as this special issue theme admirably does, "Christian traditions". The task is to acknowledge such diverse approaches as those of not only Aquinas, Anselm, and Augustine, but also of Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross, and not only those of Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, and Marilyn Adams, but also James Cone's Black Liberation Theology, Emile Townes' Womanist Theology, Pope Francis' preferential option for the poor, and Marcella Althaus-Reid's defense of Queer Theology. When it comes to thinking well about Christianity, philosophers should appropriate MacIntyre's (1988) contextual awareness and ask: Whose Christianity, Which God? Or, following MacIntyre, ask with Merold Westphal (2009), in recognition of the complicated hermeneutic realities that attend Christian identity: "Whose Community? Which Interpretation?"

In light of such diversity in the traditions that operate under the name of "Christianity," philosophers of religion have recently begun to be more sensitive to the ways in which different strands of Christianity might yield contrasting conceptions of Christian life.¹ Although this awareness can certainly play out at the level of propositional assertions about the existence and nature of God, it is also important to attend to the ways in which such diversity is reflected in the varieties of Christian practice. While recognizing the importance of thinking carefully about the cognitivist dimensions of Christian traditions, such a focus can often come at the cost of minimizing, or simply not attending to, the role of embodied practice in such traditions. In this vein, Kevin Schilbrack (2014) has recently argued that "traditional" philosophy of religion (whether continental or analytic) has been remiss in not giving more attention to the idea of ritual, liturgy, and the embodied enactment of such doxastic commitments. Importantly, in recent years, there has emerged a greater philosophical interest in embodied religious practice,² but there remains important

work to be done on exploring the ways in which key texts and thinkers in Christian traditions can stand as resources for such work.

One thinker who offers important potential contributions to such debates is Søren Kierkegaard. Given Kierkegaard's complicated conception of the relationship of faith and reason, many have assumed that his thought is simply a concern for such doxastic dynamics, but (as is often suggested) without rational support.³ Even though there has been good work done demonstrating that the charges of irrationalist fideism are misapplied to Kierkegaard,⁴ I do not intend to take that question up here. Instead, my focus will be on the way that Kierkegaard stresses the importance of practice as key to Christian living.⁵ His important text, *Practice in Christianity*, is something of a clarion call for Christianity to be a matter of critical awareness and constructive enactment. Of particular note in that text is the way that Kierkegaard understands two different models of Christianity, which he identifies with two conceptions of the Church's role in the world: the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant. In this distinction, Kierkegaard argues compellingly that Christian practice should invite a deeply critical awareness of the ways in which Christianity can fail to live up to the example of Christ in a variety of ways. In the attempt to contribute to the emerging debates on the role of practice in Christian traditions, in this essay I will turn to Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity* as providing a model well worth serious consideration. I will begin by offering a hermeneutic consideration of different ways to conceive of practice and perfection, then I will move on to Kierkegaard's presentation of the two different "Churches," and finally turn to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Simone Weil as contemporary examples of how Kierkegaard's notion of Christian practice might be appropriated in relation to the ideas of grace and liturgy, respectively. I will conclude by suggesting a couple ways in which this generally Kierkegaardian notion of Christian practice as a devotion to "militant liturgies" can be engaged both critically and constructively by contemporary philosophy of religion.

Before diving in, let me note that this essay is not meant to be normative regarding what Christianity should be—such a normative proclamation would require a different essay. Instead, this essay is simply an attempt to think with Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil about what Christian practice might involve, while still remaining cognizant that the diversity of Christian traditions will likely yield other rival accounts worthy of serious engagement.

2. Practice Makes "Perfect"

In order to situate Kierkegaard's account of Christian practice, let's get some general distinctions in place that then can serve as hermeneutic frameworks for considering the alternatives that he provides. We often hear that practice makes perfect, but it is important to realize that there are two different notions of perfection toward which our practices might aim. In the first place, and this is by far the more common notion in popular parlance, there is the idea of perfection as a state of *being accomplished*. This conception of perfection is about the elimination of any continued need to practice. It is a matter of ultimacy and finality. Let's call this model of perfection *the success orientation*. There is another option, however, whereby perfection is not about being accomplished, but *continually striving to be better*. Rather than perfection ending the need to practice, on this second version, perfection deepens the commitment to practice as essential to who one is and who one hopes to become. Let's term this model of perfection *the faithfulness orientation*. The success orientation is widespread within our cultural logic because it is a matter of economic achievement: do this and get that in return. The faithfulness orientation of perfection, alternatively, is much rarer because it operates according to a kenotic logic of dispossession: no matter how good we are, we recognize the importance humbly admitting that we are still "on the way" instead of thinking that we have having "already arrived." The success orientation is a matter of perfected *results*. The faithfulness orientation is a matter of *the way* of perfectibility.

Keeping in mind these two different notions of perfection is important as we think about the idea of Christian *practice* and the *perfection* toward which it aims. As we will see, for Kierkegaard, what it means to practice Christianity is always to be invested in the faithfulness orientation of perfection. The task is ever to move closer to the lived example of Christ, while recognizing the infinite distance that still remains, as opposed to believing that one has achieved the higher calling and now stands in distinction from those still on the way. For all the thinkers that we will be considering here, it is important to remember that the idea of Christian practice is never about being better than others, or resting on one's laurels, but instead about ever pressing forward. As we will see, for Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil, the logic by which Christian practice functions is decidedly kenotic and stands critically of any time when we think we have got it all figured out—e.g., as displayed in the “Rich Young Ruler” who claims that he is justified because of his external activities: I have kept the commandments since my youth (MATTHEW 19:16-26). Indeed, Kierkegaard suggests that it is an “upbuilding thought” to realize that in relation to God we are “always in the wrong” (Kierkegaard 1987, pp. 339–54). Rather than *being perfected*, Kierkegaard's entire approach to Christian practice is a matter of *becoming perfectible*. The two notions of perfection that yield two different approaches to practice underwrite the two different models of the church that Kierkegaard will deploy as his guiding framework for calling for individuals to “become” Christians by following the way of Christ, rather than falling into the potential complacency that attends thinking that they have perfected “being” Christian and achieved the results guaranteed by such a status.

3. Kierkegaard on the two Churches

Kierkegaard's distinction between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant maps directly onto the distinction between the success orientation and faithfulness orientation of perfection. Listen to the way that Kierkegaard frames the options:

If one wants to maintain . . . that the truth is the way, one will more and more clearly perceive that a Church triumphant in this world is an illusion, that in this world we can truthfully speak only of a militant Church. But the Church militant is related, feels itself drawn, to Christ in lowliness; the Church triumphant has taken the Church of Christ in vain. (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 209)

Kierkegaard does not pull his punches here. He is not interested in softening the critical bite of his words, but instead seeks to have his words cut through the cultural calcification that often prevent people from practicing Christianity faithfully (rather than successfully). Understanding Christianity as a “way,” rather than an outcome, Kierkegaard presents the Church Triumphant as ultimately nothing more than an “illusion” of our own social making. As such, Kierkegaard accuses the Church Triumphant of idolatry when he contends that it has “taken the Church of Christ in vain.”

Idolatry of this form is difficult to see in society due to the fact that so many cultural ideals are grounded in, and oriented toward, an economic logic of results-based justification. “What has completely confused Christianity and what has to a large extent occasioned the illusion of a Church triumphant is this,” Kierkegaard explains, “that Christianity has been regarded as truth in the sense of results instead of its being truth in the sense of the way” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 207). Here he is clear that the difference between a results-based success orientation and an along the way faithfulness orientation is quite stark. Firmly rejecting any compromise between Christianity and worldly power, Kierkegaard solidly situates the Church Triumphant as opposed to Christ's kingdom—a kingdom represented by militancy toward worldly status:

As soon as Christ's kingdom makes a compromise with this world and becomes a kingdom of this world, Christianity is abolished. But if Christianity is in the truth, it is certainly a kingdom in this world, but not of this world, that is, it is militant. (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 211)

Standing opposed to this triumphalist narrative of Christian greatness—anchored in a results-based perfection that views worldly success as the goal of “Christian” practice—we find Kierkegaard’s conception of the Church Militant. In contrast to triumphalist privilege, militancy is enacted by imitating Christ’s example of humility and abasement. As Kierkegaard says of Jesus: “You yourself were the Way and the Life—and you have asked only for imitators” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 233). Christian truth is, thus, not a matter of external manifestation, but of internal transformation whereby humility is the ground of greatness, and fallibility is the condition of perfectibility. “Only the Church militant”, Kierkegaard explains, “is truth, or the truth is that as long as the Church endures in this world it is the militant Church that is related to Christ in his abasement even if drawn to him from on high” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 232). Here we see the kenotic logic in high relief: the weak will be made strong, the low will be elevated, the poor will be made rich, the sick will be made well. Pay attention, though, to the conditional access point that Kierkegaard highlights: being related to Christ “in his abasement.” There is no way to follow the way of Christ, Kierkegaard suggests, unless one embraces radical self-dispossession. “Humanly speaking,” Kierkegaard explains in an expansion of the account of the kenotic logic that underwrites Christian militancy, “it is indeed the most utter crazy contradiction that the one who has no place where he can lay his head—that the man about whom it so accurately (humanly speaking) was said, ‘See what a man’—that he says: Come here to me all you who suffer—I will help!” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 239).

The invitation/requirement of such humility, such suffering, is strikingly at odds with the worldly/triumphalist conception that wealth, power, and strength are tantamount to righteousness. Instead, Kierkegaard’s contention is that those who would associate with the Church Militant, and imitate a Jesus who divests himself of divine power in order to model incarnational relational love would likely be dismissed as irrelevant by those seeing triumphalism as an appropriate mode of Christian life.

On this point, Kierkegaard almost anticipates the distinction drawn by John Sanders (2020) between “authoritative” and “nurturant” Christians. Whereas authoritatives are invested in an objectivist conception of divine retributive justice, nurturants are committed to a radically relational idea of divine restorative justice. The former is a matter of what Kierkegaard terms the finality of being, and alternatively the latter is a matter of Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the constancy of becoming. Challenging authoritative approaches and conceptions, Kierkegaard views Christian militancy to yield a radical social inversion of the success orientation. Indeed, Kierkegaard admits that for those who defend a triumphalist approach it will seem that “it is only the idle and the unemployed who run after him [Christ]” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 51).

In an amazing inversion of common cultural assessments of what is practical, important, and valuable, Kierkegaard is unflinching in his rejection of the idea that it is due to our material success that we are now in the right position with each other and God:

The deification of the established order . . . is the smug invention of the lazy, secular human mentality that wants to settle down and fancy that now there is total peace and security, now we have achieved the highest. (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 88)

In contrast to the smug, self-aggrandizing, other-dismissing, and result-based understanding of triumphalism, “there stands Christianity with its requirements for self-denial: Deny yourself—and then suffer because you deny yourself” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 213). Suffering, self-denial, humility—these are hardly inviting ideas, and yet this is precisely that to which Kierkegaard understands Christ to beckon all those who would seek to follow the “way” to come. But, outside of the economic logic of worldly success, Kierkegaard implores us to ask why we have thought that grace would ever have been anything other than costly to our own narratives of self-sufficiency? Grace, as Kierkegaard makes very clear, is always “costly.”

4. Costly Grace and Religionless Christianity: Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer

Although the idea of “costly grace” is perhaps most commonly associated with Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship*, the ideas presented therein are rightly viewed as developing out of a framework that Kierkegaard had already mapped out in *Practice in Christianity*. In the context of 19th century Danish Lutheranism in which being a Christian was largely a matter of social identity,⁶ “Christ’s teaching [is] taken, turned, and scaled down,” Kierkegaard notes, such that “... everything [becomes] as simple as pulling on one’s socks—naturally, for in that way Christianity has become paganism” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 35). It is indisputable that the creature comforts of modern technology had significant impacts on the way that one might relate to Christian living. But, what about the virtues of self-denial and humility? Does Kierkegaard now just see such virtues as entirely rejected within the Church Triumphant? Well, although it might seem so on first glance, Kierkegaard’s assessment is a bit more nuanced than that. Rather than owning up to the abandonment of the way of Christ, and the virtues that characterize that way, triumphalists “do not wish to do away with all these glorious virtues; on the contrary, they want—at a cheap price—to have as comfortably as possible the appearance of and the reputation for practicing them (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 60). This is a striking acknowledgement on Kierkegaard’s part that speaks directly to the possibility of excusing the abandonment of Christ in the very name of “Christianity.” To those who would claim that Christianity is a matter of external achievement—again, think of the Rich Young Ruler—Kierkegaard boldly declares: “No, one does not manage to become a Christian at such a cheap price!” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 136).

Even if Bonhoeffer did get his basic idea of cheap grace from broadly Kierkegaardian notions, he is certainly the thinker who has done the most to work through the details of what cheap vs. costly grace is all about as concerns Christian practice.⁷ Like Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer is not one to mince words: “Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting today for costly grace” (Bonhoeffer 1991, p. 157). Given how dramatic Bonhoeffer’s critique of cheap grace is, what, exactly, is the difference between it and the costly version that he claims to be in line with the way of Christ? “Cheap grace,” he explains, “means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system,” but alternatively, “costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock” (Bonhoeffer 1991, p. 158). Notice the ways in which this description resonates with Kierkegaard’s two churches and the two ideas of perfection that we discussed earlier. Cheap grace, like the Church Triumphant and success oriented perfection, is about achievement, finality, and being. In stark contrast, costly grace, like the Church Militant and faithfulness oriented perfectibility, is about striving, continued commitment, and becoming. Cheap grace is *cheap* because it is not something that humbles us in a continued demand. Costly grace is *costly* because it never allows us to escape the call of self-denial.

Famously, toward the end of his short life, Kierkegaard (1968) waged what he termed the “attack on Christendom.” This attack should never be understood as a critique of Christianity as undertaken by those who would strive to imitate Christ, to follow along the way, and to militantly position themselves in opposition to the worldly logic of success oriented perfection. Kierkegaard’s critical ire was, instead, always directed toward those who would waive the banner of Christ over their own self-seeking interests. His challenge was not to Christians, *tout court*, but those who refused to commit to the difficult task of becoming Christians while presenting themselves as Christians wrapped in “peace,” “security,” and already having “achieved the highest.” Similarly, toward the end of his own short life, Bonhoeffer increasingly explicit about a significant challenge to Christian living: far too many who claimed to be “Christian.” In unison with Kierkegaard’s challenge to those who would seek the easy way out, Bonhoeffer suggests that genuine Christianity will “bar the way to any escapism disguised as piety” (Bonhoeffer 1967, p. 142). Calling for a “religionless Christianity” (Bonhoeffer 1967, pp. 78–79, 138–45, 166), Bonhoeffer notes that his “fear and distrust of ‘religiosity’ have become greater” during his time in prison, and

then later admits that he no longer thinks he can use the term, ‘God’, around “religious” people because what they mean by it bears no relation to the way of Christ:

While I am often reluctant to mention God by name to religious people—because that name somehow seems to me here not to ring true, and I feel myself to be slightly dishonest (it is particularly bad when others start to talk in religious jargon; I then dry up almost completely and feel awkward and uncomfortable)—to people with no religion I can on occasion mention him by name quite calmly and as a matter of course. (Bonhoeffer 1967, pp. 141–42)

Kierkegaard’s “attack” and Bonhoeffer’s rejection of “religiosity” are two modes of the same commitment: a refusal to allow the way of Christ to be reducible to a focus on one’s own status, rather than a tireless devotion to neighbor-love. As Bonhoeffer so beautifully writes, it is only by turning away from the individualism that infects our self-oriented social logic that we can begin to live into the other-oriented love modeled in Christ:

Does the question about saving one’s soul appear in the Old Testament at all? Are not righteousness and the Kingdom of God on earth the focus of everything, and is it not true that Rom. 3.24ff. is not an individualistic doctrine of salvation, but the culmination of the view that God alone is righteous? It is not with the beyond that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved, subjected to laws, reconciled, and restored. (Bonhoeffer 1967, p. 144)

Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer both suggest that costly grace turns one’s attention from themselves to others, and from escaping to heaven to being invested in the Kingdom of God here and now. The task is to *practice* Christianity, not to narrate one’s social position as having *perfected* it.

For Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer, it is here, aware of human brokenness, fully cognizant of the requisite self-denial that attends neighbor-love, humbly taking up the cross daily, that one follows “along the way.” As such, for both thinkers, embodied Christian practice is a matter of militant liturgies, not triumphalist applause.

5. Militant Liturgies and Afflicted Love: Kierkegaard and Weil

There are a variety of ways to conceive of liturgy. Nicholas Wolterstorff (2015, 2018) suggests that liturgy is a scripted practice enacted by a religious community. Jean-Yves Lacoste (2004) offers a view that expands liturgy to include the very condition of being constituted before God. Bruce Ellis Benson (2013) suggests that it is a way of life that attempts to cultivate beauty and excellence.⁸ Regardless of one’s approach to liturgy, what cuts across all the various accounts is the idea of an investment in embodied relational becoming. Liturgical practice is a matter of shaping one’s identity in relation to that which one lives toward. Whether understood as specific rituals, theological constitutions, or aesthetic narrative, liturgy concerns the embodied act of living. Kierkegaard appreciates this broadly liturgical conception of Christian truth when he distinguishes between truth as something lived and truth as something affirmed:

Truth in the sense in which Christ is the truth is not a sum of statements, not a definition etc., but a life . . . The being of truth is the redoubling of truth within yourself, within me, within him, that your life, my life, his life expresses the truth approximately in the striving for it, that your life, my life, his life is approximately the being of the truth in the striving for it, just as the truth was in Christ a life, for he was the truth. (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 205)

Kierkegaardian faith is about passionate becoming, not simply about propositional assent. Embodied practice, then, becomes, for Kierkegaard, the lived site of religious knowledge because what it concerns is one’s own living after Christ’s example, not simply affirming facts about Christ’s having lived.⁹

Here Kierkegaard is quite close to Simone Weil’s account of the love of God being a matter of embracing the realities of embodied affliction.¹⁰ But, pushing a bit further than Kierkegaard’s insistence that Christian life is never about social status, but about self-denial,

Weil's account is more enflashed; more affectively impacted as concerns historical social identity. "The social factor is essential," she notes, because "there is not really affliction unless there is social degradation or the fear of it in some form or another" (Weil 1951, p. 119). Stressing the social, psychological, and physical dimensions of affliction, Weil, Kierkegaard, and Bonhoeffer all focus their attention on what we might term the *Liturgical Trinity*: God, Self, and Society. It is that last aspect that often gets lost in philosophical considerations of Christianity. By focusing so heavily on the cognitivist, and especially doxastic, dimensions of Christianity, philosophers sometimes not only miss the importance of practice, but sidestep the social context in which such practices are enacted and beliefs are held (Schilbrack 2014). Indeed, even the majority of discussions of the philosophy of liturgy commonly act like religious life is a matter purely of what happens within the walls of the church, rather than being concerned with such church practice as a broader question of Christianity's social witness and activism.¹¹ Weil excellently intervenes as a reminder that liturgy can never simply be a matter of one's relation to God, or one's relation to other Christians, but instead must concern society itself as a context in which one bears witness to the lived truth of Christ:

The present period is one of those when everything that seems normally to constitute a reason for living dwindles away, when one must, on pain of sinking into confusion or apathy, call everything in question again. That the triumph of authoritarian and nationalist movements should blast almost everywhere the hopes that well-meaning people had placed in democracy and in pacifism is only a part of the evil from which we are suffering; it is far deeper and far more widespread. (Weil 1973, p. 37)¹²

Militant Liturgies are perhaps obviously necessary in a time when the church becomes wedded to authoritarian and nationalist movements (as was the case for Bonhoeffer and Weil). However, Weil's critique is subtler than that. She also realizes that even democratic commitments and pacifist tendencies could override the commitment to the lived truth of Christ's example whenever one confuses political strategy with imitating Christ. Indeed, Kierkegaard's own opposition to the cultural erasure of the way of Christ by the tendency to confuse Danish citizenship with Christian faith nicely anticipates her point here.¹³ It is important that Bonhoeffer warned about the moral bankruptcy of the German Lutheran Church in the face of Hitler's political emergence, but Weil worries that sometimes we can fail to recognize the devil in our midst: complacency, acquiescence, and abstraction are temptations regardless of one's political association. For Weil, a social manifestation of the embodied truth of Christ's example is not just an opposition to obvious moral evils, but even those sins of apathy that emerge from a life that confuses external success with Christian righteousness. Weil is not optimistic about how to pull back from the brink. "We are living through a period bereft of a future," she fears, and concludes that "waiting for that which is to come is no longer a matter of hope, but of anguish" (Weil 1973, p. 38).

6. Conclusions: Critique and Construction

The ideas of costly grace and militant liturgies clearly are not for the faint of heart. However, the idea of Christian practice has rarely been presented as easy-going—the idea of "taking up one's cross" is not exactly a joyful recommendation toward a life of leisure. As an example from the biblical archive upon which Christian traditions draw, consider that in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he speaks precisely to the need for fortitude in Christian community:

Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an *indispensable* weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your

brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out. (Ephesians 6:13, MSG)

In light of Paul's encouragement, how might philosophers of religion appropriate the account of Christian practice presented by Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil?¹⁴ I think that in the context of philosophical consideration of Christian traditions, these three voices speak in harmony about the importance of the joint virtues of critical awareness and constructive enactment. Regarding critical awareness, consider Kierkegaard's warning about "the established order"—which we might hear as applying both to Christian communities and also to philosophical communities:

But the established order will not put up with consisting of something as loose as a collection of millions of individuals, each of whom has his relationship with God. The established order wants to be a totality that recognizes nothing above itself but has every individual under it and judges every individual who subordinates himself to the established order. (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 91)

Additionally, and again in a critique that speaks both to Christian life and philosophical engagement, Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil all warn against confusing traditionalism with responsible living. Although there are surely going to be scripted aspects of Christian practice handed down in community (indeed, Wolterstorff's notion of liturgy depends on this), these thinkers jointly caution against replacing the "way" of imitating Christ with the "results" of an inherited history of how others have done so. Accordingly, they call for critical awareness such that we avoid a situation where "finally custom and usage become articles of faith; everything becomes equally important, or ordinances, usage, and custom become what is important" (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 92).¹⁵

However, the account of Christian practice that they articulate must be understood as not purely critical. It is also constructive. They jointly encourage constructive approaches to thinking and living together as "neighbors." Although it would be too far afield here to explore the socio-political, ecclesial, and philosophical results of such a notion, it is still important to appreciate that their account is not one that simply stands *against something*, but instead stands *for others*. For Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil, following the way of Christ as a work of embodied love requires us to realize that Christ does not allow for favoritism to be shown according to the economic logic of worldly status. Indeed, "He who opens his arms and invites all—ah, if all, all you who labor and are burdened, were to come to him, he would embrace them all and say: Now remain with me, for to remain with me is rest" (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 15). Kierkegaard is clear that neighbor love is not simply an option, but is commanded: "you *shall* love your neighbor as yourself" (Kierkegaard 1995, pp. 17–43). Philosophically, we might say that they call for dialogical charity to be a mode of embodied practice.

Let's conclude, then, by again turning to the biblical archive as an important resource for philosophical reflection (even if it should not stand as authoritative within philosophical discourse in the way that it does in theology). Listen to the words of Micah, who, like Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil does not mince words, but instead presents the simple kenotic wisdom that calls for Christian practice to be a daily task:

But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do,
what God is looking for in men and women.
It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor,
be compassionate and loyal in your love,
And don't take yourself too seriously—
take God seriously.
(Micah 6:8 MSG)

Hospitality, humility, and reverence—these are philosophical virtues for sure, but also, if Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Weil are right, they are tasks for embodied Christian practice. As philosophers increasingly attend to the importance of practice for religious life, I hope

that these three thinkers become more common resources upon which they might draw and interlocutors with whom they might engage.

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Notes

- 1 For an example of recent philosophical considerations of such diversity within Christian traditions, see [Simmons \(2019\)](#).
- 2 This has especially been manifest in a sustained interest in liturgy, as will be considered in what follows.
- 3 This misguided critique has been frequently been articulated regarding Kierkegaard. As just a few influential examples, see [Blanshard \(1969, pp. 118–20; Blanshard 1975\)](#), [MacIntyre \(1984, p. 42\)](#), and [Schaeffer \(1976, p. 174\)](#).
- 4 As just one example, see [Evans \(2008\)](#).
- 5 For a good general consideration of Kierkegaard and religion, see [Walsh \(2018\)](#).
- 6 See [Coe \(2020\)](#) and [Holm \(2013\)](#).
- 7 For more on the relationship of Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer, see [Kelly \(1974\)](#), [Law \(2011\)](#) and [Kirkpatrick \(2011\)](#).
- 8 There is an emerging literature on the philosophy of liturgy that is relevant to the framework that I am developing here. See especially [Cuneo 2016; Gschwandtner 2019; Butcher 2018](#).
- 9 Indeed, [Kierkegaard \(1985\)](#), under the name of Johannes Climacus, spends a great deal of time thinking about the relation of historical truth to Christian theology.
- 10 For considerations of Kierkegaard and Weil, see [Allen \(2006\)](#) and [Andic \(1985\)](#). For Bonhoeffer's take on the relationship between love and suffering, see [Bonhoeffer \(1995, pp. 194–98\)](#).
- 11 As a good counter example to this trend, see [Farley \(Forthcoming\)](#), and the excellent essays in [Hereth and Timpe \(2020\)](#).
- 12 For more on Weil's integration of Christianity and political life, see [Weil \(1977, part 2\)](#).
- 13 For more on Kierkegaard's specific religious inheritance and its roots in pietistic movements, see [Barnett \(2011\)](#).
- 14 See also [Polk \(1997\)](#) and [Martens \(2013\)](#) who both consider the way in which Kierkegaard approaches biblical interpretation.
- 15 For an excellent Kierkegaardian consideration of the ways in which such traditionalism can lead to dangerous tendencies toward Christian nationalism, see [\(Backhouse 2011\)](#). See also [Westphal \(1991, 2013\)](#) for a substantive consideration of Kierkegaard's approach to social theory, as well as [Bukdahl \(2001\)](#) and [Garff \(2013\)](#).

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